

EQUINOX CENTER

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Job Growth, Economic Security Crucial to Region's Quality of Life, Report Finds

Equinox Center identifies 14 key areas where San Diego leads, lags behind

Equinox Center, a non-partisan, independent nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring a strong economy, healthy environment, and vibrant communities for the San Diego Region released its 2nd San Diego Regional Quality of Life Dashboard today. The report provides a lens through which to view the region's future growth.

For the first time this year, researchers examined more closely the relationship between the region's economy and its quality of life. The report finds that the high cost of living and loss of better-paying jobs in the region put residents' quality of life at risk.

"Equinox annually publishes the Dashboard as a tool to provide a fact-based foundation for leadership and decision making" said Aaron Contorer, Chair of the Board and one of the founders of Equinox Center.

"This year's report reinforces that quality of life begins at home. If residents feel financially stable, they are better able to benefit from and contribute to our region's quality of life."

The dashboard includes 14 key metrics, including jobs and wages, water and energy consumption, climate change, mobility, housing affordability, waste disposal, and land development. The report compares San Diego County to other California regions and identifies areas where the region does well and highlights issues that need serious attention. **The 2011 report states that while the region improved on many of the indicators compared to its own numbers last year, the metropolitan area still lags behind many other regions of the state and country.**

KEY FINDINGS

Quality of Life begins with Jobs and Income: the County lost 70,000 jobs from 2008-2009 due to the recession. Looking at job growth in the last decade, **San Diego fared better than many other regions of California.** However, long term trends show we are **losing higher paying jobs and gaining in lower paying sectors.**

Cost of Living is a Significant Concern: While the collapse of the housing market has driven home prices down, **over half of all homeowners and renters in the region spend more than one third of their income on housing, putting them at financial risk.** The high cost of housing is a driving factor in other quality of life issues including sprawling residential development, traffic congestion, long commute times and high transportation costs.

Slower Economic Growth and New Policies Resulted in Less Waste/More Efficient Use of Resources: Per capita water and energy usage declined, waste disposal and consumption of land for

residential buildings decreased, resulting in less air pollution, less trash going to landfills, and less destruction of natural areas.

Quality of Life is Not Equal for Everyone- Low income and communities of color in the region have less access to parks, good paying jobs, and clean air. To ensure these communities are engaged actively in planning for the future, inequities need to be addressed.

“Many of the consumption trends ticked downward in the past two years because of slower economic growth,” commented Ann Tartre, Equinox Center’s Acting Director. “But in the long term, with population growth and economic growth resuming, resuming business-as-usual won’t work. We need to develop an integrated, regional plan with clear goals and benchmarks for a healthy, lasting prosperity for San Diego County”.

Other Key Findings:

- Thanks to model conservation planning programs in the county, **45% of San Diego County’s land mass is protected**. These natural areas provide significant **recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat** for our region. On average, we have 404 acres of parkland per 1000 residents.
- The region is making **steady progress** toward **renewable energy goals**. We **increased** our **renewable energy supply by 3%** in the last year.
- San Diego County will be the **first region in the country with baseline greenhouse gas inventories** for all community and local government operations. Many municipalities have **set climate goals** and are taking **strong action on them**.
- The region is a **leader in the cleantech/clean jobs sector**. **Green tech jobs are the 3rd largest category** of new technology jobs being created in the county, behind software and pharmaceuticals/biotech.

“The San Diego Foundation is pleased to be a primary sponsor of Equinox Center’s Quality of Life Report”, said Emily Young, Senior Director Environment Analysis and Strategy at the Foundation. “Equinox’s work demonstrates the value of the non-profit sector in advancing some of the gains we’ve made in areas like climate change and land conservation. We hope this report will contribute to community dialogue and action to create and sustain a strong economy and a healthy environment”.

More information about Equinox and the Quality of Life Dashboard is available at www.equinoxcenter.org

About *Equinox Center*: The Equinox Center was founded in 2008 and funded by local donors, foundations and corporations. Equinox researches and advances best practices and innovative solutions to balance San Diego's regional growth with our finite natural resources. The Quality of Life Dashboard is an annual study conducted by Equinox Center with key support coming from The San Diego Foundation, Contorer Foundation, Brown Family Fund, Orca Fund, Qualcomm, Cox, SeaWorld, SDG&E and many other individuals and businesses.