

# BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Groups Call for Reductions in Medical Waste Incineration**

A new report cites broad increases in the amount of medical waste unnecessarily incinerated in North Carolina and argues that much of this waste could be treated safely with less cost using already approved non-burning methods. The report urges state regulators to lead a coordinated effort to reduce unnecessary incineration and involve North Carolina healthcare facilities in solving this problem.

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and its chapters in Alamance and Mecklenburg Counties released the report today to the public, "*Medical Waste in NC: The need to reduce incineration by more effective waste segregation and use of non-incineration technologies*". This report follows action this month by the Environmental Management Commission (EMC) approving Mecklenburg County's new rules tightening emissions limits and setting new operating requirements for the BMWNC medical waste incinerator in Matthews. The EMC previously adopted statewide rules that apply to the two Stericycle incinerators in Alamance County.

The League's report shows that North Carolina has "more than its fair share of commercial medical waste incinerators that impact communities," said Carolyn Cole, one of the report's authors. "Our state has three of only fourteen commercial incinerators in the country. These facilities are located in/next to residential neighborhoods. Families with young children and the elderly are highly vulnerable populations for the emissions, even with proposed stronger pollution controls." Ms. Cole went on to say that "North Carolina's facilities burned over 34 million pounds of medical waste last year from twenty-six states, including our own. Unfortunately, the trends show that we are likely to burn even more in the future, if action is not taken soon to reverse this."

The report emphasized the opportunity to reduce incineration through more effective waste segregation by health care providers. David Mickey, Zero Waste/Clean Energy Campaign Coordinator for the League, explained. "The rules adopted this month by the

EMC place more responsibility on incinerator operators for better waste management practices by their customers. State agencies such as the Division of Waste Management and the Division of Air Quality should be working together to make sure that happens.”

“Through this report we hope to encourage the move to waste management practices that take the public’s health into consideration while potentially reducing health care costs,” said Dr. Carole Troxler, co-chair of Clean Air Now (CAN) in Alamance County. She added, “Incineration is a polluting as well as a very costly method of waste disposal.”

“Alamance County alone sent over a million pounds to incineration last year,” said Dr. Troxler, citing the report. “This made Alamance County the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in-state generator of medical waste for incineration. We can do better than this.”

"This report clearly shows the need for rethinking North Carolina's role as dumping ground for the nation's medical waste. If the total volume of waste currently being burned could be substantially reduced, overall air quality would improve as a result. We shouldn't have to suffer the very real consequences of excessive incineration generated by 25 other states as well as our own," added Catherine Mitchell, co-chair of Citizens for a Healthy Environment in Matthews.

“I am hopeful that this report will encourage the conversation that needs to happen in our state,” said Cole. "Where healthcare facilities focus their attention on current waste disposal options, their costs decline and they will contribute to better air quality for our state. I believe our state-based healthcare facilities would want to move in that direction.”

The full report is available for free download at:  
<http://www.bredl.org/pdf3/ncmedwastereport-jan2011.pdf>  
and <http://bredl-medwaste.org>

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