



# Richmond Confidential

## Community-oriented process to monitor air quality kicks off tomorrow

[Mara Kardas-Nelson](#) on November 6, 2018

Richmond is about to begin a unique process to identify a group of community leaders to work with the state and local air resources boards to determine key drivers of the city's pollution and put together a plan to reduce it.

This Wednesday, Nov. 7, leaders of community environmental organizations and other members of the public are invited by County Supervisor John Gioia to attend a meeting on the new plan at the Richmond City Recreation Complex on MacDonald Avenue. Gioia is a member of the California Air Resources Board, known as CARB, and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The community-led effort is a result of Assembly Bill 617, signed into law by governor Jerry Brown last year. While Brown's administration is well known for requiring higher vehicle emissions standards, the bill was meant to tackle pollution from other sources, including refineries, ports and railroads. A particular focus is improving community health by reducing exposure in neighborhoods most impacted by air pollution.

The bill created the Community Air Protection Program, which gives authority to the state air board, together with local air boards, to identify key communities most affected by environmental contamination. Ten areas considered heavily impacted were initially selected, including two in the Bay Area: West Oakland and Richmond.

Once identified, community members from each site are supposed to work with their local air boards to identify sites that are potential sources of pollution and therefore need further monitoring. The state air board and the local air board are then expected to take steps to monitor the sources identified. The results of this monitoring will then be brought back to the community advisory group to develop a plan to reduce pollution.

Gioia expects that the monitoring sites will be selected by summer 2019, with monitoring happening for at least a year.

In an interview, Gioia stressed the importance of monitoring first and creating an action plan later. He says that while there's significant data on pollution from sites like Chevron Corp.'s refinery in Richmond, there's limited data on less obvious potential problems, like exhaust from the highway or pollution from the port. The monitoring plan, Gioia says, will help the local air board and communities better understand the scope of these

pollution sources and their impact on health in order to put together a more comprehensive emissions reduction plan.

“We need to know, ‘What are the major sources of pollution? How much can we attribute to the diesel trucks on 580, or from coal, or diesel from the ships, or the rail,’” he said.

“We want to reduce pollution from any source that is impacting people’s health, whether it is a refinery or a rail car or a truck.”

Gioia explained that AB617 is unusual because it specifically directs monitoring and action plans to be overseen by communities, not local or state governments, a type of mandated decentralization rarely seen across the U.S. The process also gives the opportunity to communities to determine what specific actions should be taken. These could include imposing new regulations or offering more public money to incentivize change within affected communities.

“This effort isn’t meant to replace the work of the state or local air board,” he said. “This provides greater leverage to communities to get more effective regulations by the local air districts.”

The pollution bill also mandates that the state air board and local air districts ensure that industrial sites, such as refineries, implement what is known as the best available retrofit technology. This means that new equipment must be installed in an effort to reduce carbon emissions and air pollutants. Last month, the state air board determined that five Bay Area refineries, including Richmond’s Chevron refinery, will be the first to undergo retrofitting, along with two other industrial sites. The development of the new rules will begin early next year, with all rules expected to be finalized by the end of 2020.

While Chevron has not yet pushed back on the expected rules, Gioia pointed out that the local air district has put out several new regulations for refineries in the past few years, “and the district has been sued every single time.”

Katie Lohec, External Affairs Specialist for Chevron’s Richmond refinery, says that the company “recognizes the value of complete and accurate air quality data to support the AB 617 process. In fact, for the last five years the Chevron Richmond Refinery has supported an independent community air monitoring program that uses state-of-the-art technology to monitor ambient emissions within our community. Real-time data from these air monitors is available to the public at [www.fenceline.org/richmond](http://www.fenceline.org/richmond). The Chevron Richmond Refinery will continue working collaboratively with the BAAQMD throughout the public rule development process.”

Wednesday’s meeting will include an overview of the pollution bill and the air protection program, Gioia said. He said community organizations interested in facilitating the process will be identified, and there will be a discussion of the process for final selection of members of the community steering committee. Gioia expects that community

members will be selected within the coming months, after which work on a monitoring plan will begin.

All members of the public are encouraged to attend. The meeting runs from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Richmond City Recreation Complex on 3230 Macdonald Ave. Those interested in attending should contact Kristen Law at 415-749-4653 or at [klaw@baaqmd.gov](mailto:klaw@baaqmd.gov).