

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Some California regulators get poor grades from environmental watchdog

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California prides itself as leading the nation in environmental regulations, but some of its state agencies face poor or failing grades from an environmental justice watchdog.

The agencies are simply not doing enough “to prioritize long-standing health and quality of life needs of constituents,” according to the watchdog report released Thursday morning.

The California Environmental Justice Alliance found that “while our 2018 (Environmental Justice) Agency Assessment shows some progress in advancing (environmental justice) priorities, we regrettably are not able to report significant improvement from our 2017 EJ Agency Assessment.”

The group found that “a number of state agencies are not successfully integrating environmental justice into their decision-making and continually fail to prioritize long-standing health and quality of life needs of constituents.”

Agencies were graded on eight categories, including prioritization of human health, meaningful community engagement, transparency and proactivity. While five agencies received what could be considered a passing grade, A- to C-, three agencies fell short of that.

That includes the California Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources, which received an F grade; as well as the Departments of Pesticide Regulation and Toxic Substances Control, which received a D grade.

The Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources oversees the state’s oil and gas industry. The organization concluded that the regulator “continues to neglect the needs of environmental justice and low-income communities, which house a majority of the 8,500 active oil and gas wells that fall within 2500 feet of schools, homes, and hospitals.”

The CEJA looked at the division's permitting process in Los Angeles and Kern counties and found that the agency continues to approve projects that make toxic and carcinogenic emissions, "increase the risk of water degradation, and add to noise and light pollution, with little to no scrutiny of adverse health impacts."

The organization called on the division to use "a science-based mandatory health and safety buffer zone" that puts at least 2,500 feet between oil and gas rigs and "sensitive receptors" such as schools, daycares and hospitals.

Other agencies that received poor marks include the Department of Pesticide Regulation, which was criticized for what CEJA called inaction on curbing the use of two pesticide chemicals, chlorpyrifos — which Gov. Gavin Newsom [has banned](#) — and [Telone](#); and the Department of Toxic Substances Control, which CEJA said has "a structural funding deficit that has reached a crisis point."

Other agencies to get a grade included:

- The California Air Resources Board, C-
- The California Public Utilities Commission, B+
- The California Water Resources Control Board, B
- The California Strategic Growth Council, A-
- The California Coastal Commission, B-

One agency, the California State Lands Commission, received an "incomplete" due to the agency "undergoing shifts in how it engages environmental justice communities," while these four agencies were rated "to watch:"

- The California Department of Food and Agriculture
- The California Department of water Resources
- The California Energy Commission
- The California Transportation Commission