

Regulators engage Barrio Logan on state's climate plan



The California Air Resources Board held a workshop in Barrio Logan Thursday (7/14/16) to gather input ahead of an update to its statewide strategy for reducing greenhouse gases. The event was one of about a dozen to be held in so-called environmental justice communities. — *John Gastaldo*

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As the state overhauls its road map for curbing greenhouse-gas emissions, regulators are reaching out to residents most impacted by air pollution that also drives climate change.

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Officials with the California Air Resources Board held a workshop in San Diego's Barrio Logan, the most polluted neighborhood in the county, on Thursday night. The meeting was part of the agency's tour of nearly a dozen cities statewide that are disproportionately affected by air pollution.

The workshop marked something of a shift in priorities for the air board, which hasn't traditionally engaged so directly with so-called environmental justice communities. People who attended Thursday's event came from places such as Chula Vista, National City and San Diego.

“It was excellent,” said Irma Ortiz, a resident of Barrio Logan, a neighborhood adjacent to shipyards and freeways.

“I was talking to someone from Sacramento, and I really, really like it because he took notes for whatever we were saying,” added the 66-year-old grandmother, who has lived in the neighborhood for 30 years. “It seems like he’s very interested in the situation.”



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City Councilman David Alvarez was on hand to thank state officials for the increased attention to underserved neighborhoods like those he represents.

“This is a very important meeting,” he said. “... You’re not going to forget Barrio Logan after you leave here tonight. It will be ingrained in your brains certainly, but hopefully also in your hearts.”

The official goal of the event was to receive input on the air board’s so-called scoping plan — the state’s outline for how to meet its climate goals, which include reducing greenhouse-gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and then 40 percent below that by 2030.

“That plan isn’t real unless it has input from people in the communities who are most impacted, and that’s all of you,” Diane Takvorian, executive director of the San Diego-based nonprofit Environmental Health Coalition, said at Thursday’s meeting.

Takvorian was appointed in February to the 14-member air board as part of legislation that designated two

new seats for representatives of environmental justice communities.

“These issues (of climate change) start as a local issue,” she said. “It starts as local air pollution. It starts here. And it starts now to make those changes.”

With about 100 people in attendance, many represented local advocacy organizations such as the Environmental Health Coalition, the Cleveland National Forest Foundation, SanDiego350.org and the San Diego chapter of the Sierra Club.

Attendees were offered food and given a quick presentation on the air board’s scoping plan before being asked to break into groups and discuss how they’ve been affected by the state’s three largest sources of climate pollution: transportation, power plants and industry.

Input from advocates and residents ranged from calling for more renewable energy to limiting pollution from cars and trucks. The comments will be posted to the air board’s website and reviewed by officials drafting the agency’s updated plan.

“They want to make more freeways, but it’s not good because you have a lot of problems,” said Enrique Sanabria, 70, a Golden Hill resident who lives next to state Route 94. “The noise is strong, but the problem is, close to the 94 you can see schools, and the schools have a lot of problems with the contamination.

“The meeting was very, very important for everybody because we explained what we need,” he added. “We explained what we want. I hope when we’re talking, they hear us and they can help us.”

State officials recognized that they could have done a better job pulling in neighborhood residents not affiliated with nonprofit groups.

“We’re definitely learning from these as we go,” said Trish Johnson, air pollution specialist for the air board’s Environmental Justice Advisory Committee. “There’s definitely improvements to be made as far as communications. We should have had more signage out front, and we intend to change that for all the next meetings.

“This isn’t just a one-day thing,” she added. “We’re not just here and then leaving. We’re going to carry forward these ideas.”

