

A year ago, I [wrote](#) about an important environmental justice initiative pioneered by the California Environmental Protection Agency and its subsidiary entity, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. That 2013 initiative, titled CalEnviroScreen, divided up the State of California by zip code, applied 11 environmental health and pollution factors, assessed each of the state's zip code areas, and ranked each of them in order to evaluate their relative environmental health and vulnerability to pollution.

CalEnviroScreen confirmed what many experts have known for years: that there exist wide disparities in the environmental health of various regions of the state as well as the populations that inhabit them. The 2013 study results, for example, identified California's San Joaquin Valley as being the most environmentally challenged region in the state.

Not satisfied with having created the nation's first comprehensive statewide environmental health screening tool, CalEPA and OEHHA have just released in draft form an updated and improved version, titled CalEnviroScreen 2.0. (The new version can be accessed [here](#).) The most important change is that CalEnviroScreen 2.0 divides the state by census tract rather than zip code. The new scale of analysis represents a finer level of resolution for many parts of the state, since California has some 8000 census tracts, as opposed to "only" 1800 zip codes. Also, the new version adds an additional, important metric in assembling its rankings—drinking water quality.

CalEnviroScreen 2.0 thus provides an even more precise set of maps and rankings than did its predecessor, and thus constitutes an even more powerful means of assessing which California neighborhoods and regions are suffering disproportionate, adverse environmental and public health impacts. That information, in turn, can inform policymakers' decisions as to how those disproportionate impacts can most effectively be remediated. (For example, recent state legislation requires that 25% of California's proceeds from cap-and-trade auctions conducted under AB 32 be used to fund environmental and public health improvements for disadvantaged communities.) Equally important, the maps and rankings compiled in CalEnviroScreen 2.0 can help California decision-makers, through more informed land use and industrial siting decisions, to avoid making those environmental inequities even worse.

Kudos to CalEPA and OEHHA for making key improvements to an already-powerful environmental justice tool.