

California Air Resources Board  
Community Air Protection Program

# **International Border Communities San Ysidro and Otay Mesa Community Emissions Reduction Program Staff Report**

Release Date: June 10, 2024



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## Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the California Air Resources Board (CARB or Board) Executive Officer approve the International Border Communities San Ysidro and Otay Mesa Community Emissions Reduction Program (CERP) developed pursuant to Assembly Bill (AB) 617.<sup>1</sup> Staff also recommends that the Executive Officer direct staff to work with the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD or District) and the International Border Communities Community Steering Committee (CSC) to take additional actions to strengthen implementation.

## Background

CARB established the Community Air Protection (CAP) Program<sup>2</sup> (Program) to implement AB 617, which requires community-focused action to reduce air pollution. CARB implements the Program which establishes criteria for developing and implementing community emissions reduction programs<sup>3</sup>, community air monitoring plans, as well as other elements of the Program. The Blueprint 2.0<sup>4</sup> was adopted by the Board in October 2023, and is the first five-year update to program guidance. Blueprint 2.0 carries over certain elements from the 2018 Blueprint, incorporates clarifications to CERP requirements, and provides new elements to identify ways to support more communities.

On February 10, 2022, CARB selected the International Border Communities to develop both a CERP and a community air monitoring plan (CAMP). The District worked with the International Border Communities CSC from April 2022 through November 2023 to develop the International Border Communities San Ysidro and Otay Mesa Community Emissions Reduction Program<sup>5</sup> to reduce emissions and exposure to air pollution in the community. CSC meetings addressed topics ranging from an introduction to the Program, community air pollution concerns, and air pollution impacts on the community. This included specific discussions of health impacts, monitoring, rules and enforcement, and the role of CAP incentives. The IBC CSC identified priority air quality issues their

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<sup>1</sup> Assembly Bill 617, Garcia, C., Chapter 136, Statutes of 2017. Note, this is the first selected community for which the Executive Officer is reviewing an air district CERP pursuant to the Board's delegation under [Resolution 23-22 \(ca.gov\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Community Air Protection Program: <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/capp>

<sup>3</sup> The Checklist for the Community Emissions Reduction Program Evaluation begins on page C-41

<sup>4</sup> The Blueprint 2.0 is available at: <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/blueprint-20>

<sup>5</sup> To view the CERP, visit <https://www.sdapcd.org/content/dam/sdapcd/documents/capp/meetings/int--border/reports/Final%20IBCSC%20CERP.pdf>

community is facing, which include community care (i.e., protecting children, elderly, chronically ill, and other groups that are vulnerable to air pollution exposure), passenger vehicles, heavy-duty vehicles, other mobile sources, and cross-border air quality issues.

Selected communities must deploy their CAMP within 12 months of selection and must develop a CERP for the air district board to adopt within one year of selection (or up to two years with the support of the CSC and CARB<sup>6</sup>). Over that period, a district must convene a community steering committee, develop a process for governance of the community steering committee, build relationships within the steering committee and with regulatory agencies, establish the technical foundation for understanding the community's air quality status, develop strategies to reduce air pollution emissions and exposure, prepare the CERP document, and seek review and approval by the District board.

In March 2023, the District, with the support of the CSC, sent a letter to CARB seeking CARB's support to extend the deadline by one year, up to February 2024, to finalize the CAMP and to adopt the CERP. The District's letter expressed concerns about the length of time the IBC CSC needed beyond the initial one-year requirement to adopt a CERP and CAMP to fully engage with the IBC CSC and build community trust. The letter also described the additional time needed to establish the groundwork to obtain meaningful input for the CERP and CAMP. CARB acknowledged, via a letter to the District on March 29, 2023, the challenging circumstances the District and CSC faced and agreed with the request for an additional year.

During the next year the District and IBC CSC worked to complete the CERP and CAMP. In the spring of 2023, the IBC CSC provided input on the draft CAMP and then the District completed the CAMP. On December 20, 2023, a majority of the IBC CSC voted to approve the CERP, which contains a set of strategies to provide benefits to the International Border Communities. CERP strategies include enhanced enforcement, research, collaboration, rule development, transportation planning, incentives, community outreach and engagement, and air monitoring. On January 11, 2024, the SDAPCD Governing Board adopted the plan.

This report summarizes the results of CARB staff's review and evaluation of the CERP to determine if it meets the criteria established in state law<sup>7</sup> and Blueprint 2.0, reflects community priorities, and is likely to reduce emissions and exposure to air pollution in the community.

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<sup>6</sup> Assembly Bill 1749, Garcia, C., Chapter 340, Statutes of 2022

<sup>7</sup> Cal. Health and Saf. Code § 44391.2.

## Community Emissions Reduction Program Overview

The IBC CERP development was a community led process. The IBC CSC is diverse, with most of its members being community residents along with representatives from businesses, non-profit organizations, public agencies, medical experts, and academia. The IBC CSC worked together with the District on development of the CERP who will serve as an important partner in CERP implementation.

The IBC contains the largest and second-largest land border crossings at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa, respectively. The communities are surrounded by several major freeways, experience heavy traffic burden, cross-border pollution and dust from U.S. Border Patrol activities along the border fence. The CERP focuses on reducing emissions and exposure to oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>), reactive organic gases (ROG), diesel particulate matter (diesel PM or DPM), and particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>) from sources such as heavy-duty trucks and passenger vehicles; other mobile sources such as off-road vehicles and airports; and cross-border sources such as industrial related emissions, open burning, and odors. The District estimates a reduction of 176 tons from NO<sub>x</sub> or ROG, or 8.8 tons of PM emission reductions from AB 617 Community Air Protection Incentives funded projects such as off-road equipment, on-road trucks, and marine vessels in the region<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, see the District Incentive Programs section starting on page 62 of the CERP. <https://www.sdapcd.org/content/dam/sdapcd/documents/capp/meetings/int--border/reports/Final%20IBCSC%20CERP.pdf>

Figure 1, below, lists examples of the CERP actions and strategies to reduce emissions and exposure in five categories. For the comprehensive list of strategies along with details, see Chapter 4 in the CERP.

**Figure 1. Examples of Actions in the International Border Communities Community Emissions Reduction Program**

<b>Community Care</b>	<b>Concerns:</b> impacts of air pollution, particularly to sensitive populations such as children and elderly people.
	<b>Actions:</b> pursue funding opportunities for school air filtration, ZE buses, urban greening, charging stations and school flag programs; residential air filtration; increase community outreach and engagement; monitor areas of concern and non-compliant sources; support development of buffers to reduce exposure.
<b>Passenger Vehicles</b>	<b>Concerns:</b> idling cars at the ports of entry; traffic circulation near or around the Las Americas Premium Outlets, Dairy Mart Rd., Calle Primera, Willow Rd., Camino De La Plaza, East San Ysidro Blvd., and other locations.
	<b>Actions:</b> support and fund incentive programs to reduce emissions from passenger vehicles and provide for zero emission alternatives; improve transportation circulation in San Ysidro; enhance pedestrian, bicyclist, and transit rider efficiency crossing the border; reduce passenger vehicles crossings and emissions.
<b>HD Trucks</b>	<b>Concerns:</b> idling heavy duty trucks at the port of entry; operations at warehouses, including current and proposed expansions; current and future impacts to people living in new housing developments near freeways and warehouses, especially along California State Route 905.
	<b>Actions:</b> implement programs that support efficiency in operations at the Ports of Entry to reduce wait times and emissions from HD trucks; invest in and install ZE technology at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry; develop and advocate for rules or strategies that reduce emissions from indirect sources; increase inspections.
<b>Other Mobile Sources</b>	<b>Concerns:</b> dust and exhaust from Border Patrol ATVs and vehicles operating on the west side of San Ysidro; emissions from freight trains going through the heart of San Ysidro; pollution from both Brown Field Municipal Airport in Otay Mesa and Aeropuerto Abelardo L. Rodriguez in Tijuana.
	<b>Actions:</b> research air quality and health impacts of local airports and from train operations; support emission reduction regulations for small aircraft; support actions that reduce emissions from Customs and Border Protection operations; identify opportunities to reduce dust from roadways and construction activities.
<b>Cross-Border</b>	<b>Concerns:</b> odor from the Tijuana River caused by untreated sewage flowing from Tijuana; trash and other items being burned in Tijuana; industrial-related emissions coming from Tijuana.
	<b>Actions:</b> advance measures that address odors coming from untreated sewage in the Tijuana River; conduct monitoring along the Tijuana River to understand health impacts and mitigation efforts; work in partnership with the Mexican government to address air quality issues.

## Summary of CARB's Evaluation

CARB staff's review of the CERP follows the framework established in the Blueprint. Throughout the process, CARB staff attended all IBC CSC meetings to hear the community's ideas and concerns. CARB staff also met regularly with SDAPCD staff to help guide the CERP development process.

CARB staff's evaluation of the IBC CERP found that the CERP follows the framework established in Blueprint 2.0. CARB staff determined that the IBC CERP reflects community priorities, meets minimum criteria established by state law and Blueprint 2.0, and sets a foundation to deliver air pollution emissions and exposure reductions in the International Border Communities. However, to ensure successful implementation, the CERP must be strengthened by continuing to refine details around strategies and ensuring continued collaboration between the District, the CSC, and other partnering agencies.

CARB staff recommends approval of the CERP with CARB's Executive Officer direction to CARB staff, SDAPCD, and the IBC to begin CERP implementation immediately. This will start actions to reduce emissions and exposures, while taking steps to strengthen implementation of the CERP. These recommendations draw directly from the core principles of the Board-adopted Blueprint 2.0.

Staff has organized the results of this review into two categories:

- Key strengths of the CERP and the CERP development process, which highlight areas staff found particularly noteworthy.
- Recommended actions for SDAPCD and CARB to strengthen implementation, including areas where additional discussion, information, clarification, and detail will help ensure the CERP is successful. These actions will also help achieve emissions reductions in the International Border Communities, as well as CARB commitments.

## Key Strengths

### Community Participation and Engagement

A major strength of the CERP is the level of community participation that went into its development as a direct result of the community steering committee's commitment to work in partnership with SDAPCD and CARB. Casa Familiar, a local community-based environmental justice organization and a member of the IBC CSC, worked in partnership with SDAPCD to conduct outreach to convene the IBC CSC. The level of work that SDAPCD and IBC CSC members put into identifying concerns and developing solutions was extensive. The additional time to develop the CERP beyond the initial 12 months was well utilized to build effective partnerships and strategies. To better engage community



members during CSC meetings, SDAPCD used a variety of tools, such as breakout sessions, Google Jamboard<sup>9</sup>, and one-on-one discussions between individual CSC members and the District.

The District's efforts to support a community-driven process included taking measures that promoted on-going resident participation such as language interpretation services at every CSC meeting, holding meetings in the evenings, providing stipends to members for their time, providing all meeting materials in both English and Spanish, and providing CSC materials in advance of the meetings to ensure members had time to preview what was going to be discussed at these meetings. The District also developed a webpage that provides transparency by hosting many of these resources, all CSC materials, and meeting recordings.<sup>10</sup> To engage the community and help build their knowledge on air quality, the IBC CSC received and discussed information on air quality and health effects, emissions inventory, regulations, and enforcement.

## **Diverse Set of Strategies**

Throughout the development of the CERP, the IBC CSC wanted to see a variety of strategies to reduce emissions and exposure. Strategies included identifying potential funding to implement school flag programs, support the replacement of high polluting equipment with clean technology, and fund air filtration systems for schools and residences. The IBC CSC incorporated advocacy strategies in their CERP to help support local, regional, and state policies, plans, and actions that would help them meet their CERP goals. Additionally, community members expressed a need for District rule development to reduce emissions from heavy-duty trucks, as well as collaboration between agencies to reduce exposure from sources where the District does not have authority, such as port of entry activities to reduce passenger vehicle volumes for cross border trips and a reduction in average border wait times.

All the strategies in the CERP, as described in Chapter 4, were co-developed, reviewed, and supported by the IBC CSC. The strategies respond to community source concerns, commit to an increase in advocacy, outreach and education, ensure that funding opportunities are identified, include monitoring efforts to provide real time data, and track concentrations trends of PM 2.5 levels over time to help determine the effectiveness of emission reduction strategies.

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<sup>9</sup> A digital whiteboard that lets users collaborate in real time using a web browser or mobile app.

<sup>10</sup> SDAPCD Community Air Protection Program (AB 617):  
<https://www.sdapcd.org/content/sdapcd/community/community-air-protection-program.html>

## Overall Goals for the CERP

The CERP includes five goals and 34 strategies encompassing 128 actions<sup>11</sup> that are meant to address the community's highest priorities. The goals represent the community's vision for the emissions and exposure reductions and the timelines by which those reductions would be achieved as part of that vision, such as the following:

- Protect children, elderly, chronically ill, and other groups that are vulnerable to air pollution exposure.
- Reduce passenger vehicle idling at the U.S. Port of Entry and improve traffic circulation, and transit and pedestrian infrastructure and options in the San Ysidro community.
- Reduce emissions and emission exposure from heavy-duty trucks traveling to and from warehouses in Otay Mesa and beyond to protect the health of people living along truck routes on both sides of the border.
- Reduce emissions from U.S. Border Patrol activity on the west-side of San Ysidro, freight trains going through San Ysidro, airports in Otay Mesa and in Tijuana, and other sources.
- Reduce emissions and odor from sources in Tijuana such as sewage in the Tijuana River, the burning of trash, and industrial-related activities.

Additionally, the District and the IBC CSC's commitment to improving air quality beyond the five-year implementation period is also exemplified in several strategies to help support emissions reduction opportunities over a longer term.

## Recommended Actions to Strengthen Implementation

Staff recognizes that the CERP is the culmination of an extensive amount of work in a short timeframe. CARB staff remain committed to work with SDAPCD and the community steering committee to refine implementation strategies and support periodic status reports required under AB 617.

CARB staff has developed the following set of recommended actions. Progress in implementing these recommendations should be included in the annual progress reports submitted to CARB as required by Blueprint 2.0.

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<sup>11</sup> The strategies begin on page 34 of the CERP.

## **Agency Partnerships and Collaboration**

The SDAPCD has included several partnerships and collaborations with other public agencies. Some of the community-identified actions in the CERP do not fall within the jurisdiction of the District, therefore collaborating with other agencies with relevant jurisdiction over a community concern is necessary to overcome limitations related to authority. The District should continue to build and maintain effective relationships to clarify roles and to bring these agencies to the table to meet the overall goals and commitments established in the CERP.

## **Continue to Refine Strategies Informed by CSC Direction**

The timeline required to develop a CERP makes it difficult to create and document detailed strategies. Throughout CERP implementation, SDAPCD and the IBC CSC should work together to refine details and prioritize actions.

CARB staff encourage the District to consider the use of the work team or subcommittee approach used in other CSCs during implementation. Creating opportunities for additional CSC leadership focused on specific strategies that are the subject of specific work teams or subcommittees can support more effective implementation.

## **Participatory Budgeting**

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which community members participate in a process to recommend how public monies should be spent based on community priorities. This process has empowered community steering committees to prioritize community identified projects eligible for Community Air Protection incentives funding and recommend the distribution of funds for these projects. This helps ensure that the District's incentives budget reflects the community funding priorities. The District should continue its efforts to work with the IBC CSC to co-develop a participatory budgeting process. This will strengthen the relationship between the District and residents as well as allow for transparency.

## **Document Public Questions and Answers**

Community outreach and engagement are critical to the success of the Program. As noted above, one of the strengths of the International Border Communities CERP is the extensive community participation and engagement. During CSC meetings, the community members participated in the meetings by posing questions and commenting on the process. Also, time was allotted at the end of each meeting to hear public comment. Documentation of the public comments and associated responses during engagement should continue to be developed and made publicly available.

## CARB Commitments

CARB actions that specifically relate to the International Border Community and identified by the IBC CSC are provided in the CERP. However, state regulations provided within the CERP are in the early phases of development and their adoption and implementation timelines are not yet established. As a result, a draft emissions inventory and estimated benefits are not yet available for many regulations still in development. As these emissions inventories are developed, CARB staff will provide estimated benefits in future updates.

CARB enforcement will also aim to provide a broader array of assistance through the development of co-designed and co-led projects that empower communities, focus on community identified priorities, and leverage enforcement. This will result in community investigations that will help CARB understand how to develop stronger enforcement approaches in the IBC. For example, CARB enforcement could work with the CSC, SDAPCD, and CHP to identify locations to deploy its Portable Emissions Acquisition System (PEAQS) within the IBC boundary, which is known to have high heavy-duty truck traffic. In addition, CARB enforcement could work with the CSC and local agencies to identify locations, where feasible, to install “No Idling” signs on roadsides or at schools and parks, as well as focused enforcement at construction sites of concern, as identified by the CSC, to evaluate compliance with CARB regulations.

Addressing the odors and emissions from the Tijuana River caused by untreated sewage flowing from the border will take concerted efforts from local, state, and federal agencies. As an example of these efforts, CalEPA and U.S. EPA have entered into a “Memorandum of Understanding on Collaborative Efforts on Enforcement and Compliance Assurance in Overburdened Communities,” mentioned in Region 9’s 2023 Enforcement Action Plan<sup>12</sup>, which focuses on strategic targeting of inspections, enforcement actions, and community engagement. These types of collaborative efforts also serve as a useful example of how to help guide actions needed to address the odors and emissions from the Tijuana River. CARB will continue to look for similar opportunities to partner in this work, including identifying funding opportunities to expedite any projects that would significantly improve the wastewater collection and treatment systems in use in the area.

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<sup>12</sup> US EPA Region 9 – California EPA, Environmental Justice 2023 Enforcement Action Plan: [Document Display](#) | [NEPIS](#) | [US EPA](#)