

Air Quality Emergency Communication Plan

Final Draft

Prepared by CONCUR Inc. www.concurinc.com

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Section 1: Introduction

Impetus for the Emergency Communication Plan and Emergency Communication Plan Meetings

Responding to challenges that arose from refuse fires that impacted school-age children and communities in the Eastern Coachella Valley, The Desert Healthcare District teaming with the environmental policy and facilitation firm CONCUR Inc. convened a series of discussions leading to the creation of an Air Quality Emergency Communication Plan.

Meeting participants (in addition to leaders of the DHCD) include representatives of Riverside County, Riverside County Fire Department, state and federal regulatory agencies, non-profits and community organizations, and staff of elected officials. A Roster of Participants appears on page 15.

Initial discussions were convened in June of 2021 to test and confirm support for the approach and then a series of periodic meetings at one to two-month intervals continued through the second half of 2022 to discuss and refine the basic objective and the steps to make up an Emergency Communication Plan. Given the constraints imposed by COVID and the realities of the disparate home offices of organizations, meetings were convened in a hybrid format, with an in-person venue at the Coachella Valley Unified School District offices in Thermal, California.

Early in the planning process, the CONCUR team outlined a stepwise approach to the Communication Plan, which was then elaborated in a series of meetings. At several meetings, cooperating organizations contributed both suggestions for the refinement of text, and new sources of information such as maps, examples of recent emergency response, and details about the organizations they represent, and the respective responsibilities of various staff.

Several of the initial plan components were represented in simple flow diagrams, projected at the meetings, which served to elicit refinements and suggestions from meeting participants.

Building on those graphics and the discussion they supported, the CONCUR team has drafted this document based on discussions in the meetings, Meeting Summary documents prepared after the meetings, and additional text and refinements offered by DHCD staff.

Section 2: Geographic Scope of The Plan

This plan, guided by leaders of the Desert Health Care District, is intended to guide response to fires that occur in the Eastern Coachella Valley. The mission of the District is to achieve optimal health at all stages of life for all District residents. The vision of the District is to equitably connect Coachella Valley residents to health and wellness services and programs through philanthropy, health facilities, information and community education, and public policy. This document strives to advance that vision. Figure 2.1 illustrates the boundaries of the District.

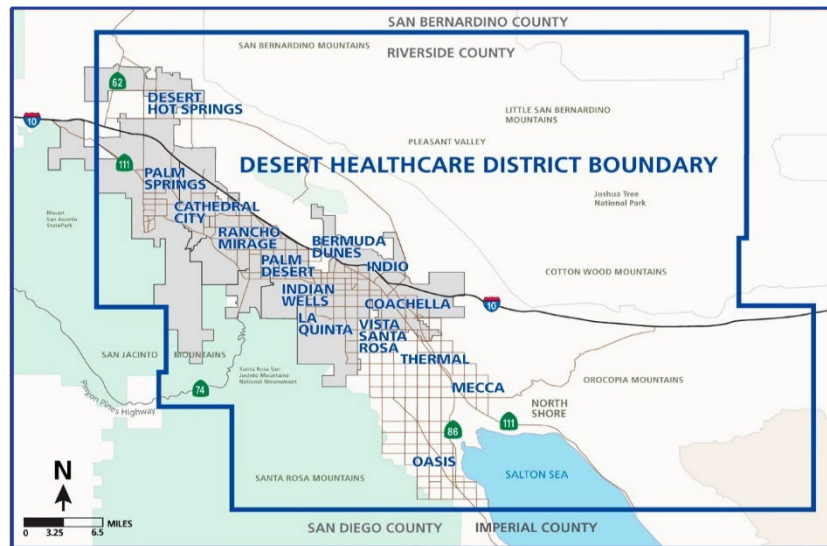


Figure 2.1: Map of Desert Healthcare District Boundary

The more specific focus of this plan is specifically the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV), and the Coachella Valley Unified School District. The School District offices are headquartered in Thermal, California where most of the in-person portions of meetings devoted to plan drafting were convened. Figure 2.2 illustrates the District.



Figure 2.2: Map of Coachella Valley Unified School District

Section 2: Geographic Scope of The Plan

Additional environmental justice work focused on air quality has been ongoing in the Eastern Coachella Valley under Assembly Bill 617. Assembly Bill (AB) 617 (Health and Safety Code Section 44391.2) is a California law that addresses the disproportionate impacts of air pollution in environmental justice communities. In 2019, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) designated Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) as one of the AB 617 communities. ECV community extends from the City of Indio south to the Riverside County boundary along the Salton Sea. It includes the City of Indio, the City of Coachella, a small portion of the City of La Quinta (the southern part of the city), and the unincorporated areas of Thermal, Mecca, Oasis, and North Shore (Figure 2.3). In collaboration with the ECV Community Steering Committee (CSC) and CARB, South Coast AQMD developed the Community Emissions Reduction Plan (CERP), which outlines goals and actions to reduce air pollution in the ECV community.

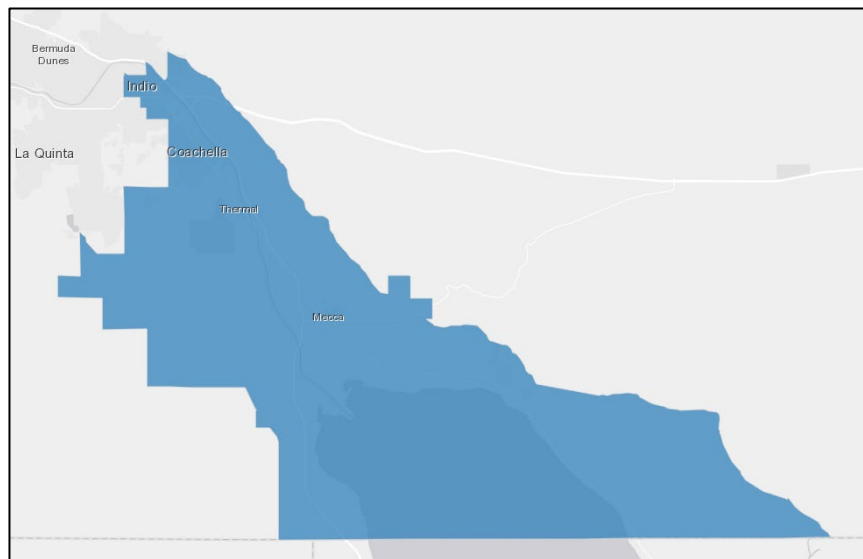


Figure 2.3: AB-617 Project Boundaries

The Air Quality Emergency Communication Plan will be a useful tool for the AB-617 project and will provide guidelines and actions to reduce poor air quality exposure to community members of the Eastern Coachella Valley.

The boundary outlined in the map represents the area within Eastern Coachella Valley where CARB and South Coast AQMD worked with community members to develop measures that reduce air pollution as part of AB 617 efforts.

Section 3: Issue Scope of the Plan

As shown in the figure below, the issue of air quality arising from fires in the Eastern Coachella Valley is one of a host of health and environmental justice issues in the region. These include some issues that directly complicate fire response, including climate change. Other issues are not directly linked, such as the aridification of the Salton Sea, but they too generate environmental and social impacts.



Figure 3.1: Scope of the Air Quality Emergency Response Plan in Context with ECV Issues

Section 4: DHCD Emergency Response Plan Guiding Principles

Experience in planning practice and collaborative problem-solving shows that establishing straightforward constructive principles at the beginning of a planning effort reinforces trust and accountability and provides a useful check for later implementation. These principles were articulated early in the planning effort and supported by participants. Participants in this planning process are listed in Section 9, Roster of Participants.

1. Encourage full, committed participation
2. Maintain mutual respect for colleagues and project partners
3. To the extent possible, exchange and pool factual information
4. Maintain accountability to home organizations and other participants in the planning effort
5. Protocol for record keeping of air quality emergency events and the actions that will be taken in response to those events.
6. Clearly express geographic boundaries and sideboards on the roles of agencies
7. Identify points of contact
8. Establish clear communication protocols among participants
9. Articulate constructive ideas that can earn broad support
10. Drive toward implementation
11. Build a durable framework. Maintain continuity of involvement to anticipate and avoid the loss of key Information with staff turnover.

Section 5: Plan Framework

The Plan rests on a series of sequential steps. The core of the plan is a framework that could be called “the planning engine”. This is a series of activities and steps that take the plan from initial concept to implementation.

SCHEMATIC FRAMEWORK

As shown in Figure 5.1 the key pre-steps include establishing the purpose, confirming participation, and outlining guiding principles, initiating the “planning engine” and confirming the steps of agreement to participate, identifying potential response triggers, outlining responsible parties for enforcement, and identifying potential implementation actions.

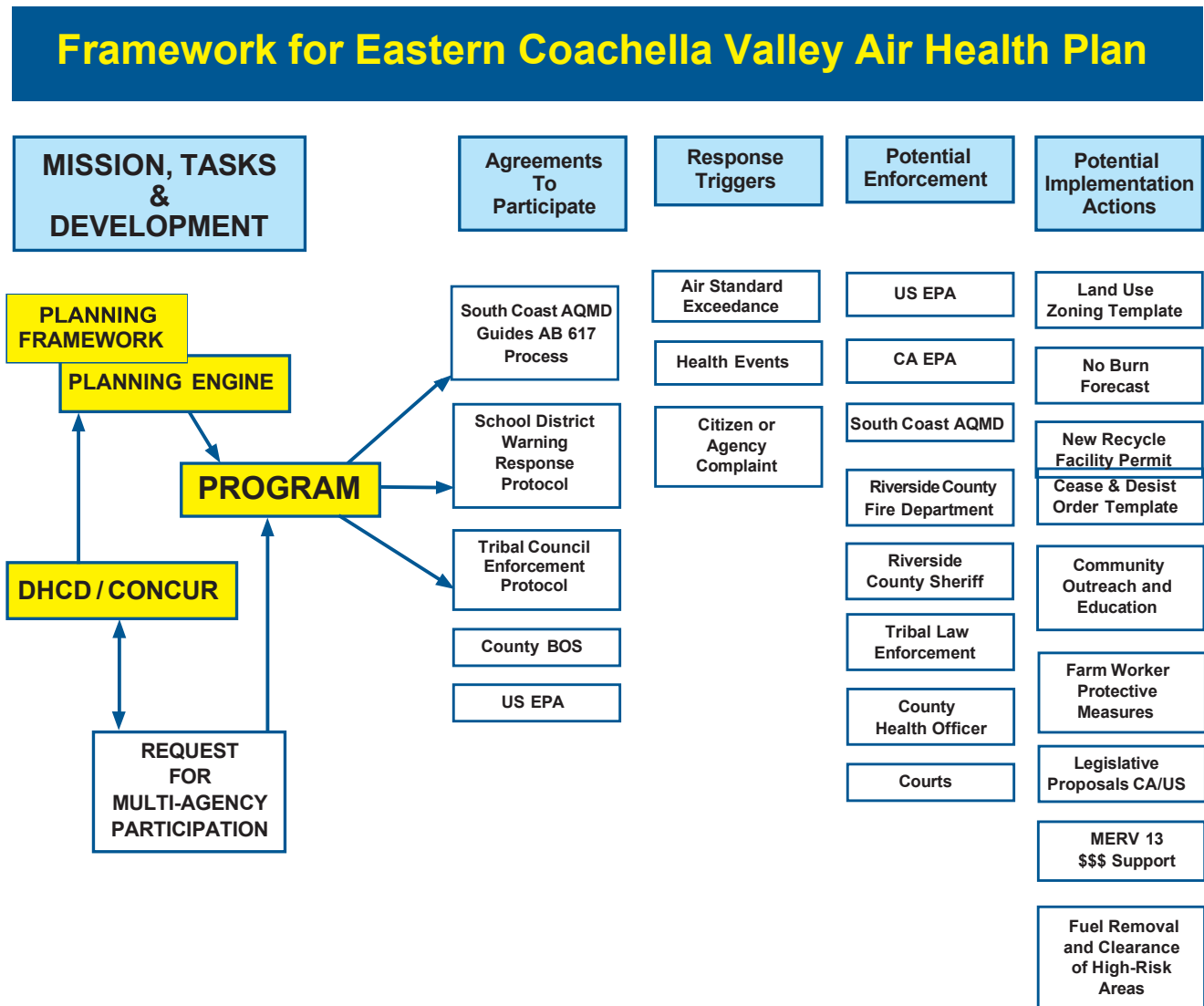


Figure 5.1: Structural Framework for ECV Air Quality

Section 5: Plan Framework

PINPOINT CORE TEAM MEMBERS AND METRICS

More detailed elements of the plan focus on the formation of a core group of key decision-makers and a set of metrics that guide response. Therefore, in building out this strategy, a key step is to identify the Core Team members and the metrics to consider. Additionally, core team members should agree on protocols to decide to invoke an emergency and to communicate the decision.

Schematic Diagram of Air Quality Emergency Core Team and Array of Metrics to Consider to Invoke Trigger

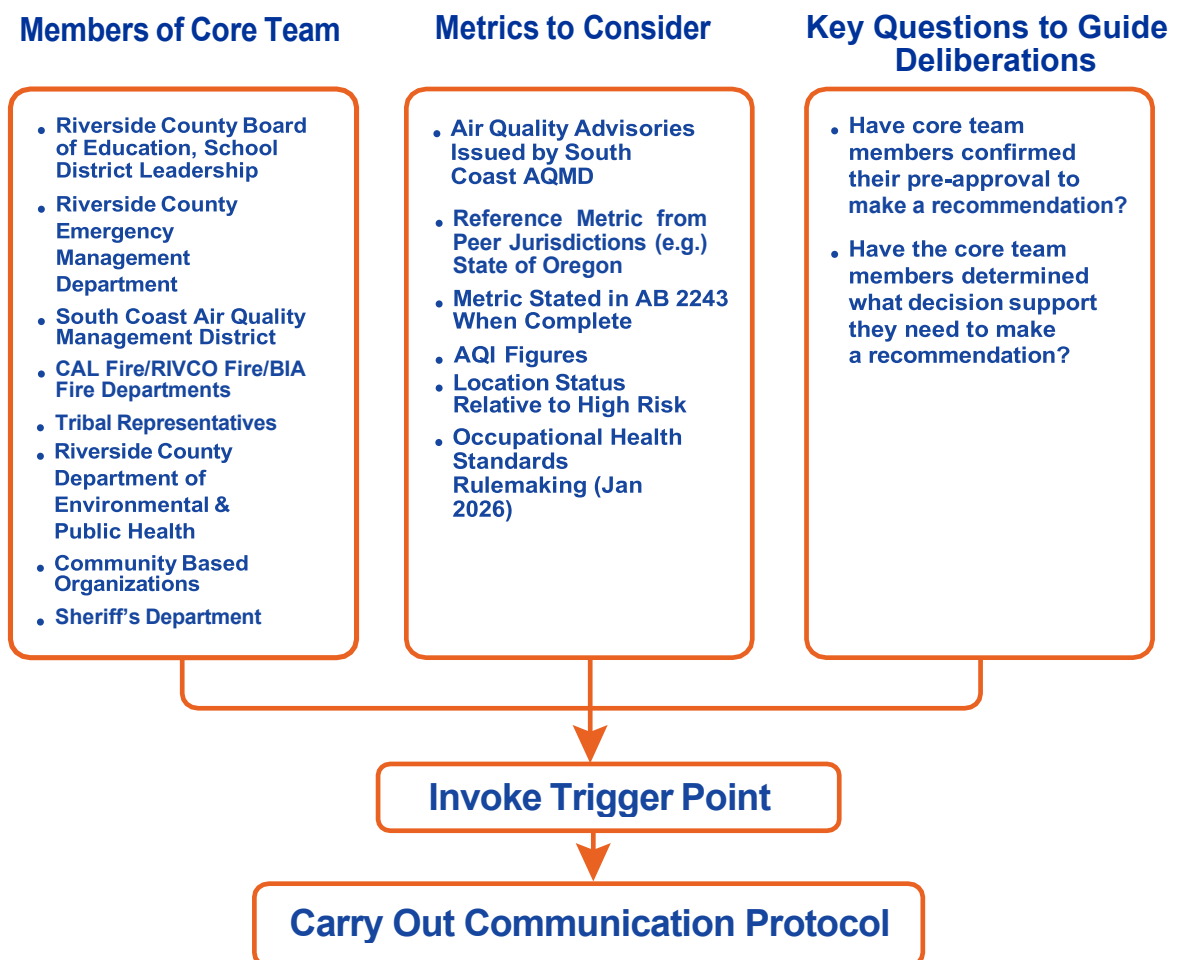


Figure 5.2: Schematic Diagram of Air Quality Core Team and Metrics

Section 5: Plan Framework

ROUNDING OUT THE CORE TEAM

Prospective Tribal Representatives on Air Quality Emergency Planning Core Team

Tribal Organization	Prospective Representative
Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians	Environmental Coordinator
Cabazon Band of Mission Indians	Environmental Coordinator
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians	Environmental Coordinator
Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission	Environmental Coordinator

Figure 5.3: DHCD-CORE TEAM Tribal Representatives

Section 5: Plan Framework

ROUNDING OUT THE CORE TEAM

**Prospective Coachella Valley School District
[Cabinet Members]
of Air Quality Emergency Planning Core Team**

**Team
Position**

**Cabinet Member–
Prospective Representative**

Superintendent

Dr. Luis Valentino

Director of Risk Management

Lawrence Luna Jr.

Director of Safety & Security

Gustavo Paiz

Figure 5.4: DHCD-CORE TEAM-School District Leadership

Section 5: Plan Framework

ROUNDING OUT THE CORE TEAM

Participating organizations may have protocols that require either some form of preauthorization or specific findings to be met for representatives to make a recommendation to invoke an air quality emergency. These protocols and preconditions should be identified and confirmed.

BUILD OUT THE CORE TEAM

CONFIRM AUTHORITY

- For each core team member, determine what pre-approval, if any, they need to make a recommendation and how that pre-approval is granted.
- For each core team member, determine what external concurrence or confirmation they need as decision support to make a recommendation.
- When the Core Team is convened, define the process for deliberation and the decision rule(s) and text for communicating an Air Quality Emergency.

Figure 5.5: DHCD CORE TEAM-Confirmation of Authority

Section 5: Plan Framework

A core component here is to state explicitly the array of triggers and specific consequential steps. An example sequence of consequent actions is illustrated below.

BUILD OUT TRIGGERS AND CONSEQUENCES

BUILD OUT THE TRIGGERS AND CONSEQUENT ACTIONS COMPONENT OF THE PROCESS

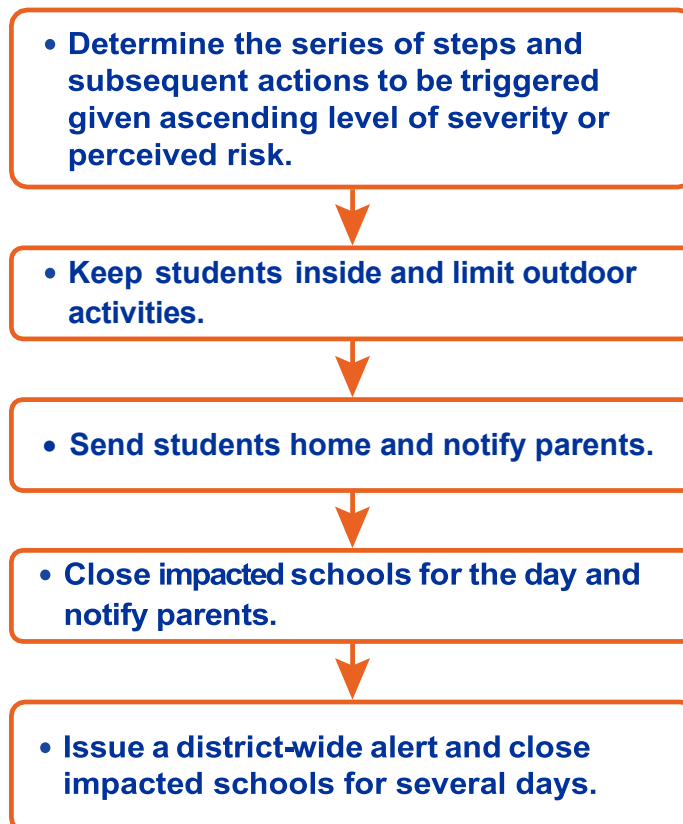


Figure 5.6: Example of Triggers and Consequent Actions

Section 6: Response to Recent October 2022 Air Quality Impairment Event

Responses from recent air quality impairment events can hold lessons for fire emergency response planning. Figure 6.1 outlines the series of steps associated with an October 2022 dust storm event referred to as a haboob.

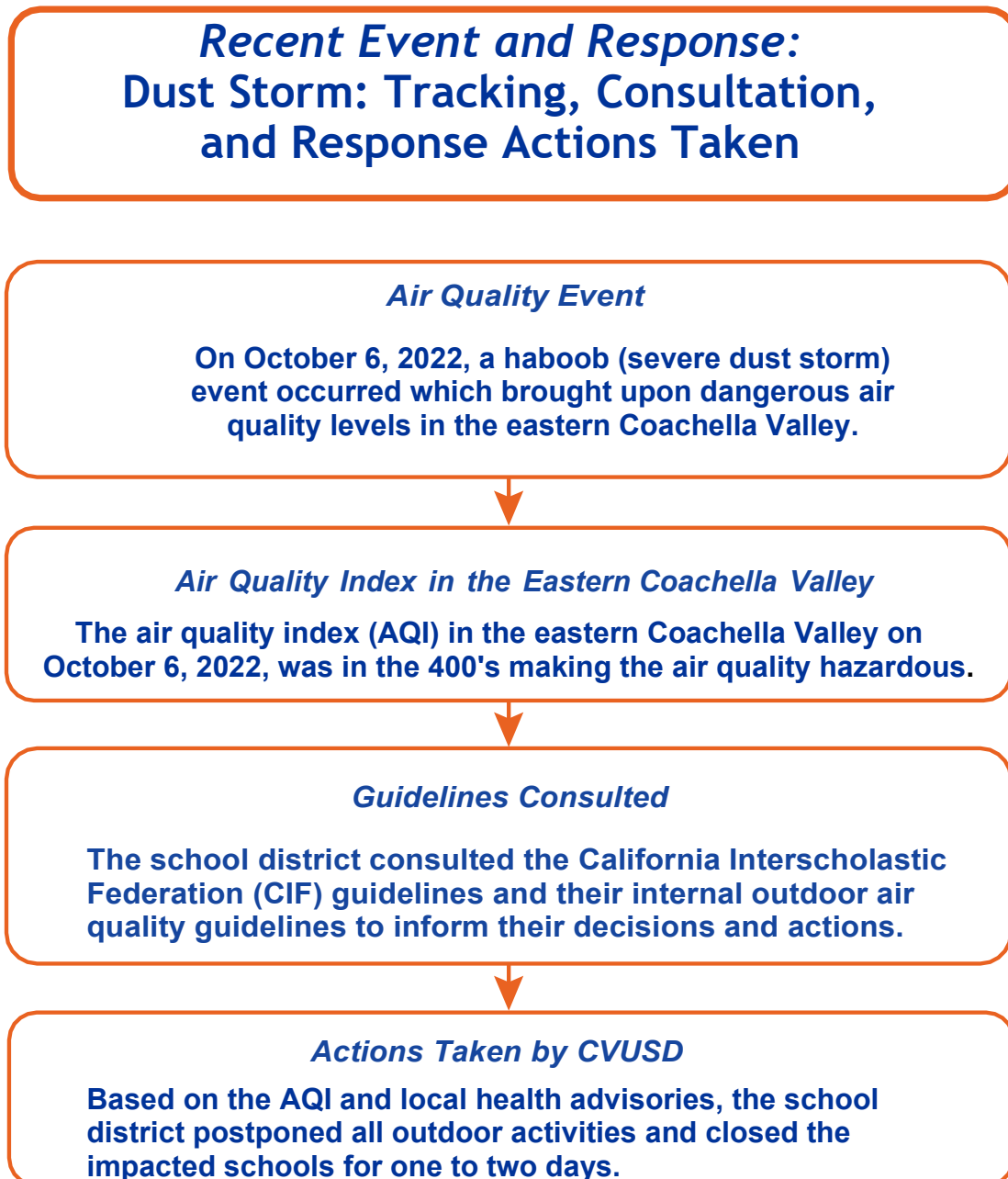


Figure 6.1: Illustrative Event and Response: October 6, 2022 Dust Storm

Section 7: Partnerships for Air Quality Community Training in Rural Communities of the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV)

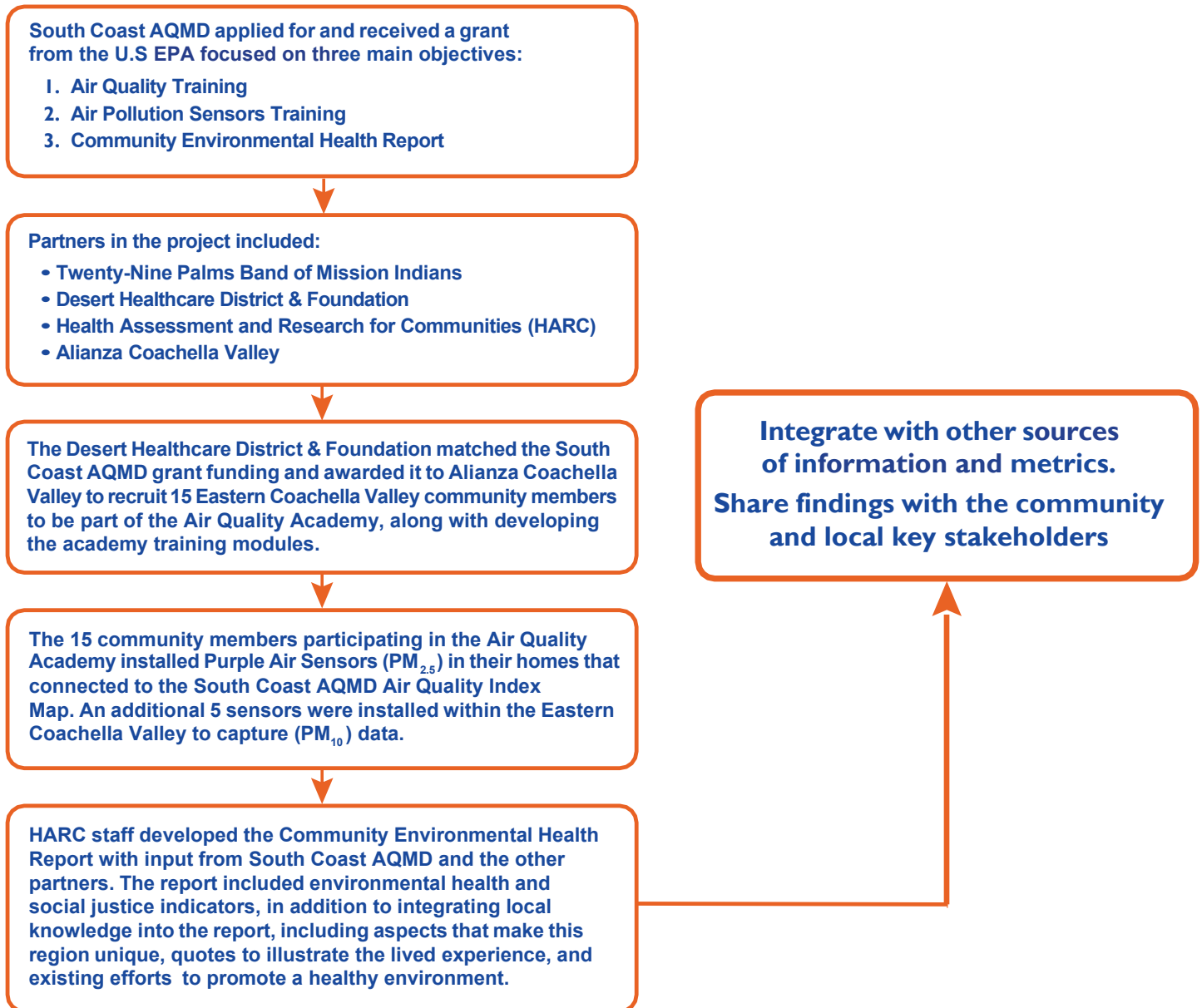


Figure 7.1: Partnerships for Air Quality Community Training

Section 8: Next Steps to Finalize this Plan Document

This Air Quality Emergency Communication Plan document has been developed based on the series of discussions started by Congressman Dr. Raul Ruiz and led by the Desert Healthcare District with participation from local key stakeholders and community-based organizations. Many components have been outlined and discussed, while a few others have not been the focus of deliberation.

The Air Quality Emergency Communication Plan can serve as a guiding document to assist in the communication, coordination, and response to air quality emergencies. The plan can also be utilized to identify actionable items that can lead to the development of policies at the local, county, and state levels to improve air quality and increase community participation.

Section 9: Roster of Participants

ROSTER OF PARTICIPANTS — DHCD Emergency Response Planning Initiative

Participant	Affiliation
Joey Acuña	Cabazon Band of Cahuilla Indians
Karina Andalon	Alianza CV
Kamal Brenner	South Coast Air Quality Management District
Yaneth Andrade-Magana	Pueblo Unido
Roshni Brahmbhatt	USEPA, Region 9
Peter Carlstrom	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
Sergio Carranza	Pueblo Unido
Pat Cooper	Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez
David De Boer	South Coast Air Quality Management District
Ruben Diaz	Riverside County Fire Department
Chief Robert Fish	Riverside County Fire Department
Janine Gregory	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
Joel Hernandez	Alianza CV
Shayra Henandez	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
William Jedi	Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Connie Mejia	South Coast Air Quality Management District
Joseph Mireles	Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Pami Mukherjee	South Coast Air Quality Management District)
George Nicholas	Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians
Gustavo Paiz	Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD)
Lissett Palacios	Coachella Valley Unified School District CVUSD
Deysi Partida	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
Ruben Perez	Office of Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia
Miguel Romero	Office of Assemblymember Garcia
Raul Ruiz, MD	Congressional Representative
Pedro Piqueras	South Coast Air Quality Management District
Heranz Quintas	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
Otoniel “Tony” Quiroz	Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Rick Sakow	US EPA Region 9
Paul Slama	Cabazon Band of Cahuilla Indians
Lily Suarez	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
Chief Bryan White	Riverside County Fire Department
Austin Yager	Office of Congressman Raul Ruiz
Rebecca Zaragosa	Leadership Council

Convening and Facilitation Team

Dr. Conrado Barzaga	Desert Healthcare District
Alejandro Espinoza, MPH	Desert Healthcare District
Scott McCreary, Ph.D.	President, CONCUR Inc.
Jasmin Muñoz, MCP Candidate	Project Associate, CONCUR Inc.
Robert Twiss, Ph.D.	Senior Affiliate, CONCUR Inc.

Table 9.1: ROSTER OF PARTICIPANTS DHCD Emergency Response Planning Initiative

Section 10: References and Glossary

AB 2243 Assembly Bill 2243, an amendment to section 6721 of the California Labor Code that will ultimately lead to changes to the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health's (Cal/OSHA) heat illness and wildfire smoke standards was signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom in September 2022. The new law requires Cal/OSHA, before December 1, 2025, to submit rule-making proposals regarding new requirements for the heat illness and wildfire smoke standards.

AQI Air Quality Index. The U.S. AQI is EPA's index for reporting air quality. The AQI can be considered a yardstick that runs from 0 to 500. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the health concern. An AQI level of 50 or below represents good air quality. AQI levels at or below 100 are generally considered satisfactory; an AQI value over 300 represents hazardous air quality.

Alianza Alianza is an organization based in the Eastern Coachella Valley that brings together community members, non-profits, and government to lead efforts for a thriving region. The organization emphasizes leadership development and a focus on representing populations in all decisions impacting our daily lives.

BIA US Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs.

BOS Board of Supervisors.

CA EPA California Environmental Protection Agency.

Cal OSHA Cal OSHA is a state of California agency created by the California Occupational and Safety Act of 1973 enacted by the California Legislature to assure safe and healthful working conditions for all Californians.

CAL FIRE Riverside County Fire Department.

CERP Community Emission Reduction Plan.

CSC Community Steering Committee is a diverse group of people, including youth, who live, work, own businesses, or attend school, within the community. Local public health agencies, regulatory agencies, tribal organizations, and elected officials are represented on the CSC. The CSC guides the development and implementation of the CERP.

CVUSD Coachella Valley Unified School District.

DHCD and DHCF The Desert Health Care District and Foundation's Mission is to achieve optimal health at all stages of life for all District residents. Its Vision is Equitably connecting Coachella Valley residents to health and wellness services and programs through philanthropy, health facilities, information and community education, and public policy.

Section 10: References and Glossary

EPA US Environmental Protection Agency.

Haboob A haboob is a type of intense dust storm carried on an atmospheric gravity, also known as a weather front. Haboos occur regularly in dryland areas throughout the world.

HARC Health Assessment and Research for Communities.

Leadership Counsel Leadership Counsel, a law firm based in the Eastern Coachella and San Joaquin Valley, works alongside the impacted communities to advocate for sound policy and eradicate injustice to secure equal access to opportunity.

MERV 13 Maximum Efficiency Rating Air Filter trapping minute soot particles.

PM Particulate Matter.

RivCo Riverside County.

South Coast AQMD South Coast Air Quality Management District.