



# 2020 Annual Summary Report

## Overview and Mission of the Agency

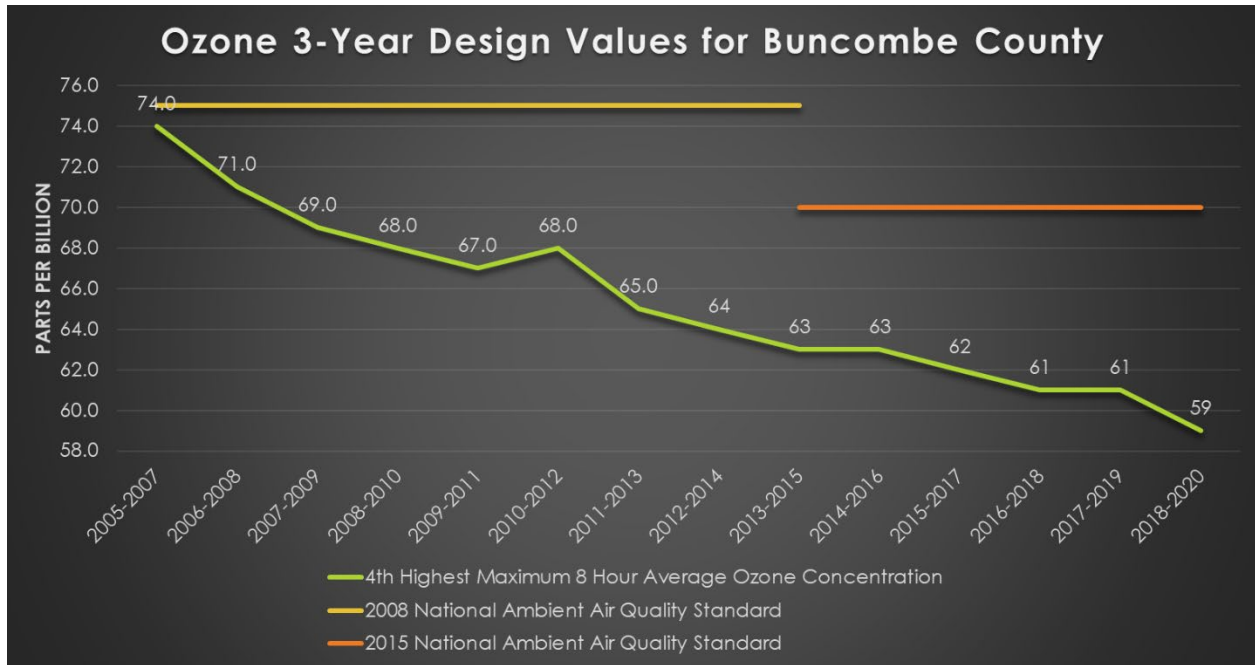
In 1947, the City of Asheville established a “Smoke Abatement Program” to address the blanket of black smoke that engulfed the city during particularly stagnant weather conditions. The local air quality agency is an extension of that program. From 1967 to 1970, the agency served four counties, and from 1970 to 2000, the Agency served two counties (Buncombe and Haywood). In 2000, the Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency (WNCRAQA) was re-formed through an interlocal agreement between Buncombe County and the City of Asheville. The purpose of this agreement was to establish, administer, and enforce a local air quality program for the City of Asheville and Buncombe County in accordance with the provisions of North Carolina General Statutes Section 143-215.112.

The mission of the Agency is to protect and monitor the area's air quality to safeguard the public health and the environment. The Agency is responsible for implementing and enforcing the provisions of the federal Clean Air Act and all additional state and local air quality regulations in Buncombe County. We operate an air pollution monitoring network that is used to determine whether our area is in compliance with the national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS). Our program ensures that industrial facilities, gas stations, dry cleaners, grading contractors, and asbestos removal activities comply with all applicable air quality regulations that are put in place to protect the public health and welfare. We enforce the open burning regulations and respond to air quality related complaints and emergencies, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We offer compliance assistance, education and outreach services, and we are available to do presentations on air quality at the request of schools, civic groups, and other community organizations. We also maintain an indoor air quality webpage for citizen inquiries and have partnered with other agencies to distribute free radon test kits.

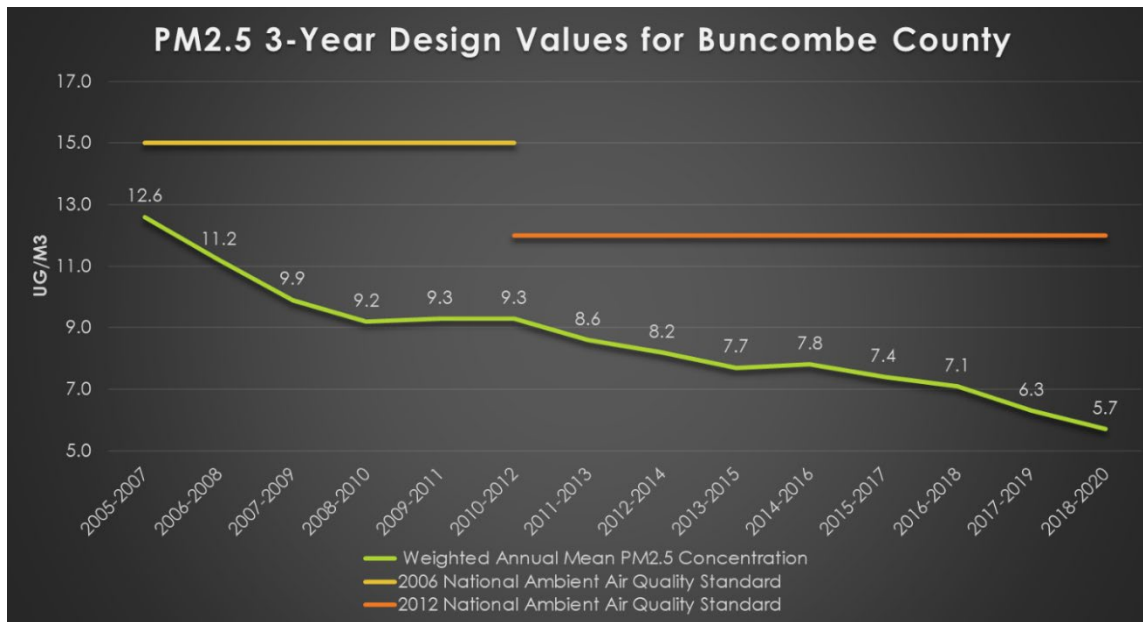
The WNCRAQA is governed by a five-member board. Three members are appointed by the Buncombe County Commissioners, and two members are appointed by the Asheville City Council. The Agency is also served by an advisory committee made up of community members from a wide range of backgrounds.

### **Current Air Quality Monitoring Data – Ozone and Fine Particles**

Our area is currently attaining the national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) that are set by EPA to protect public health and the environment. Our most recent design value used to determine compliance with the national health-based standard for ground level ozone (average of the 4<sup>th</sup> highest 8-hour ozone concentration measured over 3 consecutive years) at our Bent Creek monitor here in Buncombe County is 59 parts per billion (ppb). EPA revised the national standard in 2015 from 75 ppb to 70 ppb to better protect public health. Below are trend data for the annual standard design value.



Our agency also operates a monitoring site for particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). There are two NAAQS for PM<sub>2.5</sub>; the 98th percentile 24-hour average standard is 35 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ), and the weighted annual mean standard is 12  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . The 98th percentile 24-hour average at the Buncombe County monitoring site is 15.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , and the weighted annual mean is 5.7  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . Both of these figures are 3 year average design values for 2018, 2019, and 2020. Below are trend data for the annual standard design value.



In addition to the Ozone and PM monitors, a monitor measuring sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) was established in the Royal Pines area of Skyland in 2017 to measure the emissions from the Duke Energy Progress power plant. This monitor is operated through the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality’s Division of Air Quality. This was in response to the EPA revising the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for SO<sub>2</sub>. They established a 1-hour primary standard of 75 parts per billion (ppb) based on the 3-year average of the 99th percentile of the yearly distribution of 1-hour daily maximum concentrations. The 99th percentile of the 1-hour daily maximum concentration for 2017-2019 was 11.5 ppb. In 2020, EPA designated the area as attaining the National Ambient Air Quality Standard, which is 75 ppb.

**Air Quality has Improved due to Emissions Reductions from Vehicles and Power Plants**

The most significant emissions reduction project affecting the City of Asheville and Buncombe County during the last few years has been the installation and operation of the flue gas desulfurization (FGD) units, or scrubbers, and selective catalytic reduction (SCR) systems in accordance with the NC Clean Smokestacks Act of 2002, including those installed at the Progress Energy plant in Skyland. The NC Clean Smokestacks Act required NC power plants to reduce total emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides by approximately 70%. Sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) contribute to fine particle pollution, acid deposition, and the regional haze that obscures our mountain vistas in the summer time. Nitrogen oxides also contribute to ozone formation. The EPA has required emissions reductions at power plants in other states that is also having a positive impact on our air quality here in WNC. EPA has also required cleaner gasoline, diesel fuel, and lower emission rates for cars and trucks in recent years. Duke Energy Progress has implemented the Western Carolinas Modernization Project. This includes the installation of two new natural gas/fuel oil fired combined cycle units which became operational in 2019. They retired the two older coal fired boilers in 2020. These changes will further improve the air quality in the region. While all of these actions have resulted in improved air quality, the most recent scientific studies continue to show health effects at lower levels of pollution and as a result, the standards that we are required to meet continue to be adjusted downward, meaning more work is needed to continue to improve our air quality in order to protect public health and the environment.



The AQI is an index for reporting daily air quality. It tells you how clean or polluted the air is, and what associated health effects might be of concern. Here in Buncombe County, the air quality index is based on the two pollutants that we monitor: ground level ozone and fine particles.

Data for 2020	Number of Days the AQI was:			
Number of Days with an AQI	Good	Moderate	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Unhealthy
363	353	10	0	0

**Source of ozone, fine particle and AQI data:** U.S. EPA AirData <https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data>. AirData reports are produced from a direct query of the AQS Data Mart. The data represent the best and most recent information available to EPA from state and local agencies.

**2020 Education and Outreach and Voluntary Program Initiatives**

In addition to our core duties including the implementation of our monitoring, permitting, and enforcement programs, below is a list of voluntary initiatives and education and outreach activities that were accomplished in 2020.

- Staff participated in the annual “The State of Our Air” a media event sponsored by the Land of Sky Regional Council’s Clean Air Campaign to raise awareness about air pollution. The event was virtual due to COVID-19. Several media outlets provided coverage including Buncombe County TV.
- The WNCRAQA is committed to encouraging reductions in air pollution by encouraging reductions in vehicle miles traveled and cleaner transportation alternatives. We are a member of the local Clean Vehicles Coalition (CVC) that is administered by the Land of Sky Regional Council of Governments. On July 26, 2012, the local CVC was designated by the US Department of Energy as an official Clean Cities program for the five county area surrounding Asheville including Buncombe, Henderson, Haywood, Madison and Transylvania counties. In October of 2012, the WNCRAQA signed a Memorandum of Understanding expressing our support for the goals of the CVC and Clean Cities Program.

Staff is currently serving on a committee that approves grant funding for the NC DAQ's diesel emissions reduction grant program.

- Outreach with the regulated community in NC was conducted through staff participation in federal sewage sludge incinerator operator training.
- The Agency partnered with the NC Radon Program to promote Radon Awareness Month in January of 2020. The NC Radon program had a limited amount of test kits to give away. We issued a press release and posted to website and social media to promote testing and where to obtain free kits and reduced price kits (when free kits were no longer available).
- The Agency maintains a website with information for our permitted facilities as well as information and links to sites concerning air quality, health and other areas of interest for the citizens of Buncombe County. Please go to [www.wncairquality.org](http://www.wncairquality.org) for more information.
- WNCRAQA started Facebook and Twitter accounts in 2013. We are working to increase our social media presence and see it as a valuable tool to increase awareness of air quality issues in our area. Please like us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WesternNCRegionalAirQualityAgency> and follow us on Twitter <https://twitter.com/WNCAirQuality!>
- The Agency partnered with MSD and other stakeholders to offer Federal Sewage Sludge Incinerator Training. This presentation was offered to operators in October of 2020.
- The Agency participated in various public forums and responded to interview requests.
  - Article Mountain Express April 2020. Air quality and COVID-19.
  - Article Asheville Citizen Times April 2020: Open burning and air quality.
- The Agency continued its popular air quality awards with permitted facilities to recognize those that implement voluntary measures to reduce emissions. In recent years, our citizen's advisory committee has assisted this effort by developing more structured guidelines and expanding the awards program to include a broader range of businesses and organizations in the local community.
  - Clean Air Compliance Awards: Certificates were sent to 50 permitted facilities for complying with all air quality regulations and their permit requirements for 2019
  - Clean Air Excellence Awards. CAE Award was presented to Eaton Corporation for energy efficiency upgrades that reduced emissions at the plant.

### **Additional Comments on Calendar Year 2020**

This was a challenging year due to COVID-19. County offices closed in March and all but one member of our team was sent home with laptops to work until county offices reopened at the end of June. We managed to keep the monitors operating, issued permits, worked with the fire departments to investigate open burning complaints, and resumed inspections and open burning complaint investigations using modified procedures during the summer months. We participated

with other city and county employees in the emergency operations center and the COVID-19 shelter that the county operated at a local hotel. Thanks to our dedicated team and partners for accomplishing all required duties and continuing to provide these important services to the residents of Buncombe County during this time.

**Attached is a table of the parameters that the WNCRAQA reports to the NC Environmental Management Commission on a biennial basis.**

# *WNC Regional Air Quality Agency 2020 Environmental Management Commission Report Parameters*

REPORT ITEM	SUB-ITEM	CY 2020
Number of Staff in Each Program Area (In Person-Years)		
	<i>Permitting</i>	1.4
	<i>Inspections</i>	1.5
	<i>Enforcement</i>	0.35
	<i>Monitoring</i>	1.25
	<i>Administrative</i>	.50
Number of Facilities, By Category		
	<i>Title V</i>	6
	<i>Synthetic Minor</i>	9
	<i>Small</i>	60
	<i>Stage I Vapor Recovery</i>	148
	<i>Dry Cleaners</i>	7
Number of Operating Permits Issued, By Category		
	<i>Title V</i>	1
	<i>Synthetic Minor</i>	0
	<i>Small</i>	2
Number of Construction or Modification Permits Issued, By Category		
	<i>Title V</i>	2
	<i>Synthetic Minor</i>	1
	<i>Small</i>	3
Average Time to Process Each Permit, By Category		
	<i>Initial Title V</i>	7 months
	<i>Synthetic Minor</i>	1.5 month
	<i>Small</i>	1.5 month
	<i>Construction</i>	1.5 month
Have emissions inventories been reported to EPA?		Yes

REPORT ITEM	SUB-ITEM	CY 2020
How many stack tests were observed?		1
How many stack test protocols and reports were received, reviewed, and approved?		14
List Number of CEMs, By Type		
	<i>CO</i>	1
	<i>CO<sub>2</sub></i>	2
	<i>NO<sub>x</sub></i>	2
	<i>O<sub>2</sub></i>	1
	<i>Opacity</i>	2
	<i>SO<sub>2</sub></i>	2
	<i>Mercury</i>	2
	<i>PM</i>	2
Number of Inspections Performed at Each Source Category		
	<i>Title V</i>	6
	<i>Synthetic Minor</i>	9
	<i>Small</i>	0
	<i>Stage I Vapor Recovery</i>	148
	<i>Dry Cleaners</i>	0
Number of Full Compliance Evaluations		
	<i>Title V</i>	6
	<i>Synthetic Minor</i>	9
	<i>Small</i>	0
	<i>Stage I</i>	148
	<i>Dry Cleaners</i>	0
Asbestos Permitting Program		
	<i>NESHAP Permits</i>	106
	<i>Local Permits</i>	270
	<i>City of Asheville Permit Reviews</i>	133
	<i>Buncombe County Permit Reviews</i>	226



REPORT ITEM	SUB-ITEM	CY 2020
Number of Staff Available to Perform Compliance Evaluations		
	<i>Industrial</i>	5
	<i>Asbestos</i>	1
	<i>Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)</i>	2
	<i>Open Burning, Dust, Odor</i>	5
Number of Violations Found During Inspections		2
Number of Complaints Received		
	<i>Industry</i>	3
	<i>Asbestos</i>	2
	<i>Dust, Odor, IAQ</i>	4
	<i>Open Burning</i>	80
	<i>Stage I Vapor Recovery</i>	0
Number of Complaints Investigated		
	<i>Industry</i>	3
	<i>Asbestos</i>	2
	<i>Dust, Odor, IAQ</i>	4
	<i>Open Burning</i>	80
	<i>Stage I Vapor Recovery</i>	0
Number of NOVs, by Type		
	<i>Industry – Emissions</i>	1
	<i>Industry - Procedural</i>	9
	<i>Asbestos</i>	0
	<i>Dry Cleaners</i>	0
	<i>112(r) Program</i>	0
	<i>Open Burning</i>	26
	<i>Stage I Vapor Recovery</i>	6
Number of Enforcement Cases Processed		42
Number of SOCs Issued		0
Number of Penalties Assessed		8
Total Amount of Penalties Assessed		\$10,521
Total Amount of Penalties Collected <sup>1</sup>		\$3,350
Number of FRVs and HPVs Reported to EPA		3 FRV
Was compliance status of the facilities updated in AFS on a regular basis? How often?		Yes, Bi-Monthly

<sup>1</sup> The Agency submits 100% of all collected penalties to the local school system.