

OPINION

Eastern Coachella Valley residents, make the case for state help cleaning up your air

Rebecca Zaragoza and Lesly Figueroa, Special to The Desert Sun Published 11:05 a.m. PT Feb. 20, 2019 | Updated 11:21 a.m. PT Feb. 20, 2019

To this day, the prevalence of air pollution, water contamination and pesticide exposure negatively impacts the health of thousands of families residing in the eastern Coachella Valley (ECV).

While community anecdotes and relevant data on health issues are shocking, they don't come as a surprise. Anyone who's been paying attention knows the extraordinary health challenges that families in the ECV face. Respiratory illnesses, allergies, the lack of infrastructure and poor air quality continue to aggressively affect the livelihoods of residents in this region.

Underinvested and unincorporated communities like Thermal, Oasis, Mecca and North Shore are left struggling as they fight to attain basic services, like access to clean drinking water, paved roads, decent housing, and medical services, among many others.

Despite community advocacy, the level of meaningful action and commitment from those able to actively alleviate these issues has been less than minimal. Plenty of statistics are readily available and have been reported in various media outlets and elsewhere. These problems aren't new, but fortunately, what is new are the number of programs and legislation that can make communities healthier.

ADVERTISEMENT



Our organization, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, recently hosted a regional convening to work with residents and ensure the selection of ECV as an Assembly Bill 617 community. This bill was passed in 2017 in an effort to reduce resident exposure to air pollutants in the most impacted communities in California. At the convening, we were able to hear from residents about how the poor air quality has impacted their lives and their health. Many spoke of their children's' asthma, others of their allergies from working in the fields and being exposed to pesticides every single day. Residents were able to relate to shared experiences and strategize about how best to move forward and influence state and regional decisions on emission reduction funding. Last year, 10 communities were selected by the California Air Resources Board for this program. With the continued advocacy from residents, we hope the ECV will be selected this year.

Related: This city's air is killing people. Who will pay for it? (<https://www.desertsun.com/in-depth/news/environment/border-pollution/poisoned-cities/2018/12/05/air-pollution-taking-deadly-toll-u-s-mexico-border/1381585002/>)

Support local journalism today
Only \$9.99 per month

Editorial: Imperial Irrigation District ties Colorado River plan to Salton Sea funds. Make it happen. (/story/opinion/2019/02/08/iid-linking-colorado-river-plan-to-salton-sea-funding-justified-desert-sun-editorial/2813569002/)

[source=CPCAMBARD&utm_campaign=2018WINTERVISITOR&utm_content=freeariclesleft&utm_medium=ONSITE&utm_source=CPCAM](#)

Due to the intense agriculture industry, pesticides are frequently used on crops, and these chemicals also wash over homes. The Salton Sea is shrinking, leaving behind dry lake beds covered with toxic dust that gets blown by high winds and spread across neighborhoods. Many dirt roads crisscross the area, releasing hazardous atmosphere.

[figueroa-valley-voice%2F2928698002%2F](#)



Rebecca Zaragoza (Photo11: Courtesy)

In the face of these facts, the ECV is in desperate need of AB 617 investment, which will help monitor the air and focus on reducing emissions. At its core, AB 617 recognizes that while the state has made some improvements in air quality, not all communities have benefited. The ECV's significant amount of agricultural activity, lack of paved roads and overall geography puts the region in a strong position to receive resources to reduce exposure levels and improve the health of so many.



Lesly Figueroa (Photo11: Courtesy)

Please join us for a meeting with the California Air Resources Board and the South Coast Air Quality Management District to advocate for this program. The meeting will be held Feb. 22 at 5:30pm at the North Shore Beach and Yacht Club, 99155 Sea View Drive. We hope to see you there.

Rebecca Zaragoza and Lesly Figueroa are with Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability in Indio, which works to elevate social justice issues and improve conditions for residents of the eastern Coachella Valley. Email them at lfigueroa@leadershipcounsel.org and rzaragoza@leadershipcounsel.org.

Support local journalism today

Only \$9.99 per month

[Subscribe Now](https://subscribe.desertsun.com/?gps-SubscribeNow) Desert Sun.()

[source=CPCAMBARD&utm_campaign=2018WINTERVISITOR&utm_content=freearticlesleft&utm_medium=ONSITE&utm_source=CPCAM coachella-valley-deserves-state-air-quality-aid-rebecca-zaragoza-lesly-figueroa-valley-voice%2F2928698002%2F](https://www.desertsun.com/story/opinion/2019/02/20/eastern-coachella-valley-deserves-state-air-quality-aid-rebecca-zaragoza-lesly-figueroa-valley-voice/2928698002/)



Large pipes will bring Salton Sea water inland to Red Hill Bay, where it will be mixed with fresh water from the Alamo River to create wetland bird habitat that also will help keep toxic dust from being stirred. (Photo11: Jay Calderon/The Desert Sun)

Read or Share this story: <https://www.desertsun.com/story/opinion/2019/02/20/eastern-coachella-valley-deserves-state-air-quality-aid-rebecca-zaragoza-lesly-figueroa-valley-voice/2928698002/>

This is your **LAST** free article