

Headline: Three of Top 10 Most Polluted Zip Codes are in Los Angeles Area
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Media Contact: Heather Navarro
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Zip codes in Vernon, Baldwin Park and East LA were among the top 10 most polluted and most vulnerable to pollution

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On Tuesday, April 23, 2013, the California Environmental Protection Agency revealed a tool that identifies the zip codes most vulnerable to pollution in California, and a top 10 list where Los Angeles communities ranked in three of those spots. Traffic density is one of the 18 factors used to calculate the pollution percentage.

Three Los Angeles-area zip codes ranked in the top 10 worst polluted in California, according to a new interactive map revealed by the California Environmental Protection Agency Tuesday.

Vernon, Baldwin Park, and East Los Angeles made the list as "most burdened by pollution from multiple sources and most vulnerable to its effects," according to the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, which developed the tool that's the first of its kind.

"We don't think any other state has done anything on this scale," said Sam Delson, a spokesman for the state's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. "There are other screening tools, but we're not aware of anything that covers entire state and uses as many factors in this way."

The tool was created to identify disadvantaged communities burdened by pollution, and to prioritize ways to assist them with grants and funding. The first official use could determine which underserved communities in California will receive an estimated \$13.9 million of limited funding for cleaning up those cities.

The tool, dubbed CalEnviroScreen 1.0, creates a percentage based on multiple environmental threats as well as socioeconomic data.

Cal/EPA charted 11 environmental concerns including air pollution, groundwater threats and traffic density, as well as seven socioeconomic factors such as low birth weight, asthma rates and poverty.

"This is an attempt to look at the entire picture," Delson said. "It's a living, breathing document that we are continuing to refine and improve."

Half of the top 10 percent of the most polluted zip codes are in the Greater Los Angeles area, including the Inland Empire.

The cities would benefit most from a recent state law that went into effect in 2012 that requires 10 percent of proceeds from cap and trade auctions to be invested in disadvantaged communities. The statewide auctions, a part of a program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, allow industries to purchase the right to emit more greenhouse gases than usual, which generates the funding.

"The funding will be used to clean up the disadvantaged communities," Delson said.

The tool, which went live at Tuesday at midnight, has an interactive map that zooms in showing each zip code ranked according to the 18 factors.

Fresno ranked No. 1 with a score of 66.4 percent -- the higher the percentage, the higher the impact pollution has on a zip code. Carnelian Bay, bordering Lake Tahoe received the lowest percentage, according to the data.

The Los Angeles County Division of the League of California Cities initially raised concerns in the tool's soft release, according to a letter sent to the EPA in Sept. 2012.

In the letter, the League of California Cities wrote that the tool could name certain zip codes as "polluted" and drive away business and real estate prospects.

"It's the law of unintended consequences," said Steven Diels, member of the League of California Cities and city councilman in Redondo Beach. "I don't oppose it, but there's a concern that it could identify impacted communities with a scarlet letter."

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment released drafts of the project in 2012 and January 2013 to allow the community to respond to the tool.

"It's a useful tool but it has its limits," Delson said. "We want to make it as accurate as possible to help those disadvantaged communities."

The communities labeled as most vulnerable to pollution should begin receiving funding this year, Delson said.