A Lung Cancer Survivor Testifies

On the heels of EPA’s announcement to strengthen the nation’s ground-level ozone pollution rules, lung cancer survivor, husband and father, Dan Powell, reached out to Clean Air Carolina to share his story.

As a young man diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer just a little over a year ago, Dan wanted to ensure the EPA passed the strongest ozone standard possible. Formerly the Air Quality Director of Greenville County, South Carolina, this issue hit home for Dan. He was well aware of how poor air quality impacts public health.

In January, Clean Air Carolina funded his trip to Washington, DC to testify at an EPA public hearing in support of stronger rules that limit ozone pollution to 60 parts per billion (ppb), down from the current standard of 75 ppb.

“Lung disease has been with me all my life. I grew up with chronic asthma in my youth. It was difficult playing sports as my breathing was impaired and in seventh grade I didn’t make the school’s soccer team. Growing up in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, air pollution was huge problem.

In the South Carolina Upstate this year, there are over 87,000 adults and over 27,500 children with living with asthma. In North Carolina, there are nearly 520,000 adults and over 322,000 children living with asthma (CDC). I pose the question: what happens to those children when they grow up?”

~ Dan Powell (pictured above with his wife and son)

Clean Air Advocates Show Support for Strong Ozone Rules

Last fall, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced its long-awaited proposal to strengthen the federal rules for ozone pollution to better safeguard public health and our natural environment. The current standard of 75 parts per billion (ppb), set by the Bush Administration in 2008, falls extremely short of protecting the health of millions of Americans, especially those most at-risk from breathing dirty air - children, the elderly and those with respiratory ailments and heart disease.

While Clean Air Carolina and Medical Advocates for Healthy Air (MAHA) applaud the EPA for taking steps to clean up ground-level ozone, we believe it’s critical the agency takes the most protective action and limit ozone pollution to 60 ppb, the level recommended by the EPA’s own Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee.

Over the past three months, MAHA circulated a sign-on letter to medical and public health professionals around the state to which they added their names urging the EPA to adopt standards that result in the maximum positive impact on public health. As stated in the letter, health data currently shows more than 138,000 cases of pediatric asthma statewide, a disease known to be exacerbated by poor air quality.

North Carolina is one the fastest growing states in the country and the number of people experiencing negative health impacts from ozone pollution is expected to increase dramatically unless action is taken now to tighten the standards. EPA is expected to announce the final ozone rule later this summer.
A Federal Court dealt what is likely the final blow to the controversial Garden Parkway, a proposed toll road west of Charlotte that would increase air pollution and degrade water quality in the Catawba River Basin. Judge James Dever ruled that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration violated federal law in their environmental review of the 21-mile toll highway. This is a major victory for clean air as construction of the project is now extremely unlikely.

The case before the court was brought by Clean Air Carolina and the Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC). When we first filed suit in 2012, NCDOT was poised to begin construction of the $900 million toll highway project. Our groups alerted permitting agencies that NCDOT's analysis of the highway was fundamentally flawed as it relied on inaccurate and misleading growth estimates and asked for construction to be halted until the issues were resolved.

Despite its enormous $900 million price tag, NCDOT failed to demonstrate that the Garden Parkway will benefit anyone other than the current and former elected officials who purchased property along the highway’s proposed path. The environmental documents show that construction of the road will do nothing to improve congestion on existing roadways, such as I-85, and far from increasing economic development, will actually shift job growth out of state to South Carolina.

According to SELC Attorney, Kym Hunter, the Court’s ruling could have implications far beyond the Garden Parkway as the same exact practice was used in the environmental review of the equally controversial Monroe Bypass proposed in Union County. Clean Air Carolina has joined the Yadkin Riverkeeper and the NC Wildlife Federation in a lawsuit filed by SELC challenging that analysis which is currently pending before the same judge and is expected to be heard later this year.

See page 3 for more information on citizen action against the unnecessary Monroe Bypass.

Meet Laura - New MAHA Manager

Clean Air Carolina welcomes Laura Wenzel as our new manager of Medical Advocates for Healthy Air (MAHA) based in Chapel Hill. An inveterate networker Laura has worked as a journalist and social worker in the areas of community organizing, youth development, immigration services, civil rights and environmental justice. She co-hosted and produced La Salud Familiar, a Spanish-language radio show on health and community, and founded a Spanish-language program, Pa’lante, guiding Latino youth toward healthy, productive activities.

Laura received a graduate degree in 2014 from the School of Social Work at UNC Chapel Hill where she focused on non-profit leadership, sustainability and community development. After graduation Laura and her teenage daughter explored youth environmental stewardship programs in a cross-country road trip. Since returning, she has been partnering with agencies and communities to promote environmental and economic equity across race and class lines.

As MAHA manager, Laura will increase MAHA membership in the Triangle and eastern North Carolina, organize and conduct webinars, and provide monthly training to pediatric residents at Duke School of Medicine about air quality’s impact on children’s health and MAHA’s advocacy work.

Welcome, Laura!
CAC’s partnership with the City of Charlotte to accelerate the transition of the city’s off-road diesel fleet to low-emission equipment and promote “clean construction” practices is making significant progress. Members of Medical Advocates for Healthy Air (MAHA) played a key role when Dr. Larry Raymond, MAHA chair, and Dr. Stephen Keener, Medical Director of Mecklenburg County Health Department and MAHA board member, spoke last year to the city’s Environment Committee about diesel exhaust’s classification as a carcinogen by the World Health Organization.

In January, the Committee received an inventory report of off-road construction, maintenance, and utilities equipment. Of the 180 pieces, 31% were identified as meeting EPA Tiers 3-4 emission standards which are more restrictive than Tiers 0-2. Even though 31% of the fleet was ranked “clean”, the overall usage rate of cleaner equipment was 50% showing the city prioritizes its use. The city expects to replace 13 pieces of pre-Tier 3 equipment this year. As Charlotte grows, so does the use of construction equipment. Using new and retrofitted equipment will improve air quality and protect the health of construction workers and city residents. Clean Air Carolina is promoting a pilot project between the city and ESW Group to retrofit two pieces of equipment with diesel particulate filters which will reduce diesel particle pollution by at least 85%.

Union County Residents Travel to Raleigh for “Fix 74 First” Lobby Day

Clean Air Carolina joined Union County residents for a “Fix 74 First” Lobby Day in Raleigh on March 11 to call attention to the wasteful spending of state transportation funds currently designated for the proposed Monroe Bypass/Toll Road. Community members and Clean Air Carolina representatives met with legislators about the negative impacts of the road and highlighted real solutions to the congestion on U.S. Highway 74.

Represented by Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), Clean Air Carolina is part of a joint lawsuit against the Bypass with the Yadkin Riverkeeper and the NC Wildlife Federation challenging NCDOT’s environmental review analysis.

As one of the most expensive highways in North Carolina in terms of cost and environmental and human health impacts, the 20-mile Bypass will have nine exits. It is projected to plow over largely rural areas and open countryside resulting in sprawling development ultimately worsening traffic congestion and further degrading air and water quality.

In January, over 130 Union County residents attended a public hearing held by the NC Division of Water Resources at the request of SELC attorneys regarding the project’s environmental permits. The majority of attendees who commented spoke passionately about the Bypass paving over century-old family farm land and impacting the health of area residents.

With the legislature looking to raise more funds for transportation, the state can’t afford to put $800 million into a toll road that won’t pay for itself and won’t relieve local traffic problems on U.S. 74. Studies have shown there are lower cost alternatives for solving traffic congestion in the region that would spare the many homes and family farms in the way of the Monroe Bypass.

Visit MonroeBypassFacts.com to learn more about Union County community members efforts to stop the Monroe Bypass/Toll Road.
MAHA has joined RePower Our Schools, a statewide partnership supporting the transition of North Carolina’s public school districts to 100% renewable energy. The coalition is urging Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Durham Public Schools to pass resolutions to save critical school funding by transforming their operations to renewable sources of power, like solar. At a kickoff event to educate the community, CAC Program Director Terry Lansdell participated in a panel discussion in Charlotte. “Powering our schools with solar will lead to cleaner air resulting in fewer health-related absences, a reduced burden on school nurses, and the creation of a healthy outdoor environment which invites more physical activity on school campuses,” said Terry.

MAHA was also active over the past year generating support for EPA’s rules to limit carbon pollution from power plants. A press conference in front of Southern Alliance for Clean Energy’s solar array in Asheville highlighted this important issue. Dr. Susan Mims, Director of Mission Children’s Hospital and MAHA member (on left in above picture), spoke of the health benefits of clean energy.

2015 Airkeeper Awards

Four North Carolinians working to improve air quality will be recognized at a special Airkeeper Awards reception on the eve of NC BREATHE conference in Raleigh. Clean Air Carolina’s annual tradition of recognizing individuals and organizations for their leadership will highlight the contributions of Bill Ross, Jr., JD, Rep. Verla Insko, Lisa Johnson, RRT, RCP, BAS, AE-C, and Jason West, PhD (see insert). Ken Cook, President of Environmental Working Group, will make brief remarks at the reception.

Your Voice for Clean Air

Are you a medical or health professional? If so, you have an important role to play in our quest for clean air. Medical Advocates for Healthy Air (MAHA) is a statewide network of medical and health professionals leading the call for cleaner, healthier air. MAHA members educate colleagues, patients and policymakers about the connection between poor air quality and disease and advocate for stronger protections which will restore clean and healthy air to North Carolina. Visit MedicalAdvocatesforHealthyAir.org to learn more about MAHA.

2015 NC BREATHE Conference

On March 26, Clean Air Carolina and Medical Advocates for Healthy Air along with its partners, will sponsor the first-ever NC BREATHE Conference bringing together air quality researchers, medical and public health professionals, and policymakers. The purpose of the conference is to share the latest research on the health impacts of air pollution, the positive health outcomes related to clean air policymaking, and the resulting economic benefits. The free one-day conference will be held in Raleigh. Visit NCBREATHEConference.org to learn more about the 2015 NC BREATHE Conference.

Medical Advocates Support Clean Energy across the State

MAHA has joined RePower Our Schools, a statewide partnership supporting the transition of North Carolina’s public school districts to 100% renewable energy. The coalition is urging Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Durham Public Schools to pass resolutions to save critical school funding by transforming their operations to renewable sources of power, like solar. At a kickoff event to educate the community, CAC Program Director Terry Lansdell participated in a panel discussion in Charlotte. “Powering our schools with solar will lead to cleaner air resulting in fewer health-related absences, a reduced burden on school nurses, and the creation of a healthy outdoor environment which invites more physical activity on school campuses,” said Terry.

State rules on fracking developed by the Mining and Energy Commission were submitted to the legislature in January and the moratorium on fracking permits is now officially over. MAHA will continue to urge the NC Environmental Management Commission to adopt rules to minimize leakage of air toxins on fracking sites. MAHA applauds the co-sponsors of HB172 for their efforts to protect the health of North Carolinians. Special thanks to the hundreds of MAHA members who participated in our sign-on letter, legislative activity and public hearings in an effort to establish specific air quality rules in the fracking permitting process.