

PREFACE

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) environmental justice program is designed to protect the rights of the residents in the South Coast basin to live and work in an environment of clean air, free of airborne health threats. The guiding principle of the program is based on “equitable environmental policymaking and enforcement to protect the health of all residents, regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or geographic location, from the health effects of air pollution.” In suggesting enhancements to the AQMD’s 2002 environmental justice program, stakeholders proposed the development of a model air quality element for cities and counties within AQMD’s jurisdiction that considers the health risks to community residents associated with local government land use planning and decision-making. To that end, the AQMD is making this guidance document available to local governments as a tool to assist them as they develop or update their General Plans and make other planning decisions. The primary users will likely be local government planners within the geographic boundaries of the South Coast air district; however, the ideas, technical issues, and references in the guidance document are also intended for use by private developers, residents, and community organizations. The use of this document by local governments is strictly voluntary. The AQMD recognizes that local governments, to make the best decisions for the benefit of their residents, must weigh and balance multiple issues, demands and concerns, including, but not limited to, the need for housing, existing development and development patterns, environmental responsibilities and more when making land use decisions.

Neither state or federal law mandates separate air quality elements in General Plans. Similarly, the AQMD does not require that cities or counties include a “stand alone” air quality element in their plans, but we encourage local governments to use the information presented in this guidance document to: (1) help develop a separate air quality element, (2) update their current air quality element or (3) integrate air quality policies in other elements of their General Plans such as Land Use and Circulation. We recognize that each community must address a unique combination of air quality and community development issues in their General Plans; therefore, the suggested goals, objectives and policies/strategies presented in this document will not apply uniformly in every jurisdiction. The format and scope of suggested air pollution policies and strategies for each local jurisdiction should be tailored to be consistent with the structure and content of the existing General Plan. Local jurisdictions have complete discretion to select the appropriate mix of pertinent air quality goals and objectives and determine the level of detail of policies and implementation measures that will effectively reduce air pollution and protect public health in their communities.

The combined implementation of the suggested strategies throughout the region will strengthen the local government partnership with the AQMD to achieve state and federal clean air standards and demonstrate the resolve of cities and counties in the district to provide environmental equity and protect public health. The AQMD will

update this document periodically to make available the most current air quality information, the results of local health effects studies related to air pollution and the state of air pollution control technologies to help local governments update their General Plans and make other planning decisions.