

Secretaries' Science Advisory Board

MEETING MINUTES

Training Room, Green Square Building

Monday, August 2, 2023

10:00 AM-2:00 PM

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretaries' Science Advisory Board (SAB) met on Monday, August 2, 2023, in person in the Ground Floor Hearing Room in the DEQ Archdale Building, in a public meeting. SAB members in attendance were Betsey Tilson MD, MPH, Acting Chair; Jamie DeWitt, PhD; Richard Di Giulio, PhD; Gina Kimble, PhD; John Vandenberg, PhD; Viney Anjea, PhD, David Howard, MPH; David Dorman, PhD and Tom Starr, PhD. Also, in attendance were DEQ and DHHS staff: Sushma Masemore, P.E., Frannie Nilsen, PhD; Jared Wilson, MSc; Michael Scott; Mike Abraczinskas, Taylor Hartsfield, Robin Barrows, Joelle Bursleson, Dylan Friedberg, Bridget Shelton, Paula Chappell, Kennedy Holt, MSPH; and Virginia Guidry, PhD, MPH.

I. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 10:10 AM by Acting Chairperson ("Chair") Tilson.

II. Review and Approve Agenda

Chair Tilson asked for a motion and second to accept the agenda with the changes made to accommodate the presentations. The agenda was approved by unanimous vote.

[August 02, 2023, Agenda](#)

III. Ethics Statement

Chair Augspurger read the ethics statement and reminded the members that if anyone had any conflict of interest, or issues for which a conflict may be perceived, to indicate so. No conflicts were noted by those in attendance.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes for June 7, 2023

The draft meeting minutes were circulated to all members and minor edits were requested; the December minutes were adopted unanimously by verbal vote to include the requested edits.

[June 07, 2023, Meeting Minutes](#)

V. DEQ/DHHS Updates

DEQ Update: *(not recorded)*

Provided by Sushma Masemore, P.E., Assistant Secretary for the Environment, NC DEQ.

1. PFAS Action Strategy Updates:

- a. DEQ is currently sampling to determine contamination; the State Water Infrastructure Authority has proposed a plan to fund DW infrastructure proposals; work is in progress.
- b. DEQ's Public Water Supply group is Sampling 655 small systems incl. schools and daycares for PFAS.
- c. There is Emerging Contaminants funding under IRA program; currently sampling 44M drinking water systems and 5M wastewater systems.

- d. DEQ's Division of Waste Management (DWM) has started a pilot program with Bernard Allen Emergency Drinking Water Fund. This funding provided to residents that have contamination that meets or exceeds advisory levels, based on their income; in process of implementing this program.
 - e. DWM also issued a letter in March to solid waste sanitary landfills to take groundwater and leachate samples for PFAS testing.
 - f. As another part of strategy, DEQ presented 2 concepts to the EMC committee to propose groundwater and surface water standards for PFAS chemicals where scientific information is available.
 - i. DEQ is currently in the process of reviewing current scientific information to propose chemicals and values that can be used in regulatory development activities.
2. Chemours Updates
- a. DEQ continues to focus on remediation around the facility and to assess PFAS in the Lower Cape Fear region. The effort continues in those 4 counties and around the facility itself; current out 20+ miles from the facility and the extent of contamination has not been delineated.
 - i. To date 8,319 homes are eligible for testing,
 - ii. 1355 homes tested above the CO,
 - 1. DWR and DWM are working to determine alternative drinking water for those homes.
 - b. The barrier wall was completed in June and is operational.
3. 1,4 Dioxane Update
- a. This emerging contaminant is prevalent in NC, in the Cape Fear region. DEQ reg staff continues to address water quality requirement in discharge permits and are continuing compliance activities. DEQ is Working with water operators to address issues at the source.
4. Climate Activities
- a. DEQ has been a leader in climate- related activities for many years through state energy plans, the Volkswagen settlement, and the improved GHG emissions inventory. DEQ is prepared to support the federal initiatives to take the appropriate actions for climate mitigation. The Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) effort is helmed by DEQ as the lead agency to implement NC's part of this grant. The other state-level departments that are contributing to the CPRG effort are: DHHS, DOC, DOT, the Governor's Office, and the national Environmental Council of States (ECOS).
 - b. There are \$2 to 500 million dollars in project funding that states can complete for in winter 23/24; DEQ will apply when the application period for the funds is opened.

SAB Questions: *(not recorded)*

- 1- Who pays for the alternative drinking water sources?

DEQ- The Bernard Allen Drinking Water Fund is a new program for PFAS impacts that are not tied to a responsible party. The treatment options are essentially the same as for the Consent Order (GAC, RO, some municipal connections). If Consent Order (CO) PFAS are detected, then Chemours pays for the complete cost (testing installation and maintenance for at least 20 years). If not CO PFAS, like PFOS and PFOA, then the Bernard Allen fund can be used.

- 2- Regarding the EPA 'Climate pollution reduction plan', agriculture sector is the 4th contributing sector (after transportation, construction, and energy production), is it fair to say that as of right now 'agriculture' is not being regulated?

DEQ- There is an economy wide inventory to reduce pollution and GHG emissions across the state. All options for partnerships and innovation are on the table. The program will look at possible solutions and what can be implemented. There is a finite time that the state will be able to complete for the national funding for projects. Some programs are in place for the transportation sector.

DHHS Update: *(meeting recording: not recorded)*

Provided by Virginia Guidry MD, MPH, Section Chief, Occupational & Environmental Epidemiology, NCDHHS

Major update- FCA on the agenda

Other topics-

- 1- Covid 19 Numbers – the numbers are increasing across metrics, keeping an eye on the metrics as well go into the fall, and monitoring other respiratory viruses (RSV and flu).
- 2- Climate and health program – the significant heat lately is being tracked with health metrics in DHHS’ heat related illness surveillance. There is a weekly report published that can be found [here](#). DHHS is working with other partners to increase awareness across the state as the impacts of significant heat are felt far and wide (not just heat stroke, but cardio disease, preterm birth etc.).
- 3- The Environmental Public Health Tracking team is continually adding data to the platform. Climate indicators have been added to the dashboard so that DHHS can look at both environmental and health impacts of climate change. The dashboard can be found [here](#).
- 4- Environmental Justice (EJ) efforts continue in several areas, including the fish tissue data and climate data being added to the Dashboard too.

SAB Questions: *(not recorded)*

1. Industrial agriculture has had an impact on environmental justice communities, including the huge KAFO industry, is any of this included in the dashboard?

DHHS - There is a large body of work on Agriculture and EJ communities; the air impacts to surrounding communities need monitoring so actions can be taken if needed; wells are also monitored to track water quality. DHHS recently applied for the EJ Government to Government grant to look at well water quality and provide additional treatment across the state, a concern due to the documented health impacts.

2. Are there any Covid virus strains or variants to be concerned with? Is the current booster effective?

DHHS - XBB is dominant variant and DHHS is doing sequencing to track the dominant variants/strains. XBB has several strains; the priority is to continue following the variance and take action if needed. The variant XBB and several strains are covered in the vaccine.

[What You Need to Know About XBB.1.5, the Latest Omicron Variant | Johns Hopkins | Bloomberg School of Public Health \(jhu.edu\)](#)

3. What are the assistance programs for poor and lower middle-class citizens to cool their homes? Are there heat advisory funds available?

DHHS – Regarding the advisory- the heat advisory is mostly in the Sandhills where there is overlap of significant heat and disadvantaged communities. DHHS is working with local entities there to get advisories out ASAP; and there are efforts to expand statewide, including with academic partners, to help get the message to communities and have the messages be taken seriously. As far as mitigation in homes, DHHS is implementing those strategies with DEQ, a program named [DHHS LIEAP](#) is designed to protect people in their homes.

DEQ – The home weatherization program in that State Energy Office is a partnership with DHHS and other agencies across the state. Under BIL about \$90M is given to the state to expand the program, which includes providing cooling to the homes as well as heating, insulation, HVAC systems, etc. The workplans were publicly announced and specifically focused on disadvantaged communities. More information can be found [here](#).

VI. DHHS Fish Consumption Advisory presentation *(not recorded)*

DHHS staff will present the details of the fish consumption advisory released on July 13, 2023.

SAB Questions: (meeting recording: [00:00:32](#))

[NCDHHS Middle and Lower Cape Fear River PFOS Fish Consumption Advisories Presentation](#)

VII. DEQ Cape Fear River Fish data update (meeting recording: [00:19:42](#))

The path forward using the samples collected in 2022 will be presented by DEQ staff.

[Cape Fear River Fish Project – Data Update and Path Forward Presentation](#)

SAB Questions: (meeting recording: [00:29:54](#))

Public/tribal comments: (meeting recording: [00:38:45](#))

VIII. Lunch Break

IX. DEQ Division of Air Quality Priorities for Future SAB work (meeting recording: [00:46:25](#))

The current top priority pollutants for DAQ to provide the Board with the scope of their future work will be presented by Robin Barrow and Joelle Burlison, DAQ.

[NC DAQ Priorities for Future SSAB Work Presentation](#)

SAB Questions: (meeting recording: [01:06:45](#))

X. EPA New Approach Methodology presentation (meeting recording: [01:13:35](#))

The data behind the new approach toxicology models will be discussed by Alison Harill, PhD, Associate Director for Toxicology, Center for Computational Toxicology and Exposure, Office of Research and Development, US Environmental Protection Agency.

[Development of a New Transcriptomics-Based Assessment Product for Data Poor Chemicals Presentation](#)

SAB Questions: (meeting recording: [01:36:25](#))

XI. Public Forum (meeting recording: [01:49:10](#))

One member of the public spoke during the forum, his comments can be heard at 01:50:00 in the meeting recording.

XII. Adjourn (meeting recording: [02:02:32](#))

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:05pm.