

## Preface

**T**he California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is California's preeminent environmental law. It requires state, local, and other California public agencies to evaluate and disclose to the public and other agencies the potential environmental implications of their proposed actions before committing to them. Furthermore, it requires agencies to avoid or reduce, when feasible, the significant environmental impacts of their actions.

CEQA establishes substantive procedures to ensure that agencies accomplish the purposes of the law. The California Natural Resources Agency has adopted regulations, known as the State CEQA Guidelines, which provide detailed procedures that agencies must follow to implement the law. The key to compliance with CEQA is understanding the procedural steps and key decision points involved in the environmental review process established by the statute (Public Resources Code 21000 et seq.), the Guidelines (14 Cal. Code Reg. 15000 et seq.), agency CEQA procedures, if applicable, and relevant court decisions.

In the four decades since its enactment, CEQA has been praised by many as giving the public the ability to influence public agencies and the information to improve environmentally damaging projects, and criticized by others as a major impediment to California's economic progress and development. It has become a familiar topic whenever discussions about environmental protection, land use planning or economic development arise. Despite the divergent viewpoints on its relative benefits, CEQA is inextricably woven into the fabric of California governance, decision-making, and politics.

The authors of this deskbook have devoted their careers to achieving excellence in CEQA compliance. They have participated in many of the CEQA improvement efforts over the years and deeply believe that a solid knowledge of CEQA's policies, procedures and practices leads to successful implementation of the law. *CEQA Deskbook: A Step-by-Step Guide on How to Comply with the California Environmental Quality Act* presents the user with a handy, easy-to-

understand approach to CEQA. This 2012 edition contains new and improved materials designed to help public agency staff, consultants, attorneys, developers, and interested citizens understand the environmental review process, and identifies, in a simplified fashion, most of the key steps, requirements, and decision points necessary to comply with the law. This edition reflects the most recent changes to CEQA (as of June 2012), including all legislative and regulatory changes adopted through 2011, as well as the most important principles established by recent court decisions. Additionally, it includes the author's practical advice to help CEQA practitioners through the process of environmental review.

With this book users will be better able to:

- Determine whether CEQA applies to proposed projects and when exemptions are applicable
- Learn when a Negative Declaration is appropriate or whether an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must be prepared
- Prepare a legally defensible Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration, or EIR
- Prepare a “program level” EIR and understand how to streamline CEQA by “tiering” later analyses from that EIR
- Write feasible, enforceable, and effective mitigation measures
- Meaningfully review, evaluate, and comment on CEQA documents prepared by other public agencies
- Prepare joint CEQA/NEPA documents to satisfy both CEQA and the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- Understand the environmental review process and determine the roles and responsibilities of state and local agencies
- Make better decisions that take into account environmental factors

The book is intended to be used as a general guide to implementing the provisions of CEQA, for more detailed interpretations users should consult the CEQA statute, the State CEQA Guidelines, and relevant case law.

The legal citations in the book are not exhaustive. The handbook selectively cites CEQA (Pub. Res. Code Secs. 21000–21177), the State CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal. Code Reg. 15000-15387) other relevant statutes, case law, and other references when doing so clarifies the underlying legal authority for a particular requirement. The CEQA Statutes and the Guidelines are included as appendices. For detailed legal citations, users should refer to the applicable CEQA publications listed in the suggested reading section after the appendices.

For up-to-date information about changes in CEQA, the CEQA Guidelines, and CEQA case law, see the ICF website: website at: [www.icfi.com](http://www.icfi.com)

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Finally, the authors also wish to acknowledge the valuable input from colleagues at ICF International and many environmental professionals who have worked with the authors and attended CEQA training workshops over the years and shared their ideas for improving the book.

## **About the Authors**

Ronald E. Bass, J.D., AICP is a Senior Consultant with ICF International (formerly Jones & Stokes Associates). Mr. Bass has a professional and academic background in environmental law and planning. He has participated in a broad variety of planning and environmental studies under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other state and federal environmental laws. He provides strategic advice, peer review and issue resolution related to the implementation of CEQA and NEPA. Mr. Bass is a frequent speaker at professional workshops on environmental impact assessment. Mr. Bass received a J.D. from the Washington College of Law at American University, Washington, D.C.; an M.A. in environmental planning from California State University, Sacramento; and a B.A. in Anthropology from Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

Mr. Bass is co-author, with Mr. Bogdan, of *THE NEPA BOOK: A Step-By-Step Guide on How to Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act*. He is also a co-author of the CEQA chapters of *California Environmental Law and Land Use Practice* and a member of the on the editorial board of the *California Environmental Law Reporter*, published by LexisNexis/Mathew Bender.

Kenneth M. Bogdan, Esq., was environmental counsel and environmental education team leader and project director at ICF International for twenty-three years and is now with the California State Water Resources Control Board's Office of General Counsel. Ken's expertise is in analyzing issues regarding

compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and other federal and state environmental laws and regulations and assisting practitioners with understanding the complexities of environmental permitting requirements and developing strategies for compliance. Ken has conducted scores of CEQA and other environmental law training courses during the past decade, including tailored land use planning and CEQA courses. Ken graduated with a Bachelor of Sciences in Environmental Management from Rutgers University and a Juris Doctorate from the University of California, Davis, King Hall School of Law.

Mr. Bogdan, as well as being co-author of *The NEPA Book: A Step-By-Step Guide on How to Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act*, is an author of “Wetlands, Streams and Other Waters”; and the *League of Cities: Guide to Conservation Planning in California*. He has authored numerous CEQA and other environmental law case reviews for the *California Environmental Law Reporter*, published by LexisNexis/Mathew Bender.

Antero A. Rivasplata, AICP, is a technical director at ICF International, specializing in CEQA, land use planning, and environmental education. He manages the preparation of EIRs, Negative Declarations, and NEPA documents. In addition, he works with California planning law, Williamson Act, and zoning issues. In addition to being an instructor in CEQA and NEPA through the UC Extension, he is the editor of the Association of Environmental Professionals’ “Environmental Assessor” quarterly. He is a past director of the State Clearinghouse in the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) and, in addition to participating in the CEQA Guidelines amendments of the 1990s, was a co-author of several editions of the General Plan Guidelines while working there. Prior to OPR, Mr. Rivasplata worked as a county planner. Mr. Rivasplata received a B.S. from the University of California, Davis.

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