Pollution in San Bernardino

The BNSF Intermodal Rail Yard
San Bernardino, CA

Written by CCAEJ in partnership with ENGAGE
Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Mobilization Project
San Bernardino, CA
Health and Human Rights Impact Report

Pollution in San Bernardino is a comprehensive guide that details the impact the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) intermodal rail yard has had on the health and human rights of residents of the Westside of the City of San Bernardino, California. This guide provides the necessary information for both community members and decision makers, both government and industry leaders, to better understand the health threats facing San Bernardino residents and take informed action to remedy the situation.

The lived experiences of Westside residents are presented with equal weight as academic studies and research. Each of the community profiles humanizes the issues and illuminates the impact air pollution has had on the lives of real people. When read as a whole, Pollution in San Bernardino attests to a systemic problem—a problem that puts profits and commercial interests over the health, wellbeing, and lives of the predominantly Hispanic, working class families living near the BNSF rail yard. It is with this understanding that many individuals have come together to educate and mobilize their neighbors to hold BNSF—their most intrusive neighbor—accountable to all San Bernardino residents’ human rights.

Human rights, including economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, recognize that all people require the same basic necessities in order to live a dignified life: access to water, food, and shelter, safe and healthy working and living conditions, a voice in decisions that affect themselves and their community, among others. When the government does not work to protect any one of these necessities, it is in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed and recognized by every country of the world. The right to health in particular is outlined in detail in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) signed by 160 governments in an effort to protect the human rights of people around the world. While the U.S. signed the covenant in 1977 it was never ratified, meaning that the United States is one of only a handful of countries around the world that neither recognizes nor agrees to abide by the covenant.

Pollution in San Bernardino makes use of the ICESCR specifically because it provides a structure currently unavailable in U.S. national law or policy. The regulation of rail yard emissions is federally preempted, meaning that local and state agencies do not have the authority to impose emission standards. Only the federal government can prosecute rail companies for the violation of federal law. Since there are currently no enforceable national laws or regulations on rail yard diesel emissions, Westside residents are left unprotected and disenfranchised.

Though BNSF is operating within the law, they are clearly violating the human rights of the surrounding community, as supported by study after study by medical experts linking diesel pollution with higher rates of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and asthma. Perhaps the most important indicator of these abuses is the personal experiences of San Bernardino residents who see, feel, smell, and hear the pollution produced by the BNSF rail yard and other industrial facilities in their neighborhood every day and night. The human rights framework validates the voice of the west San Bernardino community and highlights the failure of the government and current law to protect the basic rights of west side residents.

For both San Bernardino residents and decision makers, this report provides the information and resources necessary to understand the current situation and take an active role in building a brighter future for San Bernardino.

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The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ):

CCAEJ works with communities in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties to bring people together to improve their social and natural environment. We do this by developing indigenous leadership, community organizing through strategic campaigns and building a base of community power in order to create safer, healthier, toxic free places to live, work, learn, and play. For information on getting involved email: graciela.l@ccaej.org

Educational Network for Global and Grassroots Exchange (ENGAGE):

ENGAGE is a coalition of educators, community organizers, and students who transform our learning experiences into lifelong connections and cooperative action between peoples and social movements working toward a just and sustainable world. The ENGAGE network facilitates educational exchange, collaboration, and solidarity between communities facing separate but connected issues of development throughout the US and internationally. For more information please email: humanrights@engagetheworld.org
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Pollution in San Bernardino

The Right to Health

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 12.1, General Comment No. 14

The right to health is “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

“The right to health embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life...such as housing...safe and healthy working conditions, and healthy environment.”

The right to health requires the state to formulate and implement national policies for: “the prevention and reduction of the population’s exposure to harmful substances such as radiation and harmful chemicals or other detrimental environmental conditions.”

A violation to the right to health includes the state’s “failure to take all necessary measures to safeguard persons within their jurisdiction...This category includes such omissions as the failure to regulate the activities of individuals, groups or corporations so as to prevent them from violating the right to health of others.”

Violations of Human Rights to Health in San Bernardino

The health impacts of diesel pollution are well documented and studied. Long-term exposure to diesel pollution causes greater instances of asthma among children and adults, higher cancer risk, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, and pre-mature death. There is no question that the close proximity of the BNSF railyard to residential areas is a serious health threat to residents of the Westside and surrounding communities, thus their right to health has been violated. The local, state and federal government have failed to protect the human rights of Westside residents in the following ways:

- Lacking enforceable national and state policies directly regulating the emissions of railyards that would require BNSF to reduce its emissions.

- Zoning heavy industry in close proximity to residential areas and schools. With no buffer zone between the BNSF railyard and surrounding communities, the health threat posed by fine particulate pollution dramatically increases.

- Failing to require and to facilitate a timely transition from diesel and out-of-date technology to cleaner, safer and more sustainable zero emission technologies for truck, locomotive and on-site equipment, such as electrification or maglev technology.

- Absence of a remediation plan to reduce exposure and curb health impacts on nearby communities, such as planting trees and shrubs between homes and the fence line of the BNSF railyard to capture ultrafine particles; installing effective air filtration systems in nearby schools and homes to protect residents from the constant emissions; relocating heavy moving equipment further away from residents to reduce noise and exposure to the emissions of railyard equipment; and moving the truck entrance away from residential roads to divert heavy traffic away from the community park and homes.

- Environmental discrimination—as noted in several national studies and the findings of this report, poor and minority communities have a lack to access to political and economic resources to protect themselves from the placement of polluting facilities in their communities and thus their basic human right to health is disproportionately violated. The state has failed to make effective remedies for such rights violations accessible to all communities with special consideration to those who are socially and economically vulnerable. The federal government has failed to meet its commitment to ensure environmental justice for all communities by failing to intervene in these severe health threats from diesel.
The BNSF Intermodal Rail Yard in the Westside of San Bernardino

BNSF is the second largest freight railroad company in the U.S., operating in 28 states. The company operates 6,600 locomotives and 32 intermodal facilities, serving more than 40 ports.

For over half a century before a merger created BNSF, Santa Fe Railway owned and operated the rail yard adjacent to residential communities on the Westside of San Bernardino. In 1995, Santa Fe merged with Burlington Northern and in the subsequent years BNSF expanded the rail yard into an intermodal facility. The conversion brought a high volume of truck traffic from the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles and greatly expanded the rail yard’s size and capacity. Diesel emissions significantly increased from the additional locomotives, rail yard equipment and the thousands of diesel spewing trucks that come in and out of the facility each day.

The resulting diesel emission sources include but are not limited to locomotives (48% or 10.6 tons per year); cargo handling equipment (17% or 3.7 tons per year); on road trucks and other yard vehicles (20%, or 4.4 tons per year); and off road equipment transportation refrigeration units and refrigerated railcars (15% or 3.4 tons per year). Additional toxic air contaminants amount to approximately 290 pounds per year, adding to the 22 tons per year of diesel particulate emissions, listed above.2
Maurissa Gamble & Estella Hernandez

Estella unzips her granddaughter Maurissa’s blue backpack. Instead of the toys and books you’d expect a toddler to keep with her, Estella removes boxes and boxes of medicine and a large machine with tubes coming out of it. “It’s a nebulizer,” Estella explains, “She uses it so she can breathe. It opens up her lungs. When she’s having trouble breathing she’ll come and tell us.” At the age of three Maurissa has already been diagnosed with severe asthma.

The nebulizer dissolves packets of specialized medicine into a fine mist which Maurissa inhales to treat her asthma. Maurissa has to carry the machine around with her wherever she goes in case she has an asthma attack.

“She has MediCal that covers it, but if it wasn’t for that I don’t know what we would do,” Estella says. Maurissa’s medications cost more $1,000 every three months.

Maurissa is one of many children living on the Westside whose lung development has been seriously impacted by the diesel pollution emitted by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail yard. For children, who are sensitive to environmental hazards, diesel pollution is particularly dangerous to their healthy development.

Maurissa spends most of the day with Estella, who runs a daycare out of her home a few blocks from the BNSF rail yard. Diesel is not the only type of pollution that children on the Westside face. A Robertson’s Ready Mix Concrete factory opened next door to Arroyo Valley High School in 2007, directly behind Estella’s daycare.

The view from Estella’s back porch, beyond the multi-colored toys scattered across her yard, consists of enormous piles of concrete mix and crushed rock, large conveyor belts, and heavy moving equipment. More noticeable than the view, however, is the dust. Estella says that Robertson’s does not take necessary steps to reduce dust, such as watering down the piles and roads they work on.

Early every morning Estella washes away the concrete dust and diesel soot that has settled overnight on the daycare’s toys. Despite her efforts to protect her kids, coughing is common at her daycare. “It’s hard to breathe sometimes,” Estella explains. “We can’t do normal activities outside anymore.” On days that are particularly bad she has no other choice than to ask parents to keep their children at home.

As far as Estella can tell the state and city government have not looked out for west side residents for the last two decades. “When [the mayor] wants to do something he has to ask for permission from the companies,” Estella says. Agreeing with her grandmother, Maurissa says, “We are [the mayor’s] children. He is supposed to be taking care of us.”
San Bernardino is a densely populated residential area. The BNSF intermodal rail yard is planted in the center of the city’s Westside. Across from the park where a group of neighborhood kids are playing soccer, a dozen trucks line up in the street waiting to enter the rail yard’s gates. Beyond the laughter of children playing across the street, the low rumble of the trucks’ diesel engines, the harsh clanging of heavy equipment and cranes loading the railcars, and the whistle and clack of trains arriving and departing are the constant background noises of the west side. One of many communities affected by the goods movement industry, the Westside of the City of San Bernardino can be used as a case study to understand the industry’s impact on communities in Southern California and throughout the nation.

Residents of San Bernardino’s Westside are predominately working class and Hispanic, with limited educational opportunities, and a large immigrant population. The population of San Bernardino is 57.3% Hispanic/Latino and 16.3% African American, with the majority of these two populations concentrated on the city’s west side. The Westside is a considerably poorer part of town with greatly depressed property values. Based on a survey conducted in 2009 by the U.S. Census Bureau, 26.1% of San Bernardino’s 198,411 residents live below the poverty line, almost double California’s poverty rate as a whole. Of San Bernardino residents aged 25 years and over, 32.8% do not have a high school diploma, and 80.4% have no degree beyond high school. These demographics illustrate west San Bernardino’s vulnerability as a target for environmental discrimination.

Over the past two decades heavy industry has moved into residential areas of the west side. These include Robertson’s Ready Mix Concrete factory, an OmniTrans liquid and compressed natural gas (LNG/CNG) refueling station, auto body shops, and, most prominently, the BNSF intermodal rail yard. Since BNSF expanded and converted the former Santa Fe rail yard into an intermodal facility in 1998, diesel truck traffic combined with a greatly expanded volume of goods transported through the region, have caused alarming levels of air pollution. The World Health Organization (WHO) ranked the west end of San Bernardino and Riverside counties fourth among areas with the worst particulate pollution in the world. The area ranked below only Jakarta, Indonesia; Calcutta, India; and Bangkok, Thailand. The Environmental Protection Agency has designated the South Coast Air Basin, which includes San Bernardino, as an extreme non-attainment area for ozone levels, one of only two areas in the U.S., and a severe non-attainment area for particulate pollution. This designation means that levels of these air pollutants greatly exceed the national standards set forth by the Clean Air Act, requiring urgent action.

Though BNSF Corporation reported a profit of $1.7 billion in 2009, this prosperity is not reflected in the surrounding community. In September 2010 the unemployment rate for San Bernardino was 18.9%, compared to the national average of 9.2%. Transportation and warehousing combined provide only 7.5% of employment in San Bernardino, with the sectors that employ the most people being educational services, health care, social assistance, retail trade, and construction.

BNSF and the goods movement industry have, however, passed on many health effects to residents of the Westside. Existing communities whose homes and schools are in close proximity to these pollution sources are exposed to the highest levels of particulate pollution in the nation. Poor public policies, a lack of appropriate planning, and the drive for economic growth have created a situation where schools are next door to polluting industries, diesel trucks crowd residential streets, and neighbors cannot use their backyards because of overwhelming noise and fumes. The result is an overall deterioration of the air quality, public health, and quality of life. This health threat, coupled with a lack of political resources, leaves Westside residents unprotected and creates one of the clearest examples of environmental discrimination in the country.
Juanita Costilla

Juanita has lived in the same house for 43 years. Given her long history in west San Bernardino, she is able to see the changes to the environment and identify the sources of pollution that have progressively invaded her home: “First it was the Omnitrans on the corner of 5th and Medical Center, and now it’s the BNSF rail yard.”

The BNSF rail yard is three blocks from Juanita and her husband Florentino’s home. Juanita describes the growth of the rail yard, “About 10 years ago there weren’t as many trucks as there are now. There were hardly any trucks.”

The industrial pollution has progressively taken a larger toll on her and her husband’s health – culminating in Florentino’s death in February 2010 after bladder cancer spread to his bones. Because Florentino lived a healthy lifestyle up until his diagnosis, Juanita believes his cancer was caused by pollution. “He was a healthy man until he developed cancer,” Juanita pleads.

Juanita has struggled with her own health since her husband’s death. “Before I was younger and didn’t feel it as much and felt healthier. I’m 74 years old. Now I feel all of the effects from the pollution,” Juanita says.

Juanita often has difficulty breathing and takes medicine to help regulate her heartbeat. Only eight weeks before she was interviewed she had surgery to remove a tumor. “They didn’t know how I got it. It was a mass in my abdomen,” she says. “It was not cancer, which was good luck, but I took it out because the doctors said, ‘You leave it in and it will make cancer.’”

Juanita’s doctors could not identify what caused the tumor. “They don’t know what the cause was, because I don’t drink. I don’t smoke. I don’t eat unhealthy food,” says Juanita, convinced that it was caused by the pollution in her community. She sees the proof for her claim all around her.

“When I had fruit trees, when the fruit would come in it would be all brown with the residue from the pollution,” Juanita explains. The pollution is not limited to the outdoors. Juanita points to the cooling vents in her wall and ceiling that are covered in a black residue. They are stuffed with paper towels and covered with plastic bags to try to keep the air pollution from coming into the house. “You can see the pollution on my walls that comes in from outside around the water cooler,” she says. “It gets stuck inside the house, you can’t ventilate it. I open up the windows and the pollution comes into the house, but you can’t get it out.”

The daily cycle of pollution is like clockwork to her: “The mornings is when it’s stronger, when the air pollution is thicker, and you can smell the fumes from the trains and the diesel trucks”.

Juanita feels relatively lucky to still have her home. If they had been uninsured Florentino’s cancer treatments would have cost up to $800 for one visit. “A lot of people in this area don’t have insurance. I know a family that lost their house and all of their finances because of cancer. They didn’t have insurance to help them,” she says.

Juanita’s home, despite its proximity to the BNSF, is all that she has. “We’re stuck here and we don’t have any other way. As you get older, the housing out here, the value is much lower. So if we were to sell our homes we wouldn’t be able to afford to live in a cleaner, safer area,” Juanita explains. She is faced with a fate she believes to be inevitable. “I’m just waiting to be diagnosed with cancer from so many years of smelling and inhaling the pollution,” she says.
The Goods Movement Industry

With globalization and the expansion of international trade, corporate and consumer demand for imported goods is continuously increasing. These imports, the majority of which arrive by ship, are transported to millions of destinations all over the country by an expanding logistics industry otherwise known as the goods movement industry. The goods movement industry includes ports, trucking companies, rail yards and rail lines, warehouses, and distribution centers.

Currently, more than one-third of all cargo imported into the U.S. by ship enters through the Los Angeles and Long Beach Ports, making them the most active load centers in the world and the largest sources of air pollution in Southern California. In 2005, there were more than 47,000 truck trips per day out of the ports of Los Angeles. More than 35,000 trains—many of them longer than a mile and pulled by four, diesel-powered locomotives—course through the region every year. Currently, public policy encourages the expansion of the goods movement industry in Southern California causing these numbers to increase each year.

The region east of Los Angeles, including San Bernardino and Riverside counties, is known as the Inland Valley. From an economic perspective, the rapid industrial growth, lower property values, and convenient access to freeways, airports, and rail lines have made the Inland Valley an ideal location for manufacturing and industrial facilities, warehouses, rail yards, and distribution centers. Of the millions of ocean freight containers arriving at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, 70% are transported through communities in the Inland Valley to clusters of warehouses and rail yards before being distributed to the rest of the country.

While this system benefits industry, it does not take into account externalized health costs caused by the goods movement industry in California. That cost, an estimated $21.5 billion, is paid instead by taxpayers each year. In the South Coast Air Basin, which includes Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties, industrial health impacts such as premature death, chronic bronchitis, and hospitalization are estimated to cost $10.2 billion per year. The expansion and maintenance of public freeways and roads, on which heavy trucks create the greatest wear and tear, further subsidizes the goods movement industry.

An overall decline in air quality, property values, and quality of life also reduce economic opportunities for communities crowded by the goods movement industry. A study by Jon Haveman of the Public Policy Institute of California categorizes areas near ports, rail yards, warehouses, and distribution centers as “hot spots”—bearing the brunt of negative impacts but not sharing the economic benefits. He found that between 1990 and 2000, areas within three miles of goods movement facilities experienced a slower employment growth and slower development of business establishments than the rest of Los Angeles County. In Southern California, affected communities stretch from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to Riverside and San Bernardino counties.
Rudi Flores

Rudi Flores lists his family members who have had serious health problems. Among them he picks out several; his father died of an aggressive form of cancer that led to respiratory failure, and his sister is a breast cancer survivor. He also picks out himself. He was diagnosed with a seminoma found in his upper abdomen, a rare type of cancer usually found in the testes. After going through chemotherapy, he was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a condition referring to both chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Rudi has lived at the same house in San Bernardino since birth. Memories of his childhood are marked by family, the amiable climate, and the expanse of mountains encompassing his valley home. “I've gone everywhere else but I've always returned here,” Rudi says. “To me the idea of coming back here always seemed like a good idea. But that was before this monstrosity started to really grow, to become what it is.”

Over the past ten years since the “monstrosity” – BNSF – expanded into an intermodal facility, Rudi has seen health problems in the community intensify. “If you go out here in the yard and you count the trucks that go through in an hour, and then one day, and then one week, and a year, you can see the type of contamination that’s coming through here. It’s a no brainer,” Rudi says. Thousands of diesel trucks come into west San Bernardino each day.

Due to his COPD, Rudi struggles with yard work and other exertive activities. Rudi watches the neighborhood kids walk home from school, shirt fronts soaked with blood from bloody noses. He points out households, naming the health issues for each: respiratory problems, cancer, premature births. “A lot of people can’t move away. They just endure it,” Rudi explains. His hometown no longer feels like the pleasant place it once was.

Due to west San Bernardino’s working class and Hispanic demographics, Rudi believes BNSF’s disregard for their rights is a symptom of living in a community lacking political resources. “If you’ve got minorities with no education, nobody is going to be able to cut a check to bring an attorney here,” Rudi says.

He encourages others to make a list of their family members and assess the effects pollution has had on their family’s health and wellbeing. “The second list you’ll make is how much it will cost to take care of each person, and how long they are going to live. What will it cost your family in time, effort, and tears?” Rudi asks. He hopes this exercise will lead others to fight back for their rights.
Pollution in San Bernardino

Health Impacts of Diesel Pollution

According to the California Air Resources Board, diesel engines emit a complex mixture of air pollutants, composed of gaseous and solid material. The visible emissions in diesel exhaust are known as particulate matter or PM. In 1998, California identified diesel exhaust particulate matter (PM) as a toxic air contaminant based on its potential to cause cancer, premature death, and other health problems. Toxic air contaminants (TACs) are those air pollutants that may cause or contribute to an increase in death or serious illness or may pose a present or future hazard to human health. Diesel engines also contribute to California’s fine particulate matter (PM2.5) air quality problems. Those most vulnerable are children whose lungs are still developing and the elderly who may have other serious health problems. Based on year 2006-2008 emissions in California, diesel PM contributes each year to approximately 2,000 premature deaths. In addition, diesel soot causes visibility reduction and is a potent global warmer.17

Breathing diesel exhaust isn’t just unpleasant – it is hazardous to your health. In fact, health research indicates that the portion of the exhaust you can’t see maybe the most dangerous of all. Asthma attacks, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, neurological illness, and even premature death—all of these are among the most serious public health problems linked to emissions from the nation’s fleet of diesel vehicles. Multiple short- and long-term studies carried out by California universities, organizations and foundations, including some studies done in conjunction with BNSF, have supported the understanding of just how dangerous it is, prompting South Coast Air Quality Management District to make a transition to a zero emission logistics industry a top priority.18

Diesel exhaust has been found to cause and exacerbate the effects of asthma, lead to premature death due to effects on the heart and cardiovascular systems, and cause birth defects, including increased heart defects, low birth weight, and preterm babies. Of the ten most polluted counties in the U.S., eight are in California, including San Bernardino County which boasts the highest prevalence of asthma symptoms for children ages 1 to 17 in Southern California – 13.1%.20 Children are more likely than adults to be affected by outdoor air pollution because they tend to spend more time outdoors and have higher respiration rates.21 The Children’s Health Study, a long-term study of more than 3,000 children in 12 Southern California communities, found that traffic-related pollutants, contribute to the onset of asthma. The study found that children playing three or more team sports in high pollution areas have an increased risk of developing asthma.22 Since the truck entrance for the BNSF rail yard is located across the street from the only park in west San Bernardino, children playing there are at high risk.

The USC Children’s Health Study found children of the Inland Valleys have the slowest lung growth and weakest lung capacity of all children studied in southern California. A CARB Health Risk Assessments (HRAs) found the BNSF rail yard on the Westside of the City of San Bernardino had the highest cancer risk of all rail yards in the state at a whopping 3,300 in a million compared to the accepted upper limit of 1 in a million cancer risk.23
Terry & Nick Lopez

Terry remembers the Sunday mornings of her childhood spent running around her grandmother’s yard. Forty years later she lives in the same house. From her porch she looks out at a very different landscape, now dominated by the BNSF rail yard directly across the street. Terry’s life also changed dramatically one morning in October 2009 when she began to feel lightheaded while jogging.

When Terry called her doctor she was told to get to a hospital immediately. “There was nobody at home who could take me, so I had to drive myself,” Terry says. A CAT scan showed Terry had suffered from a stroke caused by a cerebral infarction, of which air pollution has been identified as a risk factor.21 “The head doctor told me that because I had been exercising it probably prevented me from having a serious stroke, which could have killed me,” she says.

After spending a month at home resting and starting physical therapy, Terry is trying to get her life back. “I had a little bit of paralysis, and my left leg is still very weak. I know my speech is labored. I used to get up and speak, and it would just flow out of me,” she says. “Now it’s very hard for me.”

Terry has spent 10 years as a vocal leader in her community, educating and organizing neighbors around the health threats caused by BNSF and Omnitrans. Her advocacy reaches beyond the effects of the industry on community residents. She has a comparable stake in how the industry treats its workers.

“My husband works for BNSF,” Terry says. “I tell these guys you have to be careful.” Because of the long hours spent working in close proximity to sources of diesel exhaust, workers at the rail yard are exposed to the most intense concentrations of pollution.

Terry’s husband Nick has worked at the BNSF rail yard for more than 33 years. He has two more years to retirement, but Terry has reason to suspect that Nick’s prolonged exposure to diesel pollution through his work will cause health problems soon enough. “The majority of these poor guys that retire from the rail yard don’t make it to enjoy their retirement long enough. We have a man down the street that retired and then maybe about a year later he had cancer and passed away... A lot of the guys have passed away because of cancer of all kinds, mostly respiratory,” Terry says.

Among Terry’s worries for her husband’s health at work are the rail yard’s use of out-of-date, dirty technology, his workplace’s close proximity to the source of pollution, and the particles of pollution that accumulate on the ground. “Who knows what’s kicked up when the trains go by,” Terry says. “His friends that he works with, I know that all of them are worried that if they say anything about the working conditions, they’re going to get fired. It’s just easy to get rid of them and not pay them their benefits.”

Terry knows that BNSF and trucking companies that operate out of its rail yard can invest in cleaner technologies that will protect both their workers and the community. “I support my husband, and I want BNSF to do the right thing for the community,” Terry says. “They make a lot of money, and despite what everybody thinks they need to be told that they can’t do certain things, too, that they need to be responsible.”24
Health Impacts in San Bernardino

The BNSF rail yard in San Bernardino operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, creating constant noise from trucks passing through residential roads, cranes and loading equipment, and the arrival and departure of trains. Noise pollution, when encountered continuously and at high levels (of over 85 decibels) contributes to permanent hearing loss from trauma to the structures of the inner ear. Non-auditory health effects include sleep disturbance, increased blood pressure, and decreased cognitive performance. Studies of children exposed to long-term environmental noise have shown significant deficits in language comprehension, sustained attention, and reading ability and performance on national standardized tests as compared to students from quieter schools.

Communities in San Bernardino and Riverside counties suffer from the highest particulate pollution levels in the United States. The most harmful byproduct of burning diesel fuel is the ultrafine particulate matter and organic vapors. Particulate matter is classified as a toxic air contaminant by the California Air Resources Board causing cancer and other adverse health problems, including respiratory illnesses, asthma, heart disease, and premature death. A 2010 report written by CARB and peer reviewed by the EPA estimated that fine particulate pollution (PM2.5) causes 9,200 premature deaths in California each year. Particulate pollution is categorized into three main sizes (see figure 1). PM10 measure up to 10 microns in diameter and appears as black dust or soot. PM2.5 measure 2.5 microns or smaller in diameter and PM0.1 (ultra fines) make up more than 90% of diesel particulates. The smaller the size the greater the health risk. Because of their small size, ultra fine particles with their associated organic vapors are readily inhaled and can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, carrying an array of toxins throughout the body. Of the hundreds of chemical compounds in diesel exhaust, 41 are listed by the California EPA as toxic air contaminants and 19 are known carcinogens.

Based on a review of over a hundred medical studies in their database, the American Heart Association has identified a causal relationship between diesel exposure and an increase in cardiovascular mortality, fatal and non-fatal cardiovascular events (such as strokes, heart failure, and arrhythmias), and a decrease in life expectancy. Because it inhibits proper lung function and growth, particulate pollution has the greatest impact on children whose lungs are developing. An eight year study done by the University of Southern California examined the lung function of 3,677 children from 12 communities in Southern California including San Bernardino. These children were tested annually for lung capacity from the age of 10 until they turned 18. The study found that children in the Inland Valleys, like San Bernardino had the weakest lung capacity and the slowest lung growth of all children studied in southern California. Another characteristic of particulate pollution is that health risk is determined by proximity to the source. The closer one is to the diesel source the greater the health risk. In the South Coast Air Basin mobile sources like trucks and trains cause 90% of cancer risk to residents, 70% of which is from diesel exhaust. One study found that a child born in Riverside or San Bernardino county will be exposed to as many cancer-causing agents in his or her first 12 days of life as most people are in 70 years.

The ultrafine particles are surrounded by vapors of toxic chemicals. These vapors penetrate the cells and begin the disease process by two mechanisms. Prooxidant activity where reactive oxygen species are generated that induce a state of oxidative stress in the cells leading to an inflammatory response; and Electrophilic activity that form irreversible bonds with a cells proteins and DNA, resulting in the proteins being irreversibly modified and losing their normal functions. It appears that the vapors, not the particles are actually the most dangerous disease causing element within diesel exhaust.

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Community Profile

Maria Birrueta

Maria Birrueta’s daughter, Lucia now 17, was born premature with excess lead in her blood. Now such a high rate of children in her neighborhood are either born prematurely, with brain damage, or developmental deformities that Maria says doctors are suggesting women get abortions.

“I have a friend next door who has two children who were born less than two pounds. On August 24 there was another baby born that weighed a little more than two pounds. Another girl had a baby who weighed three pounds,” Maria says, listing cases of premature births in the vicinity of the BNSF.

Living only a few blocks from the BNSF, Maria has witnessed widespread health issues in her community, and worries about her family’s health. “Most of the neighbors in this community have died from cancer. So far I’ve known 15 people who have had cancer. They’ve had tumors in their breasts, intestines, in their lungs, and in their head,” Maria says.

Maria’s daughter has suffered the worst health problems in the family. When Lucia attended Ramona-Alessandro Elementary School across the street from her home, she had the same health problems as many of the children at the school: frequent nosebleeds, nausea, and migraines.

“I had to take my daughter to the doctor and get a notice saying that she couldn’t play outside because every time she would play outside in the playground she would get sick,” Maria says with distress in her voice. Whenever her daughter smells the pollution from the BNSF and Omnitrans, she gets a very strong migraine.

“[The companies are] violating our right to breath clean air. They don’t care about our health. The owners of these companies don’t live here,” Maria says. She sees a lack of information as a main problem in her community. “There are no warnings in Spanish that inform people of any contaminants that these companies generate,” Maria explains. “As Latinos, when we see a letter in English we just don’t read it. And that’s an excuse for the companies to say they sent us a notice. Since nobody did anything, they can do whatever they want.”

If she wants to protect her family and improve Lucia’s health, Maria sees no other option than to work tirelessly informing and joining with her neighbors. “We all want clean air so our children will be healthy,” Maria insists.
San Bernardino’s Unique Conditions = Severe Health Threats

Southern California is known for its sunny hot days and cool coastal breezes. The Inland Valleys are known for its majestic San Bernardino Mountains surrounding the vast heavily populated valleys. The combination of the two creates unique conditions that are disastrous for residents of the Inland Valley.

As the on shore coastal breezes bring cooled air onto land it blows easterly bringing whatever pollutants it encounters with it. The pollutants created by the industrial operations of refineries, manufacturing and at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are blown east into the Inland Valleys and are trapped by the mountain ranges—compounding the pollution levels to horrendous levels.

Recent research (Froines, UCLA, 2010) demonstrates an even more alarming factor occurring with the chemicals as they move east. Not only do the numbers of particles increase in mass as they travel east but they undergo a photochemical change in their chemical structure. As with the creation of smog where vehicle emissions and industrial fumes react in the atmosphere with sunlight to form photochemical smog, a similar reaction occurs as the ultra fines and vapors travel east. Non toxic compounds from the ports travel east and are converted to highly toxic compounds that settle in the inland valley. When these compounds reach the Inland areas they are trapped by the bowl created by the mountains. Local sources from railyards, intermodal facilities, and diesel spewing trucks delivering to massive warehouses and distribution centers in the area compound the deadly situation even more. The result is a heavy burden of pollution smothering the area, especially those at the fence line of these operations. It is of no surprise that the San Bernardino BNSF railyard poses the highest cancer risk of all railyards in the state.

The ultrafine particles of diesel exhaust are surrounded by vapors of toxic chemicals. These vapors penetrate the human cells and begin the disease process by two mechanisms. Prooxidant activity where reactive oxygen species are generated that induce a state of oxidative stress in the cells leading to an inflammatory response; and Electrophilic activity that form irreversible bonds with a cells proteins and DNA, resulting in the proteins being irreversibly modified and losing their normal functions.

The old saying of “location, location, location” certainly applies to the deadly soup of diesel exhaust that haunts the Inland Valleys of southern California. The combination of geography, meteorology, and chemistry create the conditions that threaten families in San Bernardino. Fueled by the addition of massive local sources from the intermodal facilities and railyards with the thousands of diesel spewing trucks drawn to them create a manmade disaster in the making. This unique and horrendous situation demands a unique and extraordinary response.
Alycia Enciso

Illness and death in the family have made Alycia Enciso an expert on the negative health effects of the BNSF rail yard. She is not at all surprised by the reports that cite the enormous cancer risk caused by the BNSF rail yard. The experiences of her family members and their neighbors reflect those impacts.

A few years after Alycia’s aunt, Lupe Munez, started having to take an oxygen tank wherever she went for her respiratory problems, she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Six months later Lupe passed away at age 67. Her husband Jess Munez is a survivor of bone cancer. “Though I think he’s under treatment right now again,” Alycia says.

When her aunt died, Alycia took a survey of the nine homes in her aunt’s cul-de-sac a block south of the BNSF tracks. “There’s at least one person if not several people in every household who has cancer,” Alycia reports.

Alycia can point to effects of the BNSF beyond cancer. About three years prior to Lupe’s death, another of Alycia’s aunts, Tere Enciso, died from a stroke at age 66. “She was always fairly healthy. She was very active and involved in the community, but she had always lived in the area. Our family store was on 5th and Mt. Vernon, so she was always a few feet from BNSF,” Alycia says. Alycia’s younger sister Carmen Ruiz and her 15 year old daughter Vanessa were both diagnosed with asthma a week before Alycia was interviewed.

For both San Bernardino residents and elected officials, there should be no lack of evidence that the BNSF rail yard has caused a decrease in the quality of life for its neighbors. According to some research, Alycia says, “If I was destined to live until I was 84 years old, if I live in west San Bernardino I may only live to be 70 because it cuts down the quality of life.” Yet despite mounting evidence, decision makers have failed to confront BNSF about its impact on the lives and health of surrounding communities.

“It really surprises me that the leadership of this area has not taken this on as a real challenge, because it impacts everyone. It’s not just the people on the west side,” Alycia says. She notes that the mounting health care costs alone should be enough to persuade the leadership towards action.

Alycia feels strongly that faced with failed government leadership San Bernardino residents need to take small measures to reduce their exposure to pollution: “People [need to] know that there are certain times that if they want to be outside they need to wear masks. That our air filters should be changed more often, instead of every six months, maybe every other month or every month.”

Alycia cannot understand why elected officials with the information that exists now are not doing things properly; but until they act, she and her family can’t afford to wait for them. “Those are some of the things we ourselves need to learn in order to survive,” she insists.
Environmental discrimination is exercised through policies and practices that disproportionately impact marginalized groups with environmental burdens and polluting facilities, most often, poor communities and racial minorities. One clear example of how vulnerable communities are targeted was documented with the discovery of the “Cerrell Report”. In 1984, the California Waste Management Board drafted guidelines for the placement of waste-to-energy incinerators after encountering opposition to many of its proposed projects. The Cerrell Report, as it became known, recommended the placement of incinerators in low-income communities. Waste management planners anticipated that public officials and residents in such locales would overlook the health problems associated with incinerators because of their need for employment and tax revenue. Further, poor communities were thought to lack the political resources by which higher-income neighborhoods blocked the local placement of incinerators.

The report suggests that trash-to-steam plants should be built in towns with less than 25,000 people where residents are old, poor, politically conservative, and Roman Catholic. The report found that people most likely to successfully oppose such facilities are young or middle-aged, college educated, liberal, and Protestant.44

“All socioeconomic groupings tend to resent the nearby siting of major (waste disposal) facilities, but the middle and upper socioeconomic strata possess better resources to effectuate their opposition,” the report says. “Middle and higher socioeconomic strata neighborhoods should not fall at least within five miles of the proposed site.”45 The report carefully sidesteps any reference to race but its recommendations confirmed that poor communities had been targeted as the site for polluting facilities.

Subsequent demographic surveys and studies have confirmed that race is a significant factor in determining health impacts on minority communities. One study found that race, not class, was the most significant factor in determining the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. The study found that three out of every five African American and Hispanic American citizens lived in communities with uncontrolled waste sites.46 Many studies have found that asthma occurs much more frequently among African American children than white children.47-49 African American children are also four times more likely to die from asthma than white children.50 While 52 percent of whites live in counties with high ozone levels, the figure for African Americans is 62 percent and for Hispanics it is 71 percent.51 The trend is similar for other air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, lead, and particulate matter, with higher percentages of Hispanics and African Americans in counties with poor air quality.52
Michelle Yvonne Lingo

Michelle Yvonne Lingo moved to the Westside of San Bernardino three and a half years ago. She reports that since she’s moved here she gets light headed and dizzy and has to just lie down and sleep.

Members of her family have also seen affects. While her daughter doesn’t have asthma yet, but after playing outside she gets really congested. Her husband, Kenny, has grown up on the Westside so he has been here a long time. He has allergies really bad. “He has had bronchitis in the past and gets it a lot. Sometimes he has to cough and cough to clear his air passages because he can’t breathe.”

Michelle became aware of the pollution from BNSF and Omnitrans from her neighbors. “The community is making us aware of the pollution issues. We have to know what is happening around us before we can do anything. That’s the first step,” she says.

Michelle worries about her animals too. She’s noticed that her neighbors have had dogs that died mysteriously. “I got some animals that died and I don’t know why they died, it’s kind of unexplainable – that shouldn’t happen.”

Michelle believes the best way to clean up the air is to have more community involvement. “Just the fact that the community is aware of what’s going on helps. We need to talk about it and try to get some type of resolutions,” she says. “If nobody knows what’s going on then how can they change anything, if they don’t even know that they’re being affected how they can change anything.”

Michelle continues, “Seems to me we have a right to clean air quality. They seem to be polluting the world; we are polluting the whole world.” Michelle believes that we shouldn’t have to wait for people to be affected before we do something. “It shouldn’t be to where our health is threatened before someone cares or does something about it.”
Pollution in San Bernardino

A Community’s Response

Faced with the overwhelmingly high levels of pollution; struggling on meager wages to support one’s family; given the cost of raising children; how do low income, hard working families dare to take on powerful corporations like Warren Buffet’s BNSF railroad?

CCAEJ has explored situations like these for many years— and we’ve learned some lessons. In reviewing our history we recognized that success in confronting power was based on the community’s major strength – the courage and resiliency of people strategically united toward a common goal. There is a strongly held belief in the right of all people to the basic necessities in order to live a dignified life—access to clean water, food and shelter, safe and healthy working and living conditions, a voice in decisions that affect themselves and their community. This drive for what is right spurs people no matter what the obstacles to confront power and demand action. We recognize and honor that every person brings with them special skills and talents and a wealth of lived experiences. Combining those skills in a strategic manner can overcome all the other obstacles.

Inland Valley Environmental Justice Intervention And Revitalization Program

A different approach is needed to truly address the current, outrageous levels of pollution smothering these EJ communities. To create real environmental justice where all communities have the right to healthy, safe, and prosperous communities, three things must occur—

1) Stop the levels of pollution from getting worse;
2) Intervene and take dramatic steps to reduce the imminent health threat and reduce the current levels of pollution and
3) Take proactive steps to create healthy, sustainable communities.

Once again we look back to the toxic’s movement and the systemic changes they forced around toxic chemicals. A new program similar to Superfund is needed to address the hundreds of communities suffering from the disproportionate levels of pollution smothering their families today.

CCAEJ is proposing a similar program as CERCLA be used for Environmental Justice Communities—no matter the source of the pollution. We can identify certain communities that bear a higher level of risk due to the polluting facilities in their midst. Those sources may be refineries, dump sites, landfills, incinerators, large agricultural facilities, and, as the importation of goods from Asia continues to increase, we see facilities that cater to the movement of goods and products raising the levels of air pollution. Again the concentration and highest levels are found in low income, communities of color throughout the southern California area.
Community Profile

Susana Negrete & Jose Velasco

Unaware of BNSF’s plans to develop an intermodal facility Susana and Jose bought a home two blocks north of the rail yard in 1995. “When I got to this area, it was not that noisy and it was not as big as it is now. It was sort of like an explosion,” Jose says, describing the BNSF’s expansion.

Susana sees the costs of the industry’s expansion for her family. “I paid a low price for my house, but my family and I are paying the rest with our health,” she says.

Truck traffic and the 24-hour workday of the BNSF rail yard caused a dramatic increase in noise pollution which has left Susana, Jose, and their three children with little rest. Susana says she and Jose feel more exhausted at work, and it affects the children’s work at school.

Susana and Jose’s children used to frequent the one park in west San Bernardino. With a large grassy soccer field, baseball diamonds, playground, and a community center, the park is the hub of many community recreational activities. BNSF sited their truck entrance across the street from the park, causing thousands of diesel trucks to pass the park every day. After learning about the harmful pollution created by the passing trucks, Susana and Jose no longer allowed their children to use the park.

Despite this precaution, their two youngest sons have been diagnosed with asthma. “It is not just asthma. They have developed allergies, and they are always getting worse,” Susana says.

Despite the living condition, moving is out of the question for most residents. Property values in the neighborhood have been seriously affected. “Our homes are losing value…People can buy a house for $30,000 which is bad for this community,” Susana says. She and Jose currently owe more for their house than it is worth.

Without the resources to move, Susana and Jose sought to make a change for the community. “Maybe one day,” Susana says about the possibility of moving. “But that is not a solution, because maybe one day I will have the resources to move, but what about the rest of the community?” One year after Susana and Jose became involved with the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice, Susana was hired as a community organizer with the organization, working with her own community in San Bernardino.

“Honestly, [BNSF thinks] that we as a low-income, Spanish-speaking community are not going to say anything. That we are not going to be able to speak up,” Susana says. Determined to prove them wrong Susana has committed herself full-time to fighting for an environment where kids can go to parks, play, run, and enjoy life. “I don’t want to see kids growing up having to carry their oxygen tanks, and that’s the direction we’re heading,” she says.58
CCAEJ has developed a program to intervene and reduce the health risks and lessen levels of pollution smothering these communities and restore communities to healthy, safe and sustainable communities. It would consist of the following components:

1. Identify those communities heavily impacted (EJ Communities)
2. Bring local affected residents together combining their skills, talents and lived experience to identify concerns and outline comprehensive solutions.
3. Intervene to reduce current pollution levels and where that may take time, implement measures to reduce exposure levels.
4. Conduct a community visioning process lead by the local residents to outline the vision of a healthy sustainable community.
5. Target these communities – not for polluting facilities—but for resources, funding and assistance to “get rid of the bad and bring in the good”. This is in reparations for the years of disproportionate burdens of pollution and lack of services these communities have suffered under.

In 2009, CCAEJ started our journey to explore a new way of addressing both, the severe pollution levels from multiple sources and the lack of services and necessities every community deserves in order to live a health, safe and sustainable life. We developed an experimental framework we called our Inland Valley Environmental Justice Intervention and Revitalization Program.

Working with the residents of the Westside community in the City of San Bernardino we developed a leadership development program to build the capacity within the community. CCAEJ consistently focuses on those most affected by environmental health hazards: low-income communities of color and recent immigrants who live, work, learn and play closest to rail yards, industrial areas, toxic waste facilities, intermodal facilities, freeways and other areas at greatest risk for environmental health hazards. Our work within the Inland Valley is particularly strategic in advancing the goals of the environmental health and justice movements in California. The Inland Valley represents one of the fastest growing regions of the state, with San Bernardino County alone representing 10 percent of California’s total population. We leverage resources to bring the needs of these communities to the attention of elected officials, funders and key decision makers. We work to train future generations of leaders, particularly women, whose voices would otherwise not be heard.

CCAEJ developed the belief that the key to effectively solving community problems lies in bringing the diverse segments of the community together in one strong voice. By utilizing the skills, talents, and knowledge of each community member and tapping into the resources and relationships that are inherent within each community they can identify issues, define solutions, effectively advocate and create change. Each community member brings their own expertise and talents to the table, combining with others to form a strong community force. Helping individuals recognize their own strengths; learn new skills and develop the confidence to utilize them within a group setting, defines for us grassroots leadership development. The building blocks of every community lie in the relationships at the neighborhood level. We work to enable local residents to be the authorities within their neighborhoods. People have knowledge, contacts and skills that enable them to draw their neighbors into efforts to improve their community.
Maria Hernandez

Since Maria Hernandez moved to west San Bernardino with her family in 2007, they have started to feel the effects of air pollution. “We hope to live here forever. But if we live in a contaminated area, our goal is being blocked. It’s not a healthy future for our children,” Maria says. Of Maria’s four children one of her daughters suffers from nosebleeds and one of her sons has frequent headaches. In response Maria has taken a proactive approach. “I don’t want to have to wait for something worse to happen, so I’m focusing more on prevention,” she says.

For Maria a preventative approach means organizing with her neighbors to become better informed and take action against BNSF. She found the resources she needed by working with the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ).

She first got involved with CCAEJ as a student in their community education program called Salud Ambiental Lideres Tomando Accion (SALTA program), or in English, Environmental Health Leaders Taking Action. The 12 week course teaches ways to reduce exposure to household toxins and provides information about pollution sources in the community. During each weekly class students focus on topics such as: toxins in common household cleaning supplies and how to make natural non-toxic alternatives, health effects of diesel pollution, the goods movement industry, and the history and strategies of past social movements.

Maria graduated from the SALTA program in 2009, one of more than 700 San Bernardino residents to complete the program. “People are becoming more interested. It’s not an overnight change, but the community is passing the word on and becoming more aware,” Maria says, showing faith that SALTA is making an impact.

After graduating from the program, Maria joined the Community Action Team (CAT). CAT is a group of community members organized by CCAEJ to inform neighbors about the effects of pollution, to organize meetings with the community, and to pressure polluting facilities and government agencies to consider health impacts on surrounding communities before siting heavy industries near residential areas.

Currently, Maria is a member of the Assessment Team (A-team), working with other residents of west San Bernardino and CCAEJ organizers to conduct community-based participatory research. Using a device called a P-track, A-team members collect data on diesel particulate concentrations and map out pollution levels in the areas around the BNSF. They also count the number of trucks coming into and out of the BNSF and have identified areas to plant trees in order to decrease pollution levels.

“In order to inform the community about what is going on, we need to take steps to see what the level of contamination is,” Maria says. The A-team not only takes their data to the community, but also to meetings with the mayor and various government agencies. To encourage youth involvement they organize tours where local university students come see contaminated and toxic areas.

Through her previous and current work with CCAEJ, Maria is hoping to shift the government and industry’s focus from profits alone toward respecting the rights of herself, her family, and her community. She says with conviction, “As people we have the right to live in safe environments. The companies that contaminate the environment are violating my rights.”
Community Empowerment

Our Community Empowerment Program is the cornerstone of all the work we do at CCAEJ. The Empowerment Program focuses on leadership development and a base-building approach to bringing the voices of those directly affected into the critical policy debates of our time. Our efforts are not to build community leaders, but to encourage many community residents to share leadership. Some people are strong on research and like the details; others have strong people skills and can motivate others to get involved; others have financial skills; others have good writing skills; others have close relationships and credibility with many people in the community; and others have persuasive speaking skills. Each is a leader in their own right. Each has the ability to expand their skills and explore new experiences.

Our program starts with building awareness of the environmental health threats around us, through our SALTA program—Salud Ambiental Líderes Tomando Acción— (Environmental Health, Leaders Taking Action). The SALTA course helps individuals (primarily Latinas) who live in the Inland Valley learn about environmental health issues in their homes and neighborhoods, get involved in finding solutions, and ultimately, advocate for local and regional policy changes that will improve the health of their families and their communities.

Neighborhood Assessment Teams (A-Teams) begins to demystify science and create local experts on the issues around them. The A-Teams teach basic science of air pollution and train team members in assessing their community. We are currently involved in 5 Community Based Research Projects (CBRP) with USC, Loma Linda (2 studies), UC Davis and UCLA.

CCAEJ facilitates Community Action Teams in each of our focus communities. These are groups of local residents that come together to take leadership to identify areas of concern, research and develop appropriate solutions and advocate for change.

Our Organizing Academy provides an opportunity to advance the skills and experience of residents through a more in-depth understanding of organizing theory and skills development. A structured 12-week class provides not only in class theory but outside practice. One does not “learn” organizing and leadership by studying in a class but by doing. Home work assignments, role plays, practice before venturing out to the real world.

Through our various partnerships, participation in coalitions and collaborative, we expand the view of local residents to broader setting and increase their experiences and knowledge by working with other groups, and communities on issues of common concern. CCAEJ particularly seeks opportunities to partner with organizations focused on other social justice issues.

Community’s Platform for Action

Our Empowerment program provides the foundation for our work. We survey and engage residents in identifying those issues of most concern. We then facilitate a process for conducting research on the issue and identification of solutions that address the root cause of the problem. From this exercise we develop a Community Action Platform. The Platform identifies short term, midterm and long term goals. For the Goods Movement issue our long-term goal is to convert all aspects of the movement of goods and products to a zero emission logistics industry utilizing electric trucks, locomotives and equipment or maglev and other emerging, clean technologies as well as banning the use of diesel fuel. A midterm goal is strengthening regulations governing diesel emissions from trucks, locomotives, ships and equipment. Recognizing that the health of local residents continues to be damaged by these operations while we seek policy changes, we have outlined mechanisms to reduce exposure to the pollution levels. This approach of developing policy from the bottom up ensures the policies are relevant to those most directly affected.

Multi-Agency Task Force

CCAEJ’s program recognizes that to reduce the exposures and create a more healthy community will take a comprehensive approach that utilizes the resources, regulatory oversight and expertise of as many agencies, and civic organizations, as well as the effective leadership of local elected officials. To create a coordinated effort we sought to create a multiagency Task Force comprised of federal, state, regional and local agencies along with local elected officials and residents. Through this Task Force we would implement the Intervention Plan to reduce exposure to the pollution from the BNSF railyard and other pollution sources. This project seeks to change the piece meal approach to health impacts in heavily polluted communities and instead looks at the community as a whole, utilizing the various services and resources at hand in a coordinated and cooperative manner to build a healthy community.
Marilyn Alcantar

Marilyn Alcantar fully expects to have cancer by the time she is seventy. She hopes that her students at Ramona-Alessandro Elementary School in west San Bernardino are able to have a better future than the one she sees for herself.

Yet in just 15 years of working at Ramona-Alessandro, Marilyn has observed dramatic changes in her students’ health. A few years after Marilyn began at the school, Omnitrans built a compressed natural gas refueling depot across the street, a block north of the rail yard. Students started smelling chemical odors and experiencing frequent nosebleeds, headaches, and nausea while at school. There is an even bigger change since her career started at Ramona-Alessandro: “Now, more than half of the students have asthma,” Marilyn says.

Marilyn believes the air has affected the students’ quality of life at the school. “When they’re outside playing we have to send them in to get their medications, and by the time they get back their play time is over... They should be happy at school, not affected by dirty air,” she says.

Marilyn also worries that students’ health problems affect their education because they miss so much school. One of her third-graders who lives near the BNSF, Aleena, has a lot of breathing problems. “She misses school sometimes for a month, and she’s always at Loma Linda Hospital because she has frequent asthma attacks,” Marilyn says.

Long before asthma rates hit their present high, Marilyn decided to take action. Convinced that natural gas was leaking from the OmniTrans facility she began knocking on doors and documenting whether residents smelled the odorant put in the natural gas and if they had kids at Alessandro.

“Since my kids were suffering every time that odor would come to the school, I decided to hit the streets on my own. What I did took me 4 weeks. I started from my street and I went all the way up to 9th street... To my surprise everybody was feeling the same thing that my kids were feeling,” Marilyn says.

Marilyn discovered more than statistics—she found two strong allies in Jan Misquez and Terry Lopez. The three women started the community group West Side Residents For Clean Air Now, and they initiated an investigation into OmniTrans. The group was outraged to find that OmniTrans had installed secondhand compressors purchased from a company in Texas. They believe faulty compressors to be the source of the gas leaks. “Oh yeah, instead of buying new ones to put there let’s just put some old ones in a Latino community. They’re not going to say anything,” Marilyn says, stating her understanding of the company’s attitude.

The West Side group went to city council meetings, talked to the school board, organized weekly picketing in front of OmniTrans, petitioned, contacted the media, and called in complaints with the hope of removing this health hazard from their community. OmniTrans, the school board, the city council, and regulation agencies dismissed and denied the problem. “They treated us like we didn’t know anything: ‘Oh you’re just Hispanic women. Go home and take care of your children. Get a job.’ That’s what we were told,” Marilyn says.

Despite years of fighting, issues with OmniTrans were never resolved. “OmniTrans would not back down. OmniTrans is their own government protected agency so they can do whatever they want,” Marilyn says.

In the meantime, the three women have faced their own health problems from living on the west side. Unfortunately, Terry Lopez suffered from a stroke and on December 4, 2009 Jan Misquez passed away after an 18-month battle with cancer.

Marilyn and her daughter Janela have both been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a condition that refers to both chronic bronchitis and emphysema. COPD is a disease common among long-term smokers, though neither Marilyn nor Janela have ever smoked. “My husband and I don’t have any medical insurance anymore, so I just have to treat it myself and keep coughing and coughing,” Marilyn says.

Despite the setbacks and discrimination they have faced, Marilyn and Terry are proud of themselves and Jan for speaking up. They have inspired many other parents to do the same, standing up for themselves and their children. They need both decision makers and polluting companies to take responsibility and action before it is too late for the children of west San Bernardino.
CCAEJ conducted several EJ Tours of San Bernardino for agency personnel and officials to demonstrate the issues facing this community. With the support and contacts of staff at Department of Toxic Substances Control we were able to garner commitments to participate from representatives from more than agencies at the federal, state, regional and local levels. Task Force participants include:

- U.S. EPA
- California Air Resources Board (CARB);
- Department of Toxic Substances Control;
- South Coast Air Quality Management District; (AQMD)
- State Attorney General’s Office;
- CalOSHA;
- Public Health Department;
- San Bernardino County CUPA;
- California Conservation Corp;
- Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
- Loma Linda University
- County District Attorney’s Office
- The Delta Group- researchers from UC Davis

The Task Force has been meeting every other month for two years. Task Force members are assigned to committees that meet and coordinate activities on specific tasks. For example, there is a truck idling committee that is addressing the issue of trucks parking and idling for long periods of time. CARB, County DA’s office and the City are working together to obtain funding for anti idling signs, training of local law enforcement on idling laws, and training sessions for truckers on the law’s requirements. Another committee is exploring vegetative barriers—trees and shrubs that absorb ultrafine particles. As a result of the research conducted, we have partnered with the City’s “traffic calming project” to both prevent trucks from entering residential areas and to plant trees between the railyard and homes to capture ultrafine particles. In each committee at least one community member participates to ensure the local residents’ concerns are addressed.

Our success in building the foundation for our program – from raising awareness about the severe pollution; outlining a Platform for Action through our Community Action Teams; forming a multi-agency/residents Task Force; and identifying resources to implement the plan have placed CCAEJ in the position to make significant advances in reducing exposure and pollution levels. Our engagement approach of bringing informed residents to the table with decision makers has resulted in positive partnerships to effectively address the critical issues facing our communities. The past year has proven to be extremely successful. As a result CCAEJ is in the position to undertake some extremely important projects to provide relief from the pollution for local residents.

- CCAEJ has received a $1 million grant from CARB to install high performance air filtration units at 5 schools in highly polluted areas providing relief from the heavy burden of pollution for more than 7,000 students. South Coast AQMD is providing technical assistance;
- We are partnering with Loma Linda University in conducting a comprehensive health study of 900 families living near the BNSF railyard in San Bernardino, a first to look at the impacts of railyards on health. The program is being designed in a way to be able to refer families for treatment for low or no cost, when identified with health issues;
- Working with the City of San Bernardino to redesign a “traffic calming” project to include a vegetative barrier to absorb particulate pollution and reroute truck traffic away from residential neighborhoods;
- Working with CARB, city staff to purchase and install anti-idling signs and conduct trainings on Anti-idling laws for local law enforcement.
- Working with CARB to educate truckers and help them understand the new laws and how to be in compliance.
- Partnering with Community Action Agency to target heavily polluted neighborhoods for weatherization services that not only increase energy efficiency but reduce pollution.
- Partnering with UCLA in a study funded by AQMD to measure pollution levels and better understand the disease causing mechanism; CCAEJ is translating the scientific information so that lay persons understand and to help decision makers use the information to inform their decisions;
Robert Barnard

Robert Barnard sees what could be. “They definitely need some picnic benches in here. I’d like to see people in here on the weekends having picnics. If they had something like that it would bring a lot of people here, more than what there is.”

Robert grew up in San Bernardino and for the past two years he’s volunteered for the City Parks Service, tidying up the six parks on his rotation. He’s been doing it all his life: “I’ve always had that tendency, I’ve never liked seeing trash on the ground. Growing up I always had that good attitude about doing things like that.”

Robert is committed to keeping the parks in top condition for residents of San Bernardino, but here in Nunez Park there’s only so much he can do. A peaceful, green space located just north of the BNSF rail yard, the park is never free from the sickly, heavy presence of burning diesel.

“It’s like walking into a gas chamber basically, you just feel it in your skin,” says Robert. “They’re not supposed to park along the side here but the diesel trucks will park out here and have their engines running.”

The rail yard’s 4th Street entrance is located directly across from the park’s heavily used soccer field. Just beyond the fence, not ten feet away from the field of play, an 18-wheeler towing a 53-foot trailer sits idling.

Robert worries what that could mean for the children who frequent the park. “They have two or three leagues come in a year to use [the field],” he explains. “They have teams that come here from four o’clock on till at least 10. The place sometimes will be packed.” He remembers how the park used to be before he and others began volunteering regularly: “I’d go and walk through the park and I’d walk through the playgrounds and I’m seeing syringes. When it was filthy you had more of the troublemakers.”

Robert has learned that when it comes to improving parks, a little goes a long way. In the course of a day, he might mow a field, repaint lines for parking spots, empty trashcans, pick up litter, trim roses, fill in ditches, clear out drains, or fix light fixtures. “I’ll go through a whole park and strip clean it. You won’t see no cigarette butts or gum lying on the ground.”

Yet no matter how many little things he does to keep the park clean, Robert knows that one big thing, pollution from diesel trucks, is keeping the park from reaching its full potential as a safe and enjoyable community space. “A couple times they had a big festival out there in the grass area, years back,” he remembers. “Stuff like that across the street though, that kind of postpones things. People would rather go somewhere else so they don’t have to smell the pollution.”

When it comes to diesel pollution, Robert is confident that a few small changes could make a big difference. He believes that regular police inspections, documentation of pollution, a reduction in truck traffic, and upgrades to engine emissions technology would all help. “I’m sure that rail yard makes millions of dollars for what they do,” he says. “If you can save two or three lives with that money, it’s worth more doing that then seeing somebody getting cancer.”

Robert believes that it will take a dedicated and long-term community effort to reduce diesel pollution in the park and in San Bernardino. “As long as there’s somebody on their backs, a lot of things will get done. If people start looking the other way, then all of a sudden it’s forgotten, I’ve seen that happen.”

Robert is hopeful for the future of the park, and he’s excited to see what it can become. “Once you have something that looks nicer it seems like people have more pride to come to a park. They’ll throw their blanket out and have a little picnic. That’s what makes me happy, to be able to see people do that.”
Work Underway

- CCAEJ has received a $1 million grant from CARB to install high performance air filtration units at 5 schools in highly polluted areas providing relief from the heavy burden of pollution for more than 7,000 students. South Coast AQMD is providing technical assistance;

- We are partnering with Loma Linda University in conducting a comprehensive health study of 1200 residents living near the BNSF railyard in San Bernardino, a first to look at the impacts of railyards on health. The program is being designed in a way to be able to refer families for treatment for low or no cost, when identified with health issues;

- Working with the City of San Bernardino to redesign a “traffic calming” project to include a vegetative barrier to absorb particulate pollution and reroute truck traffic away from residential neighborhoods;

- Working with CARB, and City of San Bernardino to purchase and install anti-idling signs and conduct trainings on Anti-idling laws for local law enforcement.

- Working with CARB to educate truckers to better understand the new laws and how to be in compliance.

- Partnering with Community Action Agency to target heavily polluted neighborhoods for weatherization services that not only increase energy efficiency but reduce pollution.

- Partnering with UCLA in a study funded by AQMD to measure pollution levels and better understand the disease causing mechanism; CCAEJ is translating the scientific information so that lay persons understand and to help decision makers use the information to inform their decisions;

- Partnering with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to file a federal lawsuit under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) citing the violation of federal law with respect to the deposition of hazardous materials when particles from the railyards settle onto the community’s land.

Each of these projects are the result of successfully bringing together trained, informed and involved affected residents to engage with agencies and officials in discussions of critical issues and solutions through our Intervention Task Force in a way that has engendered trust, respect and cooperation among the parties and develops public policies and programs to better serve these communities. We are developing a model for community engagement and demonstrating development of protective policies at the community level that can be a model for addressing environmental justice issues and developing community driven public policy.

Revitalization Program

The next year will be devoted to effectively implementing these programs, continuing our advocacy for strong regulations of the rail industry and promoting the need for a zero emission logistics industry. We will also begin our next phase – engaging the community in a community-driven visioning process to develop a blueprint toward a safer, healthier and more sustainable community on the Westside of San Bernardino. While reducing the impacts from past development and poor land use decisions, the Westside lacks other services that make them vulnerable to negative health outcomes. The lack of availability to healthy, fresh food and produce limits the nutritional options for families; lack of access to medical care prolongs the time for obtaining medical treatment and eliminates preventive care; lack of job security and economic opportunities limits the ability to provide the basic necessities for their families. Recreational facilities are below the recommended levels for the area. As an example of what can be done through a community driven process, CCAEJ has successfully built a community park. The 13-acre park provides hiking trails, a BMX bicycle track, playgrounds, basketball and volleyball courts, an open field for soccer, a camping area, play grounds, a water play area and more. Safe recreational facilities still limit the ability of the community to exercise, congregate and build a feeling of community.

This community driven process of defining issues, outlining solutions and engaging officials in proactive, meaningful community improvements creates a mechanism for address needs and developing protective policies in a meaningful manner.
Marcia Reyes keeps her neighborhood clean by collecting litter from her street. “I end up with pains in my hands because there is so much trash and I clean the whole street,” Marcia says. Despite her efforts to improve her neighborhood, the air and noise pollution from the BNSF are beyond her control.

Marcia has lived in San Bernardino for 23 years and pollution increasingly impacts her and her husband’s quality of life. “At night we can’t stand the smell. We have to close the windows because the smell is very strong. There is also a lot of noise coming from the trucks. Sometimes we are sleeping and we hear the noise and it wakes us suddenly,” Marcia says.

Marcia’s family has experienced many health issues. For ten years, Marcia was sick with dizzy spells the doctor couldn’t explain. Five years ago her grandson started having nosebleeds, but doctors have told him he is healthy. Marcia’s daughter-in-law, who lives near the concrete factory, gets very bad headaches, but doctors have found nothing wrong with her either. Her husband’s eyes are constantly red and irritated. After talking among her neighbors they found that they are having a lot of common health problems, including many incidents of cancer.

“Even though we are so humble, don’t know how to speak English, and may not have money, I think we still have rights as human beings, especially for our children and for the elderly. There are many elders around who are getting very sick,” Marcia says. She feels that the BNSF needs to consider the rights and wellbeing of its neighbors instead of only thinking about its own profits and hopes that BNSF and trucking companies will switch from diesel to cleaner fuels. She says, “Even if it costs them more money, let them spend money to invest in better fuels.”

She looks to the city government to work with the community and the companies to come up with solutions. “Since we are Hispanic and don’t speak English, we don’t know how to defend ourselves,” Marcia says. “I am grateful and show all my respect to the authorities of San Bernardino so that they will help us. I ask with all respect for their help in resolving this problem.” Marcia insists, “What we want now are results. We don’t want to be deceived anymore. We want help. So much cancer, so much asthma, all of this is caused by the pollution. It is time, and we have had enough, because they are killing people!”
Conclusion

San Bernardino residents interviewed for this report both attest to health problems caused by diesel pollution and to the industry and local government’s lack of regard for the lived experiences of their families and community. Suffering from cancer, cardiovascular disease, and asthma, they have brought their grievances to BNSF and their local representatives, only to have their claims denied and ignored. Based on both current medical research and interviews with residents, it is clear that BNSF’s operations in west San Bernardino are violating residents’ inherent right to the highest attainable standard of health, posing a serious threat to their very lives. The federal, state, and local government is currently failing in their duty to protect the rights and interests of its people. Faced with the reality of the current situation, all stakeholders, residents, elected officials, government agencies, and industry leaders must come together, assume responsibility, and take serious action to reduce and eliminate the health threats posed by the BNSF intermodal rail yard in San Bernardino. The lives of residents are depending on it.

Green Zones for Economic and Environmental Sustainability

The San Bernardino work is part of a pilot project of a statewide initiative of the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) called Green Zones for Economic and Environmental Sustainability. CEJA consists of six base building organizations around the state—Communities for a Better Environment (CBE-Oakland and Los Angeles); Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN- Oakland); People Organized to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER- San Francisco); Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment (CRPE- Oakland and the Central Valley); Environmental Health Coalition (EHC-San Diego and Tijuana) and CCAEJ (the Inland Valleys of Riverside and San Bernardino). It is a program to institutionalize assistance to those communities in most need—communities of color and low income neighborhoods that are heavily impacted by pollution and lack of services and amenities such as access to healthy food, recreation, health care and quality schools. It seeks to develop a systemic program that focuses funding and resources to these areas first, seeking to bring equity, fairness and justice as part of the American Dream. For more information contact Amy Vanderwarker, CEJA CO-coordinator at 510.302.0430 x 13 or avanderwarker@caleja.org or visit our website at www.caleja.org.
In the face of adversity residents of San Bernardino are coming together to take action on behalf of their community. The following recommendations are part of a community action platform put forth by San Bernardino residents with the hope of protecting their children, their families, and the future of their community. They are an invitation for both industry and government to collaborate with the community and work proactively, creatively, and concretely to reduce and eliminate the health threats outlined in this report.

**The BNSF Rail Yard Operations**

- Continuous monitoring of air pollutants at the railyard. The only way we can verify true reductions in pollution is by actual readings of pollution levels.
- Create Zero Emission Railyard operations by investing in electrification of all equipment—locomotives, on-site equipment, and trucks—as soon as possible. Utilize the most advanced technologies to bring pollution down to as close to zero as possible. Utilizing electrical equipment, trucks and locomotives will reduce the operations pollution levels significantly.

In the meantime:
- Create buffer zones between the railyard and homes, schools and other sensitive receptors.
- Plant vegetative barriers using trees and shrubs demonstrated to absorb particulate matter. A line of trees around the perimeter of the rail yard would be able to absorb some of the ultra-fine particles.
- Build block walls as a buffer between the community and the rail yard. Block walls would significantly reduce noise pollution.
- Relocate the rail yard’s truck entrance away from the community park and neighborhoods and create an alternative route that diverts truck traffic, diesel emissions, and noise away from residential roads.
- Invest in cleaner, safer, and more sustainable fuels and technology – cleaner locomotives and operating equipment, electrification of cranes, and the conversion of trucking companies from diesel to compressed and liquid natural gas.

**Legislation and Enforcement**

- Draft, legislate, and enforce federal and state policies that directly regulate the diesel emissions of rail yards, requiring BNSF to reduce its emissions in San Bernardino.
- Enforce noise regulations on neighboring companies.
- Revise current zoning regulations and procedures to ensure that in the future industrial facilities must be at minimum 500 meters away from residential properties and other sensitive receptors such as schools, parks, and daycares.
- Create regulations that prevent additional polluting industrial facilities from opening on the west side because of the already poor air quality and because the west side already bears a disproportionate amount of environmental burdens compared to San Bernardino as a whole.
Promoting Community Health

• Initiate, fund, and facilitate programs to retrofit and weatherize homes on the west side – sealing doors and windows to prevent air pollution from entering, installing AC unit filters in structures with sensitive receptors like homes, schools, and daycares, and installing dual pane windows to protect from noise pollution.

• Establish a free health clinic in west San Bernardino that provides primary care to residents suffering from health problems exacerbated by diesel pollution who would not have access to medical care otherwise.

• Offer BreathMobile programs to west side schools and daycares, offering mobile asthma clinics that provide children with testing for asthma and allergies, education on the management of asthma, and ongoing treatment.

Implementation and Collaboration

In order to have a strong healthy democracy and engaged electorate we must have an informed and involved public to actively participate in public policy decisions. No one has more of a right to information and to be involved in these decisions than those most directly affected. To accomplish this goals we recommend the following:

• Increase civic involvement of well informed, confident community residents to participate with officials in decision affecting their lives by providing training and opportunities to participate. Mechanism for involvement between residents and officials are institutionalized to address community.

• Bring together a Task Force of community members, BNSF and other company representatives, relevant agencies/entities, and local, state, and federal officials. The Task Force would collaborate long-term to implement recommendations, provide mutual support, execute solutions that reduce health threats to residents, and provide a space for the community to have an equal voice.

• Maintain a clearly defined method of communication and accountability between San Bernardino’s local government, BNSF, and west side residents.

Community Driven Planning

While focusing on reducing the pollution levels, we recognize that the absence of pollution does not make a healthy community. The second portion of the our program is the Revitalization of the community to address the incompatible land use policies, lack of access to recreational facilities and healthy foods by advancing a community driven land use planning process to attract healthy facilities-- grocery stores, fresh produce, and walk able streets, safe housing. The program will advance a General Plan revision that incorporates the State’s Office of Planning and Research guidelines recommendations for Health, Environmental Justice and Hazard Mitigation components.

Current statistics on the health status for the Counties of San Bernardino and Riverside demonstrate the need for this program; the area is the fourth most obese region in the United States with two out of three residents considered overweight or obese; highest heart disease death rates in the state; three out of every
four school children do not meet fitness standards; worst healthy food access in state, with six times as many unhealthy food retail outlets as healthy; one out of four adolescents does not have access to safe open space for physical activity; and children’s asthma rate at 32%. Compounding the problem, health research indicates that children participating in 3 or more outdoor activities actually increase their rates of asthma, making it imperative that our policy efforts to decrease air pollution are coupled with our policy efforts to address obesity. Following State and National Park Department recommendations of five acres of park land for every 1,000 persons, the area is deficient in park land by more than 300 acres. Open space around these communities is quickly being converted to industrial warehouses and intermodal facilities. Our planning process and General Plan policies are key to reversing this trend.

The lack of stores that provide fresh, healthy produce and foods are virtually not present in these two communities while liquor stores and small corner markets that sell candy, soda, and junk food abound. In addition to access to fresh foods, in our large Latino and immigrant populations we must also raise awareness to the high lead content in clay pots and bowls due to lead contaminated glazes, Mexican candies and chili’s, and even soda bottles and cans. Knowing the source of drinking water is also important due to groundwater contamination by perchlorate, an additive in rocket fuel. The chemical affects the uptake of iodine by the thyroid and is known to accumulate in plants like lettuce and nopales, an edible cactus and staple for local families. CCAEJ participated in a legislative effort to ban candy from Mexico that is contaminated with high levels of lead. We have conducted education and awareness classes on the dangers of lead and the identity of the lead tainted candies. CCAEJ Promotoras participated in a project with the State Attorney General’s office to monitor stores to determine the prevalence of these candies. We visited more than 400 stores, liquor stores, and corner markets and found that all had these dangerous and illegal candies, some repackaged to hide their contents.

Our program will couple increasing awareness and knowledge to the need and benefits of eating healthy food through local schools and organizations, with a resident driven Community Development Plan to bring needed facilities to the community and local policies within the General Plans that address health and environmental justice. We will influence school policy on nutrition education by introducing the Harvest of the Month program that exposes children and parents to new fruits and vegetables, provides an opportunity to taste test the produce and share recipes and menus. CCAEJ will work with the school district to develop a policy to improve school lunches through a Farm to School program in San Bernardino. Already implemented in the Jurupa School District serving Mira Loma/Glen Avon, the program brings local farm produce to the school lunch program by way of salad bars. We will utilize existing community facilities, such as schools or parks to establish Farmer’s Markets bringing fresh, local farm produce to the community. We will develop a Community Plan driven by local residents and their vision for a safe, healthy community to guide siting of more stores offering fresh, nutritious foods and recreational opportunities. California guidelines suggest that General Plans incorporate Health and Environmental Justice components, but few have addressed them in local plans. Community residents will advocate for their inclusion and development the specific policies to be included in the city and county General Plans. We will explore how to augment programs for recreation to ensure program policies that address obesity, such as ensuring residents of this low income area are not charged fees to use their parks and designating land for use as a community garden. We will use the general plan process and community plans to identify the most appropriate areas for open space and recreational facilities and work with the school districts to develop safe walking routes so children can walk to school under safe conditions.
The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice works to bring all stakeholders to the table by providing resources and support through its staff. Listed below is contact information for residents, decision makers, and students to find more information about how they can become involved and make a better future for San Bernardino.

**San Bernardino Residents**

For more information about enrollment in the SALTA Program and San Bernardino’s Community Action Team (see previous page for descriptions), please contact:

Susana Negrete, Josie Gaytan, and Graciela Larios  
Community Organizers, San Bernardino  
(909) 381-8883

**Decision Makers**

For more information or to discuss collaboration with CCAEJ through San Bernardino’s Environmental Justice Task Force, please contact:

Penny Newman  
CCAEJ Executive Director  
penny.n@ccaej.org

**University Students**

For information about internship opportunities with CCAEJ, please contact:

Sylvia Betancourt  
Organizing Director  
sylvia.b@ccaej.org

**General**

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Pollution in San Bernardino was written by the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ) in collaboration with the Educational Network for Global and Grassroots Exchange (ENGAGE) and was researched and written throughout the course of 2010.

This report is the second installment of the ESCR Mobilization Project. The first report, Voices from Appalachia, was written in collaboration with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth focusing on the impacts of mountaintop removal coal mining on residents in Floyd County, KY.

Both reports use the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Right to affirm the duties the United States government has to protect the rights of its communities. Both reports bring out the human voice behind the issues, focusing and putting value on the lived experiences of residents.

Voices from Appalachia has served as an effective educational tool for Floyd County residents and organizers to spread awareness among community members and key decision makers. It is our hope that Pollution in San Bernardino can be used by San Bernardino residents to educate, empower, and incite their neighbors to speak up for their rights and join together as a community to demand change.

For more information please email: humanrights@engagetheworld.org

Pollution in San Bernardino Credits

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