Department of
Toxic Substances Control

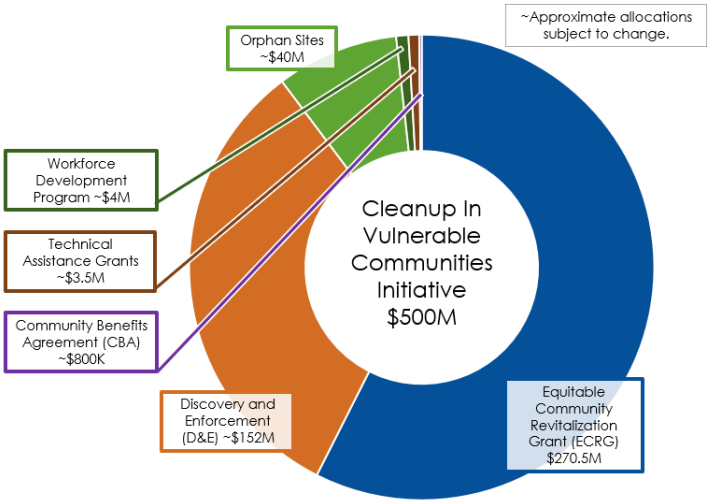
Cleanup in Vulnerable Communities Initiative

August 2023

In 2021, Governor Newsom signed SB 158 (Ch. 73, St. 2021), enacting the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)'s Governance and Fee Reform. The Cleanup in Vulnerable Communities Initiatives (CVCI) resulted from tireless efforts by many stakeholders to right size DTSC so that it would be able to meet its mission of protecting people and the environment. CVCI's $500 million influx of resources were allocated over four years with a common thread of serving disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

As we head into the last two years of the initiative, DTSC is focusing its efforts on amplifying CVCI's impact – coordinating across the initiative and targeting areas of California that could benefit from an integrated and profound investment by the State.

DTSC is creating space for deeper dialogue to build a stronger equity, inclusion, and environmental justice lens in all aspects of the initiative. We are leaning into challenging issues, such as community benefits, proposed end-uses, cleanups methods, how DTSC prioritizes sites, and how we engage and collaborate with disadvantaged and marginalized communities.



Equitable Community Revitalization Grant (ECRG)

The largest portion of CVCI funds, approximately $270 million, is dedicated to the ECRG. ECRG encourages beneficial reuse of land through assessment, investigation, and cleanup, and advances environmental justice goals through concerted support and deep investment in vulnerable and underserved communities. ECRG activities support safe recycling of land for end-uses needed by the community, such as parks, housing, community services, schools and commerce. In Round 1, DTSC awarded ~$75.5M in ECRG funds to 53 grantees on 84 sites (~70% of which are in the most environmentally compromised areas of the state) that represent 31 cities in 15 different counties. The round 2 application period is open August 14 through October 9 and awards will be announced in Winter 2024.

Discovery & Enforcement (D&E)

The D&E Program was established to assess and clean up contaminated sites that have a high potential to release toxic chemicals into the environment and vulnerable communities. With the $152 million allocated in CVCI, DTSC is first focusing on environmental releases associated with dry-cleaning operations near residential areas, schools, hospitals, child-care facilities and senior centers. DTSC identified nearly 7,500 dry cleaning facilities across the state, prioritizing 112 for Phase I Assessments in the first year of the program and nearly 300 for the next year. The vast majority of these next sites will be in "discovery" with rest of the new sites slated for enforcement or investigation with partner agencies.

Orphan Sites

CVCI's D&E Program also supplements DTSC's existing orphan program that uses Site Remediation Account or "SRA" funds where no viable responsible parties exist. $40 million in CVCI is dedicated to 21 sites in various stages of investigation and cleanup. They all have documented releases that pose unacceptable risks such as cancer-causing chemicals that may impact drinking water supplies, indoor air, and/or soil. Several have CalEnviroScreen scores in the top 25%. This funding is a deeper investment in a select set of sites to expedite their paths to cleanup.

Technical Assistance Grants (TAG)

The TAG program is being established to help impacted communities become more involved and informed in response actions at properties under DTSC oversight. The funds can be used for technical advisors and community science, with the goal of effectively communicating technical information and encouraging involvement through community science. This program is in developmental stages and will be modeled off U.S. EPA grant programs and the ECRG.

Community Benefit Agreements (CBA)

The CBA framework aims to promote benefits beyond the traditional scope of cleanup. A CBA contains a set of commitments that are usually made separate from, and in addition to, regulatory requirements of a project. Through the framework, DTSC is establishing a mechanism to facilitate CBAs between responsible parties of cleanup sites and the impacted communities. CBAs are a win-win approach to project implementation, providing communities an additional mechanism for shaping a final project design and to advocate for community benefits that are tailored to their needs. This program is in its infancy and working with external contractors to facilitate public input and learn from CBA experts to develop the framework and guidelines.

Workforce Development (WFD)

The WFD program strives to provide - a career development training program that prioritizes local hires from vulnerable communities to promote public health, community engagement, promote equity, environmental justice and support the local economy. DTSC is investing in vulnerable communities by partnering with local workforce development experts, Tribal governments , and community-based organizations. From remediation certification scholarships and career trainings, to internships for college students, WFD will be providing exposure to career pathways in environmental sectors, public service, STEM fields and remediation careers.

Environmental Justice Advisory Council (EJAC)

SB 158 also provides for a forum that represents communities across California impacted by DTSC's programs and activities and that provides environmental justice advice, consultation, and recommendations to DTSC's Director and the Board of Environmental Safety. The EJAC is intended to facilitate these discussions and empower communities so that DTSC's actions do not unfairly burden any population within California with a disproportionate impact on the health, well-being, and the quality of life of those residents. DTSC and the Board of Environmental Safety (BES) facilitated four public workshops with stakeholders and potential EJAC members to develop the EJAC framework. In Fall 2023, DTSC and the BES expect to finalize the framework and begin soliciting EJAC members.

For more information, please visit:
https://dtsc.ca.gov/cleanup-in-vulnerable-communities-initiative-cvci/