

Tips for public testimony: April 29 WNC Regional Air Quality Agency public hearing

Logistics

- Arrive early to sign up to speak. Make sure you factor in time to park and make your way to the auditorium. There will likely be a line so we suggest getting there at least 30 minutes early.
- You will have 3 minutes to speak when your name or number is called.
- Because of the number of speakers we anticipate, the hearing may go until 9 p.m. If you are able, we would love for you to join us for the duration.
- We anticipate that you'll be speaking from a podium with a microphone, facing the air board. This is a big room and can be intimidating—but remember that you have the support of your community behind you!

Tips for effective testimony:

- Prepare what you're planning to say, write it out, and practice it beforehand. This will help to organize your testimony, making sure you get in all the points you want to say in the allotted time. You can turn in your written comments at the hearing to make sure they're recorded accurately.
- Give testimony that's personal; speak from your own experience about why this issue matters to you. If you can, tie your testimony into a real story or example from your life. More personalized testimony also avoids repetition of earlier speakers: too much repetition may cause your testimony to be cut off before you're finished.
- Clearly state your position, ask for exactly what you want. It's not enough to just say, "We want a good air permit." That's open to interpretation. Instead, clearly state what you want the air agency board to do (see below for suggested talking points).
- Be concise, courteous and professional. You may have strong emotions about this issue, which many of us are feeling, but it's important to stay on topic.

BIG ASK (should be in all public comments)

- Revise the current draft Asheville coal plant Title V air pollution permit to include a numeric emission limit for SO₂ that reflects federal minimum standards and ensures the protection of public health. Specify a limit of 61.7 pounds per hour for each coal-burning unit, equating to a plant-wide SO₂ limit of .029 pounds per one million British Thermal Units (BTU's).



Suggested talking points:

- Evidence from air pollution specialists, using EPA's own modeling, shows that the Asheville coal plant is causing unsafe concentrations of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) pollution in areas downwind of the coal plant one out of every three to four days for the past several years.
- This pollution exceeds federal minimum health-based standards that were adopted by the WNC Regional Air Quality Agency on Nov. 14, 2011. All industries in our region should be held to this same standard.
- Sulfur dioxide is a dangerous respiratory irritant. Even short exposures can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate respiratory and pulmonary disease and cause trips to the emergency room.
- This pollution is concentrated in residential and recreational areas such as the Bent Creek hiking area around Buncombe County, directly endangering those who live and play in these places. ***(If you live or recreate in these areas be sure to mention it).***
- The limit in this draft permit allows for SO₂ emissions from the Asheville coal plant that would create concentrations 80 times what the EPA deems safe. There is no apparent reason for the limit to be so high.
- We all deserve clean, healthy air to breathe the WNC Regional Air Quality Agency and Board have an obligation to issue permits that protect that right and comply with the law.
- Healthy air is essential to Buncombe County's high quality of life and economy.