

**NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM THE
CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)**

To: Governor's Office of Planning and Research - State Clearinghouse 1400 Tenth St, Suite 222 Sacramento, CA 95814-5502	From: South Coast Air Quality Management District 21865 Copley Drive Diamond Bar, CA 91765
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Project Title: Community Emissions Reduction Plan for the Eastern Coachella Valley Community per Assembly Bill 617

Project Location: The project is located in communities within the jurisdiction of the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD). The boundaries of the communities extend from the City of Indio south to the Riverside County boundary along the Salton Sea, including the City of Indio, the City of Coachella, a small portion of the City of La Quinta (southern part of the city), and the unincorporated areas of Thermal, Mecca, Oasis and North Shore, referred to herein as Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) community in Riverside County.

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: Assembly Bill (AB) 617, signed into state law in 2017 (see Health and Safety Code Section 44391.2), requires air districts to prepare a Community Emissions Reduction Plan (CERP) for environmental justice communities selected by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). CERPs provide a blueprint for achieving reductions of air pollution emission and exposure within selected communities and are tailored to address each community's air quality priorities. The ECV community was selected by CARB to prepare a CERP in December 2019. The purpose of this project is to implement a CERP for the ECV community per AB 617. The beneficiary of the project is the identified ECV community and the nearby areas, but the entire region within South Coast AQMD's jurisdiction will also benefit.

The ECV CERP includes actions to reduce emissions and/or exposures to toxic air contaminants and criteria air pollutants, an implementation schedule, an enforcement plan, and a description of the process and outreach conducted to develop the CERP. Implementation of the ECV CERP actions is expected to occur over five years beginning in 2021. A summary of the action items by category is described below.

Land Use: Provide information on South Coast AQMD's CEQA Intergovernmental Review program.

Salton Sea: 1) Expand South Coast AQMD's monitoring networks and seek new opportunities to create an air quality sensor network in the ECV community; 2) Explore the development of an odor event notification system; 3) Work with other agencies to collect emissivity and dust emissions data to improve South Coast AQMD's emissions inventory; 4) Collaborate with the various entities to support the ongoing study on Salton Sea playa dust; 5) Provide additional air quality expertise for Salton Sea Management Program implementation and new development projects near the Salton Sea; 6) Collaborate with and support state and local agencies in implementing dust suppression projects, addressing cross-jurisdictional air pollution emissions from the Salton Sea and identifying opportunities to mitigate pesticide run-off into the Sea; 7) Conduct outreach on South Coast AQMD Rules 403 and 403.1, best practices to reduce dust during the implementation of projects, and how to file dust complaints; 8) Identify funding for air filtration system installation and maintenance and home weatherization project implementation; assess the benefits and feasibility of filtered "clean rooms"; 9) Collaborate with community organizations to conduct outreach on how to access air quality data and reduce exposure when H2S levels are above the State Standard; 10) Provide air quality data to local health care providers when requested; and 11) Pursue collaboration with other agencies to implement greenspace projects.

Pesticides: Pursue collaborative partnership with appropriate agencies to: 1) identify key pesticides of concern to develop an air monitoring strategy and gather pesticide use data, evaluate community impacts, and identify opportunities to reduce pesticide emissions and exposure; 2) provide an update on the Shafter Pilot Notification System project, evaluate the feasibility of a pilot notification system, provide information on pesticides applied, reporting pesticide drift, and ways to reduce exposure; 3) make pesticide data more accessible; and 4) provide outreach materials, training, and information on personal protective equipment and ways to reduce exposure.

Fugitive Road Dust and Off-roading: 1) Identify opportunities to expand the PM10 monitoring network and seek new opportunities to create an air quality sensor network; 2) Pursue collaboration with appropriate entities, and identify opportunities and funding to reduce fugitive emissions, such as pave unpaved roads and mobile home parks, restrict unnecessary public access to and reduce speed limits on unpaved roads, plant natural vegetation on unpaved surfaces, stabilize loose road surfaces with grading and gravel on unpaved roads and maintain treated roads, and expand street sweeping services beyond existing service levels; 3) Pursue a collaborative partnership with Comité Civico del Valle (CCV) to obtain complaint data to address road dust-related air quality concerns within the ECV community and to identify potential high priority areas for surface stabilizing projects; 4) Identify fugitive dust concerns and

evaluate whether Rules 403 and/or 403.1 and or enhanced enforcement of existing provisions are necessary and conduct outreach on Rules 403 and 403.1, practices to reduce fugitive dust from roads, how to file dust complaints, subscribing to air quality alerts; and 5) Identify funding for air filtration system installation and maintenance and home weatherization project implementation.

Open Burning and Illegal Dumping: 1) Work with the CSC to establish an air quality sensor network and conduct follow-up investigations, as needed; 2) Pursue emission reductions from open burning by developing a list of available technologies, best practices and alternatives and assessing the feasibility of new requirements for open burning, enhanced and focused enforcement efforts; 3) Continue existing and pursue additional collaborations with local tribes and county agency to identify opportunities to reduce open burning through outreach, enforcement or regulations and participation in emergency response plan development efforts; 4) Pursue funding opportunities for equipment or services to be used as alternatives to agricultural burning or emergency burning for freeze prevention; 5) Pursue opportunities to develop an online permitted burning notification system; 6) Identify funding for air filtration system installation and maintenance and weatherization project implementation; 7) Pursue collaborations with appropriate entities to identify or pursue opportunities to reduce illegal dumping, such as conduct focused enforcement and improve the reporting system, establish a complaint-report tracking system, support green waste complaint reporting and follow-up investigations, and encourage future allocations of funds to address illegal dumping; 8) Pursue funding opportunities to discourage illegal dumping such as waste collection services, non-agricultural waste disposal, fencing or berm construction or camera/drone technology; 9) Pursue collaboration with appropriate agencies and community organizations to develop and distribute informational materials on open burning, fire safety, and air pollution; and 10) Conduct outreach on burn practices, methods to reduce emissions, rules, and ways to report illegal burning and illegal dumping activities.

Diesel Mobile Sources: 1) Work with the CSC to identify air quality concerns, quantify emissions and provide information on trucks; prioritize actions around diesel mobile source pollution such as an air quality sensor network, collaborating with CARB for focused enforcement and outreach on reporting truck idling, developing regulatory measures, and outreach on reporting truck idling, pursuing collaboration with local land use and transportation agencies to restrict heavy-duty trucks from transiting near sensitive land uses, pursuing collaboration with land use agencies to implement vegetative barriers around the railroad, identifying funding for air filtration system installation and maintenance and weatherization project implementation; and 2) Identify opportunities or funding to incentivize the replacement of older, higher polluting on-road and off-road equipment and older diesel school buses with cleaner technology.

Greenleaf Desert View Power Plant: 1) Work with the CSC and federal government entities to reduce emission from the facility by identifying air quality concerns, compiling air quality data, identifying locations for air quality sensor deployment, and developing strategies, identifying funding for air filtration system installation and maintenance and weatherization project implementation; and 2) Pursue a collaborative partnership with Coachella Valley Association of Governments to encourage funds to be used for emissions or exposure reduction projects in ECV.

Public Agency Approving Project:

South Coast Air Quality Management District

Agency Carrying Out Project:

South Coast Air Quality Management District

Exempt Status:

CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) – Common Sense Exemption

CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 – Feasibility and Planning Studies

CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 – Existing Facilities

CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 – New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures

CEQA Guidelines Section 15306 – Information Collection

CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 – Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment

CEQA Guidelines Section 15309 – Inspections

CEQA Guidelines Section 15321 – Enforcement Actions by Regulatory Agencies

Reasons why project is exempt: Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), South Coast AQMD, as Lead Agency, has reviewed the proposed project pursuant to: 1) CEQA Guidelines Section 15002(k) – General Concepts, the three-step process for deciding which document to prepare for a project subject to CEQA; and 2) CEQA Guidelines Section 15061 – Review for Exemption, procedures for determining if a project is exempt from CEQA. Because the physical changes that may occur as a result of implementing portions of the proposed project would only require minimal construction activities and cause negligible physical impacts, it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that any physical actions that may be associated with the proposed project may have a significant adverse effect on the environment. Therefore, the project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3). Further, the overall purpose of this project is to improve the environment of the ECV community and nearby areas, and all of the action items within the ECV CERP support this goal, the action items are also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308.

The ECV CERP contains the following action items, which are speculative at this time as they require collaboration with other entities, might have some secondary air quality impacts: 1) paving unpaved road and mobile home parks, stabilizing loose road surfaces with grading and gravel on unpaved roads; 2) replacing agricultural and/or emergency open burning with alternative equipment or services such as chippers and grinders and digesters, and 3) funding waste collection services to discourage illegal dumping. However, activities associated with those action items are subject to existing South Coast AQMD rule requirements. For instance, South Coast AQMD Rules 403, 1120 and 1186 cover paving related activities, Rule 1133.1 covers chipping and grinding activities, Rule 1133.2 and 1133.3 cover digesters, and Rule 1196 requires acquiring alternative fuel refuse collection heavy-duty vehicles. These existing rules not only require reducing any potential air quality impact to the minimum, but also have gone through CEQA review during the rulemaking process. If a discretionary action triggering CEQA is needed to implement those action items, a CEQA review will be conducted at that time.

The ECV CERP contains action items involving feasibility and planning studies, because information needs to be collected to make an informed decision about further actions such as rule development. However, these action items neither prescribe or commit to specific rule requirements, nor require advance approval or adoption of future actions because they require an open public process. Thus, the ECV CERP action items involving feasibility or planning studies are statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262. The ECV CERP contains action items requiring minor physical modifications to existing structures or buildings, such as installing air filters or monitoring equipment, which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301. The ECV CERP contains action items requiring minor construction of small structures such as fencing or berms, which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303. The ECV CERP contains action items involving the collection or exchange of information or data obtained from inspections and air monitoring, which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15306. The ECV CERP contains action items involving inspections requiring performance or compliance checks, which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15309. The ECV CERP contains action items relying on enforcement activities which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15321. Finally, there is no substantial evidence indicating that any of the exceptions to the categorical exemptions apply to the proposed project pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 – Exceptions. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA.

Date of Project Approval: South Coast AQMD Governing Board Hearing: December 4, 2020

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