

CONTACT: Dee Blackwell, Executive Director  
John Marshall, Planning Director  
Western Piedmont Council of Governments  
828-322-9191



## WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA AIR QUALITY CONFERENCE RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) chose the Western North Carolina Annual Air Quality Conference project for their Innovation Award. NADO recognized the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) during the 2013 National Rural Transportation Conference on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in Greenville, SC. WPCOG Planning Director John Marshall received the award on behalf of the Unifour Region.



WPCOG Planning Director John Marshall (left) received the NADO Innovation Award on behalf of the Unifour Air Quality

The Unifour Air Quality Committee (UAQC) sponsors an annual spring conference as its primary education and outreach event. The purpose of the conference is to educate the public, provide emerging information to government officials and the private sector regarding air quality issues important to Western North Carolina. The conference attracts approximately 100 attendees representing local municipalities, local industries, public health organizations, public education agencies, environmental advocacy groups, state and federal agencies staff and other public groups and private citizens.

The first air quality conference took place on June 7, 2007 on the Lenoir-Rhyne University (LRU) campus. The UAQC began the Air Quality Conferences without dedicated funding. By partnering with The Reese Institute at LRU, the UAQC is able to access conference space and other support. Hosting the event at LRU provides the added benefit of being at a neutral and central regional location. With financial support from business and industrial partners the WPCOG is pleased to provide this conference free of charge. Beginning in 2012, the WPCOG was awarded a grant to support local Air Awareness and Outreach, including the Air Quality conference.

Lenoir-Rhyne University continues to host the conference on its campus. The Reese Institute at LRU organizes and provides logistics on the campus. No other state or regional air quality conferences occur annually in North Carolina.

**The Seventh Annual Western North Carolina (formerly “Unifour”) Air Quality Conference will take place on Wednesday, June 14, 2013, 9:30 am - 3:30 pm in the Belk Centrum Building at Lenoir-Rhyne University.** Air quality is important to economic and human health. Come share in an open exchange of information and ideas to improve air quality in the Unifour Region. There is no registration fee to attend the conference and the WPCOG and UAQC encourages the public to attend. A complementary lunch will be provided. To learn

more about the conference and for online registration instructions please go to [www.wpcog.org](http://www.wpcog.org). The conference offers six great breakout sessions throughout the day to choose from in addition to the group plenary and lunch speaker. The WPCOG is finalizing details for this year's conference but expected sessions include presentations about transportation, bio-diesel fuel, sustainability, energy supply, solar energy, fracking and air quality, health care and air quality, home energy efficiency.

In addition, the conference will offer a teacher track focusing on environmental topics for middle school and high school teachers. This event is a great opportunity for teachers to increase their understanding of environmental science, management and policy issues. During the main conference sessions the teachers join others working on air quality issues and engage environmental educators working at the regional, state and national level. The UAQC encourages teachers to gain exposure to the latest information and available resources to enrich your classroom instruction (0.75 CUE Environmental Literacy and/or Science).

According to Dee Blackwell, WPCOG Executive Director, "The UAQC efforts to understand and address air quality issues allow our region to maintain compliance with federal air quality standards. This conference, along with other efforts by the WPCOG on behalf of our region's local governments, assures ongoing transportation funding that facilitates increased economic development opportunities in our region."

The Unifour Air Quality Committee is chaired by Catawba County Commissioner Kitty Barnes. "Mrs. Barnes is the founding chair of the committee and her leadership directly led to the creation of the WNC Air Quality Conference." said Dee Blackwell.

John Marshall, WPCOG Planning Director, stated "credit should go to the staff who worked behind the scenes to organize the current and past conferences. "In particular Taylor Dellinger, Tony Gallegos and John Wear along with new staff member Kelly Larkins and retired staff member John Tippet have done a great job organizing the event." "Also the staff from Lenoir Rhyne University, Dr. John Brzorad and Erin Selling, should be recognized for their efforts and generous use of University facilities to hold the conference."