A Sustainable Environment

Vision for 20/20

As stewards of the environment, North Carolinians preserve and protect the state's vast resources. The quality of the air, water, and land will be maintained and enhanced. The collection and dissemination of environmental data will reflect advanced technology and communication.

♦♦♦

Goal 1: In 2020, North Carolina's air and water will be of the highest quality.

In some respects, North Carolina has made significant progress in protecting its air and water over the past 20 years. Four of the six primary air pollutants -- including lead and sulfur dioxide -- have declined since the 1970s. In addition, municipal and industrial sewage treatment plants are dumping less noxious waste into rivers. All is far from well, however. Ground-level ozone, which triggers asthma and other respiratory illnesses, has been on the increase since 1995, placing North Carolina among the least healthy states in terms of air quality. Non-point source pollution -- such as runoff from roads and agricultural lands -- presents a critical challenge in maintaining the quality of streams, rivers, and estuaries over the next 20 years. Meanwhile, both pollution and dwindling aquifers pose problems for ground water supplies.

Facts:

- In 1998, high ozone triggered "unhealthy" air advisories on 70 days.
- In 1999, North Carolina had the country's 5th highest number of unhealthy air days.
- Of the most ozone-polluted metropolitan areas in the nation, Charlotte ranked 8th and Raleigh-Durham ranked 11th.
- 27% of NC 7th and 8th graders reported either diagnosed asthma or undiagnosed wheezing.
- As of March 2001, 9,035 leaking underground storage tanks needed repair to prevent or halt contamination of groundwater by petroleum or other chemicals.
- 23% of the 32,392 active underground storage tanks are not in compliance with regulations designed to detect or prevent future leaks.
- Over the past 10 years, there have been 2,199 chemical, biological, and petroleum leaks and spills that contaminated ground water at unregulated sites.

Targets:

1.) **Air Quality.** Air quality throughout the ozone season will be assessed as "good." Half of this improvement will take place by 2010. In 2000 there were 35 "unhealthy" ozone alert days.