

Healthy and Clean Air, Water, and Land

OBJECTIVE: We need clean air to breathe, water to drink, and land that sustains a healthy life for all residents. We need to trust that the City and County are protecting critical drinking water sources, regulating air pollution and hazardous or solid waste, and cleaning up existing polluted areas. The environmental harms of pollution from industries and infrastructure, disproportionately placed in historically Black neighborhoods, must be corrected.

BACKGROUND: Local government planning practices in the past placed pollution-generating sources, such as cement manufacturing plants, incinerators, landfills, and busy highways in or near historically Black neighborhoods. Industrial uses that are no longer allowed near residential areas still exist in some historically Black neighborhoods because the use pre-dates current regulations. Exposure to these uses has long-term negative effects on residents' health, decreases generational wealth through lower property values, and creates a justifiable mistrust in government. In some cases, residential areas are zoned industrial, and that impacts what residents can do with their property. Streams and creeks are seen as not equally clean and maintained throughout Durham. Residents living in the county or outskirts of the city, who rely on wells and septic systems, are vulnerable to soil and groundwater pollution that could make their water sources unsafe to drink

We want a protected, safe, and healthy environment to support life in Durham. We want regulations and remediation efforts that restore polluted areas intentionally placed near historically Black communities. We want to have confidence that local government is ensuring their environment is healthy and safe.

Quotes from Durham Residents

"The rich create sacrifice zone that basically have low income people who are around chemicals, highways and chemicals which affect area in growing greens"

"water and air quality--safe drinking water, asthma and health"

"Industrial or locally unwanted land uses (factories, highways, etc) that are close to people or neighborhoods. Psychological and physical well-being is impacted."

"Last week, they were out in McDougald testing the water. They said they were just checking it, but you can smell it. If they had more communication, people could have found out information by calling a number or checking out the social media media. I didn't even know about the chemical. I thought it was a body. We thought someone was dead. We know what a dead body smells like."

"Dirty water in the neighborhood, dirty water in people's homes--even if the tap water is award winning, if people see their neighborhood water sources as dirty and the water coming out of their pipes is dirty, they won't drink it."

"Streams and creeks are not clean in my community. They have a lot of trash. The City should work on cleaning and beautifying."

"They came out and pretended to check the water. I know there's something in the water because there's algae in the water. It's been raining. When you run the water, you have to let it run otherwise you're bathing in sewage and dirt."

"It's very worrisome to read the comments that show such mistrust about water quality and safe living conditions nonpublic housing. This mistrust must be addressed. It seems people feel ignored and powerless."