

Placer County Health and Safety Element Update | Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Placer County Health and Safety Element?

The Placer County Health and Safety Element identifies potential health and safety concerns in the unincorporated areas of Placer County and lays out goals and policies to help protect the community. It is a required element of the Placer County General Plan, which is the long-range blueprint for how Placer County will grow and use resources. State law requires all city and county governments to prepare a safety element as part of their General Plan. The state also requires the safety element to contain specific information and policies about natural and human-made hazards and climate change, and to maintain, implement, and regularly update these elements.

What does a Safety Element accomplish?

A safety element helps the County plan for future natural hazards and other threats to public health and safety. For example, the safety element can identify where fault zones or floodplains are located in Placer County, allowing the County's emergency response services to anticipate where there might be victims or people in need of emergency assistance. The natural hazard descriptions in the safety element also help the County make decisions about where certain types of development should be allowed. For instance, the County could decide that certain types of development are vulnerable to harm if located in an area prone to flooding or wildfires and determine that special design and construction measures be used to reduce the flooding risk to the project.

Why is the Health and Safety Element being updated?

Placer County's Health and Safety Element was last updated in 2013. Recent changes to state law require that cities and counties review their safety elements when their housing elements (another required element of the General Plan) or their Local Hazard Mitigation Plans are updated, at least once every eight years, and make updates to the safety element to include new information and comply with new state requirements. Placer County is currently updating its Housing Element, as required by a regular schedule specified by the state, and the County has reviewed its Health and Safety Element as a result. The Health and Safety Element currently lacks some required sections and updated information, and so the County is conducting an update to provide consistency with state law and greater protection to Placer County communities.

What issues are addressed in the Health and Safety Element?

State law requires that the Health and Safety Element contain information and policies to help protect the community from mudslides and landslides, earthquakes and other seismic and geologic risks, flooding and

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dam failure, fires, climate change, and evacuation planning. Communities may also include optional issues. The Placer County Health and Safety Element currently includes airport hazards, emergency management, public safety, hazardous materials, and avalanches as additional optional issues. The updated Health and Safety Element may include new optional issues as needed.

Are there other projects related to this Health and Safety Element Update that Placer County is undertaking at this time?

Placer County is working on updates to two other community safety and resilience-planning projects, the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The County has also recently completed preparing the Placer County Sustainability Plan (PCSP), which was adopted in January of this year.

What is the difference between the Health and Safety Element Update and these other projects?

The PCSP includes an assessment of how climate-related hazards are expected to change in future years and lays out policies to help the community better respond and recover faster from these hazards. It also includes efforts to identify and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Placer County. While the Health and Safety Element does not discuss GHG emissions, it is required to include a climate change vulnerability assessment discussing how Placer County may be harmed by climate-related hazards, as well as policies to protect against these hazards. The vulnerability assessment and policies in the PCSP can help the Health and Safety Element meet state requirements.

The Placer County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) discusses individual natural hazards and risks in Placer County, describes which population sectors and critical assets are vulnerable to these hazards, and proposes short-term action items that the County can undertake to reduce the hazard risks. While the LHMP and Health and Safety Element both discuss natural hazards and ways to reduce their risk, the LHMP provides more detail and technical information about specific hazards than the Health and Safety Element. Policies in the Health and Safety Element are often broader than those in the LHMP and may be longer-term strategies.

The Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a document that aims to reduce fire risks in unincorporated Placer County, excluding the Tahoe Basin. The CWPP includes a profile for each community in the unincorporated area, describing the community's capability to protect itself against fire. While this overlaps with the Health and Safety Element's fire hazard content, the CWPP only includes a detailed discussion on fire safety. For example, the CWPP contains wildfire-resistant landscaping guidelines, which is not required to be in the Health and Safety Element. The Health and Safety Element contains information and policies on other hazards, such as flooding and seismic activity.

Unlike the other three planning documents, the County is legally required by the State of California to have a safety element in its General Plan. All the other plans are separate documents that have data or policies that help supplement the safety element but are not required by the state. For example, the PCSP is not required under state law, but the vulnerability assessment in the PCSP can be referenced by the Health and Safety Element to meet state requirements. While the other three plans contain information that can be included in the Health and Safety Element, the Health and Safety Element also has unique content that is not covered in these other documents.