

State of California

PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE

Section 21080

21080. (a) Except as otherwise provided in this division, this division shall apply to discretionary projects proposed to be carried out or approved by public agencies, including, but not limited to, the enactment and amendment of zoning ordinances, the issuance of zoning variances, the issuance of conditional use permits, and the approval of tentative subdivision maps unless the project is exempt from this division.

(b) This division does not apply to any of the following activities:

(1) Ministerial projects proposed to be carried out or approved by public agencies.

(2) Emergency repairs to public service facilities necessary to maintain service.

(3) Projects undertaken, carried out, or approved by a public agency to maintain, repair, restore, demolish, or replace property or facilities damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster in a disaster-stricken area in which a state of emergency has been proclaimed by the Governor pursuant to Chapter 7 (commencing with Section 8550) of Division 1 of Title 2 of the Government Code.

(4) Specific actions necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency.

(5) Projects which a public agency rejects or disapproves.

(6) Actions undertaken by a public agency relating to any thermal powerplant site or facility, including the expenditure, obligation, or encumbrance of funds by a public agency for planning, engineering, or design purposes, or for the conditional sale or purchase of equipment, fuel, water (except groundwater), steam, or power for a thermal powerplant, if the powerplant site and related facility will be the subject of an environmental impact report, negative declaration, or other document, prepared pursuant to a regulatory program certified pursuant to Section 21080.5, which will be prepared by the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, by the Public Utilities Commission, or by the city or county in which the powerplant and related facility would be located if the environmental impact report, negative declaration, or document includes the environmental impact, if any, of the action described in this paragraph.

(7) Activities or approvals necessary to the bidding for, hosting or staging of, and funding or carrying out of, an Olympic games under the authority of the International Olympic Committee, except for the construction of facilities necessary for the Olympic games.

(8) The establishment, modification, structuring, restructuring, or approval of rates, tolls, fares, or other charges by public agencies which the public agency finds are for the purpose of (A) meeting operating expenses, including employee wage rates and fringe benefits, (B) purchasing or leasing supplies, equipment, or materials, (C) meeting financial reserve needs and requirements, (D) obtaining funds for capital

projects necessary to maintain service within existing service areas, or (E) obtaining funds necessary to maintain those intracity transfers as are authorized by city charter. The public agency shall incorporate written findings in the record of any proceeding in which an exemption under this paragraph is claimed setting forth with specificity the basis for the claim of exemption.

(9) All classes of projects designated pursuant to Section 21084.

(10) A project for the institution or increase of passenger or commuter services on rail or highway rights-of-way already in use, including modernization of existing stations and parking facilities. For purposes of this paragraph, "highway" shall have the same meaning as defined in Section 360 of the Vehicle Code.

(11) A project for the institution or increase of passenger or commuter service on high-occupancy vehicle lanes already in use, including the modernization of existing stations and parking facilities.

(12) Facility extensions not to exceed four miles in length which are required for the transfer of passengers from or to exclusive public mass transit guideway or busway public transit services.

(13) A project for the development of a regional transportation improvement program, the state transportation improvement program, or a congestion management program prepared pursuant to Section 65089 of the Government Code.

(14) Any project or portion thereof located in another state which will be subject to environmental impact review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 4321 et seq.) or similar state laws of that state. Any emissions or discharges that would have a significant effect on the environment in this state are subject to this division.

(15) Projects undertaken by a local agency to implement a rule or regulation imposed by a state agency, board, or commission under a certified regulatory program pursuant to Section 21080.5. Any site-specific effect of the project which was not analyzed as a significant effect on the environment in the plan or other written documentation required by Section 21080.5 is subject to this division.

(c) If a lead agency determines that a proposed project, not otherwise exempt from this division, would not have a significant effect on the environment, the lead agency shall adopt a negative declaration to that effect. The negative declaration shall be prepared for the proposed project in either of the following circumstances:

(1) There is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the lead agency, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment.

(2) An initial study identifies potentially significant effects on the environment, but (A) revisions in the project plans or proposals made by, or agreed to by, the applicant before the proposed negative declaration and initial study are released for public review would avoid the effects or mitigate the effects to a point where clearly no significant effect on the environment would occur, and (B) there is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the lead agency, that the project, as revised, may have a significant effect on the environment.

(d) If there is substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the lead agency, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, an environmental impact report shall be prepared.

(e) (1) For the purposes of this section and this division, substantial evidence includes fact, a reasonable assumption predicated upon fact, or expert opinion supported by fact.

(2) Substantial evidence is not argument, speculation, unsubstantiated opinion or narrative, evidence that is clearly inaccurate or erroneous, or evidence of social or economic impacts that do not contribute to, or are not caused by, physical impacts on the environment.

(f) As a result of the public review process for a mitigated negative declaration, including administrative decisions and public hearings, the lead agency may conclude that certain mitigation measures identified pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) are infeasible or otherwise undesirable. In those circumstances, the lead agency, prior to approving the project, may delete those mitigation measures and substitute for them other mitigation measures that the lead agency finds, after holding a public hearing on the matter, are equivalent or more effective in mitigating significant effects on the environment to a less than significant level and that do not cause any potentially significant effect on the environment. If those new mitigation measures are made conditions of project approval or are otherwise made part of the project approval, the deletion of the former measures and the substitution of the new mitigation measures shall not constitute an action or circumstance requiring recirculation of the mitigated negative declaration.

(g) Nothing in this section shall preclude a project applicant or any other person from challenging, in an administrative or judicial proceeding, the legality of a condition of project approval imposed by the lead agency. If, however, any condition of project approval set aside by either an administrative body or court was necessary to avoid or lessen the likelihood of the occurrence of a significant effect on the environment, the lead agency's approval of the negative declaration and project shall be invalid and a new environmental review process shall be conducted before the project can be reapproved, unless the lead agency substitutes a new condition that the lead agency finds, after holding a public hearing on the matter, is equivalent to, or more effective in, lessening or avoiding significant effects on the environment and that does not cause any potentially significant effect on the environment.

(Amended by Stats. 2013, Ch. 523, Sec. 1. (SB 788) Effective January 1, 2014.)