



Posting the Colors
Proposal by the Cleveland County Asthma Coalition to Cleveland County Schools

The Cleveland County Asthma Coalition in partnership with the Alliance for Health is pleased to submit this initiative to the Cleveland County Schools principals for their consideration.

Based on a successful program in Merced/Mariposa County, California, the asthma-friendly flag program is a multi-colored flag system that will act as a daily indicator of outdoor air quality at your school. The system includes four colors and is based on the Air Quality Index of the US Environmental Protection Agency. Each day a flag will be raised on your school's flag pole that corresponds to the color of the AQI. The color of the flag should provide guidance for the schedule of outdoor activities for that day.

Each set of flags would include four specific colors:

Green: The air outside is “good” and is considered healthy for everyone, Outdoor activities will be permitted for all students.

Yellow: the air outside is “moderate” and is unhealthy for only extremely sensitive children and adults. Outdoor activities will be permitted for all students.

Orange: the air outside is “unhealthy for sensitive groups”. On orange days sensitive individuals should limit prolonged outdoor exertion and alternative indoor activities should be made available to students as needed.

Red: The air outside is “unhealthy” for everyone. On red days, sensitive individuals should avoid outdoor activities and alternative indoor activities should be made available to all students.

We believe that this program is important for students and families involved in Cleveland County Schools. According to the North Carolina Center for Health Statistics, there were 184 hospitalizations for asthma in Cleveland County in 2003; 40 of those hospitalizations involved children between the ages of 0 to 14. School nurses encourage parents to have updated asthma action plans on file for their children and recent legislative changes now allow students to keep asthma medications with them instead of housing them in a central school location. Using the asthma-friendly flag program would provide students, parents and teachers with one more tool to manage their asthma and reduce the potential for severe asthma attacks. This is especially critical on days when air quality is classified as “unhealthy.” The issue of air quality should be discussed by students, parents and primary care providers and recommendations should be included on asthma action plans.

The Cleveland County Asthma Coalition and the Alliance for Health will purchase and distribute a set of asthma flags for each school site. The Air Quality Index posting is available each day from the EPA website and can easily be posted on the Cleveland County Schools website to be referenced by school staff. Each morning the appropriate color flag can be posted so that students, parents and faculty are all aware of the air quality. This will also benefit other community members who see the flag posted at the school site and use it to determine their own levels of outdoor activity when air quality is unhealthy.