
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide: Your Resource for Preparing CEQA Analyses in Los Angeles (Thresholds Guide)* is a guidance document that draws together practical information useful to City staff, project proponents, and the public involved in the environmental review of projects in the City of Los Angeles subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The CEQA process, established by state law, requires the review of proposed projects in order to identify and address potential environmental effects.

This is the City's initial effort to develop citywide guidance for CEQA impact analyses. The applicability and use of the *Thresholds Guide* may be re-evaluated after a period of use. The *Thresholds Guide* is intended to be available as a voluntary tool. It supports the City's development reform efforts to streamline and enhance the City's permit and development processes. The *Thresholds Guide* is a consensus document that represents the technical input from a citywide working group, comprised of representatives from 18 City departments and bureaus, including the Environmental Affairs Department (EAD).

Content

The *Thresholds Guide* includes two sets of criteria to evaluate project impacts: screening and significance criteria. The **screening criteria** provide assistance in responding to the questions in the State's Initial Study Checklist and, thus, determining the appropriate environmental document to prepare (e.g., negative declaration, mitigated negative declaration, or environmental impact report). The **significance thresholds** assist in determining whether a project's impacts would be presumed significant under normal

circumstances and, therefore, require mitigation to be identified.

The *Thresholds Guide* contains three types of significance thresholds - **quantitative, qualitative, and case-by-case**. Quantitative thresholds provide a measurable criterion with which to compare one or more characteristics of the proposed project, such as "the vehicle-to-capacity ratio increase at a study intersection is greater than 0.020." A qualitative threshold requires comparison to non-numerical criteria, such as "interference with a wildlife movement corridor." The case-by-case thresholds were developed for issue areas where a definitive threshold could not be established, either because impacts are site- or project-specific or because there is no consistent technical guidance available. The existence of screening criteria and significance thresholds may also encourage project proponents to incorporate impact-reducing measures into project designs, prior to submitting project applications to the City, to reduce potential impacts below the significance level.

The screening criteria and significance thresholds are based on a variety of factors, including existing local, state, and federal regulations, administrative practices of other public agencies, and commonly accepted professional standards. Each threshold has been reviewed with respect to meeting the following goals: objectivity and applicability, defensibility, practicality, nexus between impacts and mitigation, and legal liability.

The *Thresholds Guide* provides assistance in evaluating 46 of the most common environmental issues in the City of Los Angeles, grouped into the following categories:

- Air Quality
- Population and Housing

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology
- Hazards
- Land Use
- Noise
- Public Services
- Public Utilities
- Transportation
- Visual Resources
- Water Resources

The information is organized generally in the same order in which the issues appear in the State’s Initial Study Checklist, although the *Thresholds Guide* does not identify thresholds for all issues found in the Checklist.

Within each issue area, the *Thresholds Guide* includes three parts: **1. Initial Study Screening Process** (Initial Study Checklist Question, Introduction, Screening Criteria, and Evaluation of Screening Criteria); **2. Determination of Significance** (Significance Threshold, Environmental Setting, Project Impacts, Cumulative Impacts, and Sample Mitigation Measures); and **3. Data, Resources, and References** (Resources, Background Information, Selected Legislation, and Exhibits).

How the *Thresholds Guide* works

The *Thresholds Guide* provides technical assistance in evaluating the potential significance of a project’s environmental impacts by putting in one place existing information and practices from a variety of sources which are useful for impact analyses. The *Thresholds Guide* applies to non-exempt, discretionary projects (including public and private projects and plans) in the City of Los Angeles under “normal” conditions. It recognizes that the impacts resulting from a particular action depend on the project setting, design, and operational components and that the determination of significance and the appropriate criteria for evaluation are the responsibility of the lead agency.

The *Thresholds Guide* does not change the authority of decision-makers or the lead agency or affect the City’s CEQA Guidelines (including the list of categorical exemptions). The

Thresholds Guide does not change existing department procedures for processing CEQA documents or introduce new evaluation methods.

The purpose and applicability of the *Thresholds Guide* are fully described in the Preface and Content and Use Sections of the Introduction. The *Thresholds Guide* provides some general information about CEQA requirements, but should not be used as a substitute for professional or legal advice. For more information, the reader should refer to the CEQA Statutes and State and City Guidelines; current case law, regulations, and scientific methods; and consult with the appropriate City departments, as necessary.

Background and Process

Numerous public and private projects and plans are undertaken each year within the City of Los Angeles. Each of these must comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including CEQA. For those projects needing discretionary approval from the City of Los Angeles, the department granting the approval generally acts as the lead agency on behalf of the City and ensures that all CEQA requirements are fulfilled. The *Thresholds Guide* can simplify the CEQA process by offering a consistent set of evaluation criteria applicable to most discretionary projects in the City.

The *Thresholds Guide* was presented and discussed at a public workshop hosted by the Environmental Affairs Commission (EAC). The EAC sent recommendations on the *Thresholds Guide* to the Environmental Quality and Waste Management Committee of the City Council, and the full Council authorized departments to use the *Thresholds Guide* in CEQA analyses in August 2001 (see Council File 98-2064).

For information, and to view or download a copy of the *Thresholds Guide*, please point your browser to EAD’s Home Page at <http://www.lacity.org/EAD>, and click on CEQA/.