

Environmental Monitoring & Health

A California Wellness Foundation-Funded Model Spreads Across California

■ Assessing Health Risks

When a grantee wants to replicate another non-profit's program, it's a great sign. That's what [The California Wellness Foundation](#) (TCWF)'s response was when one of its grantees mentioned the [Imperial Visions Action Network](#) (IVAN). IVAN is an environmental monitoring system that connects community members to solve environmental health and justice problems in Imperial County, California.

Imperial is a rural county in one of the most productive agricultural regions in California. It has the lowest median per capita income in the state and consistently has one of California's highest unemployment rates. Intensive industrial agricultural activity, coupled with living below the poverty line, presents many Imperial County residents, primarily Latino farm workers and families, with twin burdens of significant environmental health hazards and problems accessing health care. "Pesticide drift" from errant aerial spraying, diesel truck traffic and smoke from crop burning contribute to worsening air quality in the region. Imperial County's asthma hospitalization rate for children is three times higher than the state's average.

■ Monitoring & Reporting Hazards

With funding from TCWF, IVAN tracks and addresses environmental health hazards in Imperial County through an online, real-time reporting system and an environmental justice task force. The online system allows community members to report threats to the environment and health, mapping their locations with a GIS mapping tool. Those reports are collected and reviewed by the task force, which is comprised of community members, environmental and health advocates, government officials and business representatives, primarily from the agriculture industry.

TCWF sees several reasons why IVAN has won praise in Imperial and interest from other counties in California. The online reporting system employs the public's eyes and ears to spot hazards in the large, sprawling rural county that

might otherwise be missed by government agencies. Using GIS mapping to display reported problems provides a transparent way for community members and industry to see environmental and health hazards. The task force brings together diverse groups in a collaborative way to seek solutions. IVAN demonstrates how combining new technology, like GIS mapping and crowdsourcing, with traditional communication strategies, such as stakeholder meetings and mediation, can be effective in identifying and resolving environmental health and justice issues.

■ Improving Conditions & Expanding

Community members have seen a number of reported environmental health problems addressed and resolved through IVAN. In 2010, county residents used IVAN to report an abandoned cattle feedlot with half-buried cattle carcasses and excrement polluting a nearby river. The company operating the lot was denied a permit to re-open. With funding from TCWF, IVAN has expanded to three other counties in California (Coachella, Kern and Fresno); it plans to launch in a fifth county in June 2013 and in four more over the next two years.

To learn more visit:

[IVAN Online](#)

[IVAN online reporting and task force site for Imperial County, California](#)

[TCWF's Responsive Grantmaking Program](#)