

# Case Study: National City's Health and Environmental Justice Element



## Why National City Planned for Environmental Justice

National City created the state's first environmental justice element. *The Health and Environmental Justice (HEJ) Element* addresses public health issues that arose from poor land use planning (e.g., light industrial and manufacturing uses mixed with homes and schools), high daily traffic, limited parking at job sites, high noise levels, poor air quality, community exposure to hazardous materials, and a lack of access to public facilities and services (such as community centers, parks, and open space).

## Community Engagement Process

From the very beginning, the HEJ planning process was strongly supported and organized by community-based organizations and residents. For over ten years, the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) worked with residents to promote a vision of the city that reflected residents' goals and aspirations for a healthy community.

In 2009, local residents and community-based organizations, including EHC, met with the mayor to discuss a plan to leverage State funding for the new HEJ Element. Since the City was already in the process of updating its General Plan, the HEJ Element was funded through that process with no additional funding.

## Outcome

The HEJ Element includes goals to improve public health and promote the well-being of all segments of the population through better design of the built environment. Two key principles guide the HEJ Element's policies and programs.

- **Quality of Life.** In order to address socioeconomic inequities and balance development with accessible community amenities, the HEJ Element seeks to (1) increase quality of life by providing a mixture of housing opportunities; (2) improve access to different transportation modes; (3) enhance community character and promote the cultural arts; (4) address noise, nuisance, health, and maintenance issues; (5) promote the amortization of incompatible land uses over time; and (6) ensure that future generations can meet their environmental resource needs.
- **Health and Safety.** The HEJ Element seeks to encourage healthier living by increasing walkability, bikeability, recreational opportunities, and urban agriculture as well as improving air and water quality through sustainable development. The plan includes compact, mixed-use development to help increase human activity on the street, new community farms and gardens to encourage activity in common areas, increased lighting and surveillance, and improved emergency services.



## Key Lessons

- Grassroots organizing and community-led advocacy was at the forefront of efforts to identify and address land use inconsistencies between the City’s Westside Specific Plan and the existing General Plan.
- Education and awareness of environmental justice-related issues among policymakers, including city council members, increased support for the HEJ Element.
- The potential to become eligible for State funding opportunities was an incentive to create the HEJ Element.
- The HEJ Element used *CARB’s Air Quality and Land Use Handbook: A Community Health Perspective (2003)* to inform many of the Element’s goals and policies, including a specific objective to promote the creation of buffer zones around sensitive land uses.
- The City decided to create a stand-alone Element so that users of the document could easily locate all policies related to environmental justice in one place. Cross-referencing was considered but ultimately not included in the plan.
- Challenges included not having adopted policies be at the level of specificity that was desired by community-based organizations, and not having a more extensive community engagement process, including more workshops, to increase the amount of meaningful feedback on the HEJ Element.

## Case Study Summary: National City

Location	<b>San Diego County</b>
Community Type	<b>Suburban</b>
Population Size	<b>58,582</b>
Geographic Area	<b>9.12 sq. mi.</b>
EJ Issue(s) Addressed	<b>Lack of public facilities, hazardous sites, air and water quality</b>
Community Engagement Process	<b>City Council, community-based organizations</b>
Community-Based Organization Actively Engaged	<b>Environmental Health Coalition (EHC)</b>
Outcome	<b>EJ Element</b>
Adopted	<b>June 2011</b>



Traffic signs to divert heavy-duty trucks from residential areas (EHC).

