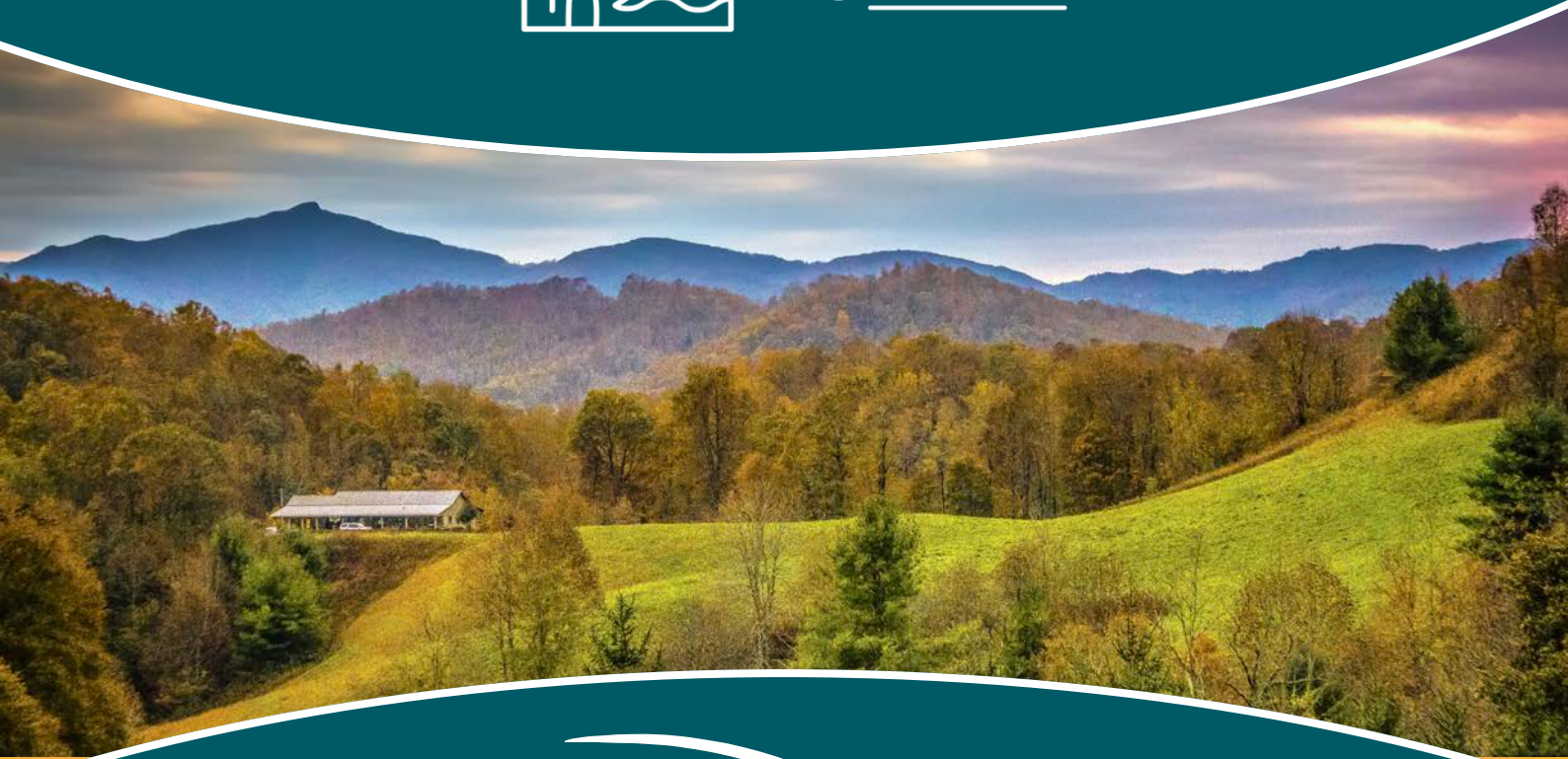




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ADVOCATING FOR CLEAN AIR!

A Guide to Air Quality Advocacy in North Carolina

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INTRODUCTION

LET'S ADVOCATE FOR CLEAN AIR!

The CleanAIRE NC Advocacy Manual is your guide to championing meaningful environmental change for air quality.

Through clean air advocacy, you can organize and take action for policy solutions that lead to better health for our communities. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or just getting started, this comprehensive approach will help you navigate the complexities of air quality issues.

So get ready to make a difference in your community. And remember: Every voice matters.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

This manual will equip you with knowledge, strategies, and tools to amplify your voice, influence policy, and inspire action. Over the next few pages, you'll learn how to:

- **Identify key issues:** Use this manual to understand the air quality challenges facing your community and identify the most pressing issues to address.
- **Build a strong advocacy campaign:** Develop a targeted strategy, craft compelling messages, and engage with policymakers to advance your goals.
- **Mobilize your community:** Learn how to build coalitions, organize events, and leverage social media to raise awareness and drive action.
- **Work with policymakers:** Understand the legislative process, build relationships with elected officials, and advocate for policy changes.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Need help getting started ? Our team is here to support you.

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SECTION 1

UNDERSTANDING AIR QUALITY ISSUES

“I know that our bodies were made to thrive only in pure air, and the scenes in which pure air is found.” – John Muir, unpublished journals

1.1 What is Air Quality?

We all need clean air to breathe. Healthy air is a vital part of a healthy community, and it's something we all deserve.

Air quality is the condition of the air around us. It's a measure of the presence and concentration of various pollutants in the atmosphere. These pollutants come from a variety of sources, including vehicle emissions, industrial processes, and the natural environment.

We eat 2 to 3 pounds of food, drink 4 to 5 pounds of water, and breathe in 30 pounds of air every day.¹

Good air quality is essential for our health and well-being. Breathing in polluted air can cause a range of health issues, including respiratory problems, heart disease, and cancer.

1.2 Causes of Poor Air Quality

Air pollution can come from a variety of sources, both natural and human-made.

Understanding these sources is essential for identifying and addressing the root causes of air quality problems.

In the United States, the four primary sources of air pollution emissions are:



Mobile Sources:
cars, trucks, and other highway vehicles; non-road mobile sources.



Stationary Sources:
electric utilities and industrial boilers; industrial and other processes.



Area Sources:
agricultural areas; cities; wood-burning stoves



Natural Sources:
wind-blown dust; wildfires; volcanoes

Major Air Pollutants

The two biggest air quality problems in North Carolina are ground-level ozone (the primary ingredient in “smog”) and **fine particulate matter** (PM2.5, or “soot”). Both pollutants are **primarily caused by the burning of fossil fuels (especially for transportation and electricity generation) along with industrial processes.**

Other common pollutants of major concern for public health include sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and carbon monoxide. Fossil fuel combustion also emits carbon dioxide and other climate-changing greenhouse gasses, which amplify the health risks of air pollution exposure.

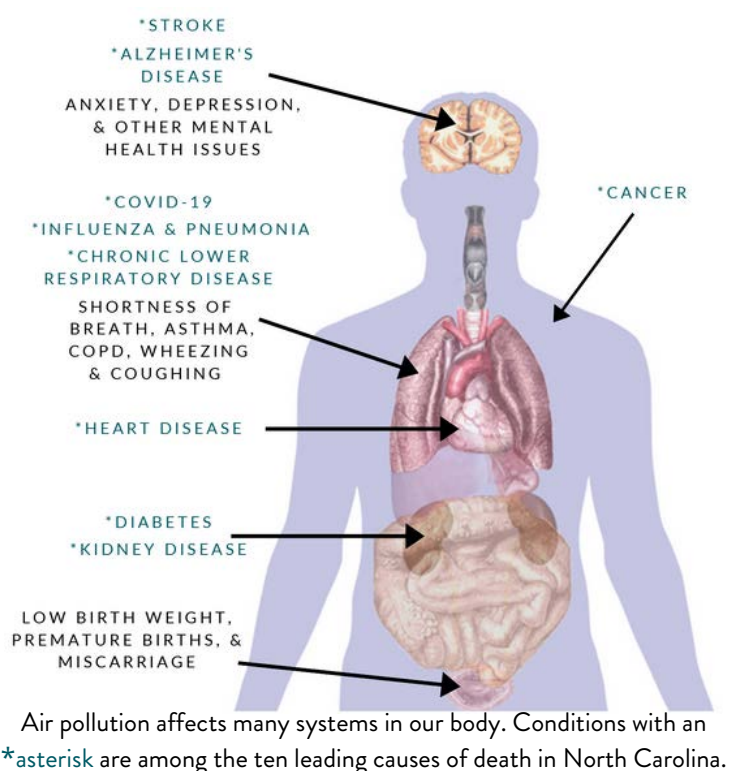
1.3 Health Impacts of Air Pollution

Air pollution is a major public health threat, impacting millions worldwide. Exposure to harmful pollutants, particularly criteria pollutants, can cause a variety of health issues, affecting multiple bodily systems and increasing the risk of numerous diseases. Compounds such as benzene and formaldehyde increase our risk for lung cancer, breast cancer, leukemia, and Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma.²

Worldwide, air pollution impacts millions of people; a recent Harvard study estimates that air pollution from fossil fuel combustion is responsible for one in five deaths globally.³

Meanwhile, **nine out of the ten leading causes of death in North Carolina are caused or exacerbated by air pollution** (see figure to the right).⁴

Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing effective public health strategies and policies.



Nine of the ten leading causes of death in North Carolina are caused or exacerbated by air pollution.

Vulnerable Populations

The health burdens of air pollution are not shared equally. Low-income or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities often live in closer proximity to emission sources due to a longstanding legacy of redlining and housing discrimination, and may experience limited access to healthcare.

Some groups are also more sensitive to air pollutants. Children, for example, are particularly vulnerable due to their still-developing organs and higher breathing rates, and early exposure can cause long-term health problems.

Air pollution poses the greatest health risks to:



Children



Pregnant Women



Elderly People



Outdoor Workers



Those With Underlying Conditions



BIPOC Communities

1.4 Environmental & Economic Impacts

Beyond our public health, air pollution also has a significant impact on the environment and the economy. By taking action to reduce air pollution, we can protect our health, environment, and economy.⁵

Environmental Consequences

Climate Change: Many pollutants, such as carbon dioxide and methane, trap heat in the atmosphere, leading to rising temperatures, sea level rise, and extreme weather events.

Water Bodies: Air pollutants such as sulfur and nitrogen can lead to acidification and eutrophication in lakes, rivers, and streams, negatively impacting aquatic ecosystems.

Forests: Sulfur and nitrogen deposition can harm trees, soils, and plant biodiversity.

Ground-Level Ozone: Ozone pollution harms forest health and reduces visibility, making it more difficult to enjoy outdoor activities.

Heavy Metals: Mercury and other heavy metals accumulate in the food chain, posing risks to wildlife and human health.

Economic Consequences

Healthcare Costs: Widespread exposure to air pollution increases the costs of treating related health issues in humans.

Productivity: Pollution can reduce worker productivity, leading to economic losses.

Property Damage: Air pollution can damage buildings, monuments, and other property.

Forestry and Agriculture: Damage to forests and crops can cause economic losses in the forestry and agricultural sectors.

Water Treatment Costs: Acidification and contamination of water bodies make it more expensive to safely treat drinking water.

Reduced Tourism: Degradation of natural scenic vistas and recreational areas can negatively affect tourism revenues.



SECTION 2

BUILDING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

2.1 What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is supporting or promoting a cause, idea, policy, or group of people. It involves speaking, writing, or acting on behalf of oneself or others to influence decisions, policies, or actions that affect rights, interests, or well-being.

Advocacy can take many forms, including:

- Lobbying: Engaging with lawmakers to influence legislation.
- Campaigning: Organizing efforts to mobilize public support.
- Public speaking: Addressing audiences to raise awareness.
- Writing letters: Communicating with decision-makers or the public.
- Organizing Events: Creating platforms for discussion and action.
- Using Social Media: Raising awareness and mobilizing support online.

Advocacy plays a crucial role in democracy by giving a voice to communities, promoting social justice, and holding institutions and decision-makers accountable. **Policymakers can only be experts on some issues and rely on advocates to educate them about issues and concerns.**

“Advocacy is an important part of public voice. It can’t just be advocates, can’t just be regulators, can’t just be legislators. It takes all of us working together to make sure that the citizens are safe.” – Robbin Barrows, NC Air Awareness

2.2 Getting Organized: Best Practices for an Advocacy Campaign

To create a meaningful impact, you need a solid plan. Building a successful advocacy strategy involves several key steps.

Define Your Goal

Clearly define what you want to achieve through your advocacy efforts. Whether it's policy change, raising awareness, or influencing public opinion, having a specific goal will help guide your strategy.

Start by identifying the problem. What are its root causes? Why is it harmful? Who is affected?

Then articulate the desired outcome of your efforts. Be as specific as possible in stating your goals, and ensure you are setting goals you can realistically achieve. Nobody can solve every problem. Determine which issues are most important to you and focus your efforts accordingly.

SMART Goals

Specific: Goals should be focused and clearly stated, so everyone can understand your objectives.

Measurable: Identify metrics to track your progress.

Achievable: Set realistic goals. Is this something that can be realistically accomplished?

Relevant: Be sure that your goals align with your desired outcome.

Time-bound: Set attainable timelines for your campaign to stay on track.

Identify Target Audiences & Stakeholders

Determine who you are trying to reach or influence, and work to understand their needs, values, and concerns. Understanding your audience will help you decide how to frame your messaging and which strategies and tactics to pursue.

To identify the stakeholders who may have an interest or be impacted by your campaign, consider the following questions:

- Who is most affected by the air quality issue you are addressing?
- Who has the power to make the changes you seek?
- Who can help you mobilize support for your cause?

Research the Issue

Gather information about the air quality problem you are addressing, including its causes, impacts, and existing policies and regulations. Is this a local or a statewide issue? And are other people or groups already doing work around this?

You can also conduct research around how the air pollutants or emissions you're targeting affect different groups of people. This might include reviewing air quality reports, health studies, or environmental justice reports.

Develop Messaging

Effective messaging is essential. Your messages should be clear, concise, and persuasive. They should resonate with your target audience and communicate the importance of your goals.

Build a Coalition

Advocacy is more effective when many individuals or organizations work together. Build alliances with like-minded groups, community leaders, experts, influencers, affected individuals, and other stakeholders who can help support your cause.

Create a Communications Plan

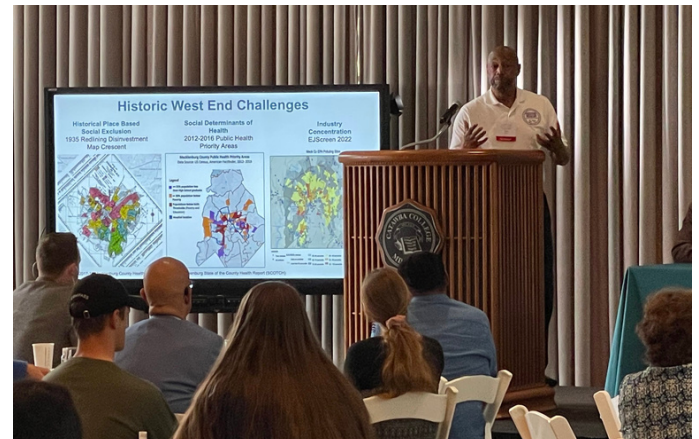
Take some time to outline how you will reach your target audience and deliver your message. Elements of a strategic plan might include:

- **Tactics:** Determine the specific activities you will undertake (e.g. petitions, media campaigns, lobbying, grassroots organizing, etc.).
- **Channels:** Select the most effective communication channels you can use to reach different audiences. These could include social media, traditional media, email, community events, direct engagement with policymakers, etc.
- **Timeline:** Establish a timeline with milestones to track progress and ensure accountability.

Mobilize Your Community

Now that you have a strategy in place and coalition partners to help carry it out, it is time to engage your target audience.

Build support for your cause through storytelling, calls-to-action, volunteer opportunities, and events. Encourage allies and supporters to share their own stories and advocate alongside you.



Monitor, Evaluate, & Adapt

Develop a plan for how you will track your progress, assess the impact of your efforts, and adjust your strategy as needed. Advocacy requires both persistence and flexibility. Collect feedback and data to evaluate the impact your campaign is having, and be prepared to adapt your strategies to overcome challenges or barriers.

Sustain Momentum

Advocacy is often a long-term (and sometimes frustrating) endeavor. It's important to stay motivated, even when progress seems slow! Celebrate small victories, and always work to learn from setbacks. Prioritize your physical and mental health by taking time for yourself. And stay informed on the latest developments on your issue to identify new opportunities for action.

2.3 Researching Policies & Regulations

Before you can advocate for change, you need to understand the status quo. That means learning about the relevant North Carolina policies and regulations already in place:

- **Search for Legislation:** In North Carolina, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) is the primary authority over air quality regulations. Go to the official [NCDEQ website](#) and look for sections or tabs related to "Air Quality" or "Divisions." You can also use the search function to look for specific laws, policies, or documents related to air quality rules, statutes, permits, and compliance guidelines.
- **Explore the Regulatory Framework:** Read through the air quality regulatory framework provided by NCDEQ, including emission standards, monitoring requirements, permitting processes, and enforcement actions.
- **Check for Updates:** Ensure that the information you find is current. Policies can change over time, so look for updates or recent amendments.
- **Review State Reports:** NCDEQ publications often provide insights into air quality trends, compliance issues, and the effectiveness of current policies.
- **Visit Legislative Websites:** You can also search the [North Carolina General Assembly](#) for relevant bills, acts, or resolutions.
- **Consult Stakeholders & Experts:** Connect with environmental advocacy groups, industry associations, or community organizations. Get advice from experts in environmental law, air quality management, or policy analysis.

Organize and assess the information you gather to identify opportunities for change.

The Importance of Finding Trustworthy Information

To build a solid foundation for your advocacy, it's crucial to ensure you're gathering information from reliable sources:

Government Agencies: With a primary objective to make decisions in the best interests of the public, many agencies consider all factors including cost, reliability, energy security, social impacts, and environmental concerns.

- *Examples:* [N.C. Department of Environmental Quality \(NCDEQ\)](#); [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#); [Public hearing transcripts](#)

News Outlets & Publications: Keep an eye on reputable news outlets for updates and analyses on environmental issues.

- *Examples:* Newspapers (e.g. the [News & Observer](#)); Local NPR stations (e.g. [WFAE](#)); Inside industry publications (e.g. the [Utility Dive](#))

Environmental Organizations: These organizations frequently work closely on environmental initiatives, developing deep expertise in air quality issues.

- *Examples:* [Environmental Defense Fund \(EDF\)](#); [Southern Environmental Law Center \(SELC\)](#); [Natural Resources Defense Council \(NRDC\)](#)

Why Trust Matters

Accuracy ensures effective advocacy: By using credible sources, your arguments carry more weight.

Misinformation can hinder progress: Biased or inaccurate information can lead to harmful or misguided policy decisions.

Empowering informed choices: Understanding the trade-offs of different policies strengthens your ability to advocate for solutions that truly meet your community's needs.

2.4 Crafting Your Message

There's an old adage in communications: **“The best story wins.”**

People respond most strongly to stories and values-based messages. Use narratives to humanize the issue you're advocating for. Hearing personal stories helps your audience connect on an emotional level and understand the challenges and perspectives of those directly affected by air quality challenges.

Whether you plan to engage supporters over social media, write to your local newspaper, or speak at a public hearing, the foundation of any successful advocacy campaign starts with an effective message:

- **State Your Case:** Clearly state your position and highlight your key concerns, priorities, and recommendations.
- **Keep it Simple:** Use clear and concise language that is easy to understand.
- **Speak Your Truth:** Firsthand experience can be the most impactful. Personalize your message by sharing how the issue affects your community, health, and economic well-being. Statements with integrity carry more weight than generic talking points.
- **Back it Up:** Lead with values and stories, follow with facts. When possible, use facts, data, and credible sources to support your position.
- **Focus on Solutions and Opportunities:** Emphasize the positive outcomes of a strong clean air policy, such as cleaner air, public health benefits, and economic opportunities.
- **Be Respectful:** Ensure your messaging is courteous, professional, and respectful.
- **Call to Action:** Close by stressing the urgency of action and the benefits of acting now.

The Messengers

It's not just what you say, it's who says it.

Strong messengers are essential to an effective advocacy strategy. So what should you look for in a messenger?

- **Relatability:** Community members who can connect on a personal level are more likely to be effective.
- **Expertise:** Individuals with expertise on air quality or health issues can lend credibility to your message.
- **Diversity:** A diverse group of messengers can help reach a wider audience and result in a more inclusive message.
- **Authenticity:** People can spot inauthenticity a mile away. Choose messengers who genuinely believe in your goals.

Compelling messengers might include a community leader, a nurse, or the parent of a child living with asthma.

2.5 Delivering Your Message

You now have a powerful message to share. But to create a lasting impact, you need to get your message out there. This section will explore some of the most effective methods for reaching your target audience.

With Public Officials

Policymakers often seek public input to inform their decisions. This is a crucial component of the democratic process, and an opportunity to weigh in on policy debates that will shape the future of your community.

However you plan to participate in the policymaking process, be sure to research the topic beforehand and consider how you'd like to express your views.



REMEMBER

You do not have to be a policy or air quality expert to express how something will directly impact you or your community. Your voice matters!

Speaking at a Public Hearing

Public hearings offer a venue for communities and advocates to meet face-to-face with public officials before policy decisions are made.

If you are considering speaking at a public hearing, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Attire:** Dress for success. Business attire is appropriate.
- **Leave an Impression:** Introduce yourself (your name, the community you live in, or the organization you represent if applicable). Explain why this issue matters to you, and how you will be impacted. And stay on message!
- **Respectful Engagement:** Public hearings often take place in a courtroom and in front of the public—even virtual hearings are conducted in a court-like manner. Your audience will always be more receptive to a message delivered respectfully. Let people remember you for your powerful arguments, not an inflammatory exchange of words!
- **Be Aware of Time:** Public hearings typically have time limits for statements, often around three to five minutes. Time yourself when practicing your statement, and keep your message concise and to the point.
- **Practice, Practice, Practice:** Practice your message before delivering it in public to build your confidence. Ask friends and family members to listen to your practice and offer feedback. And remember, it's okay to be nervous! But a well-practiced statement will help public officials follow your story and hold their attention.
- **Bring a Written Copy:** Having a written copy of your statement with you on the stand will help you keep on track. The governing agency may ask for a copy of your statement as well.



Former CleanAIRE NC Executive Director June Blotnik speaking at a Charlotte City Council meeting.

Submitting Public Comments

Public comments are written statements that individuals or organizations can submit to government agencies or elected officials to express their views on proposed policies or regulations. Comments can be used to provide feedback, raise concerns, or offer suggestions for improvement.

The process for submitting public comments may vary depending on the policymaking body involved. However, most agencies will provide instructions on their website or when announcing a public comment period.

Here are some guidelines to help you get started on public comment writing:

- Follow all instructions provided by the agency, including whether comments should be submitted by mail, email, or online.
- Identify the issues or the docket number (from the notice of public comment) that you are commenting on. If you are only commenting on a particular part of a notice, cite the relevant page number and paragraph.
- Be clear and concise. Clearly state your position and why you hold it, and avoid using technical jargon.
- When possible, provide examples and evidence to support your arguments.
- Share your story and establish your connection to the issue. Do you live in an impacted community? Do you have professional expertise or credentials in the issue? Are you representing yourself or an organization?
- Anticipate potential objections or criticisms to your position. This will allow you to address them proactively in your comments with evidence.
- Proofread carefully and ensure your comments are professional and respectful.

Policy Briefs

Another way to educate policymakers and influence decisions on an issue is to craft a policy brief, a concise summary of an issue with recommendations for action.

When writing a policy brief, focus on clarity, evidence, and actionable steps. To make information easy to find for both policymakers and the public, structure your brief into sections such as an executive summary, a policy overview with background information, a clear problem statement, an examination of potential options for action, and your recommendations.

With the Press

Generating press coverage can also be very effective at getting your message out to a wider audience with your message. Both the voting public and their elected officials watch the news.

Two effective media tools advocates can use live on the newspaper's opinion page. Op-eds (opinion editorials) and letters to the editor (LTEs) are both letters submitted to a publication to express viewpoints and make arguments around an issue.

Letters to the Editor (LTEs)

LTEs are short responses to something a newspaper has printed recently.

- Find the newspaper's LTE guidelines: how to send the letter, who to send it to, and length/format restrictions. **Adhere to the paper's word count limits:** LTEs are typically 200 words or less.
- Focus on one main point, why it's important to you, and a clear call to action.
- Keep your writing simple, easy to read, and to-the-point. Write to an 8th grade reading level to reach a wider audience. Be opinionated, factual, and positive.
- Share personal stories and mention personal experience with the issue, if you can.
- If sending by email, put the LTE in the body of the email rather than an attachment. Many papers will not open email attachments due to the risk of viruses.
- Follow up with the newspaper's opinion page editor after submitting your LTE to ensure the paper received it. If the LTE isn't published, you can try updating and re-submitting it.
- If you are targeting a legislator, company, or group in your letter, send them a copy of it once it's published.

Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds)

Op-eds are usually longer than LTEs and can be used to discuss complex issues, present arguments, and offer solutions.⁶

- Find the newspaper's op-ed guidelines: how to send the letter, who to send it to, and length/format restrictions. **Adhere to the paper's word count limits:** Op-eds are typically 750 words or less.
- Reach out to the newspaper's opinion page editor to let them know you're preparing an op-ed, when they can expect it, and ask for suggestions on what the paper looks for in the op-eds they publish.
- Focus on one main issue, why it's important, and one clear call to action.
- Keep your writing simple, easy to read, and to-the-point. Write to an 8th grade reading level, and avoid overly technical writing or jargon. Short sentences and paragraphs are best.
- Use a strong, engaging opening paragraph to hook the reader, and make it clear up top what you are calling for.
- Use personal stories and examples that can help illustrate and humanize the issue you are writing about.
- Point out weaknesses in opposing arguments and use facts to back up your points.
- A few days after you've submitted your op-ed, follow up with a phone call to the opinion page editor. Make your case for why the piece is timely and why the paper's readers would find it interesting. Ask when the paper will make a decision on whether it plans to publish the op-ed, and suggest you may submit it to other publications if the first newspaper declines it.
- Submit your op-ed to just one newspaper at a time! Newspapers like to have exclusive rights to it. If you decide to try submitting your op-ed to another paper, be sure to communicate that to the first paper.

Social Media Advocacy

Social media is a powerful tool to connect with others, share information, and build momentum for causes you care about. Here are some strategies for leveraging social media to advocate for air quality in North Carolina:

Get Connected:

Engage with others: Comment on relevant posts, ask questions, share your own thoughts, and start conversations.

Use impactful hashtags: Find out what's trending to join ongoing conversations.

Tag relevant organizations and officials: Increase visibility and encourage dialogue.

Raise Awareness:

Share credible information: Post articles and studies about the importance of air quality and its potential impacts on North Carolina.

Use visuals: Images, videos, and memes can grab attention and simplify complex information.

Personalize your message: Share stories of how climate change or air pollution affects your community or family, or a personal message of what you hope to see in the future for North Carolina.

Call Others to Action:

Spread the word about key action opportunities: Include dates, times, and registration links in your posts.

Remember:

- Be respectful and avoid personal attacks.
- Fact-check your information and use trusted sources.
- Respond to comments and questions constructively.
- Keep your posts positive and engaging.
- Use social media as a tool to build partnerships and inspire action.

2.6 Hosting Events

The communication channels explored in Section 2.5 are essential for reaching a wide audience. But don't overlook the power of in-person connections. Community events offer a unique opportunity to engage your audience on a deeper level and inspire action.

Tips for Hosting an Educational Workshop:

1. **Identify the Need:** Determine what educational topics or skills are in demand or would benefit your community.
2. **Define Your Goals:** Clarify what you want to achieve with the workshops. Are you aiming to educate, empower, or build a specific skill set among participants?
3. **Create the Agenda:** Outline the content and structure of the event. Break information into manageable segments and decide on the format (lectures, hands-on activities, etc.).

4. **Secure a Venue:** Select a location that is easily accessible, comfortable, and equipped with necessary amenities.
5. **Set a Date and Time:** Choose a date and time that is convenient for your target audience. Consider factors like other community events, holidays, and the availability of participants who are juggling work and family commitments.
6. **Recruit Speakers or Instructors:** If you want to bring in guest speakers, ensure they have the necessary expertise and experience to deliver high-quality content. Reach out to local experts or professionals who might be willing to volunteer their time.
7. **Promote the Workshop:** Spread the word through a variety of channels, including social media, community centers, libraries, newsletters, and word of mouth. Clearly communicate the workshop's benefits and what participants can expect to learn.
8. **Prepare Materials:** Develop clear, concise, and visually appealing materials, such as handouts or slides, that support your workshop objectives.
9. **Organize Logistics:** Arrange for any equipment or supplies needed for the workshop, including projectors, whiteboards, pens, or materials for hands-on activities. Depending on the size of your venue, you may want to set up a registration process to track attendance and ensure you have enough materials for all participants.
10. **Facilitate the Workshop:** On the day of the workshop, arrive early to set up the venue and greet participants. Be prepared to facilitate discussions, manage time effectively, and address any questions or concerns that arise.
11. **Collect Feedback & Follow Up:** After the workshop, gather feedback from participants to understand what worked well and what could be improved. Send follow-up communications to participants to provide additional resources, answer lingering questions, or invite them to future events.
12. **Evaluate Success:** Assess whether you met your initial goals for the workshop. Reflect on lessons learned and how you could improve future workshops.



CleanAIRE NC Community Science Manager Daisha Walls speaking at a Sampson County meeting.



SECTION 3

WORKING WITH POLICYMAKERS

3.1 Understanding the Policymaking Process

Navigating the complex world of policymaking can be daunting, but it's essential for driving change on air quality issues.

By familiarizing themselves with the system, advocates can pinpoint where policies can be improved or strengthened while anticipating potential obstacles and how to overcome them. A deep understanding of the process also enables advocates to build effective arguments, presenting data and solutions in a way that resonates with policymakers, building credibility and trust.

3.2 Who Makes Air Policy Decisions?

In North Carolina, air policies are shaped by several different entities at the federal, state, and local levels.

Federal

All state and local policies governing air quality must align with federal policies, which are primarily set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA creates rules and regulations that comply with the federal Clean Air Act and other relevant environmental laws passed by the U.S. Congress. States and municipalities cannot have weaker rules than the EPA, but they can implement stronger ones.

State

N.C. General Assembly

The North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) creates all state laws. It is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives (120 members) and the Senate (50 members). North Carolina voters elect members of both chambers every two years.



North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper signing Executive Order 246 on environmental justice.

Bills are typically introduced in one chamber, where they are referred to a committee of NCGA members to debate and modify the legislation in meetings open to the public. Once legislation is approved by the committee process it can come to the chamber floor for a vote. If it passes, the bill is sent to the other chamber and undergo the same process.

If the other chamber significantly changes the legislation, a conference committee meets behind closed doors to bring the two versions into alignment and reintroduce the bill to both chambers. Laws passed by the NCGA go to the governor, who can either sign and enact the law or to veto it (a $\frac{3}{5}$ majority of both NCGA chambers can vote to override the governor's veto).

N.C. Department of Environmental Quality

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is a cabinet-level department whose secretary is appointed by the governor. All laws governing air quality go to the DEQ, which writes rules for how the law will be implemented and enforced.

Three entities within the DEQ are of particular importance for air quality advocates:

- **The Division of Air Quality (DAQ)** proposes and ensures compliance with air quality rules, operates a statewide air quality monitoring network, develops and implements plans to meet initiatives, and educates the public regarding air quality issues.
- **The Environmental Management Commission (EMC)** is a 15-member deliberative body jointly appointed by the governor, the Commissioner of Agriculture, and the NCGA. It oversees and adopts rules for several DEQ divisions, including DAQ. The EMC Chair appoints a subset of members to serve on the Air Quality Committee (AQC), which focuss on rules governing the state's air resources. The AQC and EMC generally meet every two months in the Archdale Building at 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh. Meetings are open to the public and broadcast as a webinar via links provided on the EMC webpage.⁷
- **The Secretaries' Science Advisory Board (SAB)** assists DEQ and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in managing potentially dangerous emerging chemicals. The SAB evaluates the health risks of contaminants, advises on regulations and recommends a range of acceptable ambient levels (AALs) likely to safeguard against adverse health effects, and helps identify emerging concerns.⁸

Local

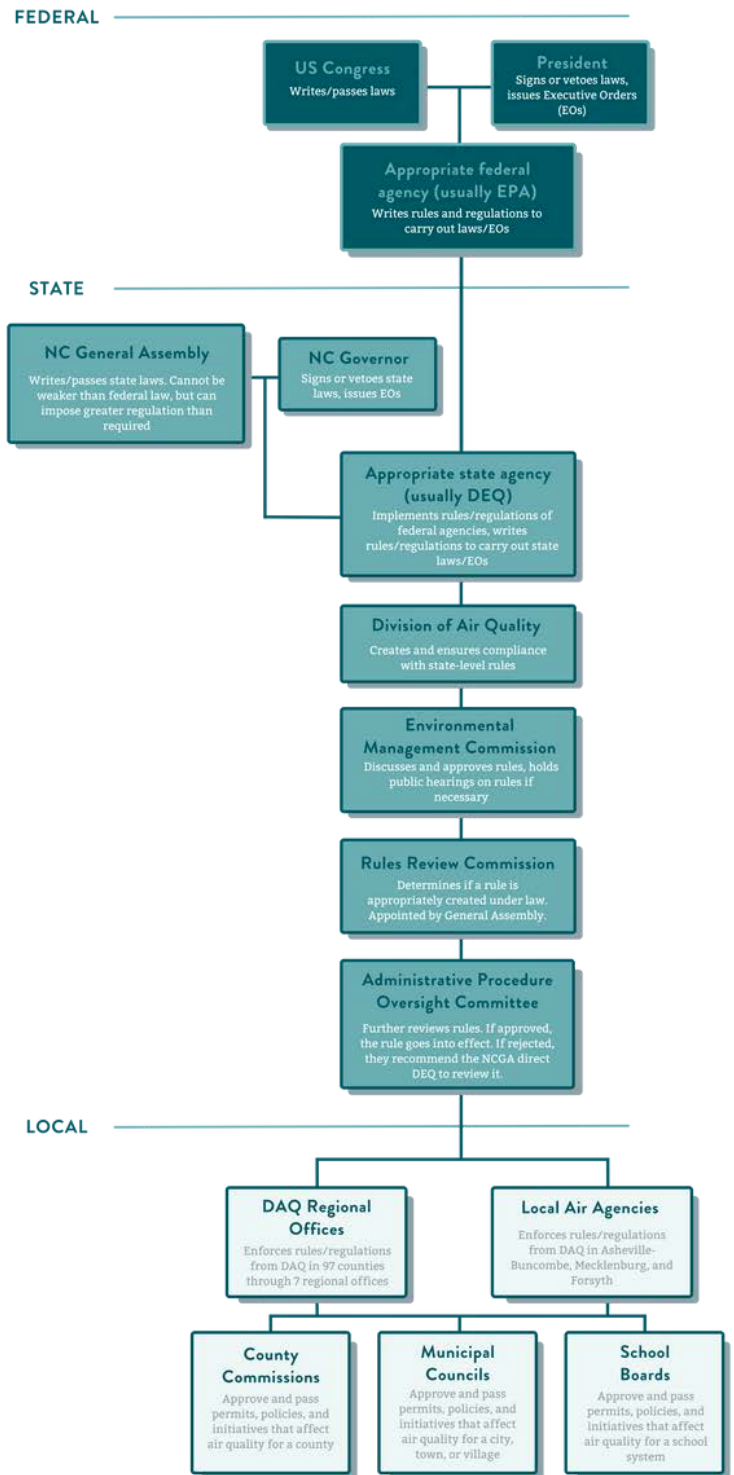
Regional and Local Air Quality Agencies

DAQ enforces air quality [regulations](#) for 97 North Carolina counties through seven [regional offices](#) (Asheville, Mooresville, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Fayetteville, Wilmington, and Washington). Three counties (Buncombe, Forsyth, and Mecklenburg) have their own local agencies. These regional and local offices also operate [air monitoring equipment](#), perform inspections, and issue [permits](#) for [facilities](#).

The three local agencies generally adopt state rules, but may enact stronger local rules on some issues. (For example, heavily forested areas may adopt stricter rules on open burning to prevent wildfires.) The local agency board may hold a public hearing to discuss the proposed changes to state rules, and all changes must be approved by the local county or city commission.

Municipal and County Citizen Committees

While school boards, municipal councils, and county commissions don't formally set air quality rules, their decisions can impact air quality. These citizen committees can approve permits, zoning rules, energy efficiency requirements for new buildings, and mass transit initiatives. Information about a citizen committee and its rule approval process is generally available on the city or county government website, or through the clerk's office.



Hierarchy of air quality decision-making.

Resources:

[N.C. DEQ Regional Offices](#)

[Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency](#)

[Mecklenburg Air Quality Agency](#)

[Forsyth County Office of Environmental Assistance & Protection](#)

3.3 The Zoning & Permitting Process

Zoning

Zoning ordinances are essential tools for communities to regulate land use and ensure the safety and well-being of residents. Zoning dictates what activities can occur on specific properties, such as residential, commercial, or industrial zones. For instance, industrial activities are typically prohibited in residential areas unless a special use permit is granted.

Zoning plays a crucial role in protecting sensitive areas like schools, neighborhoods, and wetlands from pollution. By establishing setback requirements and limitations on certain activities, zoning helps maintain a healthy environment.

Zoning decisions can have far-reaching consequences for landowners, neighbors, and the community as a whole. These decisions are typically made at the municipal or county level.

There are four types of zoning decisions:⁹

I. Legislative decisions significantly impact communities by shaping general policies that govern development. Any changes to these ordinances, such as modifications to the zoning map, require public hearings and proper notification through local newspapers and, in the case of rezoning, direct mail. Governing boards have considerable discretion in making these decisions, provided they are reasonable and comply with applicable laws.

II. Quasi-judicial decisions apply existing zoning policies to individual land use proposals. These decisions involve finding facts on the specific proposal and using discretion to apply established policies to the unique circumstances. A formal evidentiary hearing (akin to a court proceeding) is required, including the presentation of evidence and witness testimony to reach a decision.

III. Advisory decisions are non-binding recommendations made by planning boards or similar groups for the governing board to consider. These decisions do not require formal hearings.

IV. Administrative decisions include zoning permits, initial ordinance interpretations, and the initiation of enforcement actions. These decisions are strictly based on established zoning rules and do not require formal hearings.

How can I appeal a zoning decision?

Appeals to zoning decisions can be made to a municipal or county Board of Adjustment.

How can I report a zoning violation?

To report a zoning violation, contact the planning department for the governing body with jurisdiction over the property. Provide the property address and a detailed description of the nature of the violation, including specific information like names, dates, times, license plates, and any other relevant evidence.

Upon receiving a complaint, the zoning inspector will investigate the alleged violation within one to three days. If a violation is confirmed, the property owner or occupant will receive a Notice of Violation outlining the specific violation and providing a deadline for correction.

Permitting

Air quality permits are a regulatory tool used to monitor and control pollution from industrial and commercial facilities.

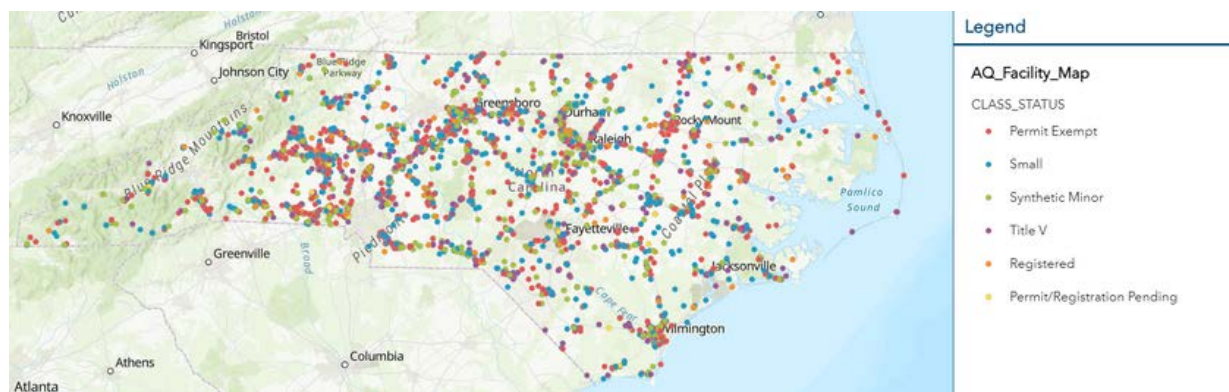
Permits set limits on the amount of various pollutants a facility can emit, and require the installation of specific pollution control equipment to meet these limits. While DAQ and local air quality agencies handle most air quality permitting in North Carolina under the Clean Air Act, the EPA retains some permitting authority.

Before issuing, renewing, or significantly modifying a permit, the permitting agency must provide the public with an opportunity for review and input during a 30-day comment period. A public hearing may be held if requested by advocates within the comment period, with at least 30 days' notice.

There are two broad categories of air quality permits:

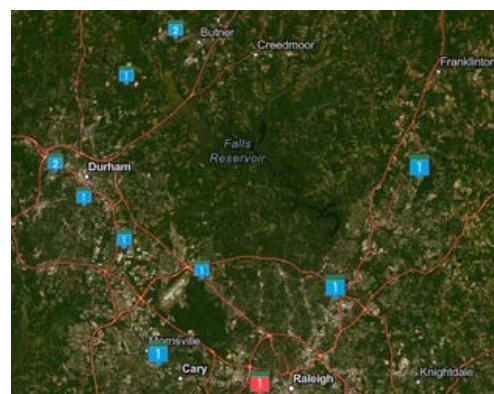
I. Title V Permits apply to facilities with emissions exceeding **any** of these three criteria: (1) 100 tons per year of a single criteria air pollutant; (2) 10 tons per year of a single hazardous air pollutant; or (3) 25 tons per year of a combination of hazardous air pollutants. Title V facilities must certify their compliance with their permitting at least annually.

II. Synthetic Minor (Non-Title V) Permits apply to facilities that emit less than **all** of the above criteria. These permits are administered by DAQ regional offices.



Map of permitted and permit-exempt facilities in NC using the DEQ permit map.

Existing permits can be found on [this interactive permit map](#) provided by DEQ (see above). Information on the compliance history of local facilities is available through the EPA's [ECHO \(Enforcement and Compliance History Online\)](#) tool (see right). ECHO provides comprehensive data for regulated facilities nationwide, including: their last inspection date; violation history; enforcement actions; neighborhood characteristics; environmental justice concerns; and more.



Snippet of ECHO map labeling facilities with Clean Air Act violations around Raleigh and Durham. Clicking a pin shows data about each facility.

Resources

[DEQ Permit Information](#)

[EPA Permit Information](#)

[DAQ Permit Information](#)

[Mecklenburg County Permit Map](#)

[Forsyth County Permit Information](#)

How can I submit an emissions complaint?

To submit an emission complaint, contact either DEQ or your local air quality agency directly.

N.C. Department of Environmental Quality

Complaints About Indoor Air
Epidemiology (919-707-5900)

Complaints About Outdoor Air
Your Regional Office ([find it](#))

If you notice an environmental emergency or other imminent threats to public health, don't hesitate! Call 800-858-0368 toll-free right away!

Mecklenburg County Air Quality Agency

Call 704-336-5430

Mecklenburg Air Quality also works to reduce engine idling by heavy-duty diesel vehicles.

To report excessive idling (more than five consecutive minutes within an hour), submit an [Unnecessary Idling Complaint Form](#) or call 311.

Forsyth County Office of Environmental Assistance

Call 336-703-2440

Submit an [Open Burning Complaint Form](#).

Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency

Call 828-250-6777 or send a letter to: P.O. Box 2749
Asheville, NC 28802

You can also use this [online reporting tool](#) to submit a report to the U.S. EPA. Your information will be forwarded to the EPA's environmental enforcement personnel or to the appropriate regulatory authority. Environmental problems arising from workplaces and local landfills must be reported to local and state agencies, not the EPA. The EPA also does not handle concerns related to automobile safety, consumer product safety, food, medicine, cosmetics, or medical devices. **To report environmental emergencies, contact the National Response Center at 800-424-8802.**

3.4 Meeting with Public Officials

Advocating directly with policymakers is influential partly because so few people do it, especially people who are not representatives of corporations. Policymakers take constituent communication very seriously. They know that for every constituent who contacts them, there are many others who feel the same way about the issue.

There are many ways to directly engage with policymakers, including written correspondence, emails, and phone calls. You can also arrange visits with your elected representatives, either in their home district or at their offices in Raleigh. These face-to-face meetings allow you to establish a personal connection with your representatives, helping them understand your concerns and humanize the issues you're advocating for.



Dr. Robert Parr meeting with an elected official.

You can find every elected official who represents you, from federal down to local, [here](#).

Best Practices for Setting Up a Meeting¹⁰

Before:

- Send a letter, a fax, or call requesting an appointment to the office you plan to visit (either local district or capitol).
- Identify yourself as a constituent and include information about who you are, what you want to discuss, when you would like to meet, and the names of anyone who may accompany you.
- Confirm the appointment with an email. Include your phone number in the email.
- Do your research. Learn the committee assignments of your representatives and where their specialties or expertise lie.

During:

- Dress in business attire and arrive on time.
- Establish that you are their constituent.
- Make a case for the action you want your legislator to take. Use stories and data that come from their district to support your case.
- Ask the legislator's position on the issue and their reasoning for it. Be open to counterarguments and respond to them.
- Admit when you don't know the answer to a question. Offer to find out the answer and send information back to the office.
- Ask them to take a specific action on the issue.
- Spend time developing relationships with staff.
- Bring fact sheets and data you can leave behind.
- Thank the legislator for the stances they have taken that you support.

After:

- Send a thank you note to the legislator reminding them of the meeting and any intended actions.



DO NOT

- Overload the meeting with too many issues. Stay on task.
- Confront, threaten, pressure or beg.
- Be argumentative. Speak calmly and avoid putting them on the defensive. Get bogged down in details—be concise!
- Expect legislators to be specialists. Their schedules and workloads tend to make them generalists.
- Be put off by smokescreens or long-winded answers. Bring the members back to the point. Maintain control of the meeting.
- Make promises you can't deliver.
- Be afraid to take a stand on the issues.
- Shy away from meetings with officials with known views opposite your own.
- Get offended if a legislator requests that you meet with their staff. Treat the staff member as though they were the legislator.

Boards & Commissions

Many of the rules and regulations that affect us on a daily basis come from boards and commissions, whose members are usually appointed and who often serve on a voluntary or near-voluntary basis. Boards and commissions exist at all levels of government. Any person, regardless of citizenship, may attend open board meetings and public hearings and make comments. Generally, only U.S. citizens can serve on government boards and commissions.

Government websites will have lists of boards and commissions, their meeting times, meeting agendas, and comment procedures. You can attend open board meetings even if there is not a public comment period. If you regularly attend meetings of a particular board, board members may begin to consider you as a resource.

SECTION 4

GLOSSARY OF TERMS & ACRONYMS

Accumulate: Increase or growth by addition especially when continuous or repeated.

Acidification: The process of making or becoming an acid. (National Cancer Institute)

Benzene: A colorless, flammable liquid with a sweet odor, commonly used in making plastics, resins, and synthetic fibers. Benzene causes problems in the blood. People who breathe benzene for long periods may experience harmful effects in the tissues that form blood cells, especially the bone marrow, which may lead to Leukemia. (CDC)

Biodiversity: The variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem.

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂): A colorless, odorless gas composed of one carbon atom and two oxygen atoms. It is a natural component of Earth's atmosphere and is produced by respiration, combustion of fossil fuels, and other processes. It plays a significant role in the greenhouse effect and global warming.

Carcinogenic: Having the potential to cause cancer.

Cardiovascular: Relating to the heart and blood vessels.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD): A chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes obstructed airflow from the lungs. (Mayo Clinic)

Cognitive Decline: The self-reported experience of worsening or more frequent confusion or memory loss. (CDC)

Committee: A smaller group of House or Senate members focused on a certain policy field (e.g. Agriculture, Environment, Commerce, etc.) that decides whether legislation will make it to the full chamber floor for discussion and voting.

Contamination: The action or state of being made impure by pollution or poisoning.

Criteria Pollutants: Air pollutants identified by the EPA as harmful to health and the environment, with established standards for their levels in the air. These include carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

Ecosystem: A community of living organisms (plants, animals, etc.) in a particular area.

Endothelial Dysfunction: Occurs when there isn't enough nitric oxide inside the blood vessel walls, increasing the risk of cardiovascular diseases and other conditions. (Cleveland Clinic)

Environmental Degradation: A process through which the natural environment is compromised in some way, reducing biological diversity and the general health of the environment. (European Environmental Information and Observation Network)

Eutrophication: Occurs when the environment becomes enriched with nutrients, increasing the amount of plant and algae growth in estuaries and coastal waters. (NOAA)

Formaldehyde: A colorless, highly toxic, and flammable gas at room temperature. It is also used as a food preservative and in household products, such as antiseptics, medicines, and cosmetics. Exposure can cause irritation to the eyes, nose, and throat, and long-term exposure may increase the risk of certain cancers. (CDC)

Lead (Pb): A heavy metal that is toxic to humans and animals. It can be found in various forms, such as lead dust or leaded gasoline, and has been used historically in pipes, paints, and gasoline. Exposure to lead can cause severe health issues, especially in children, including developmental and cognitive impairments.

Leukemia: Cancer that starts in blood-forming tissue, such as the bone marrow, and causes large numbers of abnormal blood cells to be produced and enter the bloodstream. (National Cancer Institute)

Neurological Disorders: Disorders that affect the nervous system, including the brain, neurons, and the spinal cord. (Montana.gov)

Nitrogen Deposition: The input of reactive nitrogen from the atmosphere to the biosphere both as gasses, dry deposition and in precipitation as wet deposition.

Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x): A group of gases that includes nitrogen monoxide (NO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). These gases are produced from combustion processes, such as in vehicles and power plants, and can contribute to smog, acid rain, and respiratory problems.

Ordinance: In zoning, an ordinance is a rule that defines how property can be used in a given area. Common divisions include residential, commercial, mixed-use, and industrial.

Oxidative Stress: An imbalance of free radicals and antioxidants in your body that leads to cell damage. Toxins like pollution and cigarette smoke can cause oxidative stress, while foods rich in antioxidants can help reduce it. (Cleveland Clinic)

Ozone (O₃): A molecule composed of three oxygen atoms. It exists in two main layers of the atmosphere: the stratosphere, where it forms the ozone layer that protects Earth from harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation, and the troposphere, where it is a major component of smog and can be harmful to respiratory health.

Particulate Matter (PM): A mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air. PM can be emitted directly from a variety of sources including vehicles, construction sites, industrial facilities, or fires. These particles are so small that they can pass from the lungs into the bloodstream, causing serious health problems. (EPA)

Pollutants: Substances introduced into the environment that cause harm or discomfort to living organisms or damage to the natural environment. Pollutants can be in the form of gases, liquids, or solids, and can come from various sources including industrial activities, vehicle emissions, and agricultural practices.

President Pro-Tempore (colloquially Pro-Tem): Appoints Senate committees and some members of state boards and commissions. Presides over the Senate in the absence of the Lieutenant Governor.

Regulation: Describes how to implement a law.

Respiratory: Relating to or affecting respiration or the organs of respiration.

Rule: Describes the proper course of conduct for implementation of the law.

Socioeconomic: The interaction between the social and economic factors of a population.

Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂): A toxic gas with a pungent, irritating smell, made up of one sulfur atom and two oxygen atoms. It is produced primarily from burning fossil fuels containing sulfur, like coal and oil, and can contribute to air pollution and acid rain.

Speaker of the House: Presides over NC House of Representatives and appoints members and chairs of House committees.

Veto: An executive power (Governor) to reject legislation passed by the General Assembly. The General Assembly can override vetoes with a $\frac{3}{5}$ majority vote from both chambers.

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<https://ncleg.gov/Sessions/2023/Bills/Senate/PDF/S512v5.pdf>. Judges have allowed the change to move forward for EMC but the lawsuit is ongoing
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