



Summary

On May 12, 2026, thirty - eight public health and community-based professionals met in person and via Zoom for the quarterly NC Lead and Healthy Homes Outreach Task Force meeting. During the meeting, members discussed program updates, challenges and questions on lead and healthy homes activities, and details are included below. The two-hour meeting was submitted to the NC Board of Registered Environmental Health Specialists for continuing education approval. The meeting is co-convened by the NC DHHS Children's Environmental Health Unit (CEH) and the UNC Chapel Hill Institute for the Environment. **A list of meeting participants and their contact information are provided at the end of these notes.**

Program updates, challenges and questions from other organizations

The group revisited February's discussion about challenges in testing pregnant women for lead exposure, noting ongoing issues with educating providers, reaching pregnant patients early enough, and preventing delays that result in elevated levels being discovered after birth. A planned pre-meeting conversation on this topic had limited participation, so attendees were asked to indicate their interest if they would like to join a focused follow-up discussion on **improving pregnancy testing workflows** or **on developing educational materials such as nutrition guidance and keys messaging**. Participants were encouraged to specify whether they want to join the pregnancy testing group or the education materials group so that meetings can be scheduled and next steps organized.

Karin Evanoff (NCDHHS Adult Blood Lead Program) mentioned that she often partners with the Department of Labor when companies fail to follow lead-safety practices, and she offered to explore bringing in her Department of Labor contacts to share how inspections are conducted and what follow-up requirements look like, particularly in cases involving parents of children with elevated lead levels.

Nellie Benetiz (Chatham County Public Health Department) reported that she is preparing to deliver a series of lead-prevention presentations at several childcare centers in the coming weeks to expand outreach and strengthen education for families and staff.

Kim Lewis (Cumberland County Community Development) described her agency's housing rehabilitation work, which focuses on addressing health and safety related repairs for low-income homeowners, especially seniors, living outside the Fayetteville city limits. Using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, the program handles issues such as flooring failures, electrical hazards, water damage, and mold, with full home inspections conducted to identify underlying problems. She noted challenges when repairs exceed \$50,000, as required liens can deter senior citizens from participating. She also shared that the county is exploring a partnership with Action Pathways and considering an emergency repair pilot program for urgent HVAC and mold related needs. Kim encouraged referrals within Cumberland County and emphasized the department's commitment to supporting vulnerable residents and strengthening community partnerships.

Discussion on challenge of locating qualified lead contractors in NC

Donna Coleman (NC Housing Finance Agency) reported that the pool of qualified rehabilitation contractors especially those experienced with pre-1978 homes is shrinking as many long-time contractors retire or pass away, a trend worsened by COVID. Because her program serves low-income households using HUD funds, overlapping HUD and EPA RRP requirements often create confusion and discourage contractor participation. These challenges are most acute in western North Carolina, where multiple disaster-recovery programs compete for the same limited contractor pool. Donna has encouraged partners to use available funds to support contractor training rather than relying on in-house RRP certification to help expand capacity. She also noted that some referred households earn too much to qualify for her program, but she still encouraged continued referrals and use of the contractor-locator tools on her agency's website.

Responses to Donna's Update:

Roger Rooks, NC Health Hazards Control Unit:

Roger confirmed that the state is experiencing a shortage of certified abatement contractors, noting that far fewer firms hold abatement certification compared to RRP certification. He explained that RRP has become the default standard, reducing interest in full abatement training, and that contractor availability is especially limited in remote counties. Roger also clarified that only a few training providers offer courses regularly and that the state retains certification records for decades, allowing verification when needed.

Ed Norman, NC DHHS Children's Environmental Health

Ed added that HUD grantees have historically sponsored local contractor trainings, though these efforts do not always reach rural areas. He noted that contractor availability may currently be limited because RTI has subcontracted many certified risk assessors for the ARPA childcare and school testing project. He suggested connecting with RTI once that project concludes next year, as more contractors may become available.

Relative Links & Upcoming Events

- **Searchable database of NC rehab programs:** <https://www.nchfa.com/home-ownership-partners/community-partners/current-community-partners?county-id=All&program-id=4802>
- **ESFRLP Income Limits:** <https://www.housingbuildsnc.com/sites/default/files/2026-04/ESFRLP28IncomeLimits.pdf>
- **ESFRLP Forms and Resources:** <https://www.housingbuildsnc.com/home-ownership-partners/community-partners/community-programs/essential-single-family-rehabilitation-loan-pool/forms-and-resources>

Guest Presentation

Energy Saver North Carolina and NC Weatherization Assistance Program

Helen Hossley, Special Projects Manager, NC DEQ

Helen presented an overview of the State Energy Office's two major programs for low to moderate income households: the long-standing Weatherization Assistance Program and the new Energy Saver NC rebate program launched in January 2025. She explained that the Energy Saver program helps reduce utility costs and improve home health and safety by offering contractor-applied rebates for energy-efficient upgrades such as heat pumps, air sealing, and efficient water heaters. She also noted that North Carolina is the only state to launch both rebate programs simultaneously and began with two pilot counties to refine systems, contractor enrollment, and application processes.

Attendees

Brenda Bass , Regional EH Specialist	NC DHHS Children’s Environmental Health (CEH)	brenda.bass@dhhs.nc.gov
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