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POLLUTION

Ferreting out the dirt

Bay Area communities on a new map of state's most-polluted — it's a tool to distribute money from the cap-and-trade fund



Sam Wolson / Special to The Chronicle

Serenity Davis, backpack and all, powers across an overpass near Hegenberger Road in Oakland, which is included in the list of the 10 most polluted ZIP codes in California known as CalEnviroScreen.

By Stephanie M. Lee

Nine of California's communities most heavily burdened by pollution are in the Bay Area, according to a statewide map released Tuesday and designed to point to areas in need of cleanup.

About half of the top 10 percent of the state's most polluted communities exist in the greater Los Angeles area and San Joaquin Valley, but parts of Oakland and Richmond also made the list, as did San Francisco's Bayview neighborhood, Pittsburg, Hayward and Antioch.

The map, called CalEnviroScreen, used thousands of pieces of data to identify communities that bear a disproportionate share of various toxicants, from dirty air to hazardous waste facilities. The designations



Lea Suzuki / The Chronicle

The most polluted areas will get state grant money.

make the areas candidates to receive grant and investment assistance from the state to clean them up.

"It is important for me to know, for the environment I live in, what it's like," said Amy Vanderwarker, an Oakland resident and coordinator for the California Environmental Justice Alliance, a statewide coalition of community groups. "I love Oakland and am invested in Oakland and want to see projects and development and resources come into Oakland. It needs support as a city."

The agencies analyzed public data in all of California's 1,769 ZIP codes for about 11 kinds of pollution or their sources. They took into account smog levels, traffic density, toxic emissions from factories and businesses, hazardous pesticides and the

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number of toxic cleanup sites. The analysis also included population traits that tend to make people more vulnerable to environmental harm. Those included high numbers of children and elderly people, asthma rates, low birth weights, certain races and ethnicities that have been shown to be more susceptible to pollutants, and poverty levels.

The immediate benefit will come from grants and investments from the state's cap-and-trade fund. Under the law that created the map, 25 percent of the money from the auctioning of California's greenhouse-gas emission permits, which began late last year, is designated to go to the state's most polluted pockets.

Although the Bay Area fares well compared to other areas of the state, it is home to the industrial, traffic-heavy sites of east and west Oakland and Richmond, which are among the state's top 5 percent most polluted areas.

Breaking it down

ZIP code 94621 in East Oakland, for example, includes Oakland International Airport and a busy stretch of Interstate 880, which generate heavy air pollution. The area has high rates of asthma and poverty and other issues linked to environmental hazards.

There are also several toxic sites that were or are designated by other state agencies for cleanup, such as body shops, factories and housing projects; and sites at risk of groundwater contamination from leaking underground storage sites, such as an Arco gas station on Hegenberger Road, according to data from the state's Department of



Lee Suzuki / The Chronicle

Is your ZIP code polluted?

Look it up at <http://bit.ly/YH-HIO>. Read the full report at <http://bit.ly/12dzt2P>.

Toxic Substances Control and the State Water Resources Control Board.

Meanwhile, the slice of Richmond that falls into ZIP code 94801 contains the Chevron refinery, in addition to a lot of traffic, air pollution, groundwater contamination threats, and solid and

hazardous waste sites. "The tool is really highlighting some of the air quality impacts that are very severe, particularly for the Bay Area," Vanderwarker said.

Effect on development

While environmental health advocates praised the map for shining a light on struggling areas, businesses and some lawmakers expressed concern that the map could actually keep economic development out of those areas.

"They will receive aid from

Pollution hot spots in the Bay Area

Shaded areas show Bay Area ZIP codes ranked in the top 10 percent most polluted areas in California, according to a new map by the state's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment.



Source: CalEnviroScreen Todd Thumbut / The Chronicle

There are several toxic sites designated by state environmental regulators for cleanup such as the PG&E Hunters Point power plant at left, body shops, factories and housing projects.

the state, which is good, but they may lose jobs," said Mira Guertin, a policy advocate for the California Chamber of Commerce. "They may have a more difficult job trying to get a business to locate there when the business says, 'I don't have any risk, or less risk, if I locate in a ZIP code right next door because the tool doesn't identify that ZIP code as having a high risk.'"

The state Environmental Protection Agency attempted to address this concern by saying that CalEnviroScreen's

information cannot be used in place of the state's required environmental review process for proposed construction. Still, Guertin said, the language was not strong enough. Future versions of the map are expected to include information about drinking-water quality and more specific neighborhoods, the Environmental Protection Agency said.

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