

Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: August 17, 2023 Meeting

---

The Advisory Committee for the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency (AB Air Quality) met on August 17, 2023, at 4:07 PM in the meeting room of the East Asheville Library. The meeting was preceded by a meet and greet at 3:30pm.

Members Present:

*Evan Couzo, Chair*

*Ned Guttman*

*Jim Neely*

*Keith Bamberger (virtually)*

Members Absent:

*Kevin Tipton*

*Jay Haney*

*Ichaya Dhungel*

Staff Present: *Ashley Featherstone, Director; Kevin Lance, Field Services Program Manager; James Raiford, Permitting Program Manager; Betsy Brown, Air Quality Coordinator*

1. Review and Approval of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed.

2. Review June Minutes

Mr. Neely made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Dr. Couzo. The motion passed. Mr. Bamberger abstained as he was not present for that meeting.

3. Review Low-Cost Sensor Shelter Usage Policy and Application (Agency Board has approved a general low-cost sensor policy-now we need sensor shelter usage policy)

Ms. Featherstone gave an update about the sensor shelter policy. Mr. Raiford composed an application similar to the one that Mecklenburg Air Quality uses for their citizen shelter. Several options of how to provide approval for someone to access the shelter were presented to the Assistant Superintendent of Buncombe County Schools. We could either have a combination lock and we give the approved applicant the combination, or we could meet them at the site if the schools were not comfortable with supplying them with the lock combination. The Assistant Superintendent indicated that anybody that wants to come on site and use the sensor shelter would need to fill out a volunteer application with the school board because that is how they handle any kind of guests coming on site since Nesbitt Discovery Academy, a STEM high school is located there. He would like them to come through him for access. There was concern among the committee members that access to the shelter might not be handled as quickly as we would like with that scenario.

The application requests information about the project that the applicant is proposing in the form of a one page essay about their study, what kind of sensor they are going to use, what their methodology is, and what the study is seeking to determine.

As part of the application process, we are asking that the applicant submit the data they collect to us at the conclusion of the study. This is common practice for air quality agencies and community monitoring studies. There was lengthy discussion about the data and how long we should allow a participant before we require their results be submitted. 30 days was discussed as a reasonable time to receive raw data; 60 to 90 days to 6 months were all times mentioned as reasonable and practical for the result of a study or conclusions. This could be extended at the discretion of the Agency. Although we would not advertise it, once we had that information in our possession it becomes a matter of public record and subject to the Freedom of Information Act. If the data is requested, a disclaimer could be added, such as the EPA uses, that we cannot attest to the accuracy of that data and the study is not being endorsed by the Agency.

If the person doing a study is planning on publishing the data with their conclusions, it could be required that they notify the Agency 10 days or some specified time in advance of publication. Perhaps we could request an abstract, if not the full document, to keep us being blindsided by a claim or a request for action that the author could put forth. Anyone can buy these low-cost sensors, and they are being utilized. This would be a safeguard for our Agency. We may want to have a county attorney review our application.

#### 4. Recent Smoke Event from wildfires in Canada

We now have a media toolkit, coordination with other departments including health, emergency services, risk, and community engagement.

Mr. Lance noted that the recent Canadian wildfire smoke influenced on our particulate matter forecasts, we had several orange days or alerts here. The National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQA) for PM2.5 is a 24-hour standard- 35 micrograms per cubic meter for 24 hours. Although we had many days where actual conditions were in the code yellow range and were very close to code orange, we stayed under the NAAQS. The forecasts are conservative and predict the worst possible conditions.

We announce “no burning” in a banner on our website as well as in a phone message that the public can easily access (since burning is not allowed when air quality is forecasted to be code orange). There was a lot of press and Buncombe County Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE) helped us with the media response.

County management contacted Air Quality and wanted to know if the county should be giving out N95 or KN95 masks. KN95 masks were never intended to be distributed in the US. We do not promote respirators. Air Quality met with the health director, the fire marshal, emergency services and the safety office from legal and risk to discuss the issues. The EPA and CDC basically acknowledge that there is some risk to wearing a respirator and would prefer that you stay inside and limit your exposure. A respirator should be fit tested. If you have to be outside for periods of time, you should consider using a N95 or KN95 mask and if you have breathing issues, check with your doctor before using N95 or KN95 masks.

In conclusion, if you smell smoke, you should stay inside. If you have to go out, use appropriate caution and minimize that time.

Ms. Featherstone spoke to the Buncombe County Environment and Energy Subcommittee and shared the information. Asheville City Councilwoman Maggie Ullman requested Ms. Featherstone come to the city's Environment and Safety Subcommittee she chairs and give the same message.

Mr. Bamberger noted that buildings do a good job of keeping out smoke, especially from fires, but is best that the air is filtered. He noted that it is up to an individual to make their own choice about their health. We can tell them what works; there are times when people should wear masks. The forecast includes an activity guide at different air quality code levels. If one has questions, they should check with their doctor who would be familiar with their health and any conditions they might have of concern. There was discussion along these lines- what an agency should or should not offer as advice concerning masks and outdoor exposure to air quality pollutants.

#### 5. UNCA Project Updates

##### a. Purple Air Sensor Project Updates

With EPA grant funds, Dr. Couzo is building low-cost sensors with his students. They will test them. When they have them functioning properly, they will locate the sensors at schools.

##### b. McCullough Fellowship-Energy Star Treasure Hunts at Breweries with AB Air Quality (recognition from agency-possible topic for next meeting)

Dr. Couzo stated that a student, Ava Ingle, is working with the breweries on an Energy Star Treasure Hunt project. Ms. Featherstone and Ms. Brown are also working with Ms. Ingle. We would like to provide some recognition for the participating breweries, but there is some concern about anonymity. Dr. Couzo has been with Ms. Ingle on a few brewery tours. Ms. Featherstone and Ms. Brown joined Dr. Couzo, Ms. Ingle, and others in June at New Belgium Brewery and last week at RAD brewery. Ms. Ingle's project will be completed by the end of the semester. When her results are complete and she has a presentation to share, Dr. Couzo suggested having her present her project to the committee.

#### 6. Agency Updates

a. The Agency has a new Engage Buncombe website for live streaming Board Meetings. Recorded meetings can be viewed later. <https://engage.buncombecounty.org/s8486> Board meetings and documents are posted there.

b. Buncombe County Fire Code Ordinance Update (ordinance passed by Commissioners)  
Ms. Featherstone sent the committee the approved and updated Fire Ordinance prior to the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:08pm.