Introduction

The Northwest Clean Air Agency strategic plan is a working document intended to help the agency formally identify goals, prioritize projects and guide decisions.

The agency’s governing Board of Directors instructed staff to begin work on a strategic plan in July 2012. For the next year, the leadership team met to develop and write the plan.

The Board received status updates throughout the development process and was presented with a draft of key concepts and plan structure during its Board meeting on June 13, 2013. The Board adopted the strategic plan on Dec. 12, 2013.

The plan is designed to be updated periodically to adapt it to changing conditions within and affecting our jurisdiction. The agency will review its overall performance at least annually.

Management will establish departmental work plans, specific objectives and performance measures consistent with the goals and strategies of this plan.

Agency mission

This plan is part of our ongoing efforts to fulfill our agency mission:

To preserve, protect and enhance our air quality for the benefit of current and future generations in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties by fostering individual responsibility and assuring regulatory accountability.

Core programs and services

- Permitting
- Compliance and enforcement at stationary sources of air pollution (industrial, business and residential)
- Air quality monitoring
- Public outreach and assistance
Strategic plan structure and overview

The NWCAA strategic plan is organized under five categories, called outcome areas, which broadly describe the agency’s work:

1. Clean air
2. A level playing field for business
3. Community awareness
4. Agency excellence
5. Financial stability

For each outcome area, we identified goals, objectives and strategies, and we developed methods to measure our performance in each area.
Outcome area 1
Clean air

Stakeholder group: People who live and work in our jurisdiction

Goal: The air in our jurisdiction is clean and safe to breathe.

Objective: Our air quality is in the “good” range or better every day.

Strategies:
- Continuously improve permitting, education and compliance programs.
- Promote reduced air emissions and energy efficiency in homes, businesses and transportation in our programs and outreach products, and through our grant requirements.
- Inform people about outdoor burning and wood heating regulations and issues, focusing on helping Columbia Valley area residents create and implement a long-term strategy for reducing smoke pollution.
- Work with registered sources to resolve compliance problems quickly.
- Develop a replacement schedule for ambient air quality monitoring equipment, and replace equipment accordingly.

Goal: Regulated sources of air pollution comply with air quality laws and regulations.

Objectives:
- We meet complaint response and enforcement deadlines.
- There were no repeat offenses in the last year.

Strategies:
- Contact complainants and identifiable causes of complaints by the close of the following business day.
- Continuously improve our compliance program:
  - Meet deadlines in the Washington State Compliance Assurance Agreement for Air Programs.
  - If deadlines are commonly missed, determine if there is a recurring reason and make necessary changes.
- Anticipate the public’s “need to know” by communicating compliance issues of community interest.
- Look for patterns and address them: Map the geographical distribution of complaints and emission sources.

Goal: We work with other agencies and governments to improve air quality and promote clean air.

Objective: We participate and engage with other local governments in their land use planning processes in an effort to protect and improve air quality.
Strategies:

- Coordinate: Meet with local planning departments in our jurisdiction to discuss our areas of interest and issues to look out for. Request a heads up when potential issues arise.
- Comment to local governments on land use plans that we deem likely to significantly degrade air quality or generate complaints.
  - In areas with known air quality concerns (e.g., Columbia Valley) submit air quality related comments concerning proposed projects, policies, zoning changes and other development activity.
  - For known proposed activities with potentially significant negative air quality components (e.g., marijuana businesses, asphalt plants, coffee roasters, etc.), submit air quality related comments to the permitting authority.
- Work with other local, state and federal government agencies to develop a multi-agency management plan for naturally occurring asbestos in our region.
Outcome area 2
A level playing field for business

Stakeholder group: Businesses

Goal: We make permit decisions fairly, consistently and quickly.

Objective: We issue or deny permits within 60 days of receiving complete applications.

Strategies:
- Focus on improving our permitting process:
  - Within a year of adopting this strategic plan, and then not less than every five years thereafter, review steps in the permitting process to determine if all are necessary or if there are opportunities to streamline.
  - If deadlines are commonly missed, determine if there is a recurring reason and make necessary changes.
- Provide applicants with due dates by which to supply information, and follow up with applicants by the next business day if a deadline is missed.

Goal: Our inspection process is fair, consistent and efficient.

Objective: We conduct at least one on-site inspection annually at all registered and Title V facilities.

Strategies:
- Focus on improving our inspection process:
  - Every five years, evaluate the inspection process to determine if all steps are necessary or if there are opportunities to streamline. Annually review with all field staff the inspection criteria, priorities and procedures.
  - Annually review a representative sample of inspection reports to ensure appropriate follow-up action was taken.
  - If inspection deadlines are commonly missed, determine if there is a recurring reason and make necessary changes.

Goal: All air emissions sources that should be registered are registered.

Objective: We locate and register sources that should be registered.

Strategies:
- Investigate number, type and location of emissions sources that are unregistered.
  - Prioritize by source type.
  - Assign to staff.
- At the end of each year, determine why any emission sources remain unregistered.
  - If the cause is internal, adjust staff assignments and/or our registration process.
  - If the cause is the source, pursue enforcement.
- Develop an outreach strategy to help sources understand if they should be registered and what to do.
Goal: We are fair and consistent in the way we conduct enforcement and issue penalties.

Objective: We follow all procedural steps in every enforcement action.

Strategies:
- Focus on improving our enforcement process:
  - At least every five years, evaluate the enforcement process to determine if all steps are necessary or if there are opportunities to streamline.
  - Review our penalty matrix and major source penalty guideline by the end of 2014.
  - Provide an annual refresher to field staff of the enforcement criteria, priorities and procedures.
  - Ask staff for suggestions and lessons learned from the previous year.
  - Assess whether all procedural steps were followed in every enforcement action. If not, why not? Make necessary changes.
- Develop a strategy and guidelines for consistently communicating to the public about enforcement actions.
- Report to the agency Board of Directors a summary of recent enforcement action and complaint activity.

Goal: We are fair and consistent in the way we assess and collect fees.

Objective: Businesses pay all fees according to applicable fee schedules.

Strategies:
- Review fees to determine:
  - If they are fair and consistent
  - If we charged fees according to regulations and board-approved fee schedules
- Pursue collection for delinquencies.
Outcome area 3
Community awareness

**Stakeholder group:** Community members, businesses, environmental groups, medical and health organizations, government

**Goal:** People recognize us as the local air quality authority, and our role in air quality issues is generally understood.

**Objective:** We effectively communicate to the public who we are and what we do so people know to come to us first for air quality issues.

**Strategies:**
- Get a baseline: Create an online survey that measures public awareness.
- Develop an overall communications plan for the agency and targeted communications plans for high-interest topics and current air quality issues and concerns.
- Reconstruct our website, track number and type of views/uses.
- Establish an agency presence on social media.
- Publicize agency work through news releases, interviews, blog posts, social media, group email lists and public events.
- Communicate our strategic plan to major stakeholders.
- Cultivate partnerships and/or relationships with other agencies and organizations.
- Produce an annual report summarizing strategic plan performance, permit and enforcement activity and annual financial results.

**Goal:** People understand how their own actions affect air quality.

**Objective:** We effectively communicate to the public about individual contributions to air quality.

**Strategies:**
- Use staff outreach, our website, news releases, interviews, blog posts, social media, group email lists and public events to:
  - Promote energy efficiency in homes, businesses and transportation.
  - Inform people about outdoor burning and wood heating issues and requirements, placing a high priority on reducing smoke pollution in the Columbia Valley area.
- Publish a comparison of local air quality with other areas across the nation through participation in American Lung Association Clean Cities Program.
- Evaluate restoring K-12 environmental education programs.
Outcome area 4
Agency excellence

**Stakeholder group:** Community, staff, Board of Directors, Advisory Council

**Goal:** We attract and retain superior employees.

**Objectives:**
- Employees perform tasks identified in their job descriptions and accomplish goals set annually.
- Agency pay and benefits are competitive with other employers for comparable positions.
- Our staff receives the best training available and meets or exceeds benchmarks for their positions.

**Strategies:**
- Annually reviewing position descriptions to ensure they address current needs.
- Encourage individual development by:
  - Setting annual goals with each staff member and reviewing progress toward meeting those goals.
  - Identifying professional certifications required for each staff position, and documenting certification and training activity for each staff member.
  - Developing a training program for each staff member.
  - Developing an agency-wide training program and schedule.
  - Dedicating adequate funding for core and supplemental training through the budget process.
- Maintain employee compensation that is slightly above the market average for the position and that ensures internal equity.
- Every five years (more often if needed) comprehensively review the employee compensation system and modify as necessary.
- Annually adjust compensation using an index that reflects changes in the local economy.

**Goal:** We have the technology we need, and it is current and reliable.

**Objective:** Technology equipment and systems are replaced and/or upgraded according to schedule.

**Strategies:**
- Annually evaluate suitability of technology equipment in light of evolving needs.
- Maintain a current technology equipment replacement schedule. Replace equipment on schedule. Dedicate adequate funding for equipment replacement through the budget process.
- Complete initial agency database upgrade by February 2014, and incorporate tracking and measurement tools as identified by this strategic plan.
Goal: We help our employees be as healthy as they can be.

Objectives:
- We actively encourage and provide opportunities for our employees to engage in healthy behaviors.

Strategies:
- Continue to provide comprehensive medical benefits to all employees.
- Actively participate in our health insurance provider’s wellness program by:
  - Encouraging staff to participate in wellness program activities, including a health screening and the AWC health questionnaire.
  - Having a wellness committee that meets at least quarterly and communicates regularly with staff on activities that promote health improvement.
- Offer lunchtime activities such as exercise classes, seminars and health information.
Outcome area 5  
Financial stability

Stakeholder group: Staff, Board of Directors, Advisory Council

Goal: We account for our financial resources and safeguard the assets of the agency.

Objectives: All financial and accountability audits contain no audit findings, demonstrating that we comply with all state and federal financial requirements.

Strategies:
- Annually conduct an internal review of compliance with agency policies for purchasing, asset tracking and handling of agency money.
- Implement audit recommendations as appropriate.

Goal: We maintain adequate financial reserves.

Objective: We maintain agency reserves equal to or greater than Board-approved reserve targets.

Strategies:
- Annually review reserve account balances and compare to Board established reserve targets.
- Through the annual budget process, adjust balances in reserve accounts to meet minimum reserve targets.
- In 2018 and every five years thereafter, review reserve targets and consider adjusting if needed for financial stability.

Goal: Our fee-based programs are self-sustaining.

Objective: Revenues from fee-based programs are sufficient to pay all program costs.

Strategies:
- Annually conduct a review of the previous three years’ fees and program costs for program self-sufficiency. Propose fee adjustments to the Board based on:
  - Results from the three-year review.
  - The average Consumer Price Index change during the past three years.
  - Any other factors that may affect expenses or revenues.
- Build an agency culture of continual program and process improvement to maximize cost efficiency.