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NORTH CAROLINA
Department of Environmental Quality

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2025

North Carolina celebrates 10 years of clean air

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RALEIGH

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated North Carolina in attainment with every National Ambient Air Quality Standard in August 2015, underscoring years of hard work by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and stakeholders

to reduce emissions and improve air quality. The state has maintained compliance with these standards ever since.

“Achieving ten years of meeting our clean air standards is a testament to what we can accomplish with sound policymaking and strong public and private partnerships,” said **Governor Josh Stein**. “North Carolinians are able to breathe fresh air because of our state’s continued commitment to safeguarding our natural resources.”

“Meeting the Clean Air Act’s public health standards means North Carolinians can live, work and play knowing the air they breathe meets the highest benchmark,” said **DEQ Secretary Reid Wilson**. “Our work is not done. We must continue to implement effective strategies that ensure our air remains clean and healthy for generations to come.”

“A decade of clean air was decades in the making. It took hard work and planning to achieve this milestone, and our Division staff played a monumental role in getting us here today,” said **Mike Abraczinskas, Director of DEQ’s Division of Air Quality**. “The full scale of public health benefits resulting from this work is impossible to quantify.”

The National Ambient Air Quality Standards (https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants/naaqs-table) are limits on air pollution levels set nationally by EPA to protect public health, including the health of sensitive populations like children, older adults and people with asthma. Standards are set for the six criteria air pollutants: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particle pollution and sulfur dioxide.

North Carolina and many other states had significant nonattainment issues with several of the standards in the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly for ozone and particle pollution. Air pollution also contributed to summer haze in the Blue Ridge Mountains and forest-damaging acid rain.

Key actions that improved air quality during those years included the passage of the 2002 Clean Smokestacks Act in North Carolina; significant advances in federal fuel and engine standards for cars and trucks; a shift in energy generation away from coal; and emission reductions from homes, industry and other human sources due to regulatory, voluntary and educational programs.

While air quality has improved significantly in North Carolina, there can still be a handful of days when air pollution levels may impact public health. Residents can check their county's daily air quality forecast using the Air Quality Portal (https://airquality.climate.ncsu.edu/) to help them plan their outdoor activities.

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- Attainment Status of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (/about/divisions/air-quality/air-quality-planning/attainment-status-national-ambient-air-quality-standards)

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