

STATE PROGRAM RANKS POLLUTION HOT SPOTS

Barrio Logan, National City among most environmentally vulnerable communities

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Barrio Logan, a port community at the intersection of freeways and industry, is the crossroads of pollution risk for San Diego County, according to CalEnviroScreen, a new state program that ranks communities by their environmental health.

The California Environmental Protection Agency recently rolled out the program to highlight areas most affected by pollution. Also high on the list for this county are parts of Escondido, Chula Vista, National City and El Cajon.

The program is something that various public-health and environmental groups have long sought: a way of analyzing the combined effects of multiple pollutants along with residents' susceptibility to their risks. But reducing pollution at the worst sites will require state funding — at the expense of other needs competing for the same money.

The report measures air and water pollution, diesel exhaust, toxins and other factors to calculate pollution burdens of communities at the ZIP code level. It also evaluates socioeconomic and health factors such as asthma rates, poverty and ethnicity to determine the population's vulnerability to pollution.

The final ranking is the product of the pollution and population scores, with the highest scores highlighting the most environmentally impaired communities. Those areas are entitled to funding for environmental cleanup or sustainable development through the state's greenhouse gas cap-and-trade program.

"From our perspective as environmental justice folks, this is something we've wanted for many, many years," said Joy Williams, research director for the Environmental Health Coalition, which works intensively in Barrio Logan and closely tracked development of CalEnviroScreen. "We've always been frustrated that they didn't look at whole communities."

In Barrio Logan, multiple neighborhoods show the hazards of mixed-land uses and dense urban development, said Georgette Gomez, associate director of the Environmental Health Coalition.

Light industry abuts multi-family housing, along with a school, homeless shelter and youth recreation center. A gas distribution facility and a biodiesel center lie next to homes.