

7. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), PRC 21000 et seq., was developed to provide a process for review and approval of activities that affect the environment. This process is outlined in the *CEQA Guidelines* (<http://ceres.ca.gov/qeqa/>) prepared by the Secretary of Resources. The statute and the guidelines are frequently amended, and specific questions and references should be to the most current version of the statute or guideline.

In many cases, the first contact with a project or development is through the review of an environmental impact report (EIR) submitted by a project proponent. This is the earliest official opportunity for fire service comment. In many cases, the proponent has already contacted the appropriate agencies before preparation of the report. CDF and fire department staff should review appropriate permits and tentative maps relating to development and construction in SRA for appropriate wildland fire hazard mitigation. The recommendations presented through the local jurisdiction should be taken from the forest and fire laws and requirements contained in Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Section 1270 et seq. (T14, CCR, 1270 et seq.). CDF and fire department staff should also review project environmental documentation provided via the local jurisdiction for conformance with T14, CCR, Sec. 1270 et seq., the forest and fire laws, and other CDF program interests.

As the state's wildland fire protection agency, CDF becomes the responsible agency on many projects in SRA, requiring receipt and review of project environmental documentation. Where deficiencies in the general plan are identified, the deficiencies should be noted and passed through the chain of command. The notice should include a clear description of the deficiency and recommendations or alternatives for correction. An excellent reference is the *Guide to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)*, by Daniel J. Curtin, Jr. A good example of an EIR that addresses fire management is the *Mt. Tamalpais EIR*, by Charles Leonard & Associates.

7.1 Processing

Environmental project documentation for discretionary projects received from the county should be routed back to the county after comments have been made. CDF review of permit applications and tentative maps shall be accomplished within the time frames set by, and in use by, the local jurisdiction.

7.2 Reviewing Projects

When environmental documentation for a discretionary project or a ministerial project is being processed at the local level, it is preferable to meet with an applicant to discuss construction and development requirements to review possible exceptions and alternatives prior to the submission of a tentative map or application for a permit. Initial review and joint inspections of the project site with the applicant may resolve many problems, easing the reviewer's time commitment and simplifying negotiations and approval. Station personnel, battalion chiefs, division chiefs and resource management personnel should be involved and consulted when appropriate. Meeting records should be kept for future review.

7.3 Inspection of Projects

During preliminary field inspections of projects, the adequacy of proposed activities, measures and practices should be reviewed and discussed. Requests for alternatives or exceptions should be evaluated and, if warranted, should be endorsed. Where alternatives are not appropriate, the inspector should provide recommendations. Field notes should be taken, and a letter to the applicant indicating areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as recommendations, should be prepared. In all cases, reference all documents to the project using the parcel number or project number and retain a copy of all notes and transmittals. If possible, station, battalion or supervisory personnel should be involved.

Inspections following the issuance of an application or approval of a tentative parcel map should evaluate the conformance of project activities with the conditions placed on the permit or map and notes taken during any preliminary meeting or inspection. Documentation of non-conforming activities and measures shall be based on local procedures.