



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM

Community Perspective on Environmental Health Tracking

PACOIMA BEAUTIFUL (WWW.PACOIMABEAUTIFUL.ORG)

BACKGROUND

Pacoima Beautiful, a community-based organization located in three square miles in the northeast San Fernando Valley, “provides environmental education, leadership development, and advocacy to create a clean, healthy and safe environment to improve the quality of life” for over 97,000 residents of Pacoima.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

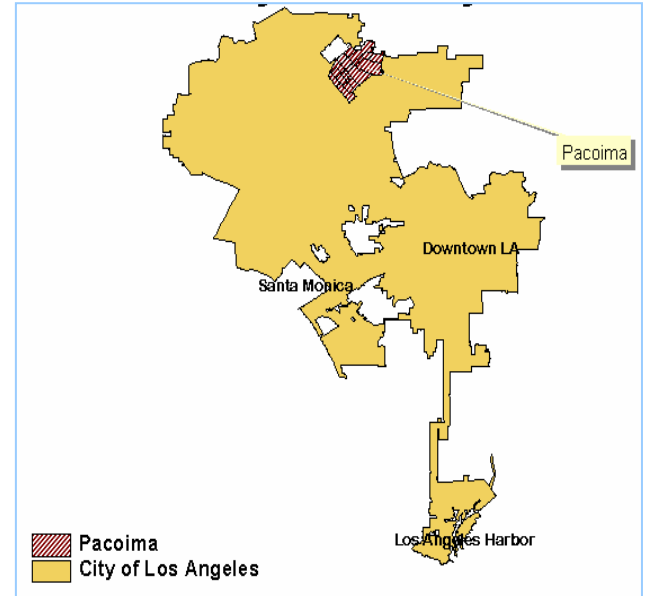
Established in the mid-1990’s, Pacoima Beautiful focuses on implementing “resident-driven” programs that:

- 1) help residents to create clean and environmentally safe neighborhoods;
- 2) assist youth in participating in activities to improve the environment in Pacoima; and
- 3) help residents to create healthy homes for their children.

ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Community members are taking steps to prioritize environmental issues and health concerns. Environmental concerns include freeways, a nearby airport, abandoned trash, oil drums, hazardous waste sites, land use conflicts and mold, dust mites, peeling paint. Health concerns include asthma, lead poisoning, and impaired children’s learning. Of primary concern to Pacoima residents is finding out which environmental hazards contribute to health problems and the specific steps that can be taken to improve the health of the residents “We can’t move the freeway, but we want to know what kind of impact it has when it is 100 to 300 feet from the school,” states Kristin Aldana-Taday, Associate Director of Administration for Pacoima Beautiful.

Pacoima Beautiful staff and community members recognize the value of having accurate, relevant data. They have conducted limited health surveys and sampled air, water, and soil. They recognize the need for ongoing help in locating and interpreting data specific to the community and comparing it to other communities.



CHALLENGES

“We need time to review, time to process, time to understand,” states Aldana-Taday. “Environmental health tracking sounds great - the more information you have the better. But not if you don’t know how to read it, not if you don’t know what it means to say - 1000 people have XYZ thing, ABC facility puts out so many pounds of this chemical, or this chemical can cause cancer or birth defects. What do we do next as a community group? What do I do with the information as a resident? How can we use the information to improve our environment and the health of our children?”

HOW ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TRACKING CAN HELP

Pacoima Beautiful’s vision of an environmental health tracking system includes the following components:

- 1) opportunities and resources for collaboration between scientists, researchers, and community members to address local environmental and health concerns;
- 2) increased accessibility to local (e.g., by zip code) relevant environmental and health data (‘centralized place to access the data; the simpler the data comes out, the easier it is for us to work with’);
- 3) training for community members on how to access and use the data;
- 4) standardized data collection tool for local communities that will allow aggregation of locally collected data;
- 5) training for health care providers on environmental health issues that will help improve services like lead testing and also improve data collection and;
- 6) greater understanding of health effects and environmental hazards.