



# USER GUIDE TO THE SAN FRANCISCO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES MAP

## Overview of The EJ Framework and the EJ Communities Map

The Environmental Justice Communities Map (“EJ Communities Map” or “Map”) identifies areas in the City that face disproportionate burden of environmental health challenges, informed by state and local data. The EJ Communities Map is part of the [Environmental Justice Framework](#) (“EJ Framework”). The EJ Framework establishes a set of visions and priorities to ensure all residents and workers live in and enjoy healthy, clean environments. The EJ Framework is meant to highlight policy priorities that can explicitly improve health in Environmental Justice Communities (“EJ Communities”).

The goals of mapping the geography of San Francisco’s EJ Communities include:

- Use local data to refine areas that are lower-income and face high pollution and other health challenges;
- Create better alignment with maps by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and San Francisco’s Departments of Public Health and Recreation & Parks;
- Designate areas where policies and resources could be directed to promote community health;
- Develop an analysis that could be easily replicated in the future; and,
- Reflect community feedback on areas of high need.

The Map identifies the top one-third of areas experiencing environmental burden in the City. These EJ Communities include the Bayview Hunters Point, Chinatown, Excelsior, Japantown, Mission, Ocean View-Merced Heights-Ingleside, Outer Mission, Potrero Hill, SoMa, Tenderloin, Treasure Island, Visitacion Valley, and Western Addition. EJ Communities are often low-income communities and communities of color. As environmental justice is defined by remedying past harms and enabling community-led solutions,<sup>1</sup> it is important to focus policies and resources to these communities, which are often overlooked in local decision-making processes.

**Direct Resources:** The primary application of the EJ Communities Map is to designate areas where General Plan policies and City resources could be directed to promote community health. In the EJ Framework, all of the vision and priority statements apply to EJ Communities. The EJ Framework intends to guide all City departments to advance environmental justice in the top one-third of environmentally burdened areas in the City.

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<sup>1</sup>The City defines environmental justice as follows: Environmental Justice is the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and elimination of environmental burdens to promote healthy communities where everyone in San Francisco can thrive. Government should foster environmental justice through processes that address, mitigate, and amend past injustices while enabling proactive, community-led solutions for the future.

**Learn More:** The Planning Department (“SF Planning”) created an interactive ArcGIS StoryMap (Data Portal) that allows users to explore other data relevant to environmental justice, such as housing, transportation, climate, and public services. The Data Portal also includes excerpts from interviews with residents and workers in EJ Communities. The SF Planning [project webpage](#)<sup>2</sup> hosts a wealth of information on environmental justice work and next steps.

## How to Use the EJ Communities Map

**1. It’s a gradient!** The Map presents environmental burden with a spectrum of seven categories, with the lowest environmental burden in green and the highest environmental burden in red. Given its numerous factors and complex nature, the SF Planning intentionally presented environmental burden as a spectrum, rather than a binary of being “in” or “out” of an environmentally burdened area.

**2. Begin with the map as a base.** Without prescribing its use, the Map can be a base for decision making to direct resources and action in areas with the highest cumulative environmental burden. There is discretion and flexibility in adding additional considerations relative to the issue at hand. Be thoughtful and transparent about unique considerations that call for adaptation of the Map.

A department may choose to use the Map for broad applications, such as when the issues at hand affect the *services* to EJ Communities. There are issues such as access to open space, transportation service, and public safety that may be addressed in locations outside of the EJ Communities, while still improving the services to EJ Communities. In this case, consider using a buffer (e.g., 50’, 100’, 200’) around the EJ Communities to designate eligible service areas.

A department may choose to use the Map for specific applications, such as when the issues at hand affect the *locations* and *residents* of EJ Communities. For issues such as affordable housing, dispersing grant funding, and green infrastructure, it’s important to directly target the built environment and residents, workers, and community leaders. In this case, consider using the high-resolution Map to identify specific locations or adding an overlay with other spatial layers (e.g., parcels, streets).

**3. Conduct outreach and engagement.** Creating change for environmental justice begins with community empowerment. Outreach and engagement is recommended to ensure the needs and priorities of EJ Communities are benefitting from department action.

## Next Steps

The Map methodology was designed to be easily replicable. This Commission-approved methodology means that SF Planning can update the Map whenever any of the underlying data sets are updated (e.g., CalEnviroScreen, Air Pollution Exposure Zone, Areas of Vulnerability analysis, and state income limits).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information: <https://sfplanning.org/project/environmental-justice-framework-and-general-plan-policies#engagement>