

**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: Amendments to the Community Emissions Reduction Plan for the Eastern Coachella Valley Community per Assembly Bill 617

Project Location: The proposed project will occur within a portion of the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) jurisdiction located in the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) community in Riverside County. The boundaries of the ECV community 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.

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 and the South Coast AQMD Governing Board adopted the AB 617 ECV CERP in December 2020. The purpose of the proposed amendments to the AB 617 ECV CERP is to include additional details to further address the community's concerns as identified by the Community Steering Committee (CSC). The proposed amendments to the AB 617 ECV CERP will benefit the identified ECV community and nearby areas, as well as the entire region within South Coast AQMD's jurisdiction.

The topics that were discussed during the ECV CERP Amendments process included actions to address the use and application of pesticides, actions to address land use concerns and coordination with local and regional planning agencies on plans that affect air quality, alternatives to agricultural burning, actions to address light-duty mobile sources and idling from trucks, and budget priorities and distribution for incentive projects. Specifically, the following amendments to the AB 617 ECV CERP are proposed:

- Chapter 5a – Introduction to Community Emissions Reduction Plan Actions: Additional actions and detailed metrics to address land use concerns and coordinate with planning agencies during the implementation of local and regional plans are proposed which include the following commitments to: 1) provide outreach opportunities and air quality information to local and regional planning agencies; 2) support climate resilience and adaptation policies such as tree planting and home weatherization projects; 3) incentivize mobile source incentive projects; 4) collaborate implementation of dust suppression projects near the Salton Sea; and 5) develop recommendations with the CSC on best practices to reduce light-duty vehicle emissions from the Thermal Racing Club Track. Additional discussion was also included on the Community Air Protection Program (CAPP) Year 3 incentives funds and budget distribution determined by the CSC and selected community-identified projects (such as funding the pavement of unpaved roads and mobile home parks, home air filtration and purifier systems, and alternatives to agricultural burning with alternative equipment or services such as chippers and grinders). Lastly, additional discussion was included on the Community Air Monitoring Plan (CAMP) implementation, which included the Monitoring Working Team (MWT) efforts, and the identification of preliminary locations for air quality monitors and sensor deployment.
 - Chapter 5b – Salton Sea: An amendment is proposed to identify appropriate locations to plant trees on an annual basis near sensitive receptors in proximity to the Salton Sea area.
 - Chapter 5c – Pesticides: Amendments are proposed that include information on the multi-agency process, jurisdictional limitations and collaborating agency responsibilities (i.e., CARB, Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), and Riverside County Agricultural Commissioner) to address pesticide emissions and exposure.
 - Chapter 5f – Diesel Mobile Sources: An additional action is proposed for CARB to work with the CSC to identify locations for “No Idling” sign installation and coordinate with appropriate agencies to install and enforce “No Idling” signs and provide outreach materials in the ECV community on idling rules. Another additional action is for South Coast AQMD to identify funding for the installation of zero emission charging infrastructure in the ECV community.
 - Chapter 5g – Greenleaf Desert View Power Plant: An amendment is proposed to identify appropriate locations to plant trees around the perimeter of the facility.
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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 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 proposed 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 Amendments support this goal, the action items are also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15308.

The ECV CERP Amendments contain 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) funding paving of unpaved roads and mobile home parks and installing home air filtration and purifier systems and 2) replacing agricultural open burning with alternative equipment or services such as chippers and grinders. 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 and South Coast AQMD Rule 1133.1 covers chipping and grinding activities. These existing South Coast AQMD 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 proposed amendments to the AB 617 ECV CERP contain 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 proposed amendments contain action items involving feasibility or planning studies which are statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262. The proposed amendments also contain action items requiring minor physical modifications to existing structures or buildings, such as installing home air filters or monitoring equipment, which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301. The proposed amendments contain 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 proposed amendments contain action items involving inspections requiring performance or compliance checks, which are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15309. The proposed amendments also contain 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 - June 4, 2021

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Date Received for Filing: _____

Signature:



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