



Public Information

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency • Planning Division
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California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

What is CEQA?

CEQA is the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970. Enacted by the State Legislature, it provides decision makers and the public with useful information about how public and private actions affect the environment. This act declares that it is the State's policy to "Develop and maintain a high-quality environment, now and in the future, and take all action necessary to protect, rehabilitate and enhance the environment quality of the State."

What does CEQA require of Ventura County?

CEQA requires the staff agencies of Ventura County to identify the significant impacts of a project on the environment, and if an Environmental Impact Report is necessary, to identify alternatives and to show how the significant impacts can be mitigated.

Why does CEQA require identification & discussion of significant impacts?

- It allows the project applicant and the County to reduce the adverse effects of a project.
- It allows the public access to information about the effects of projects.
- It allows decision makers such as the Planning Director, Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to receive important information prior to determining whether the project should be approved

KEY TERMS USED IN THE CEQA PROCESS

ENVIRONMENT

The physical conditions which exist within the area which will be affected by a proposed project, including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, noise, objects of historic or aesthetic significance.

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION (CE)

A type of project which has been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment. These are exempt from CEQA (see County of Ventura Administrative Supplement for list of CEs). Examples of Categorical Exemptions include minor repairs to existing facilities, building replacement, new construction of minor buildings, minor alterations of land, etc.

INITIAL STUDY

A preliminary analysis prepared by the Lead Agency (the agency with principal responsibility for project approval) to identify the significant environmental effects and to determine whether an Environmental Impact Report, a Negative Declaration, or a Mitigated Negative Declaration must be prepared.

NEGATIVE DECLARATION (ND)

A brief written statement describing the reasons why a proposed project will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment and thus does not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report.

MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION (MND)

The same as an ND except it requires changes to the project to reduce significant adverse impacts identified in the Initial Study to less than significant levels. The mitigation measures must be agreed to in writing by the applicant; otherwise an Environmental Impact Report must be prepared. MNDs are monitored to ensure they are implemented.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR)

A detailed report analyzing among other things:

- The significant adverse environmental effects of a project.
- Potential measures to mitigate these effects.
- Alternatives to the project and their environmental effects.
- Growth inducing features of the project.

STEPS INVOLVED IN THE CEQA PROCESS for the Ventura County Planning Division

1

Projects exempt from CEQA:

Non-Projects – Not subject to CEQA because they don't fall under the term “projects” as defined by CEQA.

Statutory Exemptions – Created by the State Legislature, certain projects fall within a statutory exemption not subject to CEQA (ex. Olympic Games)

Categorical Exemptions – Classes of projects found by the State Secretary of Resources to not have a significant effect on the environment and have been declared exempt from CEQA (ex. construction of a single family house). The Board of Supervisors has also supplemented these classes with specific activities they have determined to not have a significant effect on the environment (ex. Installation of traffic signals on existing streets). If a project falls within any of the above exemption types, it proceeds through the entitlement process without further CEQA analysis.

2

An Initial Study is prepared by the Planning Division staff in conjunction with other agencies and any interested parties. Based on these findings, the New Case Committee, comprised of Planning Division Management, determines the appropriate environmental document (ND, MND or EIR). If an EIR is required, the New Case Committee will identify what impact issues are to be covered and include them in a public "Notice of Preparation."

3

If the New Case Committee decides on an ND, the case planner prepares the appropriate form with little or no additional environmental study undertaken. If an MND is required, usually negotiations are entered into between affected agencies and the applicant to develop detailed conditions to mitigate adverse environmental effects.

If the New Case Committee decides an EIR is required, a consultant funded by the applicant will be selected to prepare the EIR. Then a scope of work is prepared and approved and the consultant writes a “administrative” draft EIR based on it. The “administrative” draft EIR is reviewed by staff, then returned to the consultant who prepares the draft EIR for public review.

4

NDs and MND's receive 20-30 days of public review and EIRs 30-45 days, depending on the need for State review.

5

At the end of the public review period, EIRs are reviewed by the Environmental Report Review Committee composed of staff from Planning, Fire Protection District, Public Works, Environmental Health, Agricultural Commissioner and Air Pollution Control District. The Environmental Report Review Committee, during a public hearing, evaluates the adequacy of the environmental document, but takes no position on the project itself. The public and ERRC comments are then used to prepare a Final EIR.

6

Once an ND, MND or Final EIR is completed, it is reviewed by the appropriate decision making authority and certified as meeting CEQA requirements at the time the project is considered for approval.

