

Clean air plan nearly finished for Upstate

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Where is public comment, some ask

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By June, the Upstate's air may again be aggravating asthmatic children and confining people with sensitive lungs to their homes.

By March 15, Greenville, Spartanburg and Anderson will have to tell the state and federal governments what they will do to clean up the air or face a loss of federal highway dollars and barriers that could prevent new companies from locating here.

As the deadline approaches, only the most committed Upstate residents will be able to read and comment on the plan that will govern air quality for the next three years, critics say, since there are no plans for any public hearings on the wide-ranging plan.

"I think they're trying to limit as much public comment as they can," said Robert Dalton, who sits on an advisory committee.

No public meetings are required, according to state Department of Health and Environmental Control guidelines. The public will get its say and there will be public hearings before any of the two dozen proposals are implemented, said John Owings, a manager with the Greenville County Planning Commission.

"For example, if the coun-

ty councils were considering a ban on open burning, there would be public hearings on that," he said.

The lack of public input into the plan doesn't surprise Norris McDonald, director of the African-American Environmentalist Association, who also said every citizen in the Upstate must be involved. More than two-thirds of the Upstate's air pollution comes from cars and trucks.

"Non-attainment areas need to come up with creative ways to come into compliance," he said. "But we're not serious about solving the air pollution problem: Capitalism trumps air pollution in the U.S."

But the only chance for the public on the over-arching document will be written comment between the end of this week and mid-March. Diane Eldridge, director of advocacy with Upstate Forever, said the real time for public pressure hasn't come yet.

"It is critically important for the Upstate's citizens to let their county councils know they support the strategies," she said. "We would urge them to review the proposal and let their county councils hear from them."

Some of the priorities in the last published report in June 2003 included offering free public transportation

TO COMMENT

How you can get your say:
In Greenville County:

Web: <http://>

www.greenvillecounty.org

Look for "Air Quality"

E-mail:

planning@greenvillecounty.org

Paper: Loaner copies will be

available from the Greenville

Planning Commission, Suite

400, County Square

In Anderson County:

Call the planning

commission, (864) 260-

4720

In Spartanburg County:

Call the planning

commission, (864) 596-

3570

on high ozone days, having governments buy gas-electric hybrid vehicles and tax credits for people who don't drive their cars. Almost all of the programs are labeled "voluntary" or prefaced by "encourage."

"There are certainly a lot of things that are proposed that the public will want to know," said Eric Thompson, president of the Greenville Sierra Club.

Once the proposal is sent to the state and the EPA, changes can be made to the plan before the end of the year, Owings said. While the public hearings are not required, a cross-section of public opinion is expected, said Henry Phillips, who is coordinating the effort for DHEC.