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To: Cozad, Daniel; Moore, Tim; Chilcott, Jeanne@Waterboards; Dunham, Tess
Subject: FYI – interesting

A need to improve/expand our outreach?

California AG launches environmental justice unit focused on poorer communities

By Peter Fimrite
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Frustrated by declining federal regulation of the environment and health disparities between poorer and wealthier communities, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra on Thursday appointed a team of lawyers to fight pollution.

The four attorneys assigned to the new Bureau of Environmental Justice will focus on low-income Californians and people of color who suffer a “disproportionate share of environmental pollution and public health hazards,” according to Becerra’s office.

“The harsh reality is that some communities in California — particularly low-income communities and communities of color — continue to bear the brunt of pollution from industrial development, poor land-use decisions, transportation, and trade corridors,” Becerra said in a statement. “Meeting the needs of these communities requires our focused attention.”

The ideas of environmental justice and equity have gained increasing currency in recent years among activists and some local governments. The California unit will handle legal cases like one Becerra recently joined opposing the storage and handling of coal at the Port of Oakland.

Becerra has filed 30 lawsuits against the federal government, including challenges of Trump administration moves to open the California coast to offshore oil drilling, suspend the Clean Water Rule that sought to protect streams and wetlands, and repeal the Clean Power Plan that was intended to fight global warming.

Nearly half of the lawsuits were attempts to enforce laws ensuring that children have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, the attorney general’s office said.

The office said it has so far won favorable rulings in seven lawsuits, including a Feb. 15 ruling by a U.S. District Court judge in San Francisco that the Department of Energy failed to implement energy efficiency standards for several polluting products, including portable air conditioners.

The attorney general’s office has been on its toes over the past year keeping track of moves by Trump, EPA administrator Scott Pruitt and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke affecting the California environment, officials said. Pruitt said he believes the EPA has for years overstepped its congressional mandate and unfairly hindered oil, gas and coal production.

Besides challenging federal deregulation, the Bureau of Environmental Justice will prioritize pollution cases that threaten public health, Becerra said.

The attorneys will seek to compel businesses and government agencies to clean contaminated drinking water, reduce exposure to lead and other toxins and prevent illegal waste discharges in communities burdened disproportionately by pollution.

“Far too many families in California suffer from both poverty and pollution — in fact, they usually go hand in hand,” said Vien Truong, who heads Dream Corps and Green For All, Oakland-based organizations that focus on social and environmental justice. “Families across the state will breathe a sigh of relief with the promise of justice and accountability for polluters.”

The supervising deputy attorney general is expected to start work next week while the three other lawyers in the bureau are expected to be in place soon, Becerra’s office said.

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<https://www.sfchronicle.com/science/article/California-AG-launches-environmental-justice-unit-12646555.php>