



Chapter 9: Air Quality Element

Introduction



Air quality attainment goals established by the South Coast Air Quality Management District have been more than met despite the substantial growth in the region in the last 20 years. Most of this is a result of significantly improved engine technology and the replacement of more polluting vehicles. However, local initiatives that expanded transit options, concentrated development more efficiently, and increased local employment opportunities have also contributed to air quality improvement.



– RCIP Vision

WHY IS AIR QUALITY IMPORTANT?

The quality of the air we breathe directly affects our health, environment, economy and our quality of life. Because the inside of our bodies are in constant contact with the outside world through the oxygen we inhale, air pollutants make their way to our lungs and into our blood stream. An overabundance of pollutants in the air can cause mild to severe health effects, including increased hospitalization and emergency room visits, respiratory illnesses, increased risk of developing cancer, decreased breathing capacity, lung inflammation, difficulty in exercising and even a reduction in life-span.

Just as we are affected by air pollution, so too are plants and animals. Animals must breathe the same air and are subject to the same types of negative health effects. Certain plants and trees may absorb air pollutants which can stunt their development or cause premature death. There are also numerous impacts to our economy including lost work days due to illness, a desire on the part of business to locate in areas with a healthy environment, and increased expenses from medical costs. Pollutants may also lower visibility and cause damage to property. Certain air pollutants are responsible for discoloring painted surfaces, eating away at stones used in buildings, dissolving the mortar that holds bricks together, and cracking tires and other items made from rubber.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT AIR QUALITY?

Air quality is a regional issue, effecting and affected by every city and county. Although Riverside County generates the lowest emissions of any county in the South Coast Air Basin, air quality in the County is among the Basin's worst due to onshore winds transporting vast amounts of pollutants from Los Angeles and Orange Counties into the Inland Empire.

While the County and the region have made great strides in reducing air pollution, it is committed to meeting state and federal air quality guidelines. Policies and programs addressed in this element will focus on the two main sources of air pollutant emissions: mobile sources and stationary sources. Mobile sources include automobiles, motorcycles, trucks and airplanes. Motor vehicles constitute the largest generator of air pollutant emissions in Riverside County. Stationary sources produce significant amounts of pollutants and include electrical power-generating facilities, manufacturing, fabrication, miscellaneous industrial processes and combustion of natural gas.