

# BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

PO BOX 44 Saxapahaw, North Carolina 27340 (336) 525-2003 office

## **Stericycle's Haw River Medical Waste Incinerators**

Visit our website: [bredl-medwaste.org](http://bredl-medwaste.org)

Email: [info@bredl-medwaste.org](mailto:info@bredl-medwaste.org)

### **What is Stericycle?**

...the largest medical waste treatment company in the US. Revenue = \$1.18 billion in 2009.

### **Where are the medical waste incinerators?**

1168 Porter Av, Haw River, NC 27258 (just east of Burlington). The two smoke stacks are visible from Interstate 40/85, looking south from Exit 150 (Jimmy Kerr Rd). They are adjacent to new residential developments and less than a half a mile from Alamance Community College.

### **What's wrong with medical waste incineration?**

Medical waste incineration, even with pollution controls, creates a wide range of harmful air emissions. These include mercury, dioxins, furans, particulates (soot), lead, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides (ozone), hydrogen chloride, chlorine, hydrofluoric acid, cadmium, other heavy metals and more.

These toxic air emissions pollute our air, our gardens, crops and soil, rivers, lakes and streams. Individually and collectively these pollutants can threaten public health. For example:

Mercury – Potent neurotoxin that affects brain development, particularly in unborn and young children. Mercury enters the body by eating mercury-tainted fish.

Dioxins – Some of the most toxic chemicals known to science; can cause cancer, are linked to birth defects and may damage the immune system. Children exposed in utero are most sensitive and vulnerable to its effects.

Particulate matter – Also known as soot and dust. Particulate matter has been linked to increased lung cancer and cardiovascular health problems.

Lead – Heavy metal that can damage the brain, nerves, kidney, liver, digestive tract, and heart.

Greenhouse gases – Gases (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub>) that cause global warming and climate change.

### **Who is affected by incineration?**

We all are. But people living nearby and directly downwind of the incinerator are more susceptible to harmful emissions.

People of all ages with chronic respiratory problems such as asthma and allergies.

Pregnant women and young children are at particularly high risk due to the toxic impacts of poisons including lead, mercury and dioxin.

The elderly and others with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable.

### **How much waste does Stericycle incinerate?**

Between 21 - 27 million pounds each year.<sup>1</sup>

In 2008-09 Stericycle burned 26.3 million pounds.<sup>2</sup>

Their permit allows them to burn up to 33.4+ million pounds per year.

NC facilities send 53 to 66% of the total waste burned at Stericycle (yearly average=62%).<sup>3</sup>

### **Are incinerators safe with their pollution controls?**

No, even with pollution controls and under normal operating conditions, medical waste incinerators emit tens of thousands of pounds of toxic compounds into the air annually including hydrochloric acid, cadmium, dioxin, nickel and mercury. Also, so-called bypass events occur when there are malfunctions during startup and shutdown of the incinerator. When the bypass stack is open, toxic air contaminants are released directly into the air with no pollution controls. The vast majority of these 'bypass events' are allowed under the operating permit and are not considered a violation by the North Carolina Division of Air Quality.

## **Does Stericycle have any record of permit violations?**

2006 -- Violation for two incidents of bypass stacks in open position (excess emissions).  
2004 -- Violation for exceeding the mercury emissions standard. Civil penalty of \$10,352  
2002 -- Violation for exceeding the particulate matter standard. Violation for exceeding the mercury emissions standard. Civil penalty of \$8,518  
2001 -- Violation for exceeding the particulate matter standard. (Failed stack test) Civil penalty of \$4,666  
2000 -- Five violations for exceeding the maximum amount of waste allowed to be burned per hour, for multiple hours (waste charge rate). This is overloading the incinerator.

## **What can be done about medical waste incineration?**

Cleaner and safer alternatives to incineration exist. Regulations and technology now allow incineration to be replaced by more environmentally-friendly alternatives for the vast majority of medical waste (e.g., advanced autoclave). Stericycle uses some of these new technologies, even in NC. But they continue to use their two Haw River incinerators as their east coast regional burning center. Hospitals and clinics can segregate waste and opt for safer medical waste disposal technologies.

## **Will Stericycle comply with the new stricter EPA rules?**

The stricter rules for incinerators will be final in NC by October 2010. Even though Stericycle has been operating on an expired permit since 2007, their permit renewal is scheduled for March 2010. If granted, they can avoid the stricter standards until 2014. Emissions testing in 2008 were in compliance with current rules, but when compared with new EPA rules, excessive levels of lead (8.3x more), cadmium (9% more) and mercury (28x more) are found.

## **What can I do about Stericycle's incinerators?**

### **WRITE TO REQUEST A PUBLIC HEARING ON STERICYCLE'S TITLE V PERMIT RENEWAL**

## **Send your letter (Postmarked no later than March 10, 2010)**

Requests for a public hearing must be in writing and include a statement supporting the need for such a hearing; an indication of your interest in the facility, and a brief summary of the information intended to be offered at such hearing.

Mr. Gautam Patnaik  
Division of Air Quality  
1641 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1641  
[gautam.patnaik@ncdenr.gov](mailto:gautam.patnaik@ncdenr.gov)  
RE: Stericycle Title V Operation Permit Renewal

## **You can also-----**

Watch the video about Stericycle's Haw River incinerators: "Burning Issues in Medical Waste" at <http://bredl-medwaste.org/stericycle.htm>

Get involved! Volunteer to help with this project. Call BREDL's office at (336) 525-2003 or email [info@bredl-medwaste.org](mailto:info@bredl-medwaste.org)

Invite the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League to do a presentation for your church, civic group or business about the health risks associated with Stericycle's Haw River medical waste incinerators.

Ask your healthcare providers to view the video: "Medwaste: Call to Action for Health Care" at <http://bredl-medwaste.org/healthcare.org>

Call the NC Division of Air Quality immediately 336-771-5000 if you see dark smoke or smell odors coming from the Stericycle incinerators. Keep a record of your call.

Tell Mark Miller, President and CEO of Stericycle, to stop burning medical waste in North Carolina. Write him at: Stericycle Inc. 28161 North Keith Drive Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

<sup>1,3</sup> NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Division of Waste Management. Incinerator Annual Reports 7/1/2000 - 6/30/2008 for Stericycle, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Division of Waste Management. Incinerator Annual Reports 7/1/2008 - 6/30/2009 for Stericycle, Inc.