

March 22, 2019

Ms. Tracy Zinn  
T&B Planning, Inc.  
17542 East 17<sup>th</sup> Street  
Tustin, CA 92780

**SUBJECT: ALTITUDE BUSINESS CENTRE SUPPLEMENTAL AIR QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

Dear Ms. Tracy Zinn:

Urban Crossroads, Inc. is pleased to submit this Supplemental Air Quality Assessment for the Altitude Business Centre (“Project”), which is located in the City of Chino. This letter has been prepared to supplement information in the *Altitude Business Centre Air Quality Impact Analysis* (“AQIA”) and the *Altitude Business Centre Diesel Mobile Source Health Risk Assessment* (“HRA”) prepared May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 by Urban Crossroads, Inc.

**PURPOSE**

A recent Supreme Court of California decision, *Sierra Club v. County of Fresno (Friant Ranch)*, found an EIR inadequate and states that:

*The EIR should be revised to relate the expected adverse air quality impacts to likely health consequences or explain in meaningful detail why it is not feasible at the time of drafting to provide such an analysis, so that the public may make informed decisions regarding the costs and benefits of the Project<sup>1</sup>.*

Given that the analysis for this Project identifies a significant and unavoidable project level and cumulative impacts with regard to Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) emissions, the following assessment serves to provide an analysis in conformance with the *Friant Ranch* decision which further clarifies, amplifies, and augments the air quality analysis already undertaken for the Project.

As summarized in the AQIA, the Project’s operational-source NO<sub>x</sub> emissions will exceed applicable SCAQMD numeric regional mass daily thresholds. Per SCAQMD significance guidance, these impacts at the project level are also considered cumulatively significant and would persist over the life of the proposed project. NO<sub>x</sub> is an ozone precursor and as such emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> has the potential to contribute to existing ozone non-attainment conditions within the Basin. This is a cumulatively significant impact persisting over the life of the proposed project.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the EIR for Friant Ranch did not include a health risk assessment report. The Project’s EIR includes a detailed mobile source health risk assessment which evaluates the Project’s potential health impacts to sensitive land uses as a result of diesel exhaust generated by the Project’s on-going operations.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **REGIONAL AIR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

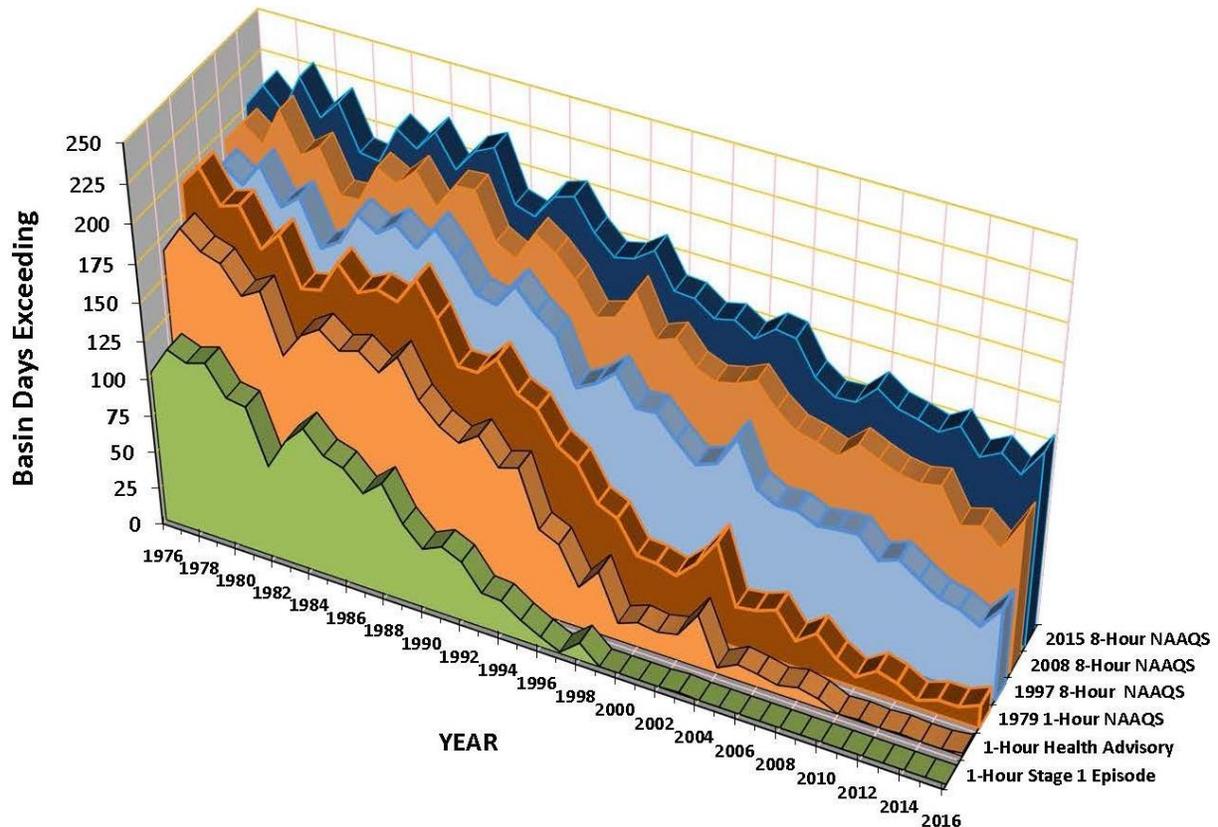
The Project is within the jurisdiction of the SCAQMD. In 1976, California adopted the Lewis Air Quality Management Act which created SCAQMD from a voluntary association of air pollution control districts in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. The geographic area of which SCAQMD consists is known as the SCAB. SCAQMD develops comprehensive plans and regulatory programs for the region to attain federal standards by dates specified in federal law. The agency is also responsible for meeting state standards by the earliest date achievable, using reasonably available control measures.

SCAQMD rule development through the 1970s and 1980s resulted in dramatic improvement in Basin air quality. Nearly all control programs developed through the early 1990s relied on (i) the development and application of cleaner technology; (ii) add-on emission controls, and (iii) uniform CEQA review throughout the Basin. Industrial emission sources have been significantly reduced by this approach and vehicular emissions have been reduced by technologies implemented at the state level by CARB.

The SCAQMD is the lead agency charged with regulating air quality emission reductions for the entire Basin. SCAQMD created AQMPs which represent a regional blueprint for achieving healthful air on behalf of the 16 million residents of the South Coast Basin. The 2012 AQMP states, “the remarkable historical improvement in air quality since the 1970’s is the direct result of Southern California’s comprehensive, multiyear strategy of reducing air pollution from all sources as outlined in its AQMPs,” (1).

Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), Nitrogen Oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC), and Carbon Monoxide (CO) have been decreasing in the Basin since 1975 and are projected to continue to decrease through 2020 (2). These decreases result primarily from motor vehicle controls and reductions in evaporative emissions. Although vehicle miles traveled in the Basin continue to increase, NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC levels are decreasing because of the mandated controls on motor vehicles and the replacement of older polluting vehicles with lower-emitting vehicles. NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from electric utilities have also decreased due to use of cleaner fuels and renewable energy. Ozone contour maps show that the number of days exceeding the national 8-hour standard has decreased between 1997 and 2007. In the 2007 period, there was an overall decrease in exceedance days compared with the 1997 period. Ozone levels in the SCAB have decreased substantially over the last 30 years as shown in Table 1 (3). Today, the maximum measured concentrations are approximately one-third of concentrations within the late 70’s.

**TABLE 1: SOUTH COAST AIR BASIN OZONE TREND**



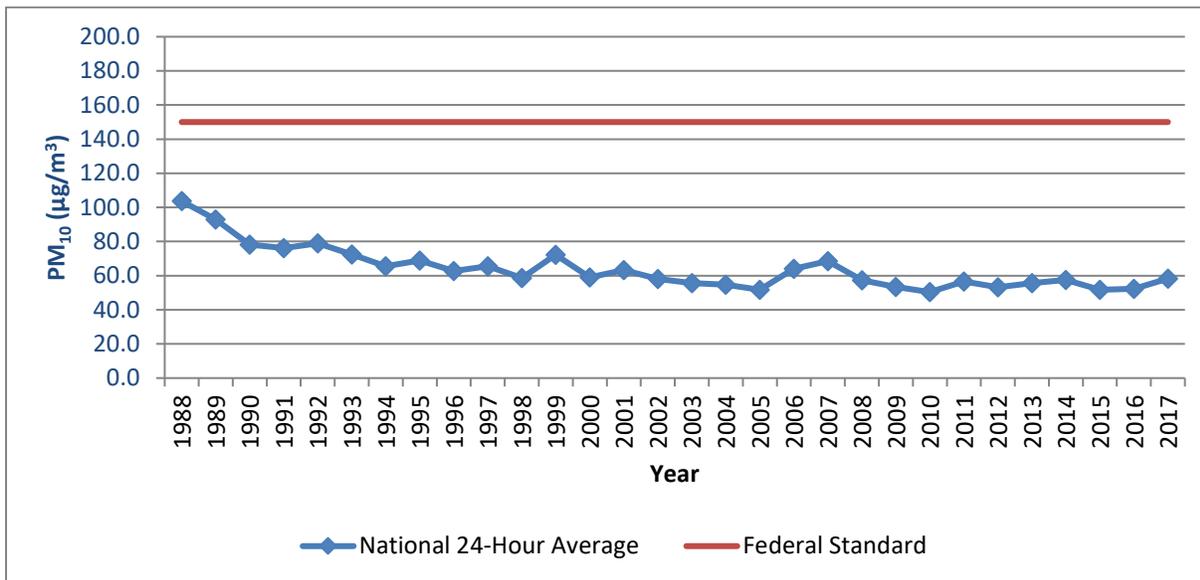
Source: Air Quality Management District

The overall trends of Particulate Matter 10 microns in diameter or less ( $PM_{10}$ ) and Particulate Matter 2.5 microns in diameter or less ( $PM_{2.5}$ ) levels in the air (not emissions) show an overall improvement since 1975. Direct emissions of  $PM_{10}$  have remained somewhat constant in the Basin and direct emissions of  $PM_{2.5}$  have decreased slightly since 1975. Area wide sources (fugitive dust from roads, dust from construction and demolition, and other sources) contribute the greatest amount of direct particulate matter emissions.

As with other pollutants, the most recent  $PM_{10}$  statistics show an overall improvement as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3. During the period for which data are available, the 24-hour national annual average concentration for  $PM_{10}$  decreased by approximately 44 percent, from  $103.7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in 1988 to  $58.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in 2017 (4). Although the values are below the federal standard, it should be noted that there are days within the year where the concentrations will exceed the threshold. The 24-hour state annual average for emissions for  $PM_{10}$ , have decreased by approximately 56 percent since 1988 (4). Although data in the late 1990's show some variability, this is probably due to the advances in meteorological science rather than a change in emissions.

Similar to the ambient concentrations, the calculated number of days above the 24-hour PM<sub>10</sub> standards has also shown an overall drop.

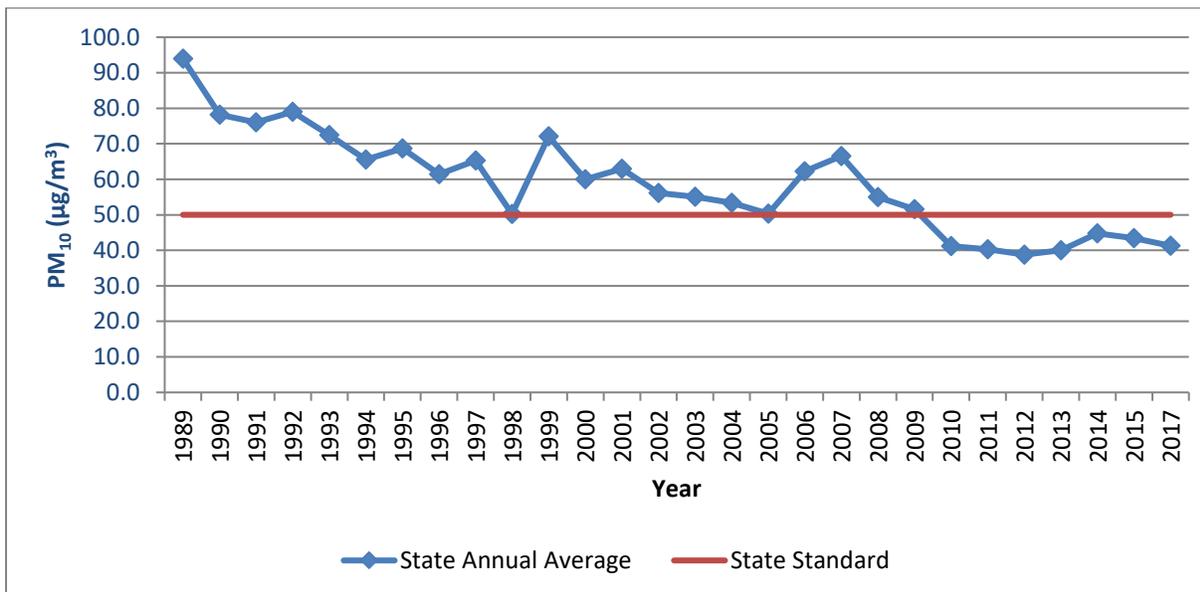
**TABLE 2: SCAB AVERAGE 24-HOUR CONCENTRATION PM<sub>10</sub> TREND (BASED ON FEDERAL STANDARD)<sup>1</sup>**



Source: California Air Resource Board

<sup>1</sup> Some year have been omitted from the table as insufficient data (or no) data has been reported. Years with reported value of "0" have also been omitted.

**TABLE 3: SCAB ANNUAL AVERAGE CONCENTRATION PM<sub>10</sub> TREND (BASED ON STATE STANDARD)<sup>1</sup>**

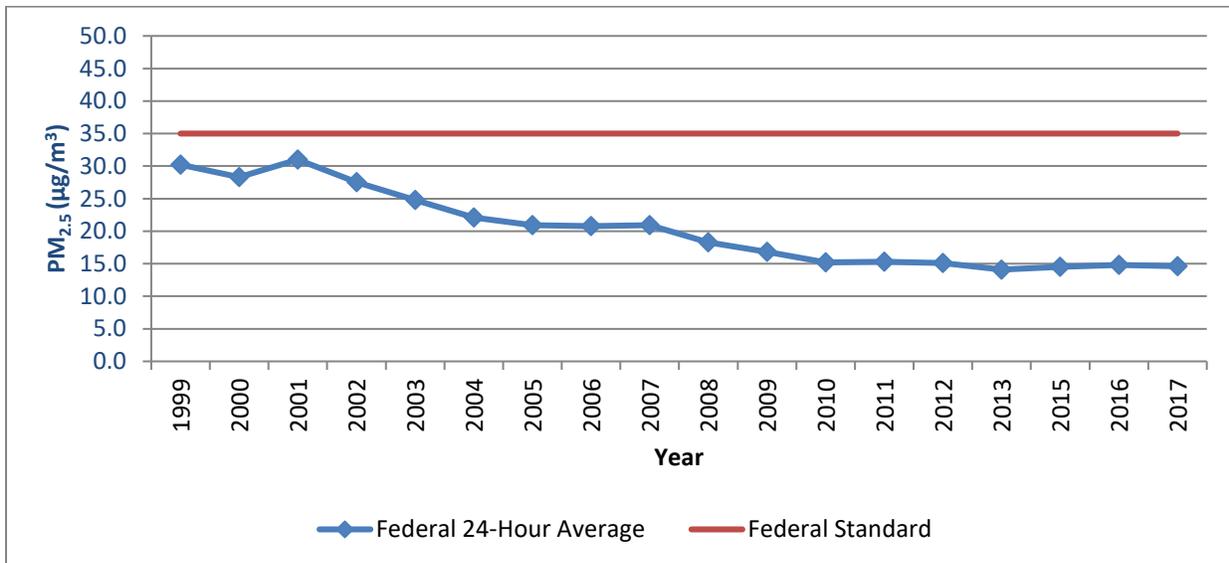


Source: California Air Resource Board

<sup>1</sup> Some year have been omitted from the table as insufficient data (or no) data has been reported. Years with reported value of "0" have also been omitted.

Tables 4 and 5 shows the most recent 24-hour average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations in the SCAB from 1999 through 2017. Overall, the national and state annual average concentrations have decreased by almost 52 percent and 30 percent respectively (4). The SCAB is currently designated as nonattainment for the State and federal PM<sub>2.5</sub> standards.

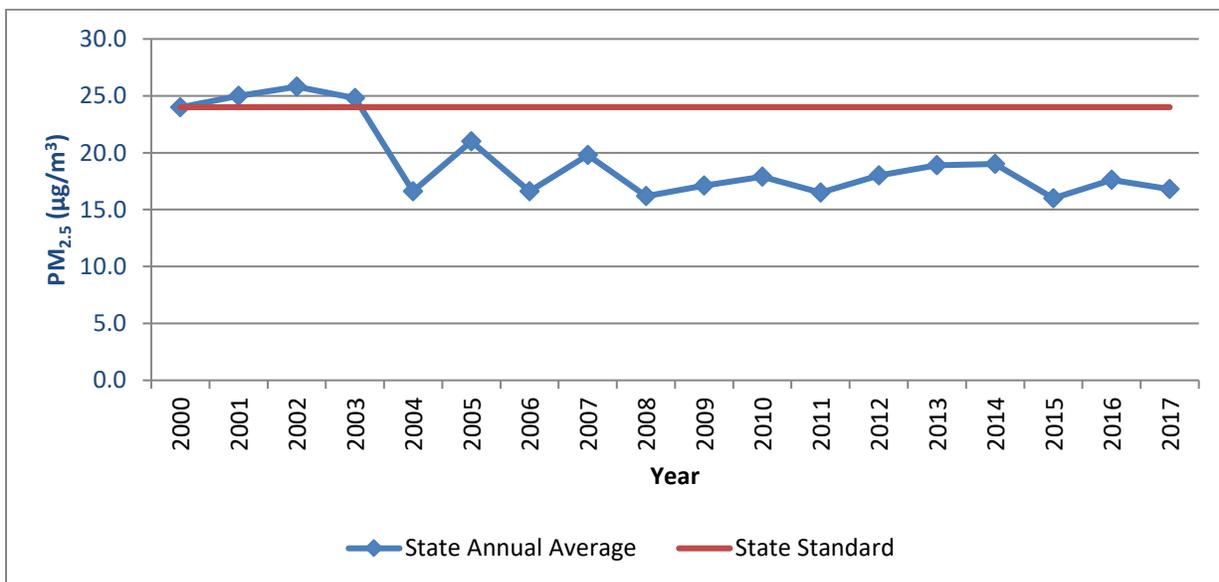
**TABLE 4: SCAB 24-HOUR AVERAGE CONCENTRATION PM<sub>2.5</sub> TREND (BASED ON FEDERAL STANDARD)<sup>1</sup>**



Source: California Air Resource Board

<sup>1</sup> Some year have been omitted from the table as insufficient data (or no) data has been reported. Years with reported value of "0" have also been omitted.

**TABLE 5: SCAB 24-HOUR AVERAGE CONCENTRATION PM<sub>2.5</sub> TREND (BASED ON STATE STANDARD)<sup>1</sup>**



Source: California Air Resource Board

<sup>1</sup> Some year have been omitted from the table as insufficient data (or no) data has been reported. Years with reported value of "0" have also been omitted.

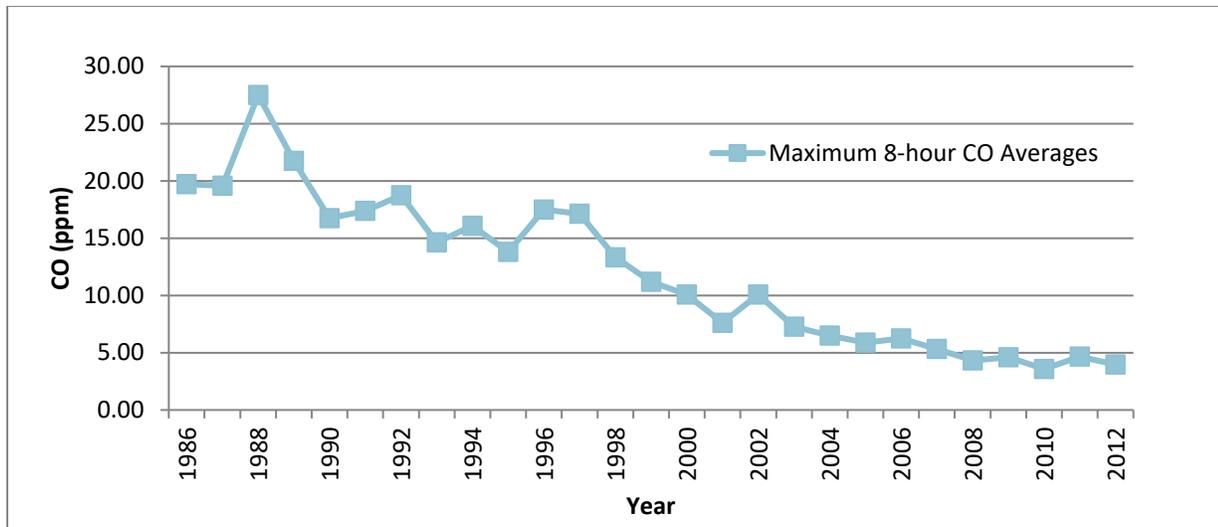
While the 2012 AQMP PM<sub>10</sub> attainment demonstration and the 2015 associated supplemental SIP submission indicated that attainment of the 24-hour standard was predicted to occur by the end of 2015, it could not anticipate the effect of the ongoing drought on the measured PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

The 2006 to 2010 base period used for the 2012 attainment demonstration had near-normal rainfall. While the trend of PM<sub>2.5</sub>-equivalent emission reductions continued through 2015, the severe drought conditions contributed to the PM<sub>2.5</sub> increases observed after 2012. As a result of the disrupted progress toward attainment of the federal 24-hour PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard, SCAQMD submitted a request and the U.S. EPA approved, in January 2016, a “bump up” to the nonattainment classification from “moderate” to “serious,” with a new attainment deadline as soon as practicable, but not beyond December 31, 2019.

In March 2017, the AQMD released the Final 2016 AQMP. The 2016 AQMP continues to evaluate current integrated strategies and control measures to meet the NAAQS, as well as, explore new and innovative methods to reach its goals. Some of these approaches include utilizing incentive programs, recognizing existing co-benefit programs from other sectors, and developing a strategy with fair-share reductions at the federal, state, and local levels (5). Similar to the 2012 AQMP, the 2016 AQMP incorporates scientific and technological information and planning assumptions, including the 2016 RTP/SCS and updated emission inventory methodologies for various source categories (6).

The most recent CO concentrations in the SCAB are shown on Table 6 (7). CO concentrations in the SCAB have decreased markedly — a total decrease of more about 80 percent in the peak 8-hour concentration since 1986. It should be noted 2012 is the most recent year where 8-hour CO averages and related statistics are available in the South Coast Air Basin. The number of exceedance days has also declined. The entire SCAB is now designated as attainment for both the state and national CO standards. Ongoing reductions from motor vehicle control programs should continue the downward trend in ambient CO concentrations.

**TABLE 6: SCAB 24-HOUR AVERAGE CONCENTRATION CO TREND<sup>1</sup>**



Source:

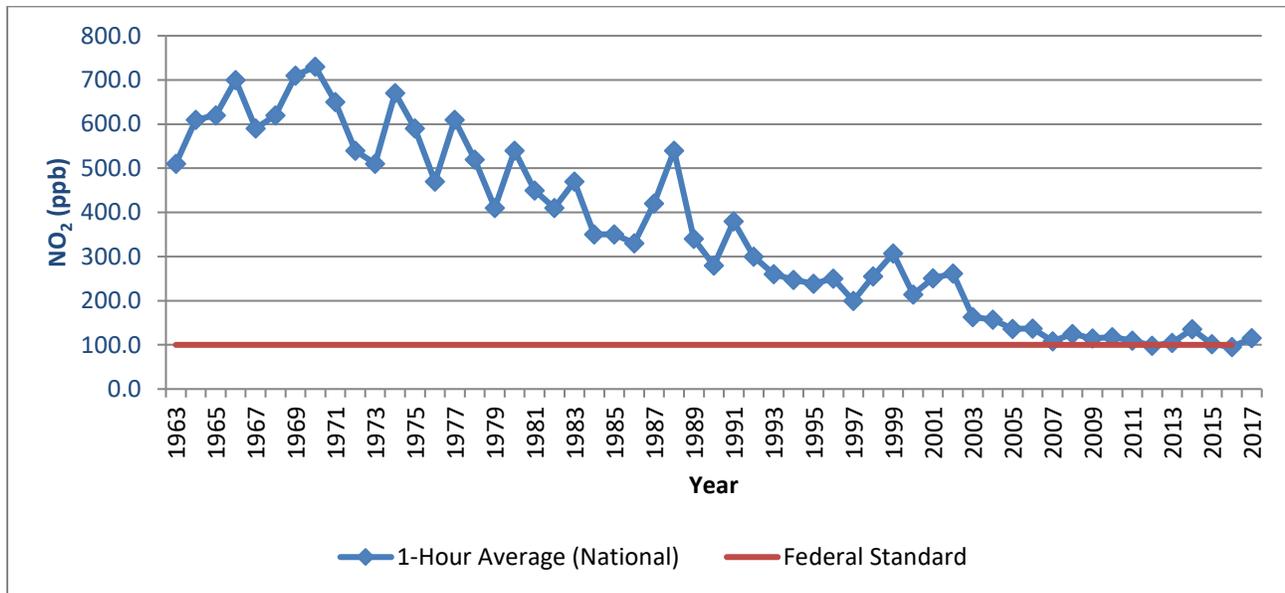
California Air Resource Board

<sup>1</sup> The most recent year where 8-hour concentration data is available is 2012.

Part of the control process of the SCAQMD’s duty to greatly improve the air quality in the Basin is the uniform CEQA review procedures required by SCAQMD’s CEQA Handbook (8). The single threshold of significance used to assess Project direct and cumulative impacts has in fact “worked” as evidenced by the track record of the air quality in the Basin dramatically improving over the course of the past decades. As stated by the SCAQMD, the District’s thresholds of significance are based on factual and scientific data and are therefore appropriate thresholds of significance to use for this Project.

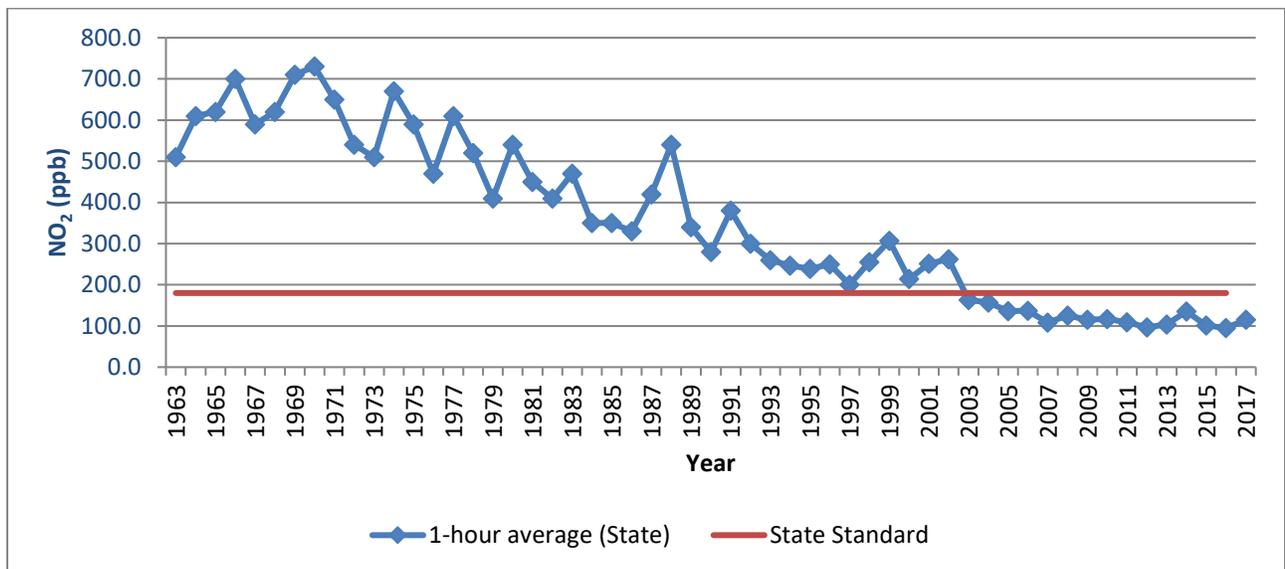
The most recent NO<sub>2</sub> data for the SCAB is shown in Tables 7 and 8 (4). Over the last 50 years, NO<sub>2</sub> values have decreased significantly; the peak 1-hour national and state averages for 2017 is approximately 77 percent lower than what it was during 1963. The SCAB attained the State 1-hour NO<sub>2</sub> standard in 1994, bringing the entire State into attainment. A new state annual average standard of 0.030 parts per million was adopted by the ARB in February 2007 (9). The new standard is just barely exceeded in the South Coast. NO<sub>2</sub> is formed from NO<sub>x</sub> emissions, which also contribute to ozone. As a result, the majority of the future emission control measures will be implemented as part of the overall ozone control strategy. Many of these control measures will target mobile sources, which account for more than three-quarters of California’s NO<sub>x</sub> emissions. These measures are expected to bring the South Coast into attainment of the State annual average standard.

**TABLE 7: SCAB 24-HOUR AVERAGE CONCENTRATION NO<sub>2</sub> TREND (BASED ON FEDERAL STANDARD)**



Source: California Air Resource Board

**TABLE 8: SCAB 24-HOUR AVERAGE CONCENTRATION NO<sub>2</sub> TREND (BASED ON STATE STANDARD)**



Source: California Air Resource Board

The American Lung Association website includes data collected from State air quality monitors that are used to compile an annual State of the Air report. The latest State of the Air Report compiled for the Basin was in 2017 (10). As noted in this report, air quality in the Basin has significantly improved in terms of both pollution levels and high pollution days over the past three decades. The area's average number

of high ozone days dropped from 38% regionally in the initial 2000 State of the Air report (1996–1998) to 69% in the 2004 report and continues to decrease the number of days. The region has also seen dramatic reduction in particle pollution since the initial 2000 State of the Air report (10).

### **TOXIC AIR CONTAMINANTS (TACs) TRENDS**

In 1984, as a result of public concern for exposure to airborne carcinogens, the CARB adopted regulations to reduce the amount of air toxic contaminant emissions resulting from mobile and area sources, such as cars, trucks, stationary products, and consumer products. According to the *Ambient and Emission Trends of Toxic Air Contaminants in California* journal article (11) which was prepared for CARB, results show that between 1990-2012, ambient concentration and emission trends for the seven TACs responsible for most of the known cancer risk associated with airborne exposure in California have declined significantly (between 1990 and 2012). The seven TACs studied include those that are derived from mobile sources: diesel particulate matter (DPM), benzene, and 1,3-butadiene; those that are derived from stationary sources: perchloroethylene and hexavalent chromium; and those derived from photochemical reactions of emitted VOCs: formaldehyde and acetaldehyde<sup>2</sup>. TACs data was gathered at monitoring sites from both the Bay Area and South Coast Air Basins, as shown on Exhibit A; Several of the sites in the SCAB include Reseda, Compton, Rubidoux, Burbank, and Fontana. The decline in ambient concentration and emission trends of these TACs are a result of various regulations CARB has implemented to address cancer risk.

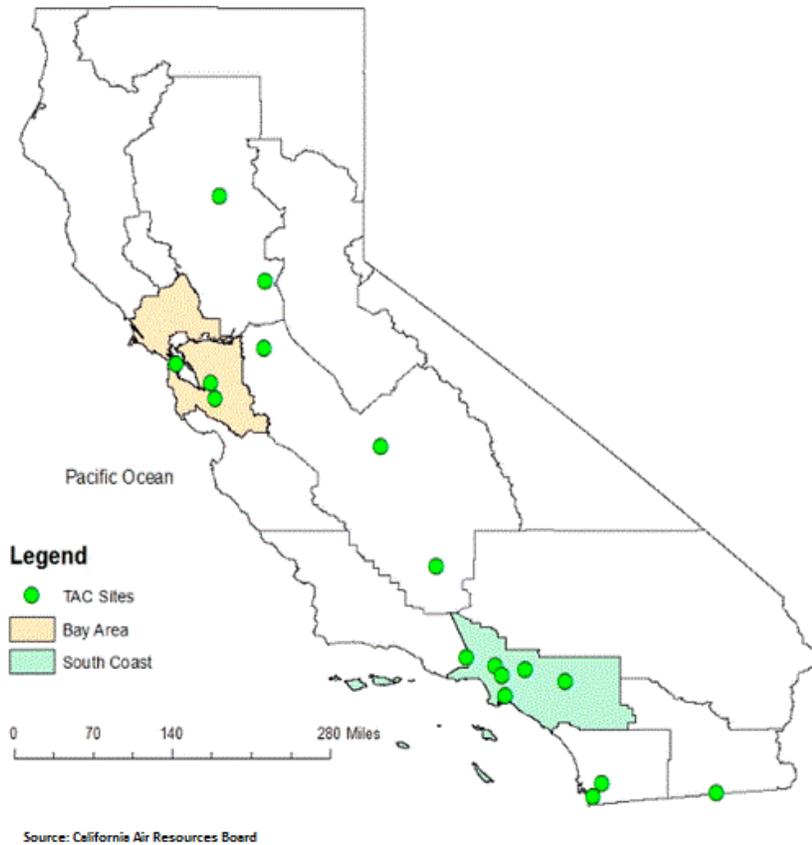
### **Mobile Source TACs**

CARB introduced two programs that aimed at reducing mobile emissions for light and medium duty vehicles through vehicle emissions controls and cleaner fuel. In California, light-duty vehicles sold after 1996 are equipped with California's second-generation On-Board Diagnostic (OBD-II) system. The OBD II system monitors virtually every component that can affect the emission performance of the vehicle to ensure that the vehicle remains as clean as possible over its entire life and assists repair technicians in diagnosing and fixing problems with the computerized engine controls. If a problem is detected, the OBD II system illuminates a warning lamp on the vehicle instrument panel to alert the driver. This warning lamp typically contains the phrase Check Engine or Service Engine Soon. The system will also store important information about the detected malfunction so that a repair technician can accurately find and fix the problem. ARB has recently developed similar OBD requirements for heavy-duty vehicles over 14,000 lbs. CARB's phase II Reformulated Gasoline (RFG-2) regulation, adopted in 1996, also led to a reduction of mobile source emissions. Through such regulations, benzene levels declined 88% from 1990-2012. 1,3-Butadiene concentrations also declined 85% from 1990-2012 as a result of the use of reformulated gasoline and motor vehicle regulations (11).

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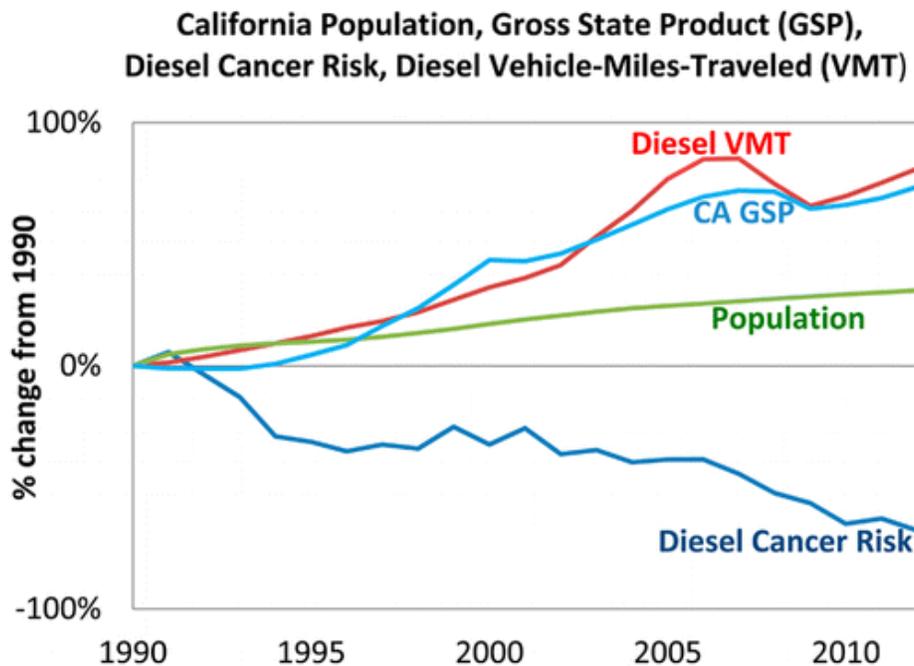
<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that ambient DPM concentrations are not measured directly. Rather, a surrogate method using the coefficient of haze (COH) and elemental carbon (EC) is used to estimate DPM concentrations.

**EXHIBIT A: CALIFORNIA TOXIC AIR CONTAMINANT SITES**



In 2000, CARB’s Diesel Risk Reduction Plan (DRRP) recommended the replacement and retrofit of diesel-fueled engines and the use of ultra-low-sulfur (<15ppm) diesel fuel. As a result of these measures, DPM concentrations have declined 68% since 2000, even though the state’s population increased 31% and the amount of diesel vehicles miles traveled increased 81%, as shown on Exhibit B. With the implementation of these diesel-related control regulations, ARB expects a DPM decline of 71% for 2000-2020.

**EXHIBIT B: DIESEL PARTICULATE MATTER AND DIESEL VEHICLE MILES TREND**



Source: California Air Resources Board

**DIESEL REGULATIONS**

The CARB and the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have adopted several iterations of regulations for diesel trucks that are aimed at reducing diesel particulate matter (DPM). More specifically, the CARB Drayage Truck Regulation (12), the CARB statewide On-road Truck and Bus Regulation (13), and the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach “Clean Truck Program” (CTP) require accelerated implementation of “clean trucks” into the statewide truck fleet (14). In other words, older more polluting trucks will be replaced with newer, cleaner trucks as a function of these regulatory requirements.

Moreover, the average statewide DPM emissions for Heavy Duty Trucks (HDT), in terms of grams of DPM generated per mile traveled, will dramatically be reduced due to the aforementioned regulatory requirements.

**CANCER RISK TRENDS**

Based on information available from CARB, overall cancer risk throughout the basin has had a declining trend since 1990. In 1998, following an exhaustive 10-year scientific assessment process, the State of California Air Resources Board (ARB) identified particulate matter from diesel-fueled engines as a toxic air contaminant. The SCAQMD initiated a comprehensive urban toxic air pollution study, called MATES-II (for Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study). Diesel particulate matter (DPM) accounts for more than 70 percent of the cancer risk.

In 2008 the SCAQMD prepared an update to the MATES-II study, referred to as MATES-III. MATES-III estimates the average excess cancer risk level from exposure to TACs is an approximately 17% decrease in comparison to the MATES-II study.

Nonetheless, the SCAQMD's most recent in-depth analysis of the toxic air contaminants and their resulting health risks for all of Southern California was from the *Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study in the South Coast Air Basin, MATES IV,* which shows that cancer risk has decreased more than 55% between MATES III (2005) and MATES IV (2015) ( 15)).

MATES-IV study represents the baseline health risk for a cumulative analysis. MATES-IV calculated cancer risks based on monitoring data collected at ten fixed sites within the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB). None of the fixed monitoring sites are within the local area of the Project site. However, MATES-IV has extrapolated the excess cancer risk levels throughout the basin by modeling the specific grids. MATES-IV modeling predicted an excess cancer risk of 780.30 in one million for the Project area. DPM is included in this cancer risk along with all other TAC sources. DPM accounts for 68% of the total risk shown in MATES-IV. Cumulative Project generated TACs are limited to DPM

## **ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT-RELATED HEALTH-REALATED IMPACTS**

### **SUPPLEMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

#### **SCAQMD ANALYSIS IN ITS BRIEF**

As noted in the Brief of Amicus Curiae by the South Coast Air Quality Management District in the Friant Ranch case (April 6, 2015, Attachment A) (Brief), SCAQMD has among the most sophisticated air quality modeling and health impact evaluation capability of any of the air districts in the State, and thus it is uniquely situated to express an opinion on how lead agencies should correlate air quality impacts with specific health outcomes. (Brief at page App-2). SCAQMD receives as many as 60 or more CEQA documents each month (around 500 per year) in its role as commenting agency or an agency with "jurisdiction by law" over air quality. Brief at page 7. The SCAQMD staff provides comments on as many as 25 or 30 such documents each month. *Ibid*. Therefore, the AQIA, the HRA and this Supplemental Assessment rely on SCAQMD expertise, thresholds, and guidance to disclose the Project's air quality impacts.

The SCAQMD discusses that it may be infeasible to quantify health risks caused by projects similar to the proposed Project, due to many factors. It is necessary to have data regarding the sources and types of air toxic contaminants, location of emission points, velocity of emissions, the meteorology and topography of the area, and the location of receptors (worker and residence). Brief at pages 9-10. The Brief states that it may not be feasible to perform a health risk assessment for airborne toxics that will be emitted by a generic industrial building that was built on "speculation" (i.e., without knowing the future tenant(s)). Brief at page 10. Even where a health risk assessment can be prepared, however, the resulting maximum health risk value is only a calculation of risk--it does not necessarily mean anyone

will contract cancer as a result of the project. Ibid. The Brief also cites the author of the CARB methodology, which reported that a PM<sub>2.5</sub> methodology is not suited for small projects and may yield unreliable results (Brief at page 14). Similarly, SCAQMD staff does not currently know of a way to accurately quantify ozone-related health impacts caused by NO<sub>x</sub> or VOC emissions from relatively small projects. reached with respect to NO<sub>x</sub> or VOC emissions from relatively small projects, due to photochemistry and regional model limitations (Brief at page 12). The Brief concludes, with respect to the Friant Ranch EIR, that although it may have been technically possible to plug the data into a methodology, the results would not have been reliable or meaningful (Brief at page 15).

On the other hand, for extremely large regional projects (unlike the Proposed Project), the SCAQMD states that it has been able to correlate potential health outcomes for very large emissions sources – as part of their rulemaking activity, specifically 6,620 pounds per day of NO<sub>x</sub> and 89,180 pounds per day of VOC were expected to result in approximately 20 premature deaths per year and 89,947 school absences due to ozone (Brief, at page 12)

#### **APPLICATION OF SCAQMD ANALYSIS TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

The Brief makes it clear that SCAQMD does not believe that there must be a quantification of a project's health risks in all CEQA documents prepared for individual projects. Any attempt to quantify the proposed Project's health risks would be considered unreliable and misleading. The proposed Project is much less intense than the Friant Ranch project, and the SCAQMD determined that an attempt to quantify the Friant Ranch health risks would be unreliable and misleading, due to the aforementioned factors. Also, the proposed Project does not generate anywhere near 6,620 pounds per day of NO<sub>x</sub> or 89,190 pounds per day of VOC emissions, which SCAQMD stated was a large enough emission to quantify ozone-related health impacts. Therefore, the Project's emissions are not sufficiently high enough to use regional modeling program to correlate health effects on a basin-wide level. Notwithstanding, as previously noted, the AQIA does include a site-specific localized impact analysis that does correlate potential project health impacts on a local level to immediately adjacent land uses. Lastly, the Project's HRA also evaluates the potential local health (cancer) impacts to adjacent land uses due to exposure to diesel exhaust from trucks accessing the site (see Pages 12-14 of SCAQMD Brief of Amicus Curiae).

#### **FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT'S HEALTH RISKS**

Although it may be misleading and unreliable to attempt to specifically quantify the proposed Project's health risks, the AQIA, HRA and this report provide extensive information concerning the proposed Project's health risks. While the proposed Project is expected to exceed the SCAQMD's numeric regional mass daily thresholds, this does not in itself constitute a significant health impact to the population adjacent to the Project and within the air basin.

The SCAQMD's numeric regional thresholds are based in part on Section 180 (e) of the federal Clean Air Act (CAA) – it should be noted that the numeric regional mass daily thresholds have not changed since their adoption as part of the *CEQA Air Quality Handbook* published by SCAQMD in 1993 (over 20 years ago). The numeric regional mass daily thresholds are also intended to provide a means of consistency in

significance determination within the environmental review process. Notwithstanding, simply exceeding the SCAQMD's numeric regional mass daily thresholds does not constitute a particular health impact to an individual receptor. The reason for this is that the mass daily thresholds are in pounds per day emitted into the air whereas health effects are determined based on the concentration of emissions in the air at a particular receptor (e.g., parts per million by volume of air, or micrograms per cubic meter of air). State and federal ambient air quality standards were developed to protect the most susceptible population groups from adverse health effects and were established in terms of parts per million or micrograms per cubic meter for the applicable emissions.

For this reason, the SCAQMD developed a methodology to assist lead agencies in analyzing localized air quality impacts from a proposed project as they relate to CO, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, and PM<sub>10</sub>. This methodology is collectively referred to as the localized significance thresholds (LSTs). The LSTs differ from the numeric regional mass daily thresholds since the LSTs are based on the amount of emissions generated from a project that are not expected to cause or contribute to an exceedance of the most stringent applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard, and are based on the ambient concentrations of the pollutant and the relative distance to the nearest sensitive receptor (the SCAQMD performed air dispersion modeling to determine what amount of emissions generated a particular concentration at a particular distance).

The AQIA evaluated the proposed Project's localized impact to air quality for emissions of CO, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, and PM<sub>2.5</sub> by comparing the proposed Project's on-site emissions to the SCAQMD's applicable LST thresholds (see Sections 3.6 and 3.7 of the AQIA). As evaluated in the AQIA Report, the Project would not result in emissions that exceeded the SCAQMD's LSTs. Therefore, the Project would not be expected to exceed the most stringent applicable federal or state ambient air quality standards for emissions of CO, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, and PM<sub>2.5</sub>. It should be noted that the ambient air quality standards are developed and represent levels at which the most susceptible persons (children and the elderly) are protected. In other words, the ambient air quality standards are purposefully set low to protect children, elderly, and those with existing respiratory problems.

Furthermore, as shown in the previous sections, air quality trends for both emissions of NO<sub>x</sub>, VOCs, and O<sub>3</sub> (which is a byproduct of NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs) have been trending downward within the air basin even as development has increased over the last several years. Therefore, although the proposed Project will exceed the SCAQMD's numeric thresholds for emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs this does not in itself constitute a basin-wide increase in health effects related to these pollutants.

For analytical purposes, the LSTs for emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> can be used as a surrogate to determine whether or not there would be a potential health impact related to emissions of VOCs (since there are no ambient air quality standards for VOCs). As shown above, LSTs for NO<sub>x</sub> would not exceed the applicable threshold and a less than significant impact to localized (adjacent) sensitive receptors would occur. It should be noted that impacts related to air quality in the general sense are based on a source-receptor relationship – in other words, the further away one moves from the source, the lower the concentration in the ambient air.

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The proposed Project does not generate anywhere near 6,620 pounds per day of NO<sub>x</sub> or 89,190 pounds per day of VOC emissions. The Project would generate 86.07 pounds per day of NO<sub>x</sub> during construction and 486.14 pounds per day of NO<sub>x</sub> during operations (1.30 percent and 7.34 percent of 6,620 pounds per day, respectively). The Project would also generate 28.99 pounds per day of VOC emissions during construction and 51.35 pounds per day of VOC emissions during operations (0.03 percent and 0.06 percent of 89,190 pounds per day, respectively).

Therefore, the Project's emissions are not sufficiently high enough to use a regional modeling program to correlate health effects on a basin-wide level.

The SCAQMD Brief of Amicus Curiae is incorporated by reference into this letter and into the environmental documentation for this Project, including all references therein.

Unfortunately, current scientific, technological, and modeling limitations prevent the relation of expected adverse air quality impacts to likely health consequences. For this reason, this Supplemental Air Quality Assessment explains in meaningful detail why it is not feasible to provide such an analysis.

Respectfully submitted,

URBAN CROSSROADS, INC.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Haseeb Qureshi', with a stylized, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Haseeb Qureshi,  
Senior Associate

## REFERENCES

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**ATTACHMENT A**

**S219783**

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF CALIFORNIA**

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SIERRA CLUB, REVIVE THE SAN JOAQUIN, and  
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FRESNO,

Plaintiffs and Appellants,

v.

COUNTY OF FRESNO,

Defendant and Respondent,

and,

FRIANT RANCH, L.P.,

Real Party in Interest and Respondent.

SUPREME COURT  
FILED

APR 13 2015

Frank A. McGuire Clerk  
Deputy

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After a Published Decision by the Court of Appeal, filed May 27, 2014  
Fifth Appellate District Case No. F066798

Appeal from the Superior Court of California, County of Fresno  
Case No. 11CECG00726  
Honorable Rosendo A. Pena, Jr.

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**APPLICATION OF THE SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY  
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT FOR LEAVE TO FILE  
BRIEF OF *AMICUS CURIAE* IN SUPPORT OF NEITHER PARTY  
AND [*PROPOSED*] BRIEF OF *AMICUS CURIAE***

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**TO THE HONORABLE CHIEF JUSTICE AND JUSTICES OF THE  
SUPREME COURT:**

**APPLICATION FOR LEAVE TO FILE *AMICUS CURIAE* BRIEF**

Pursuant to Rule 8.520(f) of the California Rules of Court, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) respectfully requests leave to file the attached *amicus curiae* brief. Because SCAQMD's position differs from that of either party, we request leave to submit this *amicus* brief in support of neither party.

**HOW THIS BRIEF WILL ASSIST THE COURT**

SCAQMD's proposed *amicus* brief takes a position on two of the issues in this case. In both instances, its position differs from that of either party. The issues are:

- 1) Does the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) require an environmental impact report (EIR) to correlate a project's air pollution emissions with specific levels of health impacts?
- 2) What is the proper standard of review for determining whether an EIR provides sufficient information on the health impacts caused by a project's emission of air pollutants?

This brief will assist the Court by discussing the practical realities of correlating identified air quality impacts with specific health outcomes. In short, CEQA requires agencies to provide detailed information about a project's air quality impacts that is sufficient for the public and decisionmakers to adequately evaluate the project and meaningfully understand its impacts. However, the level of analysis is governed by a rule of reason; CEQA only requires agencies to conduct analysis if it is reasonably feasible to do so.

With regard to health-related air quality impacts, an analysis that correlates a project's air pollution emissions with specific levels of health impacts will be feasible in some cases but not others. Whether it is feasible depends on a variety of factors, including the nature of the project and the nature of the analysis under consideration. The feasibility of analysis may also change over time as air districts and others develop new tools for measuring projects' air quality related health impacts. Because SCAQMD has among the most sophisticated air quality modeling and health impact evaluation capability of any of the air districts in the State, it is uniquely situated to express an opinion on the extent to which the Court should hold that CEQA requires lead agencies to correlate air quality impacts with specific health outcomes.

SCAQMD can also offer a unique perspective on the question of the appropriate standard of review. SCAQMD submits that the proper standard of review for determining whether an EIR is sufficient as an informational document is more nuanced than argued by either party. In our view, this is a mixed question of fact and law. It includes determining whether additional analysis is feasible, which is primarily a factual question that should be reviewed under the substantial evidence standard. However, it also involves determining whether the omission of a particular analysis renders an EIR insufficient to serve CEQA's purpose as a meaningful, informational document. If a lead agency has not determined that a requested analysis is infeasible, it is the court's role to determine whether the EIR nevertheless meets CEQA's purposes, and courts should not defer to the lead agency's conclusions regarding the legal sufficiency of an EIR's analysis. The ultimate question of whether an EIR's analysis is "sufficient" to serve CEQA's informational purposes is predominately a question of law that courts should review *de novo*.

This brief will explain the rationale for these arguments and may assist the Court in reaching a conclusion that accords proper respect to a lead agency's factual conclusions while maintaining judicial authority over the ultimate question of what level of analysis CEQA requires.

#### **STATEMENT OF INTEREST OF *AMICUS CURIAE***

The SCAQMD is the regional agency primarily responsible for air pollution control in the South Coast Air Basin, which consists of all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of the Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. (Health & Saf. Code § 40410; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 17, § 60104.) The SCAQMD participates in the CEQA process in several ways. Sometimes it acts as a lead agency that prepares CEQA documents for projects. Other times it acts as a responsible agency when it has permit authority over some part of a project that is undergoing CEQA review by a different lead agency. Finally, SCAQMD also acts as a commenting agency for CEQA documents that it receives because it is a public agency with jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by the project.

In all of these capacities, SCAQMD will be affected by the decision in this case. SCAQMD sometimes submits comments requesting that a lead agency perform an additional type of air quality or health impacts analysis. On the other hand, SCAQMD sometimes determines that a particular type of health impact analysis is not feasible or would not produce reliable and informative results. Thus, SCAQMD will be affected by the Court's resolution of the extent to which CEQA requires EIRs to correlate emissions and health impacts, and its resolution of the proper standard of review.

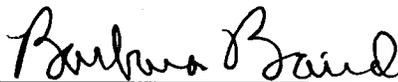
**CERTIFICATION REGARDING AUTHORSHIP AND FUNDING**

No party or counsel in the pending case authored the proposed amicus curiae brief in whole or in part, or made any monetary contribution intended to fund the preparation or submission of the brief. No person or entity other than the proposed *Amicus Curiae* made any monetary contribution intended to fund the preparation or submission of the brief.

Respectfully submitted,

DATED: April 3, 2015

SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY  
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
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*Attorneys for [proposed] Amicus Curiae*  
*SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY*  
*MANAGEMENT DISTRICT*

## BRIEF OF AMICUS CURIAE

### SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) submits that this Court should not try to establish a hard-and-fast rule concerning whether lead agencies are required to correlate emissions of air pollutants with specific health consequences in their environmental impact reports (EIR). The level of detail required in EIRs is governed by a few, core CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) principles. As this Court has stated, “[a]n EIR must include detail sufficient to enable those who did not participate in its preparation to understand and to consider meaningfully the issues raised by the proposed project.” (*Laurel Heights Improvement Assn. v. Regents of the Univ of Cal.* (1988) 47 Cal.3d 376, 405 [*“Laurel Heights I”*]) Accordingly, “an agency must use its best efforts to find out and disclose all that it reasonably can.” (*Vineyard Area Citizens for Responsible Growth, Inc. v. City of Rancho Cordova* (2007) 40 Cal.4th 412, 428 (quoting CEQA Guidelines § 15144)<sup>1</sup>). However, “[a]nalysis of environmental effects need not be exhaustive, but will be judged in light of what is reasonably feasible.” (*Association of Irrigated Residents v. County of Madera* (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 1383, 1390; CEQA Guidelines §§ 15151, 15204(a).)

With regard to analysis of air quality related health impacts, EIRs must generally quantify a project’s pollutant emissions, but in some cases it is not feasible to correlate these emissions to specific, quantifiable health impacts (e.g., premature mortality; hospital admissions). In such cases, a general description of the adverse health impacts resulting from the pollutants at issue may be sufficient. In other cases, due to the magnitude

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<sup>1</sup> The CEQA Guidelines are found at Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14 §§ 15000, *et seq.*

or nature of the pollution emissions, as well as the specificity of the project involved, it may be feasible to quantify health impacts. Or there may be a less exacting, but still meaningful analysis of health impacts that can feasibly be performed. In these instances, agencies should disclose those impacts.

SCAQMD also submits that whether or not an EIR complies with CEQA's informational mandates by providing sufficient, feasible analysis is a mixed question of fact and law. Pertinent here, the question of whether an EIR's discussion of health impacts from air pollution is sufficient to allow the public to understand and consider meaningfully the issues involves two inquiries: (1) Is it feasible to provide the information or analysis that a commenter is requesting or a petitioner is arguing should be required?; and (2) Even if it is feasible, is the agency relying on other policy or legal considerations to justify not preparing the requested analysis? The first question of whether an analysis is feasible is primarily a question of fact that should be judged by the substantial evidence standard. The second inquiry involves evaluating CEQA's information disclosure purposes against the asserted reasons to not perform the requested analysis. For example, an agency might believe that its EIR meets CEQA's informational disclosure standards even without a particular analysis, and therefore choose not to conduct that analysis. SCAQMD submits that this is more of a legal question, which should be reviewed de novo as a question of law.

## **ARGUMENT**

### **I. RELEVANT FACTUAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK.**

#### **A. Air Quality Regulatory Background**

The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) is one of the local and regional air pollution control districts and air quality

management districts in California. The SCAQMD is the regional air pollution agency for the South Coast Air Basin, which consists of all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. (Health & Saf. Code § 40410, 17 Cal. Code Reg. § 60104.) The SCAQMD also includes the Coachella Valley in Riverside County (Palm Springs area to the Salton Sea). (SCAQMD, *Final 2012 AQMP (Feb. 2013)*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/clean-air-plans/air-quality-mgt-plan/final-2012-air-quality-management-plan>; then follow “chapter 7” hyperlink; pp 7-1, 7-3 (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) The SCAQMD's jurisdiction includes over 16 million residents and has the worst or nearly the worst air pollution levels in the country for ozone and fine particulate matter. (SCAQMD, *Final 2012 AQMP (Feb. 2013)*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/clean-air-plans/air-quality-mgt-plan/final-2012-air-quality-management-plan>; then follow “Executive Summary” hyperlink p. ES-1 (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).)

Under California law, the local and regional districts are primarily responsible for controlling air pollution from all sources except motor vehicles. (Health & Saf. Code § 40000.) The California Air Resources Board (CARB), part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, is primarily responsible for controlling pollution from motor vehicles. (*Id.*) The air districts must adopt rules to achieve and maintain the state and federal ambient air quality standards within their jurisdictions. (Health & Saf. Code § 40001.)

The federal Clean Air Act (CAA) requires the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to identify pollutants that are widely distributed and pose a threat to human health, developing a so-called “criteria” document. (42 U.S.C. § 7408; CAA § 108.) These pollutants are frequently called “criteria pollutants.” EPA must then establish “national ambient air quality standards” at levels “requisite to protect public health”,

allowing “an adequate margin of safety.” (42 U.S.C. § 7409; CAA § 109.) EPA has set standards for six identified pollutants: ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, particulate matter (PM), and lead. (U.S. EPA, National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), <http://www.epa.gov/air/criteria.html> (last updated Oct. 21, 2014).)<sup>2</sup>

Under the Clean Air Act, EPA sets emission standards for motor vehicles and “nonroad engines” (mobile farm and construction equipment, marine vessels, locomotives, aircraft, etc.). (42 U.S.C. §§ 7521, 7547; CAA §§ 202, 213.) California is the only state allowed to establish emission standards for motor vehicles and most nonroad sources; however, it may only do so with EPA's approval. (42 U.S.C. §§ 7543(b), 7543(e); CAA §§ 209(b), 209(c).) Sources such as manufacturing facilities, power plants and refineries that are not mobile are often referred to as “stationary sources.” The Clean Air Act charges state and local agencies with the primary responsibility to attain the national ambient air quality standards. (42 U.S.C. § 7401(a)(3); CAA § 101(a)(3).) Each state must adopt and implement a plan including enforceable measures to achieve and maintain the national ambient air quality standards. (42 U.S.C. § 7410; CAA § 110.) The SCAQMD and CARB jointly prepare portion of the plan for the South Coast Air Basin and submit it for approval by EPA. (Health & Saf. Code §§ 40460, et seq.)

The Clean Air Act also requires state and local agencies to adopt a permit program requiring, among other things, that new or modified “major” stationary sources use technology to achieve the “lowest achievable emission rate,” and to control minor stationary sources as

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<sup>2</sup> Particulate matter (PM) is further divided into two categories: fine particulate or PM<sub>2.5</sub> (particles with a diameter of less than or equal to 2.5 microns) and coarse particulate (PM<sub>10</sub>) (particles with a diameter of 10 microns or less). (U.S. EPA, Particulate Matter (PM), <http://www.epa.gov/airquality/particulatepollution/> (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).)

needed to help attain the standards. (42 U.S.C. §§ 7502(c)(5), 7503(a)(2), 7410(a)(2)(C); CAA §§ 172(c)(5), 173(a)(2), 110(a)(2)(C).) The air districts implement these permit programs in California. (Health & Saf. Code §§ 42300, et seq.)

The Clean Air Act also sets out a regulatory structure for over 100 so-called “hazardous air pollutants” calling for EPA to establish “maximum achievable control technology” (MACT) for sources of these pollutants. (42 U.S.C. § 7412(d)(2); CAA § 112(d)(2).) California refers to these pollutants as “toxic air contaminants” (TACs) which are subject to two state-required programs. The first program requires “air toxics control measures” for specific categories of sources. (Health & Saf. Code § 39666.) The other program requires larger stationary sources and sources identified by air districts to prepare “health risk assessments” for impacts of toxic air contaminants. (Health & Saf. Code §§ 44320(b), 44322, 44360.) If the health risk exceeds levels identified by the district as “significant,” the facility must implement a “risk reduction plan” to bring its risk levels below “significant” levels. Air districts may adopt additional more stringent requirements than those required by state law, including requirements for toxic air contaminants. (Health & Saf. Code § 41508; *Western Oil & Gas Assn. v. Monterey Bay Unified APCD* (1989) 49 Cal.3d 408, 414.) For example, SCAQMD has adopted a rule requiring new or modified sources to keep their risks below specified levels and use best available control technology (BACT) for toxics. (SCAQMD, *Rule 1401-New Source Review of Toxic Air Contaminants*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/regulations/rules/scaqmd-rule-book/regulation-xiv>; then follow “Rule 1401” hyperlink (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).)

## **B. The SCAQMD's Role Under CEQA**

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires public agencies to perform an environmental review and appropriate analysis for projects that they implement or approve. (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(a).) The agency with primary approval authority for a particular project is generally the “lead agency” that prepares the appropriate CEQA document. (CEQA Guidelines §§ 15050, 15051.) Other agencies having a subsequent approval authority over all or part of a project are called “responsible” agencies that must determine whether the CEQA document is adequate for their use. (CEQA Guidelines §§ 15096(c), 15381.) Lead agencies must also consult with and circulate their environmental impact reports to “trustee agencies” and agencies “with jurisdiction by law” including “authority over resources which may be affected by the project.” (Pub. Resources Code §§ 21104(a), 21153; CEQA Guidelines §§ 15086(a)(3), 15073(c).) The SCAQMD has a role in all these aspects of CEQA.

Fulfilling its responsibilities to implement its air quality plan and adopt rules to attain the national ambient air quality standards, SCAQMD adopts a dozen or more rules each year to require pollution reductions from a wide variety of sources. The SCAQMD staff evaluates each rule for any adverse environmental impact and prepares the appropriate CEQA document. Although most rules reduce air emissions, they may have secondary environmental impacts such as use of water or energy or disposal of waste—e.g., spent catalyst from control equipment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The SCAQMD's CEQA program for its rules is a “Certified Regulatory Program” under which it prepares a “functionally equivalent” document in lieu of a negative declaration or EIR. (Pub. Resources Code § 21080.5, CEQA Guidelines § 15251(l).)

The SCAQMD also approves a large number of permits every year to construct new, modified, or replacement facilities that emit regulated air pollutants. The majority of these air pollutant sources have already been included in an earlier CEQA evaluation for a larger project, are currently being evaluated by a local government as lead agency, or qualify for an exemption. However, the SCAQMD sometimes acts as lead agency for major projects where the local government does not have a discretionary approval. In such cases, SCAQMD prepares and certifies a negative declaration or environmental impact report (EIR) as appropriate.<sup>4</sup> SCAQMD evaluates perhaps a dozen such permit projects under CEQA each year. SCAQMD is often also a “responsible agency” for many projects since it must issue a permit for part of the projects (e.g., a boiler used to provide heat in a commercial building). For permit projects evaluated by another lead agency under CEQA, SCAQMD has the right to determine that the CEQA document is inadequate for its purposes as a responsible agency, but it may not do so because its permit program already requires all permitted sources to use the best available air pollution control technology. (SCAQMD, *Rule 1303(a)(1) – Requirements*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/regulations/rules/scaqmd-rule-book/regulation-xiii>; then follow “Rule 1303” hyperlink (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).)

Finally, SCAQMD receives as many as 60 or more CEQA documents each month (around 500 per year) in its role as commenting agency or an agency with “jurisdiction by law” over air quality—a natural resource affected by the project. (Pub. Resources Code §§ 21104(a), 21153; CEQA Guidelines § 15366(a)(3).) The SCAQMD staff provides comments on as many as 25 or 30 such documents each month.

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<sup>4</sup> The SCAQMD's permit projects are not included in its Certified Regulatory Program, and are evaluated under the traditional local government CEQA analysis. (Pub. Resources Code §§ 21150-21154.)

(SCAQMD Governing Board Agenda, Apr. 3, 2015, Agenda Item 16, Attachment A, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/meeting-agendas-minutes/agenda?title=governing-board-meeting-agenda-april-3-2015>; then follow “16. Lead Agency Projects and Environmental Documents Received by SCAQMD” hyperlink (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) Of course, SCAQMD focuses its commenting efforts on the more significant projects.

Typically, SCAQMD comments on the adequacy of air quality analysis, appropriateness of assumptions and methodology, and completeness of the recommended air quality mitigation measures. Staff may comment on the need to prepare a health risk assessment detailing the projected cancer and noncancer risks from toxic air contaminants resulting from the project, particularly the impacts of diesel particulate matter, which CARB has identified as a toxic air contaminant based on its carcinogenic effects. (California Air Resources Board, Resolution 98-35, Aug. 27, 1998, <http://www.arb.ca.gov/regact/diesltac/diesltac.htm>; then follow Resolution 98-35 hyperlink (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) Because SCAQMD already requires new or modified stationary sources of toxic air contaminants to use the best available control technology for toxics and to keep their risks below specified levels, (SCAQMD Rule 1401, *supra*, note 15), the greatest opportunity to further mitigate toxic impacts through the CEQA process is by reducing emissions—particularly diesel emissions—from vehicles.

**II. THIS COURT SHOULD NOT SET A HARD-AND-FAST RULE CONCERNING THE EXTENT TO WHICH AN EIR MUST CORRELATE A PROJECT’S EMISSION OF POLLUTANTS WITH RESULTING HEALTH IMPACTS.**

Numerous cases hold that courts do not review the correctness of an EIR’s conclusions but rather its sufficiency as an informative document. (*Laurel Heights 1*, *supra*, 47 Cal.3d at p. 392; *Citizens of Goleta Valley v.*

*Bd. of Supervisors* (1990) 52 Cal.3d 553, 569; *Bakersfield Citizens for Local Control v. City of Bakersfield* (2004) 124 Cal.App.4th 1184, 1197.)

As stated by the Court of Appeal in this case, where an EIR has addressed a topic, but the petitioner claims that the information provided about that topic is insufficient, courts must “draw[] a line that divides *sufficient* discussions from those that are *insufficient*.” (*Sierra Club v. County of Fresno* (2014) 226 Cal.App.4th 704 (superseded by grant of review) 172 Cal.Rptr.3d 271, 290.) The Court of Appeal readily admitted that “[t]he terms themselves – sufficient and insufficient – provide little, if any, guidance as to where the line should be drawn. They are simply labels applied once the court has completed its analysis.” (*Id.*)

The CEQA Guidelines, however, provide guidance regarding what constitutes a sufficient discussion of impacts. Section 15151 states that “the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in light of what is reasonably feasible.” Case law reflects this: “Analysis of environmental effects need not be exhaustive, but will be judged in light of what was reasonably feasible.” (*Association of Irrigated Residents v. County of Madera, supra*, 107 Cal.App.4th at p. 1390; see also CEQA Guidelines § 15204(a).)

Applying this test, this Court cannot realistically establish a hard-and-fast rule that an analysis correlating air pollution impacts of a project to quantified resulting health impacts is always required, or indeed that it is never required. Simply put, in some cases such an analysis will be “feasible”; in some cases it will not.

For example, air pollution control districts often require a proposed new source of toxic air contaminants to prepare a “health risk assessment” before issuing a permit to construct. District rules often limit the allowable cancer risk the new source may cause to the “maximally exposed individual” (worker and residence exposures). (*See, e.g.*, SCAQMD Rule 1401(c)(8); 1401(d)(1), *supra* note 15.) In order to perform this analysis, it

is necessary to have data regarding the sources and types of air toxic contaminants, location of emission points, velocity of emissions, the meteorology and topography of the area, and the location of receptors (worker and residence). (SCAQMD, *Supplemental Guidelines for Preparing Risk Assessments for the Air Toxics "Hot Spots" Information and Assessment Act (AB2588)*, pp. 11-16; (last visited Apr. 1, 2015) <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/documents-support-material>; "Guidelines" hyperlink; AB2588; then follow AB2588 Risk Assessment Guidelines hyperlink.)

Thus, it is feasible to determine the health risk posed by a new gas station locating at an intersection in a mixed use area, where receptor locations are known. On the other hand, it may not be feasible to perform a health risk assessment for airborne toxics that will be emitted by a generic industrial building that was built on "speculation" (i.e., without knowing the future tenant(s)). Even where a health risk assessment can be prepared, however, the resulting maximum health risk value is only a calculation of risk—it does not necessarily mean anyone will contract cancer as a result of the project.

In order to find the "cancer burden" or expected additional cases of cancer resulting from the project, it is also necessary to know the numbers and location of individuals living within the "zone of impact" of the project: i.e., those living in areas where the projected cancer risk from the project exceeds one in a million. (SCAQMD, Health Risk Assessment Summary form, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/forms>; filter by "AB2588" category; then "Health Risk Assessment" hyperlink (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) The affected population is divided into bands of those exposed to at least 1 in a million risk, those exposed to at least 10 in a million risk, etc. up to those exposed at the highest levels. (*Id.*) This data allows agencies to calculate an approximate number of additional cancer cases expected from

the project. However, it is not possible to predict which particular individuals will be affected.

For the so-called criteria pollutants<sup>5</sup>, such as ozone, it may be more difficult to quantify health impacts. Ozone is formed in the atmosphere from the chemical reaction of the nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and volatile organic compounds (VOC) in the presence of sunlight. (U.S. EPA, Ground Level Ozone, <http://www.epa.gov/airquality/ozonepollution/> (last updated Mar. 25, 2015).) It takes time and the influence of meteorological conditions for these reactions to occur, so ozone may be formed at a distance downwind from the sources. (U.S. EPA, *Guideline on Ozone Monitoring Site Selection* (Aug. 1998) EPA-454/R-98-002 § 5.1.2, <http://www.epa.gov/ttnamti1/archive/cpreldoc.html> (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC are known as “precursors” of ozone.

Scientifically, health effects from ozone are correlated with increases in the ambient level of ozone in the air a person breathes. (U.S. EPA, *Health Effects of Ozone in the General Population*, Figure 9, <http://www.epa.gov/apti/ozonehealth/population.html#levels> (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) However, it takes a large amount of additional precursor emissions to cause a modeled increase in ambient ozone levels over an entire region. For example, the SCAQMD's 2012 AQMP showed that reducing NO<sub>x</sub> by 432 tons per day (157,680 tons/year) and reducing VOC by 187 tons per day (68,255 tons/year) would reduce ozone levels at the SCAQMD's monitor site with the highest levels by only 9 parts per billion. (South Coast Air Quality Management District, *Final 2012 AQMP (February 2013)*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/clean-air-plans/air-quality-mgt-plan/final-2012-air-quality-management-plan>; then follow “Appendix V: Modeling & Attainment Demonstrations” hyperlink,

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<sup>5</sup> See discussion of types of pollutants, *supra*, Part I.A.

pp. v-4-2, v-7-4, v-7-24.) SCAQMD staff does not currently know of a way to accurately quantify ozone-related health impacts caused by NO<sub>x</sub> or VOC emissions from relatively small projects.

On the other hand, this type of analysis may be feasible for projects on a regional scale with very high emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs, where impacts are regional. For example, in 2011 the SCAQMD performed a health impact analysis in its CEQA document for proposed Rule 1315, which authorized various newly-permitted sources to use offsets from the districts “internal bank” of emission reductions. This CEQA analysis accounted for essentially *all* the increases in emissions due to new or modified sources in the District between 2010 and 2030.<sup>6</sup> The SCAQMD was able to correlate this very large emissions increase (e.g., 6,620 pounds per day NO<sub>x</sub> (1,208 tons per year), 89,180 pounds per day VOC (16,275 tons per year)) to expected health outcomes from ozone and particulate matter (e.g., 20 premature deaths per year and 89,947 school absences in the year 2030 due to ozone).<sup>7</sup> (SCAQMD Governing Board Agenda, February 4, 2011, Agenda Item 26, *Assessment for: Re-adoption of Proposed Rule 1315 – Federal New Source Review Tracking System* (see hyperlink in fn 6) at p. 4.1-35, Table 4.1-29.)

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<sup>6</sup> (SCAQMD Governing Board Agenda, February 4, 2011, Agenda Item 26, Attachment G, *Assessment for: Re-adoption of Proposed Rule 1315 – Federal New Source Review Tracking System, Vol. 1, p.4.0-6*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/meeting-agendas-minutes/agenda?title=governing-board-meeting-agenda-february-4-2011>; the follow “26. Adopt Proposed Rule 1315 – Federal New Source Review Tracking System” (last visited April 1, 2015).)

<sup>7</sup> The SCAQMD was able to establish the location of future NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC emissions by assuming that new projects would be built in the same locations and proportions as existing stationary sources. This CEQA document was upheld by the Los Angeles County Superior Court in *Natural Res. Def. Council v SCAQMD*, Los Angeles Superior Court No. BS110792).

However, a project emitting only 10 tons per year of NO<sub>x</sub> or VOC is small enough that its regional impact on ambient ozone levels may not be detected in the regional air quality models that are currently used to determine ozone levels. Thus, in this case it would not be feasible to directly correlate project emissions of VOC or NO<sub>x</sub> with specific health impacts from ozone. This is in part because ozone formation is not linearly related to emissions. Ozone impacts vary depending on the location of the emissions, the location of other precursor emissions, meteorology and seasonal impacts, and because ozone is formed some time later and downwind from the actual emission. (EPA Guideline on Ozone Monitoring Site Selection (Aug. 1998) EPA-454/R-98-002, § 5.1.2; <https://www.epa.gov/ttnamti1/archive/cpreldoc.html>; then search “Guideline on Ozone Monitoring Site Selection” click on pdf) (last viewed Apr. 1, 2015).)

SCAQMD has set its CEQA “significance” threshold for NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC at 10 tons per year (expressed as 55 lb/day). (SCAQMD, *Air Quality Analysis Handbook*, <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/regulations/ceqa/air-quality-analysis-handbook>; then follow “SCAQMD Air Quality Significance Thresholds” hyperlink (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) This is because the federal Clean Air Act defines a “major” stationary source for “extreme” ozone nonattainment areas such as SCAQMD as one emitting 10 tons/year. (42 U.S.C. §§ 7511a(e), 7511a(f); CAA §§ 182(e), 182(f).) Under the Clean Air Act, such sources are subject to enhanced control requirements (42 U.S.C. §§ 7502(c)(5), 7503; CAA §§ 172(c)(5), 173), so SCAQMD decided this was an appropriate threshold for making a CEQA “significance” finding and requiring feasible mitigation. Essentially, SCAQMD takes the position that a source that emits 10 tons/year of NO<sub>x</sub> or VOC would contribute cumulatively to ozone formation. Therefore, lead agencies that use SCAQMD’s thresholds of significance may determine

that many projects have “significant” air quality impacts and must apply all feasible mitigation measures, yet will not be able to precisely correlate the project to quantifiable health impacts, unless the emissions are sufficiently high to use a regional modeling program.

In the case of particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>)<sup>8</sup>, another “criteria” pollutant, SCAQMD staff is aware of two possible methods of analysis. SCAQMD used regional modeling to predict expected health impacts from its proposed Rule 1315, as mentioned above. Also, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has developed a methodology that can predict expected mortality (premature deaths) from large amounts of PM<sub>2.5</sub>. (California Air Resources Board, *Health Impacts Analysis: PM Premature Death Relationship*, [http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/health/pm-mort/pm-mort\\_arch.htm](http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/health/pm-mort/pm-mort_arch.htm) (last reviewed Jan. 19, 2012).) SCAQMD used the CARB methodology to predict impacts from three very large power plants (e.g., 731-1837 lbs/day). (Final Environmental Assessment for Rule 1315, *supra*, pp 4.0-12, 4.1-13, 4.1-37 (e.g., 125 premature deaths in the entire SCAQMD in 2030), 4.1-39 (0.05 to 1.77 annual premature deaths from power plants.) Again, this project involved large amounts of additional PM<sub>2.5</sub> in the District, up to 2.82 tons/day (5,650 lbs/day of PM<sub>2.5</sub>, or, or 1029 tons/year. (*Id.* at table 4.1-4, p. 4.1-10.)

However, the primary author of the CARB methodology has reported that this PM<sub>2.5</sub> health impact methodology is not suited for small projects and may yield unreliable results due to various uncertainties.<sup>9</sup> (SCAQMD, *Final Subsequent Mitigated Negative Declaration for: Warren*

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<sup>8</sup> SCAQMD has not attained the latest annual or 24-hour national ambient air quality standards for “PM<sub>2.5</sub>” or particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter.

<sup>9</sup> Among these uncertainties are the representativeness of the population used in the methodology, and the specific source of PM and the corresponding health impacts. (*Id.* at p. 2-24.)

*E&P, Inc. WTU Central Facility, New Equipment Project* (certified July 19, 2011), <http://www.aqmd.gov/home/library/documents-support-material/lead-agency-permit-projects/permit-project-documents---year-2011>; then follow “Final Subsequent Mitigated Negative Declaration for Warren E&P Inc. WTU Central Facility, New Equipment Project” hyperlink, pp. 2-22, 2-23 (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).) Therefore, when SCAQMD prepared a CEQA document for the expansion of an existing oil production facility, with very small PM<sub>2.5</sub> increases (3.8 lb/day) and a very small affected population, staff elected not to use the CARB methodology for using estimated PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions to derive a projected premature mortality number and explained why it would be inappropriate to do so. (*Id.* at pp 2-22 to 2-24.) SCAQMD staff concluded that use of this methodology for such a small source could result in unreliable findings and would not provide meaningful information. (*Id.* at pp. 2-23, 2-25.) This CEQA document was not challenged in court.

In the above case, while it may have been technically possible to plug the data into the methodology, the results would not have been reliable or meaningful. SCAQMD believes that an agency should not be required to perform analyses that do not produce reliable or meaningful results. This Court has already held that an agency may decline to use even the “normal” “existing conditions” CEQA baseline where to do so would be misleading or without informational value. (*Neighbors for Smart Rail v. Exposition Metro Line* (2013) 57 Cal.4th 439, 448, 457.) The same should be true for a decision that a particular study or analysis would not provide reliable or meaningful results.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Whether a particular study would result in “informational value” is a part of deciding whether it is “feasible.” CEQA defines “feasible” as “capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, social, and

Therefore, it is not possible to set a hard-and-fast rule on whether a correlation of air quality impacts with specific quantifiable health impacts is required in all cases. Instead, the result turns on whether such an analysis is reasonably feasible in the particular case.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, what is reasonably feasible may change over time as scientists and regulatory agencies continually seek to improve their ability to predict health impacts. For example, CARB staff has been directed by its Governing Board to reassess and improve the methodology for estimating premature deaths. (California Air Resources Board, *Health Impacts Analysis: PM Mortality Relationship*, <http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/health/pm-mort/pm-mort.htm> (last reviewed Dec. 29, 2010).) This factor also counsels against setting any hard-and-fast rule in this case.

### **III. THE QUESTION OF WHETHER AN EIR CONTAINS SUFFICIENT ANALYSIS TO MEET CEQA'S REQUIREMENTS IS A MIXED QUESTION OF FACT AND LAW GOVERNED BY TWO DIFFERENT STANDARDS OF REVIEW.**

#### **A. Standard of Review for Feasibility Determination and Sufficiency as an Informative Document**

A second issue in this case is whether courts should review an EIR's informational sufficiency under the "substantial evidence" test as argued by Friant Ranch or the "independent judgment" test as argued by Sierra Club.

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technological factors." (Pub. Resources Code § 21061.1.) A study cannot be "accomplished in a *successful* manner" if it produces unreliable or misleading results.

<sup>11</sup> In this case, the lead agency did not have an opportunity to determine whether the requested analysis was feasible because the comment was non-specific. Therefore, SCAQMD suggests that this Court, after resolving the legal issues in the case, direct the Court of Appeal to remand the case to the lead agency for a determination of whether the requested analysis is feasible. Because Fresno County, the lead agency, did not seek review in this Court, it seems likely that the County has concluded that at least some level of correlation of air pollution with health impacts is feasible.

As this Court has explained, “a reviewing court must adjust its scrutiny to the nature of the alleged defect, depending on whether the claim is predominantly one of improper procedure or a dispute over the facts.” (*Vineyard Area Citizens v. City of Rancho Cordova, supra*, 40 Cal.4th at 435.) For questions regarding compliance with proper procedure or other legal questions, courts review an agency’s action de novo under the “independent judgment” test. (*Id.*) On the other hand, courts review factual disputes only for substantial evidence, thereby “accord[ing] greater deference to the agency’s substantive factual conclusions.” (*Id.*)

Here, Friant Ranch and Sierra Club agree that the case involves the question of whether an EIR includes sufficient information regarding a project’s impacts. However, they disagree on the proper standard of review for answering this question: Sierra Club contends that courts use the independent judgment standard to determine whether an EIR’s analysis is sufficient to meet CEQA’s informational purposes,<sup>12</sup> while Friant Ranch contends that the substantial evidence standard applies to this question.

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<sup>12</sup> Sierra Club acknowledges that courts use the substantial evidence standard when reviewing predicate factual issues, but argues that courts ultimately decide as a matter of law what CEQA requires. (Answering Brief, pp. 14, 23.)

SCAQMD submits that the issue is more nuanced than either party contends. We submit that, whether a CEQA document includes sufficient analysis to satisfy CEQA's informational mandates is a mixed question of fact and law,<sup>13</sup> containing two levels of inquiry that should be judged by different standards.<sup>14</sup>

The state CEQA Guidelines set forth standards for the adequacy of environmental analysis. Guidelines Section 15151 states:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection, but for adequacy, completeness, and a good-faith effort at full disclosure.

In this case, the basic question is whether the underlying analysis of air quality impacts made the EIR "sufficient" as an informative document. However, whether the EIR's analysis was sufficient is judged in light of what was reasonably feasible. This represents a mixed question of fact and law that is governed by two different standards of review.

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<sup>13</sup> Friant Ranch actually states that the claim that an EIR lacks sufficient relevant information is, "most properly thought of as raising mixed questions of fact and law." (Opening Brief, p. 27.) However, the remainder of its argument claims that the court should apply the substantial evidence standard of review to all aspects of the issue.

<sup>14</sup> Mixed questions of fact and law issues may implicate predominantly factual subordinate questions that are reviewed under the substantial evidence test even though the ultimate question may be reviewed by the independent judgment test. *Crocker National Bank v. City and County of San Francisco* (1989) 49 Cal.3d 881, 888-889.

SCAQMD submits that an EIR's sufficiency as an informational document is ultimately a legal question that courts should determine using their independent judgment. This Court's language in *Laurel Heights I* supports this position. As this Court explained: "The court does not pass upon the correctness of the EIR's environmental conclusions, but only upon its *sufficiency as an informative document*." (*Laurel Heights I, supra*, 47 Cal.3d at 392-393) (emphasis added.) As described above, the Court in *Vineyard Area Citizens v. City of Rancho Cordova, supra*, 40 Cal.4th at 431, also used its independent judgment to determine what level of analysis CEQA requires for water supply impacts. The Court did not defer to the lead agency's opinion regarding the law's requirements; rather, it determined for itself what level of analysis was necessary to meet "[t]he law's informational demands." (*Id.* at p. 432.) Further, existing case law also holds that where an agency fails to comply with CEQA's information disclosure requirements, the agency has "failed to proceed in the manner required by law." (*Save Our Peninsula Comm. v. Monterey County Bd. of Supervisors* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 99, 118.)

However, whether an EIR satisfies CEQA's requirements depends in part on whether it was reasonably feasible for an agency to conduct additional or more thorough analysis. EIRs must contain "a detailed statement" of a project's impacts (Pub. Res. Code § 21061), and an agency must "use its best efforts to find out and disclose all that it reasonably can." (CEQA Guidelines § 15144.) Nevertheless, "the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in light of what is reasonably feasible." (CEQA Guidelines § 15151.)

SCAQMD submits that the question of whether additional analysis or a particular study suggested by a commenter is "feasible" is generally a question of fact. Courts have already held that whether a particular alternative is "feasible" is reviewed by the substantial evidence test.

(*Uphold Our Heritage v. Town of Woodside* (2007) 147 Cal.App.4th 587, 598-99; *Center for Biological Diversity v. County of San Bernardino* (2010) 185 Cal.App.4th 866, 883.) Thus, if a lead agency determines that a particular study or analysis is infeasible, that decision should generally be judged by the substantial evidence standard. However, SCAQMD urges this Court to hold that lead agencies must explain the basis of any determination that a particular analysis is infeasible in the EIR itself. An EIR must discuss information, including issues related to the feasibility of particular analyses “in sufficient detail to enable meaningful participation and criticism by the public. ‘[W]hatever is required to be considered in an EIR must be in that formal report; what any official might have known from other writings or oral presentations cannot supply what is lacking in the report.’” (*Laurel Heights I, supra*, 47 Cal.3d at p. 405 (quoting *Santiago County Water District v. County of Orange* (1981) 118 Cal.App.3d 818, 831) (discussing analysis of alternatives).) The evidence on which the determination is based should also be summarized in the EIR itself, with appropriate citations to reference materials if necessary. Otherwise commenting agencies such as SCAQMD would be forced to guess where the lead agency's evidence might be located, thus thwarting effective public participation.

Moreover, if a lead agency determines that a particular study or analysis would not result in reliable or useful information and for that reason is not feasible, that determination should be judged by the substantial evidence test. (See *Neighbors for Smart Rail v. Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority, supra*, 57 Cal.4th 439, 448, 457:

whether “existing conditions” baseline would be misleading or uninformative judged by substantial evidence standard.<sup>15</sup>)

If the lead agency’s determination that a particular analysis or study is not feasible is supported by substantial evidence, then the agency has not violated CEQA’s information disclosure provisions, since it would be infeasible to provide additional information. This Court’s decisions provide precedent for such a result. For example, this Court determined that the issue of whether the EIR should have included a more detailed discussion of future herbicide use was resolved because substantial evidence supported the agency’s finding that “the precise parameters of future herbicide use could not be predicted.” *Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch v. California Dept. of Forestry & Fire Protection* (2008) 43 Cal.4th 936, 955.

Of course, SCAQMD expects that courts will continue to hold lead agencies to their obligations to consult with, and not to ignore or misrepresent, the views of sister agencies having special expertise in the area of air quality. (*Berkeley Keep Jets Over the Bay v. Board of Port Commissioners* (2007) 91 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> 1344, 1364 n.11.) In some cases, information provided by such expert agencies may establish that the purported evidence relied on by the lead agency is not in fact “substantial”. (*Id.* at pp. 1369-1371.)

In sum, courts retain ultimate responsibility to determine what CEQA requires. However, the law does not require exhaustive analysis, but only what is reasonably feasible. Agencies deserve deference for their factual determinations regarding what type of analysis is reasonably feasible. On the other hand, if a commenter requests more information, and the lead agency declines to provide it but does *not* determine that the

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<sup>15</sup> The substantial evidence standard recognizes that the courts "have neither the resources nor the scientific expertise" to weigh conflicting evidence on technical issues. (*Laurel Heights I, supra*, 47 Cal.3d 376, 393.)

requested study or analysis would be infeasible, misleading or uninformative, the question becomes whether the omission of that analysis renders the EIR inadequate to satisfy CEQA's informational purposes. (*Id.* at pp. 1370-71.) Again, this is predominantly a question of law and should be judged by the de novo or independent judgment standard of review. Of course, this Court has recognized that a "project opponent or reviewing court can always imagine some additional study or analysis that might provide helpful information. It is not for them to design the EIR. That further study...might be helpful does not make it necessary." (*Laurel Heights I, supra*, 47 Cal.3d 376, 415 – see also CEQA Guidelines § 15204(a) [CEQA "does not require a lead agency to conduct every test. . . recommended or demanded by commenters."].) Courts, then, must adjudicate whether an omission of particular information renders an EIR inadequate to serve CEQA's informational purposes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> We recognize that there is case law stating that the substantial evidence standard applies to "challenges to the scope of an EIR's analysis of a topic" as well as the methodology used and the accuracy of the data relied on in the document "because these types of challenges involve factual questions." (*Bakersfield Citizens for Local Control v. City of Bakersfield, supra*, 124 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> 1184, 1198, and cases relied on therein.) However, we interpret this language to refer to situations where the question of the scope of the analysis really is factual—that is, where it involves whether further analysis is feasible, as discussed above. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the *Bakersfield* court expressly rejected an argument that a claimed "omission of information from the EIR should be treated as inquiries whether there is substantial evidence supporting the decision approving the project." *Bakersfield, supra*, 124 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> at p. 1208. And the *Bakersfield* court ultimately decided that the lead agency must analyze the connection between the identified air pollution impacts and resulting health impacts, even though the EIR already included some discussion of air-pollution-related respiratory illnesses. *Bakersfield, supra*, 124 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> at p. 1220. Therefore, the court must not have interpreted this question as one of the "scope of the analysis" to be judged by the substantial evidence standard.

**B. Friant Ranch's Rationale for Rejecting the Independent Judgment Standard of Review is Unsupported by Case Law.**

In its brief, Friant Ranch makes a distinction between cases where a required CEQA topic is not discussed at all (to be reviewed by independent judgment as a failure to proceed in the manner required by law) and cases where a topic is discussed, but the commenter claims the information provided is insufficient (to be judged by the substantial evidence test). (Opening Brief, pp. 13-17.) The Court of Appeal recognized these two types of cases, but concluded that both raised questions of law. (*Sierra Club v. County of Fresno* (2014) 226 Cal.App.4th 704 (superseded by grant of review) 172 Cal.Rptr.3d 271, 290.) We believe the distinction drawn by Friant Ranch is unduly narrow, and inconsistent with cases which have concluded that CEQA documents are insufficient. In many instances, CEQA's requirements are stated broadly, and the courts must interpret the law to determine what level of analysis satisfies CEQA's mandate for providing meaningful information, even though the EIR discusses the issue to some extent.

For example, the CEQA Guidelines require discussion of the existing environmental baseline. In *County of Amador v. El Dorado County Water Agency* (1999) 76 Cal.App.4th 931, 954-955, the lead agency had discussed the environmental baseline by describing historic month-end water levels in the affected lakes. However, the court held that this was not an adequate baseline discussion because it failed to discuss the timing and amounts of past actual water releases, to allow comparison with the proposed project. The court evidently applied the independent judgment test to its decision, even though the agency discussed the issue to some extent.

Likewise, in *Vineyard Area Citizens* (2007) 40 Cal.4th 412, this Court addressed the question of whether an EIR's analysis of water supply impacts complied with CEQA. The parties agreed that the EIR was required to analyze the effects of providing water to the development project, "and that in order to do so the EIR had, in some manner, to identify the planned sources of that water." (*Vineyard Area Citizens, supra*, at p. 428.) However, the parties disagreed as to the level of detail required for this analysis and "what level of uncertainty regarding the availability of water supplies can be tolerated in an EIR . . . ." (*Id.*) In other words, the EIR had analyzed water supply impacts for the project, but the petitioner claimed that the analysis was insufficient.

This Court noted that neither CEQA's statutory language or the CEQA Guidelines specifically addressed the question of how precisely an EIR must discuss water supply impacts. (*Id.*) However, it explained that CEQA "states that '[w]hile foreseeing the unforeseeable is not possible, an agency must use its best efforts to find out and disclose all that it reasonably can.'" (*Id.*, [Guidelines § 15144].) The Court used this general principle, along with prior precedent, to elucidate four "principles for analytical adequacy" that are necessary in order to satisfy "CEQA's informational purposes." (*Vineyard Area Citizens, supra*, at p. 430.) The Court did not defer to the agency's determination that the EIR's analysis of water supply impacts was sufficient. Rather, this Court used its independent judgment to determine for itself the level of analysis required to satisfy CEQA's fundamental purposes. (*Vineyard Area Citizens, supra*, at p. 441: an EIR does not serve its purposes where it neglects to explain likely sources of water and "... leaves long term water supply considerations to later stages of the project.")

Similarly, the CEQA Guidelines require an analysis of noise impacts of the project. (Appendix G, “Environmental Checklist Form.”<sup>17</sup>) In *Gray v. County of Madera* (2008) 167 Cal.App.4th 1099, 1123, the court held that the lead agency’s noise impact analysis was inadequate even though it had addressed the issue and concluded that the increase would not be noticeable. If the court had been using the substantial evidence standard, it likely would have upheld this discussion.

Therefore, we do not agree that the issue can be resolved on the basis suggested by Friant Ranch, which would apply the substantial evidence standard to *every* challenge to an analysis that addresses a required CEQA topic. This interpretation would subvert the courts’ proper role in interpreting CEQA and determining what the law requires.

Nor do we agree that the Court of Appeal in this case violated CEQA’s prohibition on courts interpreting its provisions “in a manner which imposes procedural or substantive requirements beyond those explicitly stated in this division or in the state guidelines.” (Pub. Resources Code § 21083.1.) CEQA requires an EIR to describe *all* significant impacts of the project on the environment. (Pub. Resources Code § 21100(b)(2); *Vineyard Area Citizens, supra*, at p. 428.) Human beings are part of the environment, so CEQA requires EIRs to discuss a project’s significant impacts on human health. However, except in certain particular circumstances,<sup>18</sup> neither the CEQA statute nor Guidelines specify the precise level of analysis that agencies must undertake to satisfy the law’s requirements. (see, e.g., CEQA Guidelines § 15126.2(a) [EIRs must describe “health and safety problems caused by {a project’s} physical changes”].) Accordingly, courts must interpret CEQA as a whole to

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<sup>17</sup> Association of Environmental Professionals, 2015 CEQA Statute and Guidelines (2015) p.287.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Pub. Resources Code § 21151.8(C)(3)(B)(iii) (requiring specific type of health risk analysis for siting schools).

determine whether a particular EIR is sufficient as an informational document. A court determining whether an EIR's discussion of human health impacts is legally sufficient does not constitute imposing a new substantive requirement.<sup>19</sup> Under Friant Ranch's theory, the above-referenced cases holding a CEQA analysis inadequate would have violated the law. This is not a reasonable interpretation.

#### **IV. COURTS MUST SCRUPULOUSLY ENFORCE THE REQUIREMENTS THAT LEAD AGENCIES CONSULT WITH AND OBTAIN COMMENTS FROM AIR DISTRICTS**

Courts must "scrupulously enforce" CEQA's legislatively mandated requirements. (*Vineyard Area Citizens, supra*, 40 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 412, 435.) Case law has firmly established that lead agencies must consult with the relevant air pollution control district before conducting an initial study, and must provide the districts with notice of the intention to adopt a negative declaration (or EIR). (*Schenck v. County of Sonoma* (2011) 198 Cal.App.4th 949, 958.) As *Schenck* held, neither publishing the notice nor providing it to the State Clearinghouse was a sufficient substitute for sending notice directly to the air district. (*Id.*) Rather, courts "must be satisfied that [administrative] agencies have fully complied with the procedural requirements of CEQA, since only in this way can the important public purposes of CEQA be protected from subversion." *Schenck*, 198 Cal.App.4th at p. 959 (citations omitted).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> We submit that Public Resources Code Section 21083.1 was intended to prevent courts from, for example, holding that an agency must analyze economic impacts of a project where there are no resulting environmental impacts (see CEQA Guidelines § 15131), or imposing new procedural requirements, such as imposing additional public notice requirements not set forth in CEQA or the Guidelines.

<sup>20</sup> Lead agencies must consult air districts, as public agencies with jurisdiction by law over resources affected by the project, *before* releasing an EIR. (Pub. Resources Code §§ 21104(a); 21153.) Moreover, air

Lead agencies should be aware, therefore, that failure to properly seek and consider input from the relevant air district constitutes legal error which may jeopardize their project approvals. For example, the court in *Fall River Wild Trout Foundation v. County of Shasta*, (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 482, 492 held that the failure to give notice to a trustee agency (Department of Fish and Game) was prejudicial error requiring reversal. The court explained that the lack of notice prevented the Department from providing any response to the CEQA document. (*Id.* at p. 492.) It therefore prevented relevant information from being presented to the lead agency, which was prejudicial error because it precluded informed decision-making. (*Id.*)<sup>21</sup>

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districts should be considered “state agencies” for purposes of the requirement to consult with “trustee agencies” as set forth in Public Resources Code § 20180.3(a). This Court has long ago held that the districts are not mere “local agencies” whose regulations are superseded by those of a state agency regarding matters of statewide concern, but rather have concurrent jurisdiction over such issues. (*Orange County Air Pollution Control District v. Public Util. Com.* (1971) 4 Cal.3d 945, 951, 954.) Since air pollution is a matter of statewide concern, *Id.* at 952, air districts should be entitled to trustee agency status in order to ensure that this vital concern is adequately protected during the CEQA process.

<sup>21</sup> In *Schenck*, the court concluded that failure to give notice to the air district was not prejudicial, but this was partly because the trial court had already corrected the error before the case arrived at the Court of Appeal. The trial court issued a writ of mandate requiring the lead agency to give notice to the air district. The air district responded by concurring with the lead agency that air impacts were not significant. (*Schenck*, 198 Cal.App.4th 949, 960.) We disagree with the *Schenck* court that the failure to give notice to the air district would not have been prejudicial (even in the absence of the trial court writ) merely because the lead agency purported to follow the air district’s published CEQA guidelines for significance. (*Id.*, 198 Cal.App.4th at p. 960.) In the first place, absent notice to the air district, it is uncertain whether the lead agency properly followed those guidelines. Moreover, it is not realistic to expect that an air district’s published guidelines would necessarily fully address all possible air-quality related issues that can arise with a CEQA project, or that those

Similarly, lead agencies must obtain additional information requested by expert agencies, including those with jurisdiction by law, if that information is necessary to determine a project's impacts. (*Sierra Club v. State Bd. Of Forestry* (1994) 7 Cal.4th 1215, 1236-37.) Approving a project without obtaining that information constitutes a failure to proceed in the manner prescribed by CEQA. (*Id.* at p. 1236.)

Moreover, a lead agency can save significant time and money by consulting with the air district early in the process. For example, the lead agency can learn what the air district recommends as an appropriate analysis on the facts of its case, including what kinds of health impacts analysis may be available, and what models are appropriate for use. This saves the lead agency from the need to do its analysis all over again and possibly needing to recirculate the document after errors are corrected, if new significant impacts are identified. (CEQA Guidelines § 15088.5(a).) At the same time, the air district's expert input can help the lead agency properly determine whether another commenter's request for additional analysis or studies is reasonable or feasible. Finally, the air district can provide input on what mitigation measures would be feasible and effective.

Therefore, we suggest that this Court provide guidance to lead agencies reminding them of the importance of consulting with the relevant air districts regarding these issues. Otherwise, their feasibility decisions may be vulnerable to air district evidence that establishes that there is no substantial evidence to support the lead agency decision not to provide specific analysis. (*See Berkeley Keep Jets Over the Bay, supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th 1344, 1369-1371.)

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guidelines would necessarily be continually modified to reflect new developments. Therefore we believe that, had the trial court not already ordered the lead agency to obtain the air district's views, the failure to give notice would have been prejudicial, as in *Fall River, supra*, 70 Cal.App.4th 482, 492.

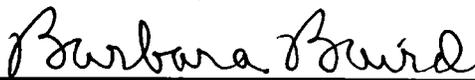
## CONCLUSION

The SCAQMD respectfully requests this Court *not* to establish a hard-and-fast rule concerning whether CEQA requires a lead agency to correlate identified air quality impacts of a project with resulting health outcomes. Moreover, the question of whether an EIR is “sufficient as an informational document” is a mixed question of fact and law containing two levels of inquiry. Whether a particular proposed analysis is feasible is predominantly a question of fact to be judged by the substantial evidence standard of review. Where the requested analysis is feasible, but the lead agency relies on legal or policy reasons not to provide it, the question of whether the EIR is nevertheless sufficient as an informational document is predominantly a question of law to be judged by the independent judgment standard of review.

Respectfully submitted,

DATED: April 3, 2015

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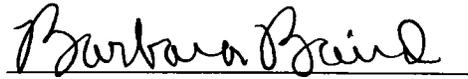
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## CERTIFICATE OF WORD COUNT

Pursuant to Rule 8.520(c)(1) of the California Rules of Court, I hereby certify that this brief contains 8,476 words, including footnotes, but excluding the Application, Table of Contents, Table of Authorities, Certificate of Service, this Certificate of Word Count, and signature blocks. I have relied on the word count of the Microsoft Word Vista program used to prepare this Certificate.

DATED: April 3, 2015

Respectfully submitted,

  
Barbara Baird

**PROOF OF SERVICE**

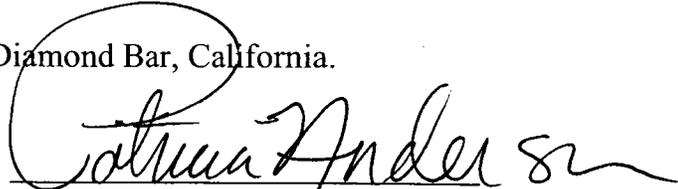
I am employed in the County of Los Angeles, California. I am over the age of 18 years and not a party to the within action. My business address is 21865 Copley Drive, Diamond Bar, California 91765.

On April 3, 2015 I served true copies of the following document(s) described as **APPLICATION OF THE SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT FOR LEAVE TO FILE BRIEF OF *AMICUS CURIAE* IN SUPPORT OF NEITHER PARTY AND [PROPOSED] BRIEF OF *AMICUS CURIAE*** by placing a true copy of the foregoing document(s) in a sealed envelope addressed as set forth on the attached service list as follows:

**BY MAIL:** I enclosed the document(s) in a sealed envelope or package addressed to the persons at the addresses listed in the Service List and placed the envelope for collection and mailing following our ordinary business practices. I am readily familiar with this District's practice for collection and processing of correspondence for mailing. Under that practice, the correspondence would be deposited with the United States Postal Service, with postage thereon fully prepaid at Diamond Bar, California, in the ordinary course of business. I am aware that on motion of the party served, service is presumed invalid if postal cancellation date or postage meter date is more than one day after date of deposit for mailing in affidavit.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on April 3, 2015 at Diamond Bar, California.

  
Patricia Anderson

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