

# Bay Area Air Quality Management District

**Draft  
2024-2029  
Strategic Plan**

**Executive  
Summary**



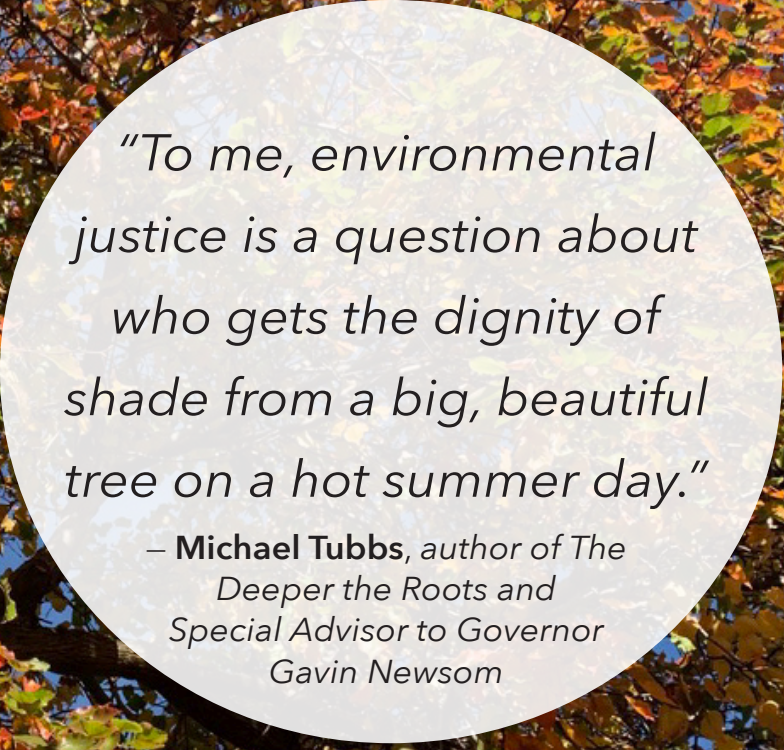
**BAY AREA  
AIR QUALITY  
MANAGEMENT  
DISTRICT**





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*“To me, environmental justice is a question about who gets the dignity of shade from a big, beautiful tree on a hot summer day.”*

– **Michael Tubbs**, author of *The Deeper the Roots* and  
Special Advisor to Governor  
Gavin Newsom

## What is the Strategic Plan?

For nearly seventy years, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District has led the way toward cleaner air for people living in the Bay Area. We have adopted groundbreaking regulations on businesses and industry, funded cleaner cars and trucks, and partnered with local governments to create a healthier environment. These efforts have transformed smog-filled skies into ones that are mostly clean. Unfortunately, not everyone has shared equally in these improvements.

Since 1955, our efforts have focused on regional solutions to what many experience as local problems. Communities located near freeways, busy roadways, distribution centers, and large industrial facilities are exposed to relatively higher levels of air pollution than most everyone else in the Bay Area. These communities are also most often lower income, communities of color.

The *2024-2029 Strategic Plan* is about how we will transform our work to address air quality issues more effectively, with a focus on local

communities most overburdened by air pollution. It is also about how we will transform our organization to align more closely with our core values of environmental justice, equity, integrity, partnership, transparency, and trust.”

The strategic plan includes 6 core values, a revised mission, a 5-year organizational vision, 4 goals, and 36 strategies.

## Why is it important?

The strategic plan will guide the Board of Directors, Committees, Councils, and Air District employees in their work and decision-making, making certain the envisioned transformation happens. It is also a tool for accountability and for the public to track progress and communicate feedback.

## Where can I find the full plan?

View the full plan or download it from the Air District’s website: [www.baaqmd.gov/strategicplan](http://www.baaqmd.gov/strategicplan).

## WHO WAS INVOLVED?

The *2024-2029 Strategic Plan* was developed through a collaborative process with community leaders, Air District employees, the Board of Directors and Community Advisory Council members, representatives from regulated industries, and our government partners. Over the course of many months, we discussed what needs to change, what we are doing well, and where we can do better. We talked about the Air District's internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats. We held visioning exercises to learn about what we aspire to be over the long term and hope to achieve in the short term. We collaborated on goals and strategies and the actions needed to achieve real change.

What we learned is that people value the Air District's renewed focus on environmental justice and community engagement. They appreciate our knowledge and technical expertise, and our emphasis on science. We heard about our internal challenges, like poor internal communication and bureaucratic processes that disincentivize change, innovation, and collaboration. We heard that there continues to be a lack of trust in the Air District, particularly in communities overburdened by pollution. There is also a sense of opportunity. Permitting and enforcement of our regulations could be more transparent, efficient, and a mechanism for advancing environmental justice. People also see an opportunity to embrace new technology and funding sources to achieve our air quality goals.

Notably, communities, Board members, and employees all share the belief that the Air District is an air quality leader, in California and nationally. Being a leader, however, means we need to continue to be bold and visionary to ensure that all communities have equitable access to clean air.

# Strategic Plan Framework

The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan includes an update to the Air District's mission and core values, and a 5-year vision. It has four goals: 1. Achieve impact, 2. Advance environmental justice, 3. Foster cohesion and inclusion, and 4. Be an effective, accountable, and customer-oriented organization. The

plan's Strategic Framework aligns our long-term mission and near-term vision of organizational transformation. They are grounded in the Air District's core values and further the Community Advisory Council's Environmental Justice Priorities, described in Chapter 2 of the plan.

## MISSION

The Air District improves air quality to protect public health, reduce historical and current environmental inequities, and mitigate climate change and its impacts.

## CORE VALUES



## 5-YEAR VISION

Over the next 5 years, the Air District will transform its workforce, operations, community engagement, and programs to improve air quality, increase public trust, and demonstrate leadership in equity-centered environmental stewardship.

## Environmental Justice Priorities

## 5-YEAR GOALS





## GOAL 1: ACHIEVE IMPACT

Under Goal 1, we will achieve impact by improving our approach to air quality planning. While we continue to reduce regionwide air pollution, we will ensure we have a complete and accurate picture of local air pollution, one that includes community experience and perspectives of local air pollution.

We will also strengthen our regulations, permitting and enforcement policies, and improve how we hold industry accountable when our regulations are violated. We will work with communities to reimagine how we distribute state and federal funding for electric vehicles and charging stations to our most vulnerable communities. We will also develop innovative regional solutions to climate change and support our local government partners and other agencies in their efforts to mitigate climate change.

*See strategic plan Chapter 3 for detailed strategies and commitments for this goal.*



## GOAL 2: ADVANCE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Under Goal 2, we will advance environmental justice by supporting, partnering with, and uplifting communities overburdened by pollution, so that we may work together to identify and reduce disparities in air pollution exposure. So that communities can collect their own air pollution data, we will help to build their data collection skills and knowledge. We will also provide the tools they need to access and better understand existing air pollution data.

We will improve our air quality complaint process to ensure it is effective and transparent. We will directly engage with communities about compliance and enforcement activities. We will also work with communities to identify air pollution disparities and to develop a more complete understanding of air pollution in their neighborhoods. We will use this information to develop more effective strategies to reduce pollution from the sources that most impact them.

We will develop a community-led process where communities participate in decisions on how to spend money that illegal air polluters pay in penalties so that projects benefit communities. We will work to change laws that prevent the Air District and others from advancing environmental justice and will advance and prioritize our compliance with civil rights laws, and better address cumulative impacts.

*See strategic plan Chapter 3 for detailed strategies and commitments for this goal.*

## GOAL 3: FOSTER COHESION AND INCLUSION

Under Goal 3, we will foster cohesion and inclusion by striving to make the Air District's workforce more diverse and reflective of the communities we serve. To increase organizational cohesion, we will make sure everyone in the organization understands and respects the value of a diverse workforce, one that welcomes and includes everyone.

We will become One Air District, where employees have a sense of belonging and understand and value how diverse backgrounds and expertise come together in support of the organization's mission and vision. We will also be more united in our goal to advance environmental justice by increasing the capacity and effectiveness of employees, Board members and advisory bodies to integrate environmental justice into all aspects of our work. We will broaden all employees' internal knowledge of the Air District and create more opportunities for relationship building among employees.

To increase morale and overall organizational effectiveness, we will better recognize employees' contributions. We will expand professional development opportunities to foster success, boost morale, and enhance workforce retention.

*See strategic plan Chapter 3 for detailed strategies and commitments for this goal.*



## GOAL 4: BE EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE, AND CUSTOMER-ORIENTED



Under Goal 4, we will maintain an effective, accountable, and customer-oriented organization, delivering exemplary services with transparency and efficiency. We will improve our permitting, monitoring, and enforcement processes. We will improve the timeliness of permitting decisions and improve the process to be more transparent to applicants and the public. We will ensure Air District rules and associated air quality permits that we issue are clear, consistent, and enforceable to minimize air pollution affecting communities.

We will improve air monitoring and associated data management systems. We will improve reliability, efficiency, data quality and accessibility, especially to support our efforts to understand local exposure to air pollution. We will also increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our inspection and investigation resources to improve compliance rates and increase the impact of our enforcement programs.

We will expand our public communication to inspire the public to support efforts to reduce air pollution and to mitigate climate change. We will strengthen communication skills and organization-wide knowledge. We will also enhance our incident response program, in collaboration with government partners.

To make sure we keep the promises we make, we will align the Air District's resources and annual budgets with organization and community priorities, as identified in the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan*, and report on our progress.

*See strategic plan Chapter 3 for detailed strategies and commitments for this goal.*



An aerial photograph of a coastal region, likely the San Francisco Bay Area, showing a mix of urban development, green spaces, and a large body of water. The image is used as a background for the text overlay.

## Strategic Plan Aligns with Community Plans

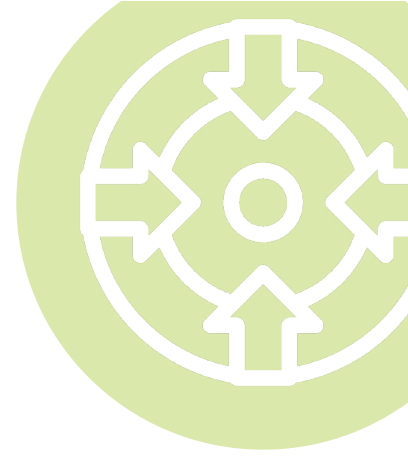
Assembly Bill 617 requires the state to select communities to partner with local air districts to develop plans for community monitoring and for reducing pollution in communities. Since the law passed, we have worked with two communities, West Oakland and Richmond-North Richmond-San Pablo, to develop and adopt a community monitoring plan and emission reduction plans. We are now working with East Oakland and Bayview Hunters Point-Southeast San Francisco on similar plans.

These community plans and partnerships have inspired the transformative focus of the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan*. They have also inspired many of the strategies in the plan; the plan's strategies are consistent with or supportive of strategies and actions in both the West Oakland and Richmond-North Richmond-San Pablo plans.

In the West Oakland plan, *Owning Our Air*, we committed to reporting on enforcement activities and to strengthening a variety of regulations. In the Richmond area plan, *Path to Clean Air*, there are strategies calling for stronger regulations to control dust, pollution from backyard fires and restaurant cooking, and marine and rail activity. There are also strategies about more imaginative incentives, the consideration of land use and cumulative impacts, improving permitting to ensure better health protection, minimizing flaring, holding violators accountable, and ensuring resources are aligned to deliver the commitments made to community.

Many of the actions we need to take to finish implementing West Oakland's *Owning our Air* and to begin implementing *Path to Clean Air* will benefit other communities and the region more broadly. The ideas developed in the adopted community plans will also be building blocks of action plans to advance strategies in the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan*.

# Goal 1: Achieve Impact



## Reduce Health Impacts of Air Pollution

### **Strategy 1.1 Change Approach to Air**

**Quality:** We will change our approach to reducing air pollution so that we achieve more meaningful improvements to air quality in communities, with a focus on those overburdened by air pollution.

### **Strategy 1.2 Stronger Regulations:**

We will develop stronger regulations, prioritizing those that can improve local air pollution.

**Strategy 1.3 Minimize Flaring:** We will minimize flaring at oil refineries to lessen the impact flaring has on communities, including air pollution and odors.

### **Strategy 1.4 Reimagine Funding:**

We will reimagine funding programs so that they better benefit communities impacted by air pollution.

## Hold Violators Accountable

### **Strategy 1.5 Enhance Violation**

**Investigations:** We will enhance our procedures for investigating violations of Air District regulations in communities overburdened by air pollution to better protect community health.

### **Strategy 1.6 New Enforcement Policy:**

We will collaborate with communities to develop an enforcement policy to better prevent violations of air quality regulations.

## Mitigate Climate Change and Its Impacts

### **Strategy 1.7 New Climate Solutions:**

We will develop new regional solutions for climate change and support partners to advance climate change mitigation.

# Goal 2: Advance Environmental Justice



## Build Partnerships and Community Capacity

### **Strategy 2.1 Community Partnership:**

We will develop partnerships with communities so they can directly participate in the solutions to the air quality problems that impact them.

### **Strategy 2.2 Collect Community Data:**

We will build community capacity to collect air pollution data and ensure the Air District better utilizes those data to reduce the pollution that harms communities most.

### **Strategy 2.3: Make Data Accessible:**

We will give communities the tools and data they need to access and understand air pollution data so they can be better informed of any potential air pollution problems.

### **Strategy 2.4 Community Health Data:**

We will provide communities with better health information, so they know the potential health implications of air pollution and are better able to participate in decision-making.

### **Strategy 2.5 Air Quality Complaints:**

We will improve the complaint process to ensure it is effective and transparent.

### **Strategy 2.6: Talk with Communities:**

We will meet with communities about air pollution problems in their neighborhood, their concerns, how we are addressing them, and what more they need from us, so we are more responsive to communities.

## Identify Disparities

### **Strategy 2.7 Understand Local Air**

**Pollution:** We will work with communities overburdened by air pollution to develop a more complete understanding of air pollution in their neighborhoods.

## Reduce Disparities

### **Strategy 2.8 Community-Directed Funds:**

We will develop a community-led process where communities participate in decisions on how to spend money that illegal air polluters pay in penalties so that funded projects benefit communities, especially the communities where the illegal pollution occurred.

### **Strategy 2.9 Address Legal Barriers:**

We will strive to change laws that prevent the Air District from advancing environmental justice.

### **Strategy 2.10 Civil Rights Laws:**

We will advance and prioritize compliance with civil rights laws, including the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related California laws.

### **Strategy 2.11 Cumulative Health Impacts:**

We will develop our understanding of the cumulative and synergistic effects of air pollution in conjunction with other environmental, socioeconomic, and other stressors, and use this information to focus regulatory efforts in areas experiencing the most serious air pollution and related cumulative public health impacts.

# Goal 3: Foster Cohesion and Inclusion



## Embody Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

### **Strategy 3.1 A Diverse Workforce:**

We will build on our efforts to ensure the Air District's workforce is diverse and reflective of the communities we serve to instill community trust and develop better solutions to air quality problems.

### **Strategy 3.2 Be Welcoming and Inclusive:**

We will make sure everyone in the organization understands and respects the value of a diverse workforce, one that welcomes and includes everyone to increase organizational cohesion.

## Become One Air District

### **Strategy 3.3 One Air District Community:**

We will broaden internal knowledge of Air District activities and create more opportunities for relationship building to increase understanding of how different employee roles and perspectives come together in support of the organization's mission and vision.

### **Strategy 3.4 Environmental Justice**

**Expertise:** We will increase the capacity and effectiveness of employees, Board members, and advisory bodies to advance environmental justice and to better integrate environmental justice into all aspects of our work.

### **Strategy 3.5 Recognize Employees:**

We will better recognize employees' contributions to increase morale and overall organizational effectiveness.

### **Strategy 3.6 Support Employee Success:**

We will expand professional development opportunities to foster success and diversity, boost morale, enhance workforce retention, and improve overall organizational effectiveness.

# Goal 4: Be Effective, Accountable, and Customer-Oriented



## Improve Permitting, Monitoring, and Enforcement

**Strategy 4.1 Timely Permits:** We will improve the timeliness of permitting decisions.

**Strategy 4.2 Transparent Permit Process:** We will improve our permitting process to be more transparent and accountable to applicants and the public.

**Strategy 4.3 Consistent Permits:** We will ensure Air District regulations and associated air quality permits issued are clear, consistent, and enforceable so that air pollution affecting communities is minimized.

**Strategy 4.4 Improve Air Monitoring:** We will update the design and operations of the air quality monitoring network to improve reliability, efficiency, data quality, and accessibility to better meet monitoring objectives and to support efforts to understand local exposure to air pollution.

**Strategy 4.5 Improve Compliance Investigations:** We will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of inspection and investigation resources to improve compliance and increase the impact of our enforcement program.

## Build Relationships and Enhance Communication

**Strategy 4.6 Inspire Action:** We will expand our public communication to inspire the public to support efforts to reduce air pollution and to mitigate climate change.

### **Strategy 4.7 Customer Service:**

We will strengthen employees' organization-wide knowledge and communication skills, so people experience the highest level of service from the Air District.

**Strategy 4.8 Air Quality Incidents:** We will enhance our incident response program in collaboration with government partners.

**Strategy 4.9 Land Use Impacts:** We will provide tools for local governments to consider environmental justice, air quality, and climate priorities in local land use plans, policies, projects, and permitting decisions.

## Be Accountable

**Strategy 4.10 Ensure Success:** We will ensure we have the resources and capacity to meet both Board and community expectations and honor our commitments, thereby building trust in the Air District's capacity to succeed.

**Strategy 4.11 Align Resources:** We will be intentional about ensuring the Air District's resources and annual budgets are well-aligned with organization and community priorities, as identified in the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.

**Strategy 4.12 Report Progress:** We will transparently report on progress in meeting the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan* goals and strategies to be accountable for our commitments and meeting expectations.

# Accountability Through Action

The Air District prepared the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan* to guide our work, and more importantly to hold ourselves accountable. To ensure we honor our commitments, we have already begun developing action plans, initiatives, and programs to advance the strategies in the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan*. We will also develop performance timelines, milestones, metrics, and targets. In our annual budget process, we will ensure resources are made available to complete the actions identified in action plans. We will annually report progress and transparently communicate what we have accomplished. Every five years, we will do a full review of the strategic plan and update it to reflect current conditions and priorities.

## Acting on Our Commitments

We are already actively working to implement the *2024-2029 Strategic Plan*. Below is a snapshot of some of recent actions to implement specific plan strategies.

### Changing Approach to Air Quality

We are working with communities in West Oakland, Richmond, North Richmond, and San Pablo to identify pollution sources of concern. We are developing methods to better understand local risks from fine particulate matter. We also recently completed neighborhood-scale computer modeling of all known air pollution

sources in West Oakland and Richmond-North Richmond-San Pablo to determine which sources are driving exposure to air pollution in each neighborhood. These efforts support implementation of **Strategy 1.1 Change Approach to Air Quality**.

### Better Responding to Air Quality Incidents

The Air District Board of Directors recently approved new approaches and improvements to how we respond to air quality incidents. The changes will improve how we communicate about incidents and how we coordinate with government agencies in our response. We will improve information accessibility regarding our air quality incident response and investigation. The revisions will also improve how we collect information about an incident's impact on the surrounding community. As a first step, we will work with community members near refineries to develop a program to sample and analyze particulate matter emitted during incidents and to communicate the results.

We are also working closely with industries, such as oil refineries, to install continuous monitors near their equipment to better estimate emissions from flaring events. These actions will help us provide more timely and relevant information to communities potentially impacted by an incident. These actions support **Strategies 4.8 Air Quality Incidents** and **2.2 Collect Community Data**. Many of these actions are also consistent with actions in the Richmond-North Richmond-San Pablo *Path to Clean Air*.





### Improving the Permitting Process

To improve the timeliness of permits, we have identified all backlogged permits and where in the process the permit is getting delayed. We are developing plans to address these sticking points. We are also taking steps to improve the efficiency of our permitting requirements for large, complex industries, back-up generators, and composting. These include improving our process for testing emission levels at specific facilities, which is often part of the permit process at complex facilities.

To improve permit consistency, we have recently overhauled our permit handbook, which provides emission calculations, applicable regulations, and standard permit conditions. This new handbook will be piloted internally to see if it indeed improves permit consistency and timeliness. To improve transparency of the permitting process, we are developing a public dashboard on permit application status, where applicants and members of the public can see the status of permit applications. These actions support **Strategies 4.1 Timely Permits, 4.2 Transparent Permit Process, and 4.3 Consistent Permits.**

### New Policy for Directing Penalty Funds to Community

The Board of Directors adopted a policy in May 2024 to allocate a significant portion of penalty funds to benefit affected communities. For the largest penalties, 80 percent of the penalty will go to the community impacted by the air quality violation. The broader region will also benefit from penalties. Implementation of this groundbreaking policy is underway. This action supports **Strategies 2.8 Community-Directed Funds and 1.4 Reimagine Funding.**

### Recognizing Employees and Supporting their Development

We have developed action plans to recognize our employees for their outstanding performance and to support our employees' professional development and growth through their career life cycles. We have already taken the first steps, including creating ways to spotlight employees' successes, launching a learning program for supervisors, and expanding our mentoring program. These actions support **Strategies 3.5 Recognize Employees and 3.6 Support Employee Success.**



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