



December 3, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL

Kitty Richards, Chair
Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Joint Air Quality Control Board
Environmental Health Department
3rd Floor, Room 3023
One Civic Plaza NW
Albuquerque, NM 87103
Email: krichardsaqcb@gmail.com

Dear Chair Richards & Air Board Members,

Local environmental justice communities have asked the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Joint Air Quality Program (“Program”), administered by the City of Albuquerque (“City”) Environmental Health Department (“EHD”), to do more to protect overburdened communities in the City and Bernalillo County (“County”) from multiple sources of air pollution. Recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) recognized that low-income communities and communities of color suffer disproportionate environmental impacts from poor air quality, other sources of pollution, and social vulnerabilities. The current City Administration and the Program are committed to developing meaningful cumulative impacts regulations within the parameters of the law and EPA rules, and to advocate for changes in the law or rules if necessary.

Chair Richards asked the Program to provide the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board (“Air Board”) with an update on the City’s current efforts to address environmental justice concerns and cumulative impacts. Please accept this letter as the update, as I am not able to attend the December 8, 2021 meeting.

The Program and EHD were proud to be part of, and learn from, the community event on November 3, 2021 at the University of New Mexico School of Law where Dr. Nicky Sheats spoke about New Jersey’s efforts to address cumulative impacts. The event facilitated an engaging and valuable conversation about the challenges our communities are experiencing locally and how similar communities addressed the same challenges in New Jersey and the City of Newark. Numerous staff members from the Program, EHD, and other City departments were present at the event. Since then, the City and Program have been considering the information we learned.

In response, the City established an internal taskforce to put our “ducks in a row” to focus on environmental justice concerns and the cumulative impacts of air pollution. As discussed at the cumulative impacts community event, the City is looking at New Jersey’s efforts as a model for Albuquerque. The internal taskforce brings together all relevant City departments and staff with expertise to be a part of the conversation. This first step has already been implemented.

Additionally, the City and the Program do not want the November 3rd conversation to stagnate and we want to make sure that the community and environmental justice advocates are actively involved in all parts of developing cumulative impacts regulations. The City is working on a plan for thoughtful community engagement, including stakeholder meetings and an intergovernmental workgroup. The expectation of these efforts are to identify approaches to address our community's specific needs within and pursuant to our local jurisdiction, and to identify the goals, definitions, and deliverables to address the experienced disparate health impacts of local overburdened communities.

Moreover, the City and the Program are identifying ways in which we can advocate for more, specific support from the EPA regarding environmental justice and the cumulative impacts of air pollution. This includes seeking additional guidance, technical support, and funding for air quality monitoring at the neighborhood level. We will continue to keep the Air Board apprised of these efforts.

The Program understands that addressing cumulative impacts is a priority for the Air Board as well. The Program looks forward to working collaboratively with the Air Board, its Information Committee, and the community to find creative solutions to these longstanding injustices.

Regards,

Mara Elana Burstein

Mara Elana Burstein
Deputy Director, Environmental Health Department
City of Albuquerque, New Mexico

Cc: Sarita Nair, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Albuquerque
Mark DiMenna, Acting Director, Environmental Health Department, City of Albuquerque
Susan Langner, Vice Chair, Air Quality Control Board
Judy Calman, Air Quality Control Board
Lauren Meiklejohn, Air Quality Control Board
Maxine Paul, Air Quality Control Board
Elizabeth Reitzel, Air Quality Control Board
Morris "Mo" Chavez, Air Quality Control Board
Sue Chappell, Attorney for Air Quality Control Board