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Public Comment

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Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors,

I appreciate that the County has written an Environmental Justice (EJ) Element meant to reduce the pollution and environmental hazards that disproportionately burden the County's lower-income communities as is required by Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000). The EJ Element needs to clearly identify the environmental justice communities and must develop policies to reduce exposure to pollution, improve air quality, promote public facilities, provide safe homes, increase food access, and prioritize programs and improvements that address the needs of these communities.

Unfortunately, the Element's policies fall short of ensuring that pollution and other environmental risks are reduced in environmental justice communities. As currently written, the policies largely allow for the same types of activities and development to continue in and near these communities that have historically contributed to the inequities they currently face. In other words, the EJ Element maintains the status quo, and is therefore unlikely to result in real, tangible, and meaningful pollution reductions and improvements in most impacted communities.

In order to correct the proposed policies please include the suggestions below:

Modify and strengthen the Element by revising the policies to be measurable, binding, and using mandatory language.

- Ensure that the policies adequately address groundwater pollution and surface water pollution in environmental justice communities, many of which have some of the most polluted water in California.
- add references in the EJ Element to existing policies, rules, and regulations that are designed to reduce the environmental burdens that disproportionately impact the EJs.
- conduct further community outreach to its Environmental Justice Communities (EJCs) to gather feedback, insight, and recommendations on the EJ Element, any possible gaps in the policies, and to inform the development or modification of the Element with residents' lived experiences, concerns, and priorities.
- continue their outreach work by continuing to survey EJC residents and hold in-person meetings that are accessible to residents in each of the eight EJs.
- explicitly consider demographic data such as race, language isolation, and employment patterns (for example, the presence of farmworker populations) in these low-income communities as part of the community outreach process to ensure efforts are accessible, diverse, inclusive and culturally relevant.

To ensure that the EJ Element results in measurable improvements for EJs, the County should establish an ongoing Environmental Justice Oversight Committee or similar advisory body focused on implementation, accountability, and community partnership.

-An oversight structure would help ensure that EJ policies are not only adopted, but effectively implemented and evaluated over time.

-Membership on the Environmental Justice Oversight Committee should include EJC residents and community-based organizations.

-Environmental Justice Oversight Committee would not impede County decision-making authority, but would serve as a practical tool to strengthen implementation, improve outcomes, and build trust with EJC residents.

Thank you,

Ann Dorsey