

# SMART SURFACES

## SOUTH CAROLINA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

South Carolina Public Health Association has advanced its efforts to address climate change as a public health issue. SCPHA's Environmental Health Section is dedicated to tackling the most pressing environmental concerns in their community, and one of our central initiatives is the Smart Surfaces project. Through this work, SCPHA has partnered with APHA and the Smart Surfaces Coalition to educate, advocate, and implement smart surface technologies in Columbia, SC.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The project began with a focus on community connection and listening. SCPHA conducted focus groups to hear directly from residents about their concerns regarding the heat and energy crisis. At these forums, SCPHA brought in subject matter experts to share knowledge while also providing participants with resources tailored to their needs. This collaborative approach not only informed their strategy but also built trust and ensured that community voices guided their work. SCPHA attended community events, often unrelated to environmental issues, to meet people where they were. This approach allowed them to engage individuals who might not otherwise have sought out climate resources. At these events, SCPHA was able to share information, listen to concerns, and distribute materials developed in response to earlier focus group insights. Building on this foundation, they hosted educational forums through webinars and presentations at partner organizations' events. These efforts connected them with groups pursuing similar missions, and expanded opportunities to collaborate on solutions.

#### 6 MINI-GRANTS AWARDED

SCPHA's next step was implementation. They chose to maximize community impact by launching a mini-grant series, empowering 6 local organizations, students, and researchers to apply for small grants to implement smart surface projects or conduct related research. Initiatives included rain garden workshops and installations, a cool mural project, weatherization workshops and installations, and studies quantifying the effects of smart surfaces on urban heat. These projects have generated strong community involvement and demonstrated success in implementing smart surface technologies.

### NEW PARTNERSHIPS

From the beginning of this project, SCPHA has sought to identify collaborative partners in the fields of public and environmental health in Columbia as well as academic institutions, community-based organizations, and other advocacy groups. Some of the new partnerships include:

- **Columbia Green:** a local nonprofit organization focused on enhancing the environment by collaborating with



Rain Garden Installation in Columbia, SC (Gills Creek Watershed Association). October 2025.



USC Citizen Science Heat Mapping Study. Ben Marosites pictured. August 2025.

the community to preserve and improve public green spaces through sustainable planting. SCPHA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Columbia Green where the two organizations agreed to engage in workshops, networking meetings, presentations, and other events that explore our mutual interests; create opportunities for future joint or allied funding of activities and projects; and act mutually to promote and advocate for one another's projects and events.

**The Gills Creek Watershed Association (GCWA):** a nonprofit organization focused on protecting the Gills Creek Watershed. Their efforts include watershed restoration, stream mitigation, and promoting water quality. GCWA's initiatives involve litter cleanups, citizenscience monitoring, community restoration planning, rain garden workshops, and the installation of rain gardens in public spaces.

**1. The South Carolina Energy Justice Coalition (SCEJC):** a nonpartisan group made up of over 70 organizations across South

- Carolina. Its goal is to address the high energy burdens and inequities present in the state's energy system. The coalition's mission is to ensure fairness within the energy sector while correcting past harms and advocating for investments in renewable energy solutions that foster economic growth and improve public health. The coalition specifically focuses on reducing energy burdens, which refers to the percentage of household income spent on heating and cooling. Additionally, it aims to support communities that face ongoing energy inefficiencies.
- **The City of Columbia's Climate Protection Action Committee (CPAC):** an advisory group, spearheaded by the City of Columbia's Sustainability Facilitator, that develops and advocates for effective strategies on a municipal level to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to climate change, and conserve natural resources

## SMART SURFACE POLICIES

Representatives of the SCPHA Smart Surfaces Team and the SC Energy Justice Coalition attended APHA's Policy Action Institute in June 2025. In addition to attending this advocacy workshop, SCEJC met with Senator Tim Scott's office staff. Tim Scott serves on several committees including Finance (Subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure) and Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. More locally, State House Representative Robert Reese introduced Resolution H. 4531 which recognizes September 24, 2025, as "South Carolina Energy Justice Day".



Cool and Colorful Mural (SC Energy Justice Coalition). Lower Richland High School. Rep. Robert Reese, David Cann, Principal Latayna Williams, Mahaganee Foster, Mark Dreher, Shayne Kinloch, Beata Dewitt pictured. Nov. 13, 2025.