California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance
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June 2, 2014

Dr. John Faust
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CalEnviroScreen version 2.0

Dear John,

CCEEB is a non-partisan, non-profit coalition of business, labor, and public leaders that advances strategies for a strong economy and a healthy environment. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) on the draft release of version 2.0 of CalEnviroScreen.

We have four main suggestions:

1. Continue to work with public and agency stakeholders on refinement of the drinking water indicator;
2. Add a discussion on how census tracts create large geographic units in rural areas that may over-represent impacts, and note any tradeoffs between census tracts and ZIP codes;
3. Re-run the sensitivity analysis and make this publicly available in order to help end users better understand how final results are calculated and how individual indicators and categories of indicators work to influence scores; and
4. Analyze race and ethnicity in terms of pollution burden, not just final scores, which include a number of heavily correlated indicators.

In addition, we reiterate high-level concerns about the methodology used to calculate scores, which we have expressed in past CCEEB comments to OEHHA, as well as more minor recommendations or questions on specific indicators that have been adjusted in version 2.0.

New Drinking Water Indicator

OEHHA staff has clearly done a tremendous amount of work to develop a weighting and scoring method for this critical new indicator, especially given that no database exists to

provide adequate or consistent information across the entire state. Furthermore, CCEEB recognizes that lack of access to safe drinking water is a major problem facing some communities in California, particularly disadvantaged communities in rural areas that may have been undercounted in past versions of CalEnviroScreen.

While OEHHA should be commended for addressing this important data gap, it needs to continue to develop and refine this indicator in an open process with direct engagement from relevant stakeholders, including but not limited to responsible water agencies, state and regional water boards, and non-governmental organizations with expertise in water quality and/or water management issues. For example, all other indicators benefitted from input by the Cumulative Impacts and Precautionary Approaches Working Group and the 2012 academic panel, as well as multiple public comment periods and workshops. As the most novel and complicated indicator in CalEnviroScreen to date, it seems appropriate to have robust stakeholder input. At a minimum, OEHHA should consider as part of such stakeholder discussions whether it should base the drinking water indicator on Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) rather than Public Health Goals, since the former are better aligned with Cal/EPA's regulatory responsibilities and purview.

Shift to Census Tracts from ZIP Codes

Similarly, OEHHA staff should be commended for responding to comments to shift the geographic unit from ZIP codes to census tracts since this provides greater granularity in much of the state, particularly urban areas. However, in rural areas with less population density, census tracts can be geographically large units, which in turn could over-represent actual exposure levels and environmental effects for a given community. In order to help users of the tool understand the tradeoffs between using ZIP codes versus census tracts, OEHHA should include a discussion under the Method Section about spatial differences in geographic units, how data for indicators have been adjusted to match census tracts, and any uncertainties arising from adjusting data sets to fit within census tracts. The language in the preface does not address these points.

Sensitivity Analysis

CalEnviroScreen has changed significantly since the June 2013 sensitivity analysis report was released. That analysis provided important information that helps users understand how each indicator and category of indicators works to influence the results and output from the model. We strongly recommend that OEHHA rerun this analysis for the new version and set of indicators and make this publicly available.

Race & Ethnicity Analysis

OEHHA has analyzed CalEnviroScreen results in relation to race and ethnicity. However, OEHHA only looked at final scores, which include multiple indicators strongly correlated with race and ethnicity. For example, linguistic isolation is a characteristic that exists primarily (but not solely) in non-white or Hispanic/Latino populations; that is to say, these indicators could be highly correlated. To paint a clearer picture about where

environmental pollution exists and who carries the burden, OEHHA should run similar analysis for race and ethnicity using the pollution burden scores alone.

Concerns about Overall Method Remain

CCEEB has well documented its persistent concerns about the overall method for calculating CalEnviroScreen scores.[1] We still find these criticisms valid and worthy of consideration in future versions of the model. Chief among these is the use of the multiplier, which muddles together pollution burden and population characteristics, making it difficult for end users to easily discern which phenomena results in either high or low scores.[2] Rather, OEHHA should employ a two-step method that first ranks communities by pollution burden and then prioritizes highly ranked communities that are also the most socioeconomically disadvantaged.

CCEEB also continues to recommend a toolbox approach, whereby users can select which indicators are most appropriate for specific policy purposes. For example, when allocating drinking water funds, decision makers (and communities) may want to exclude or reduce the weights of unrelated indicators, such as traffic and diesel particulate matter, in order to refine results and better target scarce public funds to those communities in greatest need.

Other Comments, by Indicator

- Toxic Releases – OEHHA should note EPA-provided limitations on the use of RSEI data,[3] e.g., it cannot be used to provide proof that a chemical release is causing harm to a particular community, or to draw conclusions about the risk posed by a specific facility, or used in risk assessments. RSEI is meant, like CalEnviroScreen, to help identify communities for further investigation. To date, neither OEHHA nor Cal/EPA has committed to developing a community-level evaluation method; CCEEB believes this is a logical next step and urges Cal/EPA to undertake this work.

- Groundwater Threats – in the narrative, staff should explain why LUST Cleanup Program and military UST sites are weighted differently than other sites.

- Hazardous Waste Facilities and Generators – Version 2.0 assigns additional weight based on permit status (current, expired less than five years, expired 5-10 years, expired 10+ years, or no permit/interim status). We do no think this weighting is justified as permit status is largely due to agency backlog and inadequate staff resources; facilities should not be penalized or held accountable

[1] CCEEB letters to OEHHA on September 23, 2010, October 16, 2012, February 1, 2013, and October 30, 2013.
[2] For example, media reports commonly state that the most polluted communities are also the poorest, based on CalEnviroScreen results. However, and by design, a heavily polluted community with medium- or high-socioeconomic status would never be prioritized or identified by the tool because of the multiplier used to calculate scores.
[3] See http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/rsei/pubs/using_rsei.html.

for this, nor should there be a presumption of greater risk from these facilities. As such, this weighting should be removed from the calculation.

- Impaired Water Bodies – in the narrative, staff should explain why a 2 km buffer is used for major rivers (>100 km in length, plus the Los Angeles River and Imperial Valley canals and drainage ways) whereas a 1 km buffer was used for all other rivers and streams.

- Low Birth Weight, Infants - in the narrative, staff should explain why the average for years 2006-2009 was used instead of the data set used in versions 1.0 and 1.1, which averaged data from 2007-2011.

CCEEB asks that OEHHA and Cal/EPA staffs consider our comments as they prepare the final report on CalEnviroScreen 2.0 and (1) leave open the opportunity to work with public and agency stakeholders on the refinement of the drinking water indicator, (2) provide an updated sensitivity analysis for the new version of the model, (3) analyze the relationship between pollution burden scores and race and ethnicity, (4) note RSEI limitations, as set forth by U.S. EPA, and (5) expand discussion in the report narrative to provide the rationale for changes to indicators not addressed or explained. We would be happy to discuss these points in detail or answer any questions. Please contact Janet Whittick of CCEEB at (415) 512-7890 x111.

Sincerely,

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cc: George Alexeef, OEHHA
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