



ACHIEVING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA

How CalEnviroScreen Plays a Critical Role

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In California, low-income residents, people of color, immigrants and indigenous communities experience a disproportionate burden of environmental pollution and related health problems. These inequitable impacts are caused by living in close proximity to multiple environmental health hazards.¹ The problem is exacerbated by the fact that environmental hazards are deadlier when combined with socioeconomic vulnerabilities such as pre-existing health problems, disenfranchisement and poverty – including an inability to afford proper medical care. In response to such challenges, environmental justice (EJ) groups have pushed for state and national agencies to develop a more comprehensive approach to addressing the full range of environmental and socioeconomic burdens that communities face. Through the groundbreaking **California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen)** developed by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), state, regional and local environmental laws and programs are now being designed to protect our state's hardest-hit communities.

CalEnviroScreen 3.0 (CES 3.0) is a place-based cumulative impact screening methodology that uses 20 indicators to provide a statewide ranking of all 8,000 census tracts in California. In the EJ context, the term '**cumulative impact**' means the totality of environmental issues and health stressors a community faces. CalEnviroScreen highlights the unfortunate reality that some Californians are exposed to more environmental problems and are more vulnerable to the effects of pollution than others.

While communities often experience pollution from multiple sources, environmental regulations and policies tend to address each source from an individual standpoint. CalEnviroScreen's ability to assess a community's cumulative impact is thus an important departure from this single issue framework. The CalEnviroScreen tool considers the aggravating effects of socioeconomic issues and health outcomes that can have an exacerbating impact on pollution exposure, yet are infrequently included in environmental decision-making.

CES 3.0 provides a clear, accessible and science-based method for identifying environmental justice communities and the particular challenges they face. It serves as a critical tool for achieving social equity and environmental justice in California by reshaping what is possible in state and local policymaking. It enables decision-makers to craft and implement policies that target our state's most vulnerable communities, such as programs that direct improvements and investments to under-resourced neighborhoods, and regulations that avoid harms against already overburdened communities. Multiple state agencies, departments and laws now include explicit commitments to California's most environmentally impacted areas. *For more information on CES 3.0 uses in state and local policy, please see Table 1.*

CalEnviroScreen is well-suited for pollution-reduction strategies in which there is a clear nexus between environmental and socioeconomic issues. While it has received widespread attention for its use in the California

Climate Investments Initiative, CalEnviroScreen was originally intended to achieve a much broader range of environmental justice goals. It is applicable to land use and zoning decisions, permitting processes that restrict siting in overburdened areas, and regulatory enforcement actions. The California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) strongly supports the use of CES 3.0 and other similar tools in state, regional and local policymaking to prioritize important protections for and investments in our state’s most impacted communities.

CalEnviroScreen can also be applied to other focus areas that intersect with environmental concerns, such as housing and transportation. The tool can also be modified or customized to meet the needs of different geographies, issues or programs. Depending on the policy

application however, other tools may be more appropriate for identifying other burdens and forms of disadvantage. Tools such as the Environmental Justice Screening Method or the California Healthy Places Index, can be used in tandem with or instead of CES 3.0 to inform comprehensive state, regional and local policies.

By adopting an effective cumulative impact screening tool such as CalEnviroScreen, California continues to serve as a national leader in environmental policy. CEJA hopes that the State of California can continue to expand its role and commitment to environmental justice by using CES 3.0 to innovate ways to address long-standing environmental inequalities. In doing so, we can improve the overall quality of life for low-income residents and communities of color while creating a healthier California for all.

CALENVIROSCREEN USES AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

AGENCY, GOVERNMENT OR PROGRAM	SCALE	CALENVIROSCREEN APPLICATIONS
Department of Transportation (CalTrans)	Statewide	The Active Transportation Program (ATP) aims to enhance public health and reach California’s climate goals by increasing safety and mobility for non-motorized, active transportation such as biking and walking. Twenty-five percent of program funds are set aside for ATP projects in ‘disadvantaged communities’ (defined by SB 535 as census tracts within the top 25% of CES scores), while an additional 2% is set aside to fund active transportation planning in DACs.
Energy Commission (CEC)	Statewide	AB 523 (Reyes, 2017) allocates at least 25% of the Electric Program Investment Charge (EPIC) Fund to support technology demonstration and deployment located in and benefitting ‘disadvantaged communities’ as defined by SB 535, while also dedicating 10% of the fund to activities located in and benefitting ‘low-income’ communities as defined by AB 1550.
Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) and its boards, departments and office	Statewide	CalEPA’s Environmental Justice Compliance and Enforcement Working Group has engaged in two cross-media enforcement initiatives that target communities with the highest burdens in the cities of Los Angeles and Fresno. The selected neighborhoods are located in census tracts that are in the top 5% of CES scores. SB 673 (Lara, 2015) allows the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to include criteria such as cumulative impact and neighborhood vulnerability when issuing or renewing facility permits. The law provides the Department with an opportunity to use tools such as CalEnviroScreen when making decisions on hazardous waste permitting. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) utilizes CES data to prioritize areas for clean up and revitalization through its Abandoned Underground Storage Tank Initiative .
Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) (Various state agencies and departments)	Statewide	SB 535 (De Leon, 2012) allocates a minimum of 25% of GGRF funds to benefit disadvantaged communities. CalEPA designated the top 25% highest scoring census tracts in CalEnviroScreen as ‘disadvantaged communities’ (DACs). AB 1550 (Gomez, 2016) amended SB 535 to require all GGRF investments that benefit DACs to also be located within those communities. The law also requires that an additional 10% of the fund to be dedicated to low-income communities, of which 5% is reserved for low-income communities living within a half mile of a designated DAC.

Office of Planning and Research (OPR)	Statewide	SB 1000 (Leyva, 2016) requires cities and counties to incorporate environmental justice (EJ) goals, policies and objectives, or an EJ Element, into their General Plan if they have disadvantaged communities. Defines a ‘disadvantaged community’ as: (1) a census tract in the top 25% of CalEnviroScreen scores, or (2) a low-income area that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards.
Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)	Statewide	SB 43 (Wolk, 2013) , the Green Tariff Shared Renewables program, enables utility customers to meet their energy generation needs through offsite generation of renewable energy projects. The program requires 100 MW of renewable energy projects to be sited in the top 20% of CES 2.0 scores based on each IOU service territory. AB 693 (Eggman, 2015) allocates \$100 million per year for ten years to fund solar installations on multifamily affordable housing. To qualify, a multifamily affordable housing property must be: (1) located in a DAC as defined by SB 535, or (2) have at least 80% of tenants with incomes at or below 60% of Area Median Income (AMI).
Strategic Growth Council (SGC)	Statewide	The Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) Program , created by AB 2722 (Burke, 2016) , is a GGRF-funded program that supports innovative, comprehensive, and community-led plans that reduce pollution and achieve multiple co-benefits at the neighborhood level. TCC requires that at least 51% of a proposed plan’s geographic area overlaps with census tracts in the top 5% highest CES 3.0 scores. The remaining 49% or less of the project’s geographic area must overlap with either a disadvantaged community as defined by SB 535 or a low-income community as defined by AB 1550.
City of Los Angeles	Local / Regional	Mobility Plan 2035 is a City of Los Angeles General Plan Element that will employ CalEnviroScreen data and other datasets to make transportation decisions that promote safety, equity, environmental justice, public health, social and/or economic benefits, and language and physical access.
City of San Diego	Local / Regional	The City of San Diego’s Climate Action Plan uses CalEnviroScreen to identify the most impacted communities to target for mitigation and investments from the city’s Capital Improvement Program. The CAP defines ‘underserved communities’ as those in the top 30% of CES scores in San Diego County or statewide.

TABLE 1: CALENIROSCREEN USES AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

ABOUT

The **California Environmental Justice Alliance** is a statewide, community-led alliance that works to achieve environmental justice by advancing policy solutions. We unite the powerful local organizing of our members in the communities most impacted by environmental hazards – low-income communities and communities of color – to create comprehensive opportunities for change at a statewide level. For more information, see: <https://caleja.org/about-us/vision-and-history>

Environmental Justice Solutions (E / J Solutions) provides comprehensive environmental justice consulting to enable informed decision-making and equitable outcomes for all Californians. For more information, see: <http://environmentaljusticesolutions.com>

To download full report, please visit: <https://caleja.org/CEsreport>

1. See e.g., Lara Cushing, et al, Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Cumulative Environmental Health Impacts in California: Evidence From a Statewide Environmental Justice Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen 1.1), November 2015, available at [10.2105/AJPH.2015.302643](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302643)