



CALIFORNIA
ENVIRONMENTAL
JUSTICE ALLIANCE

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE 2020

AGENCY ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





CEJA members and partners at CEJA's 2019 Congreso event
Source: Brooke Anderson for CEJA

CEJA is proud to release our fifth annual *Environmental Justice Agency Assessment* — the only report in the nation that examines how state agencies perform on environmental justice policies that impact low-income communities and communities of color.

For 2020, we assessed five California state agencies and conducted issue-level reviews on another five, according to eight Environmental Justice Principles (see reverse). We selected these 10 agencies based upon our members' engagement with them in 2020.

Our 2020 *Environmental Justice Agency Assessment* shows an overall decline in grades. Compared to 2019, two out of four agencies' scores were lower, and the average letter grade worsened from a C to a C-. This outcome is particularly alarming given the pandemic's grave impact on communities with poor environmental health.

California's environmental regulatory bodies bear immense responsibility for communities. For decades, residents disproportionately impacted by environmental harms — majority Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities — have demanded that lawmakers and regulators meaningfully act upon air pollution, water quality, and environmental health concerns. BIPOC communities continue to lack safe drinking water while enduring hazards that degrade the immune system, harm reproductive health, cause diseases, and result in premature death.

While community advocates have achieved important progress toward racial equity, persistent structural and social inequities continue in government actions and inactions.

These disparities were more evident than ever in 2020, when communities nationwide were devastated by the crises of the pandemic and state

violence against Black people. Environmental racism was also magnified as BIPOC communities at the frontlines of pollution suffered the worst impacts of COVID-19. Underlying both crises is the state's continued disregard and devaluation of Black, Indigenous, and Brown lives

The pandemic laid bare the debilitating and deadly impact of pollution. People living in highly polluted areas were more likely to die from COVID-19, and environmental health was a factor in the racial disparities among COVID-19 cases. Our state regulatory bodies should have taken immediate, urgent actions to center equity and protect communities with significant risk factors. Oil drilling permits and refinery expansions should have been denied and direct emissions reduction requirements should have been created. Yet, environmental regulatory bodies did not take such actions. If not in the midst of a health crisis, then when?

COVID-19's impact on communities with poor environmental health foretells the impacts that the

climate crisis will have on these communities for years to come. Environmental regulatory bodies must act in a manner commensurate to the crisis and protect human health by centering those who are most vulnerable. As with the pandemic, the public health hazards from the climate crisis fall hardest on BIPOC and low-income communities.

The pollution and climate crises require every regulatory body to prioritize harm prevention and racial equity, while ensuring a just transition away from polluting industries. This calls for a commitment from staff and leadership alike to actively dismantle institutional racism in all of their work. We hope that agency actions in 2021 will better reflect this need and moral imperative.

We hope this assessment serves as a resource to hold our state agencies accountable to the people they serve, improve environmental conditions across California, and provide tangible ways to support environmental justice.

Name	2020 Grade	2019 Grade	2018 Grade
California Air Resources Board (CARB)	C-	D	C-
California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR)	C	C	D
California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)	D	C-	D
California Department of Water Resources (DWR)	C-	To Watch	To Watch
California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM)	D+	C	F
California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)	To Watch	F	Not Assessed
California Energy Commission (CEC)	To Watch	To Watch	To Watch
California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)	To Watch	To Watch	B+
California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)	To Watch	B+	B
California Strategic Growth Council (SGC)	To Watch	A-	A-

Green = Grade improved in 2020

Red = Grade worsened in 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AT REGULATORY AGENCIES

CEJA and our members have developed the following principles to assess whether agencies are effectively integrating environmental justice into their policy implementation and regulatory proceedings.

1. **Prioritize and value prevention, human health, and improved quality of life:** Human health and well-being must be given full weight in decisions, and not overlooked in favor of business interest or “cost-effectiveness.”
2. **Do no harm:** Decisions must not do further harm to environmental justice communities.
3. **Prioritize environmental justice communities:** Decisions must confront the historic legacy and ongoing disproportionate siting of polluting sources in environmental justice communities, as well as the trend of disinvestment in those neighborhoods. Programs and investments should prioritize environmental justice communities.
4. **Meaningful community engagement:** Decisions must be informed by residents of environmental justice communities, which means decision makers should be proactive and culturally relevant in soliciting input and ideas on actions to improve health, responsive to community concerns, and transparent in their work to ensure continued engagement and accountability.
5. **Be proactive:** Decision makers should not wait for communities to approach them with solutions, but proactively reach out to impacted community groups for ideas and feedback.
6. **Take an intersectional approach:** Environmental justice communities are systematically disinvested in economically and impacted by patriarchy, racism, and state violence. To be more inclusive, we must partner to advance intersectional solutions that creatively address the multiple crises Californians are facing.
7. **Be responsive:** Decision makers have a responsibility to be responsive and accountable to community concerns when addressed. Offices should make follow-up and continued discussion on issues a priority, and should keep working on an issue until it is fully resolved.
8. **Respect community expertise:** Environmental justice communities are experts in what is happening in their communities, and know the solutions that they want to see. Too often, however, community voices are ignored or invalidated, which prevents or delays effective actions to address harms. Decision makers should turn to community leaders for input, and trust what they tell them as truthful and valid data to be used to help inform more equitable policy.

