

CEQA Glossary

CEQA statute: Public Resources Code §21000 et seq. (CEQA)

CEQA Guidelines: 14 CCR §15000 et seq.

SWRCB implementation regulations: 23 CCR §3720 et seq.

Updated statute, guidelines, caselaw, other info: <http://www.ceres.ca.gov/ceqa>

Alternatives	CEQA requires an EIR to examine a “reasonable range” of alternatives to the project or its location. These must include the “no project” alternative. Alternatives must be feasible, meet most of the project objectives, and reduce one or more of the project’s significant effects.	Guidelines §15126.6
Baseline	The situation against which the project’s impacts are compared in order to determine significance. Normally, the existing conditions at the time the environmental analysis commences constitute the baseline.	Guidelines §15125
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act	Public Resources Code (CEQA) §21000 et seq.
CEQA Guidelines	Regulations adopted by the Secretary of Resources to implement CEQA	14 California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, §15000 et seq.
Certified Regulatory Program (CRP)	A state agency program that has been certified by the Secretary of Resources as meeting the requirements of CEQA.	Public Resources Code (CEQA) §21080.5
Checklist	Normally, the initial study checklist is used to assist in determining whether a project may have a significant effect on the environment. Part of the Water Boards’ Substitute Environmental Documentation (SED)	SWRCB CEQA regulations Appendix A for CRPs; Guidelines Appendix G otherwise
Discretionary Project	A decision wherein the agency must apply its judgment and may condition or deny approval	Guidelines §15357
EIR	Environmental Impact Report prepared pursuant to CEQA	CEQA §21061; Guidelines §15140
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy ACT (NEPA), <i>roughly</i> analogous to an EIR under CEQA	
Emergency	A sudden and unexpected occurrence involving a clear and imminent danger to the public that demands immediate action to prevent or mitigate loss of or damage to life, health, property, or essential public services	Guidelines §15359 CEQA §21060.3 Statutory exemption for emergency projects: Guidelines §15269

Statutory Exemption	A project or class of projects exempted from CEQA by statutory law	Guidelines §§15260–15285
Categorical Exemption	One of 33 classes of projects that are usually exempt from CEQA, provided that no exceptions apply	Guidelines §§15300 – 15333
Fair Argument –	The standard by which an agency determines whether to prepare an EIR. An EIR is required when it can be fairly argued, based upon substantial evidence in the whole of the record before the agency, that the project may have a significant environmental effect.	Guidelines §15064(f)
Feasible	“Capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors”	Guidelines §15364 CEQA §21061.1
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact: NEPA term roughly analogous to Negative Declaration under CEQA	
Impact	Direct and reasonably foreseeable changes in the physical environment Synonymous with “effect”	Guidelines §15358
Initial Study	A systematic review of a proposed project undertaken to determine whether there is substantial evidence that it may result in one or more significant impacts	Guidelines §§15358, 15060 (“Preliminary Review”)
Lead Agency	The public agency responsible for completing the CEQA documentation. Usually the agency undertaking the project or the first agency to act on a project	Guidelines §15367
Mitigated Negative Declaration	A negative declaration which incorporates mitigation measures that reduce any potential significant effects below the level of significance, and with which the project applicant has agreed before circulation of the draft document for public review	Guidelines §§15369.5, 15070
Mitigation Measure	A measure that avoids, reduces, or compensates for the significant impacts of a project	Guidelines §§15370, 15126.4
Negative Declaration	A determination, based upon an initial study, that there is no substantial evidence that a proposed project may result in a significant effect	Guidelines §§15371, 15070 et seq.
NEPA	– National Environmental Policy Act. Federal analog to CEQA	
Notice of Decision	Notice filed with the Secretary of Resources upon making a decision based upon a substitute environmental document.	Guidelines §15252 CEQA §21080.5(d)(2)(E) (CRPs)
Notice of Exemption	A notice filed with the Office of Planning and Research upon making a decision based upon a statutory or categorical exemption	Guidelines §§15374; 15062
Notice of Preparation	A notice issued by the lead agency to responsible and trustee agencies and the State Clearinghouse, advising them of the preparation of a draft environmental documents and requesting comments on the project	Guidelines §§15375, 15082 (a) (1) et seq.

Piecemealing	The improper (and often artificial) separation of a project into smaller parts in order to avoid preparing EIR-level documentation.	
Project	A discretionary action being undertaken by a public agency that would have a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect impact on the physical environment. This includes actions by the agency, financing and grants, and permits, licenses, plans, regulations or other entitlements granted by the agency. CEQA requires that the project include “the whole of the action” before the agency.	CEQA §21065 Guidelines §15378 Project Description: Guidelines §15124
Public Review Period	For Substitute Environmental Documentation, Negative Declarations	CEQA §21091
Recirculation	Release of <i>revised</i> environmental documentation for public review—when significant new information is added after public notice is given of the availability of draft documents, but before adoption or certification	Guidelines §15088.5 CEQA §21092.1
Responsible Agency.	An agency, other than the lead agency, that will issue permits or other approvals for the project. Acts after lead agency completes its CEQA process	Guidelines §15381
Scoping	Providing the opportunity for agencies and the public to review the proposed project, identify issues, and suggest actions before the draft EIR is prepared. Generally, a scoping meeting is held to provide this opportunity.	CEQA §21083.9 Scoping notice: Guidelines §15082
Significant impact	A substantial adverse change in the physical environment caused either directly or indirectly by the project	Guidelines §15382
Statement of Overriding Considerations	A written statement, based on substantial evidence, to be adopted by the lead agency upon approval of a project that has one or more significant and unavoidable impacts. The statement explains the specific benefits of the project that outweigh its unavoidable impacts.	Guidelines §15093
Substantial Evidence	Facts, expert opinion based on facts, or reasonable assumptions predicated upon facts	Guidelines §15384 CEQA §21081.5
Substitute Environmental Documentation (SED)	Environmental documentation prepared by a certified regulatory program that substitutes for an EIR or a Negative Declaration.	
Trustee Agency System).	A state agency that has jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project, that are held in trust for the people of the State of California. As designated in Guidelines §15386 the trustee agencies are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The California Department of Fish and Game • State Lands Commission • California Department of Parks and Recreation • University of California (for its Natural Land and Water Reserves) 	CEQA §21070 Guidelines §15386