BUNCOMBE COUNTY
AIR QUALITY

# MEMORANDUM

**To:** Buncombe County Air Quality Council

**From:** Ashley Featherstone, Division Program Manager

**Date:** 11/17/2026

**Re:** Program accomplishments and highlights 2026

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Below is a list of program highlights for 2026. Thanks to the Council, Staff, and County leadership for supporting the program.

- Buncombe County's air quality continues to be in attainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for fine particles and ground level ozone. Met all data requirements to determine compliance with the standards.
- Transitioned the air quality program from an interlocal agreement with the City of Asheville to a County Department under the Board of Commissioners. Ensures continuity of services due to increasing uncertainty with federal grant funding.
- Program was reviewed and certified by the North Carolina Environmental Management Commission as part of the reorganization, confirming all required program elements are being met.
- Implemented new procedures to ensure air quality staff that issues permits and enforcement orders and Council members that hear appeals do not have conflicts of interest with companies they regulate in accordance with Section 128 of the Clean Air Act.
- Air quality rules were updated and the entire code was readopted (required by the NC General Assembly every 10 years-over 300 pages of code).
- Worked with NC DAQ and EPA to extend for another year the post Helene air quality monitoring project with 8 to 10 Purple Air sensors

on loan from EPA to measure fine particles in areas of the county where additional data coverage is beneficial. BC Air Quality is now the grantee for the program.

- Set up a new air quality monitoring station to measure ground level ozone at AB Tech. This will be a second monitoring site for ground level ozone here in Buncombe County.
- Improved customer service for 220 industrial facilities with air quality permits by adding online annual fee payment options. Also continued fee reduction program for Helene impacted residents and worked with partners to issue demolition and asbestos removal permits as part of the recovery.
- Hosted a Recognition and Appreciation Ceremony To recognize participants of the Western North Carolina (WNC) Post Helene Air Quality Particulate Monitoring Project in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Air Quality (DAQ) AND our former Air Quality Advisory Committee members for their many years of service to the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency.
- Purchased and gave away 100 radon test kits during radon awareness month in January with assistance from Environmental Health.
- Loaned retired ground level ozone monitoring equipment to UNCA for use in a course on Meteorological Instruments-where students design and implement their own short-term field instrumentation projects.
- Continued partnership with UNCA with our citizen science shelter on particulate matter sensor project that is using our regulatory monitors for quality control to compare to data collected with low cost sensors at UNCA. Current project since Spring of 2026 is looking to correlate night sky brightness and air quality readings along the parkway near the Asheville area.
- Worked with Alliance for Green Heat, Barnardsville Area Resilience Network and Full Circle Foresty Collective (FCFC) to plan the Wood Stove Safety and Education Workshop. Provided EPA Burn Wise

materials for Full Circle Forestry Collective's Firewood Bank. Had a table for Buncombe County and Air Quality at the Workshop.

- Participated in numerous outreach events related to air quality including a Nesbitt School Presentation for PM2.5 Monitoring site with DAQ, Reynolds Middle School STEM Field Day, Mountain Science Expo at the NC Arboretum, and Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation Field Day at North Buncombe Middle School.
- Media interview with WLOS on air quality, weather and wildfires.
- Worked with CAPE and other county departments to contribute information for the 2026 Wildfire Communications Plan. Also coordinated on CAPE messaging with Spring Burn Bans issued by the Buncombe County Fire Marshal's Office.

*ashley.featherstone@buncombenc.gov*
*828.250.6778*