

BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

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Frequently Asked Questions

Stericycle's Haw River Incinerator

Visit the website: bredl-medwaste.org

What is Stericycle?

Stericycle, Inc. is the largest medical waste treatment company in the U. S. with 2007 revenues of \$932.8 million. One of the company's largest incinerators is their Haw River, NC, facility.

What's wrong with medical waste incineration?

Medical waste incineration 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., CO₂) that cause global warming and climate change.

Who is affected by incineration?

We all are. But people living 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?

The Stericycle incinerator in Haw River burns medical waste from as many as 24 states and from as far away as Puerto Rico.¹

- Official records show that Stericycle actually incinerates 22 to 25 million pounds of waste per year or between 59 and 73 thousand pounds per day.²
- Their permit allows them to burn even more: 33.4+ million pounds per year (91.7 thousand pounds per day).
- NC facilities send 53 to 66% of the total waste burned at Stericycle.³

Why does Stericycle incinerate so much waste at Haw River?

The incinerators are highly profitable for the company. In 2003 Stericycle made a major investment upgrading the Haw River incinerator. Continued operation allows them to recover this investment and postpone the expense of a cleaner treatment facility.

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.

Where is the incinerator?

Haw River, North Carolina, just east of Burlington. The incinerator's two smoke stacks are visible from Interstate 40/85, looking south from Exit 150 (Jimmy Kerr Rd). It is adjacent to the Old Fields residential development and less than a half a mile from Alamance Community College.

What can be done about medical waste incineration?

There are cleaner and safer alternatives to incineration. Regulations now allow more environmentally-friendly alternative technologies to be used in place of incineration for the vast majority of medical waste; for example, autoclave and microwave.

- Stericycle operates some of these new technologies, but still operates the Haw River incinerator as their east coast regional facility.
- Hospitals and clinics can use safer medical waste disposal systems.

What can I do about Stericycle's incinerator?

- Watch a video about Stericycle's Haw River incinerator: **Burning Issues in Medical Waste**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqYeianqB5o&feature=related>
- Learn more about Stericycle and incineration at <http://bredl-medwaste.org>
- Get involved! Volunteer to help with this project. Call BREDL's office at (336) 525-2003.
- Invite 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 incinerator.
- Express your concerns to your local elected officials and your representatives in Raleigh.
- Ask your healthcare providers to find out about and use non-incineration technologies for their medical waste. Check this website for suggestions: <http://bredl-medwaste.org>
- Share this FAQ with your neighbors.
- Call the NC Division of Air Quality immediately (919) 733-3340 if you see dark smoke or smell odors coming from the Stericycle incinerator. Keep a record of your call.
- Tell Mark Miller, the 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

^{1,2,3} NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Division of Waste Management. Incinerator Annual Reports 7/1/2000 - 6/30/2007 for Stericycle, Inc.