

ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORTS

What is an Environmental Impact Report?

Cities and counties prepare "environmental impact reports" when they determine that a project may have a significant effect on our surroundings. Such reports are often referred to by the initials "EIR."

An environmental impact report evaluates a proposed project's impacts on the environment. The report also recommends steps to avoid or minimize those impacts. These actions are called "mitigation measures." Possible alternative projects are considered too, including the option of no project.

General Concepts

The California Environmental Quality Act guides the process of preparing and considering the report. This law often is referred to by the nickname "CEQA" (pronounced "See Kwa").

The information in an environmental impact report helps decision-makers decide whether to approve a project. The report also helps them to decide whether putting conditions on a project's approval helps. But the ultimate decision on whether to approve a project is up to decision-makers.

The term "environment" includes natural and man-made elements of our surroundings. This includes land, air, water, minerals, plants, animals and noise. It also includes things like historic buildings.

Decision-Making Process

The public has an opportunity to review and provide comments on a draft of the report. You can share your thoughts in writing. There may also be one or more meetings about the report.

Public input shapes the content of the final report. The report includes responses to the public's ideas.

Note that approval of the environmental impact report does not mean that the project is approved. Once the report is approved, decision-makers review the project in light of the information in the report and other considerations.

To Learn More

- State of California website on California Environmental Quality Act: <http://ceres.ca.gov/ceqa/>
- *The Planning Commissioner's Handbook*, League of California Cities, 2005, Chapter 4: The Planning Framework (www.ca-ilg.org/pch4)
- California Public Resources Code Section 21000 and following (accessible from www.leginfo.ca.gov/calaw)
- Solano Press (www.solano.com) has a number of land use-related publications, available for purchase, including one on the California Environmental Quality Act