

CHAPTER 9

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Providing public information and education to the individuals throughout San Luis Obispo (SLO) County is an integral component of the District's efforts to achieve California's air quality standards. Its importance is recognized in our mission statement, "*As stewards of healthful air, our mission is to realize and preserve clean air, promote community and individual responsibility for air quality through education, and to provide efficient and cost-effective service,*" and is a guiding principle for District activities. By increasing public awareness on the air quality issues occurring throughout SLO County, the District's goal is to motivate more individuals and organizations throughout our communities to assist in developing solutions to those issues.

In order to gather public support for the Clean Air Plan and to achieve the stated goals, the need for individual, group, and community responsibility to improving local air quality is emphasized. A key component of the CAP is a well-planned and effective Public Outreach Strategy and Action Plan. In fact, section 40918 (f) of the California Health & Safety Code requires that the CAP include: "Provisions for public education programs to promote actions to reduce emissions from transportation and area wide sources." The integration of public outreach programs with transportation, land use management, and indirect source review programs is essential to their acceptance and success.

9.2 DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

Annually the District's Public Education and Public Information (PEPI) Team develops the Public Outreach Strategy that identifies the primary outreach objectives, key audiences, outreach tactics and evaluation protocol on which to focus resources throughout the fiscal year. The outreach goals center on increasing air quality awareness amongst the general public, as well as targeting individual segments of the population such as outreach to children and the Latino community. The Public Outreach Strategy also includes plans to assist the District with implementation of rules and regulations.

A Public Outreach Action Plan is developed for each of the goals included in the Public Outreach Strategy. This plan lists out the specific programs to be implemented and evaluated throughout the year. A critical component to the Outreach Strategy is the tracking and evaluation process. This allows the District to identify the number of people reached with each outreach program and to measure public awareness, attitudes and actions.

The following programs listed below provide background information, current issues and ideas for public participation pertaining to many air quality topics.

Community Outreach & Events

Since August 1995, the District has been providing presentations to numerous civic groups, community organizations and local schools from third grade to college level. District staff present an overview of air quality in San Luis Obispo County and identify specific practices citizens can embrace to assist the District in achieving air quality goals. The District's "Clean Air...Everyone's Business" video, supplementary brochures and educational materials accompany the presentations.


Several APCD staff participate on the District's "Speaker's Bureau," which provides speakers on an ad hoc basis for many different types of functions and events. Speaker requests range from panelists for scientific forums to lunchtime speakers for civic groups. The District also places a high value on responding to educational requests and provides speakers for presentations to grade schools and classroom lectures to college students.

To make our message more accessible to younger children, District staff created a character called “Professor Ozone.” This “scientist” informs and entertains children by guiding them through a recipe for “Smog Soup”, and then explains what changes in the recipe would create a cleaner, more pleasant version of the soup. Professor Ozone has appeared before numerous elementary school classes and community youth organizations throughout the county, and continues to receive requests for appearances.

By partnering with local organizations and governmental agencies, the District participates in a variety of educational and environmental forums throughout the county to promote programs relating to clean air. We have been a long time sponsor of the annual Earth Day celebrations held each April, Clean Air Month observed each May, and Rideshare Week in October. We also sponsor and are an active participant in Pollution Prevention Week, held in September, which recognizes businesses and organizations for proactive efforts to reduce air pollution at the source before it is generated.

The District is actively involved in the planning and sponsoring of these events. Activities are varied and have included speaker’s forums, electric bicycle test-drive, bike tune-up and safety clinics, clean-fueled vehicle demonstrations, free bus/shuttle transportation, and air quality information displays. The District’s public information booth, replete with informational posters, brochures and an interactive air quality game, invites and encourages the public to learn more about air quality issues and how they can help protect the air we share.

“Bikefest” is an annual event that is co-sponsored by the District and the County Rideshare Office. This event promotes bicycling as a viable commute mode as well as healthy, environmentally friendly recreation. All ages are encouraged to participate. Incentives such as T-shirts, bike water bottles, and bike helmets for riders under 18 years of age have been distributed free of charge to participants at previous events.

The District designed and funded  Interactive Clean Air Exhibit for the San Luis Obispo Children’s Museum. This booth was created to help parents and their children understand how their transportation choices impact air quality, and what they can do to help protect the air. It is estimated that more than 50,000 children and adults visit the Children’s Museum each year.

The 2000 Census Report concluded that the Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic group in California; in San Luis Obispo County, Latino’s now comprise over sixteen percent of the population. To respond to the growing population, in 2000 the District launched it’s first ever Latino Outreach Project, a six month outreach program that focused on two cities in the south county. A “foto novella” styled brochure was developed in both English and Spanish to introduce the District and explain the recently adopted Backyard Burn Rule. In addition to the brochure, posters and flyers were also designed and disseminated at Health Fairs, service organizations and common marketplaces in the communities. A telephone line was installed to receive calls from Spanish speaking individuals and in-field translation services were secured to assist the District in our efforts. Television and radio public service announcements were also aired to expand awareness within the Latino community countywide.

Publications

Since 1980, the *Quarterly Report* summarized the District’s air monitoring data, special projects, and the activities of the planning, engineering, enforcement, and technical services divisions. In 1993, the District modified the format of the *Quarterly Report* into a four to six page newsletter called *Clear Vision*. Each edition includes features on current air quality issues and upcoming events, a message from the Director, information on alternative transportation, and a summary of air quality measurements at our monitoring stations. Currently, *Clear Vision* is distributed to approximately 260 organizations and individuals, including the media, industries, environmental groups, local government agencies, cities and the general public.

Each year, an *Annual Air Quality Report* is produced describing the results of air monitoring in the county during the previous calendar year. This informative document provides graphics and text descriptions of the air quality at each monitoring station, including where and when exceedances of health standards have occurred, and an analysis of significant pollutant trends over the past 10 years. The *Annual Report* is distributed to the media, local jurisdictions, public agencies, California Air Resources Board (ARB), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), local industry and the general public.

A resource guide for employers participating in the Transportation Choices Program has been developed and distributed to all employers with 50 or more employees. This user-friendly handbook describes the various transportation alternatives available and provides useful information on benefits, incentives, potential candidates, minimum requirements and associated support services for each option described. Transportation Choices Information Centers are also provided to large employers as a convenient way for commuters to get vanpool schedules, bus schedules and other transportation information while at work.

The District continues to update and produce a series of informational brochures on APCD operations and local air quality issues to assist the District's efforts to implement rules and clean air programs. These brochures have a common graphic theme, and include such topics as: *SLO County APCD: Who Are We, and What Do We Do; Asbestos Compliance; Permits; Notices Of Violation, and The Outdoor Burn Rule*. We have also produced three citizen action brochures entitled *10 Tips On How You Can Clear the Air*, and *Woodburning Tips, and Alternatives to Burning*. As part of the District's Latino Outreach Pilot Project, a Spanish brochure *El Aire Limpio nos Beneficia a Todos* was developed to introduce the Spanish-speaking community to the District and expand awareness on the Backyard Burn Rule. Compliance assistance booklets published by the ARB are also distributed to the public on such topics as agricultural burning, vapor recovery at gasoline stations, coating of metal and plastic parts, and others.

All of the air quality brochures, newsletters and the annual report are available free to the public and can be picked up at the District office or on our website. Also available at the SLO County Local Resource Display is a short synopsis of air quality in the county describing general trends, meteorology and major emission sources.

World Wide Web

In 1996, the District initiated efforts to obtain a presence on the Internet with the introduction of a District website. Recently revamped and expanded, this user-friendly site provides information on APCD operations, upcoming meetings and events, Board meeting summaries and agendas, downloadable forms and applications to aid businesses, a staff contact list, grant information, links to related websites, and a variety of other useful information on different air quality topics and issues. Located at www.slocleanair.org, the website is updated frequently and continues to grow as an integral means for the District to disseminate air quality information to businesses, media and the public at large.

Media Relations

Press releases are issued by the District on an "as needed" basis to inform and educate the public on local air quality issues, special programs or projects, upcoming meetings and other newsworthy information. Local print and broadcast news media often follow up the press releases with more in-depth stories or with special feature articles on particular issues. A weekly ozone report with information about current levels of ozone monitored at four different county locations has been published in The Tribune newspaper since 1989.

Identity and Image

The District's logo is incorporated into all District publications, letterhead, and outreach materials to ensure a consistent, professional image and style. The logo design is readily identifiable and provides an immediate association with the APCD and air quality to the viewer. The District is also planning other graphic aids such as bumper stickers and posters to promote different aspects of the Clean Air Plan and our agency mission.

9.3 NEW PROGRAMS PROPOSED FOR ADOPTION

Only a fully aware and informed public can make intelligent choices about critical issues that affect their lives. Therefore, it is important that new publications and outreach programs be developed to inform the public about critical air quality issues. These programs should be designed to motivate people to integrate positive attitudes and behaviors regarding air quality into their daily lives. Only with the public's assistance can we reach the goals in the Clean Air Plan, providing cleaner, healthier air for everyone.

Community Outreach

Through the PEPI Team, the District updates the annual Public Outreach Strategies to promote different air quality programs each year that will increase public awareness regarding the importance of, and their role in, preserving clean air as a resource for San Luis Obispo County. Depending on the District's top priorities for any given year, programs might include topics such as transportation alternatives, clean car awareness, pollution prevention, global warming and other issues of current concern. Promotional efforts will include radio, television and print advertisements, public forums, website postings, email list-serve, literature publication and distribution, and other outreach tools.

Partnering with community-based organizations and local governments (e.g., American Lung Association, Community Health Commission, SLO Regional Rideshare, etc.) allows the District to apply our limited resources collectively and expand an outreach program to reach a larger audience. By joining efforts with Cal Poly and Cuesta College, the District can work effectively with faculty and students to develop and implement outreach materials to be used on a number of air quality programs throughout the County.

After successful completion of the Latino Outreach Pilot Project in 2001, the District needs to build on this effort and incorporate Latino outreach as a standard element of our Public Outreach Action Plan.

With the rapidly increasing use of the web by the general public, community organizations, governmental agencies and industries, the District will be updating our website presence to maximize the use of our site. Adding new sections such as the Kid Zone will complement the District's efforts to better reach target audiences.

In addition to these outreach programs the District can gain further public support in the county by taking part in annual community events such as the California Mid-State Fair in Paso Robles, Mission Plaza events in San Luis Obispo, and business fairs held throughout the county.

Educational Programs

The future rests in our children. Attitudes and behaviors that are begun today will become habits they will carry with them throughout their lives. Outreach to schools should be seen as a high priority when planning for the future of our county. Personal contact with representatives of the County Superintendent of Schools Office, as well as school districts and individual schools is essential to the success of such

programs. Through the County Office of Education's Curriculum Committee the District can work to secure an air quality curriculum in schools countywide. In addition, an updated educational display is needed at the local Children's Museum.

A wide variety of air quality educational resources are available to curriculum specialists, principals, and teachers. These include our speaker's bureau; the "Clean Air...Everyone's Business" program for grades 7-12; "Think Earth", a K-6 curriculum on land, air, water, and energy; and "Transportation Tips", a program that encourages walking, biking, and carpooling with special emphasis on bike safety, available for grades K-3, 4-8, and 9-12. In addition, the District has developed four separate air quality curriculum that are designed for grades K - 6. These teacher resources, as well as other kid-focused materials, will be available on the District's new website.

The District will also sponsor special environmental contests and promotions and will work with teachers to provide ideas, materials, and support for classroom or school-wide projects. One potential project entails soliciting children's artwork for a calendar promoting alternative transportation choices, similar to those developed in other districts.

Earth Day and Clean Air Month activities will continue to be an exciting opportunity to reach large sections of the public due to the established tradition and excellent media coverage it has generated. Speakers, demonstrations, clean air promotions, and environmental forums during annual celebration will continue to be important elements of the education program.

New Publications

Several new publications will be designed and a distribution system developed to reach the appropriate target audience. All new publications will be printed on recycled paper whenever possible to provide a positive model of conservation in action.

New publications will include the following:

- Clean Car Awareness: information on new vehicle emission standards as well as driving and vehicle maintenance tips.
- Smart Growth Brochure: introduction to land use practices, transportation infrastructure and the overall impact on air quality
- "Who We Are" Brochure: update the general APCD brochure in both English and Spanish
- Global Warming Brochure: causes and solutions for global warming and stratospheric ozone depletion

Media Relations

A major avenue for community outreach and program promotion is through television, radio, and print media. The District can continue to expand its audience by providing additional public service announcements, publicizing events on community calendars, issuing press releases and participating in talk show interviews about general and specific air quality issues.

9.4 IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING

The public information and education program is an integral element of this Plan and will help contribute to its success. To meet the needs of implementing the public education program, the District employs a public information officer. The PEPI team assists this individual in developing, implementing, and presenting the various components that have been described above.

In order to reach students as efficiently as possible, the District will provide teachers with information, materials, and resources at the Science Cooperative for Outstanding Public Education teacher training workshops. We are fortunate in this area to have a pool of resources to draw from at Cal Poly State University. Senior project students, teaching credential candidates, interns, and volunteers will be sought to assist in all phases of our information and education programs.

Funding is programmed into our annual budget on an ongoing basis to support our public information and education programs. Additional funding will be sought from nonprofit groups, local, state, and federal government grants, as well as private funding sources.

As the public information and education program is implemented, accurate records need to be kept on all phases of design, promotion, and presentation to facilitate critique of the program as a whole. Opportunities for public feedback and suggestions have been designed into each program element to ensure that our program is responsive to the needs and interests of the community. From that standpoint, development of our public information and education program should be an ongoing creative and dynamic process that adjusts to the needs of the public and to the changing nature of air quality issues as we work to achieve the goals of the Clean Air Plan.