



The LEAGUE LINE

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Biomass Energy: The Big Green Lie



By Louis Zeller, Science Director

Two broad questions must be asked before constructing any new biomass energy plants: What is the effect on human health and the environment caused by burning this fuel? And what are the true impacts on global warming?

The evidence supporting human activity as a cause of global warming mounts steadily, approaching scientific certainty. However, the concepts used to promote biomass energy are based upon mistaken beliefs about the effect of biomass fuel on global warming.

What is biomass?

Biomass is a broad term for biologically produced matter. For energy production, it includes materials which are produced for energy and materials which are by-products.

Biomass includes: crops grown for energy purposes, agricultural and forestry residue, municipal solid waste, industrial waste, paper mill black liquor, wastewater treatment plant sewage sludge, landfill methane, furniture manufacturing wood waste, scrap tires, poultry manure, household garbage etc. Biomass is claimed by some to be a large part of the South's green energy resources. However, this notion relies on the twin myths of the closed-loop carbon cycle and the carbon neutrality of biomass.

No Closed Loop for Global Warming

The natural carbon cycle is a virtual circle between air, water, plants and animals. Plants depend on carbon dioxide in the air; humans and other animal life rely on oxygen. The natural carbon cycle is the result of millions of years of evolution. It is a complex process which relies on photosynthesis in plants and respiration in animals. This plant-animal carbon cycle can rightly be called "natural." On the other hand, the combustion of coal or petroleum—fossil fuel—is anything but natural and is not considered so. Burning fuel with oxygen in industrial processes releases carbon dioxide; there is no "closed loop."

Similarly, the combustion of fuel made from corn, soybeans and waste products—biomass—is also an industrial process, not a natural one. Large amounts of carbon dioxide and other pollutants are emitted by combustion of biomass. The impacts are immediate and long-lasting because carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for a very long time:

Indeed, for a given amount of CO₂ released today, about half will be taken up by the oceans and terrestrial vegetation over the next 30 years, a further 30 percent will be removed over a few centuries, and the remaining 20 percent will only slowly decay over time such that it will take many thousands of years to remove from the atmosphere. 1

The so-called closed loop is centuries or millennia in diameter, too large to be of any help in reducing global warming in the 21st Century. (continued on page 4)





BREDL: Who and what we are

In March 1984, fifty citizens of Ashe and Watauga Counties met in the Mission House of Holy Trinity Church in Glendale Springs, North Carolina. Teachers and farmers, home-makers and merchants listened to the report of the Episcopal Church Women on the US Department of Energy's siting search for a high-level nuclear waste dump in the rain-rich east.

Recognizing that the North Carolina mountains were a region at risk, the assembled group organized the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) to protect their own backyard and those of other threatened communities.

Grassroots organizing was a cornerstone of our early all-volunteer organization. One of our first multi-county boards of directors adopted our credo, which embodies our mission statement:

BREDL Credo

We believe in the practice of earth stewardship, not only by our league members, but by our government and the public as well. To foster stewardship, BREDL encourages government and citizen responsibility in conserving and protecting our natural resources. BREDL advocates grassroots involvement in order to empower whole communities in environmental issues. BREDL functions as a "watchdog" of the environment, monitoring issues and holding government officials accountable for their actions. BREDL networks with citizen groups and agencies, collecting and disseminating accurate, timely information. BREDL sets standards for environmental quality, and awards individuals and agencies who uphold these standards in practice.

Moving into the future

Since then, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League has grown to be a regional community-based, nonprofit environmental organization. Our founding principles - earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice and community empowerment - still guide our work for social change. Our staff and volunteers put into practice the ideals of love of community and love of neighbor, which help us to serve the movement for environmental protection and progressive social change in southwest Virginia, east Tennessee, north Georgia, the foothills of South Carolina, and all of North Carolina.

Grassroots Campaigns

Nothing creates hopefulness out of helplessness like a successful grassroots campaign -and our chapters have a history of winning. For twenty-four years Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League chapters have protected their communities by stopping dangerous facilities and promoting safe alternatives.

In the 1980's and 1990's, BREDL stopped the ThermalKEM hazardous waste incinerator and the proposed southeastern nuclear waste dump. In 2007, our coordinated grassroots citizens' lobby won a legislative victory with the passage of the NC Solid Waste Act, effectively blocking at least four multi-state mega-dumps. This year our chapter won a victory when the Person County Board of Commissioners rejected attempts to expand the Republic Services land-fill there. Our Cascade, Virginia, chapter shut down a huge hazardous waste incinerator. Other chapter victories over the years include the elimination of mercury emissions from the Stericycle incinerator, the shut down of a tire incinerator in Martinsville, the landmark environmental justice court decision in Greene County, and passage by local governments of eight polluting industries ordinances. Further, our chapters have protected air quality by blocking scores of asphalt plants, four medical waste incinerators, a PVC plant and a lead smelter.

Our work on nuclear power and coal plants laid the groundwork for our new Safe Energy Campaign. Victories over twenty-four mega-dumps have resulted in our affirmative Zero Waste Campaign. Our work on air and water quality has led to the creation of our newest campaign: the NC Healthy Communities Project. Guided by the principles of earth stewardship and environmental justice, we have learned that empowering whole communities with effective grassroots campaigns is an effective strategy for change. ■

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P.O. Box 88, Glendale Springs, NC 28629

Tel: 336-982-2691 Fax: 336-982-2954

email: bredl@skybest.com

www.bredl.org

Editor: Beverly Kerr

Co-Editor: David Mickey

Contributing writers:

Janet Marsh, Lou Zeller, Jaime Zeller, Sue Dayton, Charles Utley, Ann Rogers, David Mickey, Matthew Sands, Carolyn Cole, Sam Tesh, Beverly Kerr

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The Secrets of Our Success:

A Tribute to James Johnson and Sam Tesh

by Janet Marsh, BREDL Executive Director



For two decades, James A. Johnson and Sam Tesh have worked as advocates in rural communities for public health protection, earth stewardship, social justice and environmental democracy. These outstanding leaders have built a powerful grassroots movement in our the Southeast which ensures that no newly threatened community stands alone.

Both James and Sam were drafted onto this work by threats to their own communities. James Johnson was working as a child psychologist for the state and a minister in the Church of God in Burke County. His rural, mostly African-American neighborhood in Chesterfield-Hartland was targeted for a hazardous chemical blending facility and ultimately for a large hazardous waste incinerator. James met with his neighbors and brought together a black-and-white alliance: the Chesterfield-Hartland Environmental Protection Association. The organizing of CHEPA resulted in strict limitations on the blending facility, defeat of the hazardous waste incinerator and the first-ever land use management ordinance in Burke County.

Sam Tesh was working as a teacher in Northampton County when his home became the final target for the nation's second largest hazardous waste incinerator. He and his wife Betty helped found the Northampton Citizens Against Pollution which went on to defeat the ThermalKEM incinerator. Sam put his work, his reputation and his body on the line in the struggle to protect the town of Woodland and surrounding communities from air pollution and environmental injustice. At a crucial point, Sam advocated for a red, white and blue rally in Woodland which became the turning point of the campaign. The rally gave voice to the American values of justice and democracy. The Town of Woodland and the County of Northampton were changed forever.

With his grounding in earth stewardship, his intuition that the same rural North Carolina communities would be targeted over and over, and his commitment to a broader grassroots movement, James reached out to the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. CHEPA became a League chapter and James became an emissary for the message of community power in forums and presentations throughout the state. James brought the message to discouraged community people that "it's not a done deal," "you can fight city hall," and "we've got the power." In his home county of Burke, James led the Dry Ponds community to a huge victory over a Waste Management, Inc. megadump which would have imported trash from all over the East Coast. The creative activities of the Burke Citizens for Environmental Responsibility included a filibuster of a county meeting resulting in the voices of the people being heard, a noon time rally around the county government center replete with marchers, baby carriages and wheelchairs and a well-placed billboard recounting WMI's criminal track record. The Burke County turnaround led to county after county in western North Carolina saying *no* to megadumps. James was in the forefront.

As an extension of his work in Northampton County, Sam Tesh traveled to Washington, DC to join activists from throughout the country to request an end to the devastation of communities from hazardous waste incinerators. He supported a powerful Pennsylvania Ave. demonstration which resulted in EPA Administrator Carol Browner's moratorium on new hazardous waste incinerators. This collective action protected rural communities throughout the United States.

The key to truly effective advocacy is the ability to take a local success to a broader arena. Following the defeat of the ThermalKEM incinerator in Northampton County, Sam Tesh joined James Johnson on the board of directors of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. In 1994 they were elected by the grassroots board as Co-presidents of the organization. For fifteen years they have led our league to perfect our policies and procedures, to achieve "impossible" goals, and to nourish and sustain a grassroots environmental movement.

Today, James and Sam are working to realize their vision of grassroots power throughout the Southeast. They are revered by the people who live in their neighborhoods as strong and effective advocates. Moreover, the whole organization depends on James and Sam for their wisdom, inspiration and guidance in heading a grassroots, community based league which we all believe is unlike any other. ■

Biomass Energy: The Big Green Lie

The Myth of Carbon Neutral

Many alternative energy advocates promote biomass as part of the solution to global warming. They assert that biomass plants do not add any additional pollutants to the environment and that the carbon dioxide released by combustion would be there anyway. Some even claim that biomass-powered electricity is “emissions free.”²

In order to be carbon neutral, biomass energy systems rely on a set of assumptions which attempt to balance their pollution with offsets and credits to reduce their carbon footprint. Without such assumptions, biomass power fails the carbon neutral test.

A report by Argonne National Laboratory illustrates the problem:³ “Most studies conducted so far have concluded that producing biofuel will double total NOx emission compared to conventional petroleum-based fuels.” And: “The limitation of the proposed options is an increase in total VOC emissions for almost all options.” Here we see that air pollution from biomass fuel production is high compared even to emissions from conventional fuels.

In order to offset such high levels, the analysis assumes that biomass electric energy displaces conventional electric power plant pollution. The Argonne lab’s biomass energy analysis continues:

Energy consumption and emissions associated with production of conventional fuels, electric power (U.S. mix), and chemical (soy protein) were assumed to be displaced by biofuels, bio-power export, and protein from switchgrass.⁴ (emphasis added)

In Argonne’s analysis, bio-fuels displace the carbon footprint and air pollutants from conventional sources. In other words, they *subtract* rather than *add* the effects of biomass emissions on air quality and global warming.

The effect of these assumptions is borne out in the environmental impact statement for a cellulosic ethanol refinery: “The reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are due largely to the emissions credit for the electricity being exported to the grid.”⁵ The foundation of biomass carbon neutrality is this credit-debit flip, tantamount to a butcher’s finger on the scale.

One global warming expert held that assuming that biomass combustion is carbon neutral means that a forest would have the same carbon footprint whether it is standing or cut down.⁶ Plainly, trees are more beneficial standing for ecological reasons. And they provide natural carbon storage. Less obvious is the impact of unjustified assumptions. Upon analysis, the greenhouse gas reduction arguments for biomass fall by the wayside. Biomass fuel is not carbon neutral and Catch-22 style ambiguities stem from the fundamental irrationality of regarding it so. ■

1. 74. Fed Reg.18886, page 18899, April 24, 2009, *Proposed Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases Under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act*

2. From Dominion Resources, Inc. annual update: “Dimensions 2008-2009: Corporate Responsibility Report,” page 20, available at www.dom.com

3. May Wu, Ye Wu, and Michael Wang, *Mobility Chains Analysis of Technologies for Passenger Cars and Light-Duty Vehicles Fueled with Biofuels: Application of the GREET Model to the Role of Biomass in America’s Energy Future (RBAEF) Project*, Argonne National Laboratory-Energy Systems Division, ANL/ESD/07-11 (May 2005) pages 33 and 37.

4. *Id*

5. *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Abengoa Biorefinery Project near Hugoton, Stevens County, Kansas*, US Department of Energy, Golden Field Office, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, DOE/EIS-0407D, September 2009, page F-25

6. Johnson E, “Goodbye to carbon neutral: Getting biomass footprints right,” *Environ Impact Asses Rev* (2008), doi:10.1016/j.eiar.2008.11.002

A Poultry Litter Exchange For North Carolina

By David Mickey Zero Waste/Clean Energy Campaign Coordinator



What do you do with five million tons of chicken litter? The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League has an answer:

-the North Carolina Poultry Litter Exchange.

According to the North Carolina Poultry Federation, that's how much litter the hundreds of millions of broilers grown each year in North Carolina leave behind. Turkeys and layers add to the total. The litter, a mix of manure and sawdust or wood shavings, contains valuable nitrogen, phosphorus and potash that traditionally have been applied to farmland as fertilizer. In some places, poultry manure has been over applied. But one company's plans to burn poultry litter for fuel, creating air pollution, is driving creative solutions to the question: How, and where, should litter be used in the future?

In some states, poultry growers, the people who raise chickens or turkeys, have access to an "exchange", or a way to find farmers who need fertilizer. A September 2009 analysis by The Litter Link finds that the nutrients in broiler litter are worth \$60 per ton. This non-profit operates in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas, providing a comprehensive service that connects growers with farmers. The Litter Link is operated by the non-profit BMPs Inc. and was organized by the five poultry companies operating in the region.

Virginia has a "poultry litter hotline" that growers, haulers and farmers can call. Virginia also has a Litter Transport Incentive Program that pays up to \$12 per ton to move litter out of counties with a concentration of poultry houses to counties that can make the best use of the nutrients without harming water quality. All of the end-users in Virginia must implement Nutrient Management Plans for fields receiving litter. The same is true for farmers in North Carolina.

While burning poultry litter pollutes the air and benefits no one (except for a few developers and Wall Street investors), the responsible use of litter as fertilizer conserves natural resources, rebuilds soils, reduces costs for farmers, and provides additional income for growers. Most importantly, it supports local agricultural economies and keeps money in the community.

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League counts among its members both farmers and poultry growers. The League also has active chapters in areas of the state where the poultry industry is located-the same areas that are targeted for poultry waste incinerators. Working with our members and chapters, the League is prepared to move forward with a pilot project for North Carolina.

Our mission of earth stewardship, the preservation of natural resources, and empowering communities to protect themselves reinforces our determination to find solutions that benefit people and the natural environment. A North Carolina Litter Exchange fulfills that purpose. ■





Constitution Day Essay By Jaime Zeller

*Jaime is an 11 year old sixth grade student at East Lake Elementary school in Massapequa Park, New York.
She is the niece of Janet and Lou Zeller of BREDL.*

In 1787 a very important document was written, it was named the Constitution. Then two years later the Bill of Rights was added on to the Constitution. The Bill of Rights was designed to protect people from the government.

I feel that freedom of speech is an important amendment in the Bill of Rights. If there were no freedom of speech my Uncle Louie and Aunt Janet wouldn't be able to protest in favor of protecting the environment. Sometimes my Aunt and Uncle go to Washington and put on little plays that show how dangerous nuclear power can be. They walk around holding signs protesting about it. They make the public aware what this can do to our planet. If we eat fish that have been contaminated from the garbage people dump in water, they can pass disease on to humans and we can die because of it.

They also protest about other things too. One of the recent things they protested about are companies using chicken waste for fuel and energy. They are concerned that it can be dangerous to our environment because when objects burn a chemical reaction occurs, and sometimes the reaction can be toxic for people to breath in. It is just like what happened in the Simpsons movie with the pig waste. As you see my Aunt and Uncle protest about that because they are concerned about the Earth.

If we didn't have freedom of speech my Aunt and Uncle wouldn't be able to do what they are doing. This amendment influences me because I can say what I think, but people don't have to agree with me about what I say. ■

Webstats January 2010 Report by Webmaster Mark Barker

Feb. 15, 2009 marked the Ten Year Anniversary of www.bredl.org

Chronology of www.bredl.org milestones:

- February 15, 1999 - www.bredl.org was launched
- July 19, 2001 - reached 1 million hits (online for 885 days)
- November 30, 2001 - Added PayPal as a way to accept online credit card donations
- March 8, 2002 - reached 2 million hits (online for 1117 days)
- August 9, 2002 - reached 3 million hits (online for 1271 days)
- January 14, 2003 - reached 4 million hits (online for 1429 days)
- June 1, 2003 - reached 5 million hits (online for 1567 days)
- **November 2003 - new look for the website. New navigational design reduces amount of hits.**
- January 26, 2004 - reached 6 million hits (online for 1806 days)
- April 2005 – reached 7 million hits.
- November/December 2005 – added BREDL Shop.
- April 2006 – reached 8 million hits.
- **June 16, 2006 – new look for the website. Added image graphic, improved look.**
- April 2007 – reached 9 million hits.
- May 18, 2007 – website overhauled to match current campaigns
- **Oct 31, 2007 – transferred website from rev.net to purehost.com servers.**
- May 2008 – reached 10 million hits.
- The past 4 years, our website hits have leveled to just under 1 million a year.
- **Feb. 23, 2009 – 6249 hits - highest daily hit total since website format change Nov. 2003.**
- May 2009 – reached 11 million hits | Dec. 2009 – reached 11.5 million hits
- January 9, 2010 – Changed homepage from javascripts to style sheets. ■



Sludge Spreading Poses Risk to Children

City of Burlington asked to voluntarily increase buffers for spreading sewage sludge

By Sue Dayton, BREDL NC Healthy Communities



Last month, Sue Dayton, Statewide Coordinator for NC Healthy Communities, met with the members of the City of Burlington City Council, and gave a PowerPoint presentation on the risks of spreading sewage sludge near schools. The City of Burlington's Mayor Ronnie Wall was present, Harold Owen, Burlington's City Manager, and staff from the City's wastewater treatment plant. Others present included Jon Risgaard, NC State Division of Water Quality, and Jean Creech, a representative from Synagro, an international corporation that contracts with the City of Burlington to spread sewage sludge from its two sewage treatment plants on area farms.

State records show that in 2007 the City of Burlington spread close to 30 million gallons of sewage sludge in six counties. Sewage sludge is given free to farmers to use as a fertilizer, and constitutes a cheap and convenient way for municipalities to dispose of sludge, a by-product of the wastewater treatment process. Sewage sludge (also known as BIOSOLIDS) contains a mix of toxic chemicals that are neither regulated nor required to be tested under state or federal rules. These chemicals include a range of various pathogens, pharmaceutical drugs, hormones, steroids, toxic metals, endocrine disrupting chemicals, radionuclides, and flame retardants, to name a few.

NC Healthy Communities asked the City of Burlington to voluntarily increase the state-mandated minimum distance of 400 feet from residences, schools and churches to a distance of 1.5 miles. The City has not yet responded to the request, and the Burlington Times-News has quoted Mayor Ronnie Wall as saying the city is "still in the process of reviewing all of the information."

The presentation at the council meeting closed with a challenge from NC Healthy Communities to the City of Burlington, state regulators and Synagro to disclose to farmers what, in addition to nutrients, is actually contained in sewage sludge. After the council meeting, the Synagro representative left the room before reporters converged to get Ms. Creech's take on NC Healthy Communities' challenge to Synagro to tell farmers what's in sludge.

Sue Dayton, NC Healthy Communities Coordinator, called the lack of disclosure about what's in sludge an "injustice," and said if farmers were told what's actually in sludge that they wouldn't want it spread on their fields. She added that the state's current buffers for spreading sludge next to schools and other public places are not protective of public health, and especially for children, who are more susceptible to contracting illnesses from viruses and bacteria not removed from sludge.

"We wanted to make sure we officially made a request to the City of Burlington before we began our Healthy Schools Siting Campaign. NC Healthy Communities will be working with the Sewage Sludge Action Network, a chapter of BREDL, and other communities, on the Safe Schools Siting Campaign. ■

For more information contact Sue Dayton, (336) 525-2003 or sdayton@swcp.com

Environmental Justice Cries Out

By Rev. Charles Utley



All of us—yes, you and I—must hear the cry for Environmental Justice. It is our Earth crying out against the injustice that is being done to her.

The environment needs a voice to speak for her against these ugly injustices. She constantly raises her head up in our mom-and-pop gas stations on the corner, to the dry cleaners tucked away in our neighborhoods, to the chemical plants around the corner and across the street. She cries out to us from her ground complaining about the disproportion of pollution she has to ingest, spilling out into our streams, lakes and our rivers. Her cry can be heard in our conversations concerning her heavens calling it “greenhouse gases” and “global warming.”

Yes, she speaks to us declaring that someone must speak on her behalf about the sludge and unsafe landfills in our communities, about the sweltering desires for more nuclear plants in our poorest communities. These are threats to our most important inhabitants: our unborn, our children and our elderly.

We must be the voice, and hear the cry of our universe who constantly cries about these injustices that she must endure. I want to encourage organizations, communities, and our elected officials to hear the voice of our environment for her cry is for real. To the foundations and donors that support our work on these pressing issues, I say it is a matter of life and death not only to environment, but to our people. I invite you to join us at Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. Help us to combat these injustices and answer the cry.

Help us to protect Earth's most precious asset—you.■

BREDL Is Worth Its Weight In Gold!



By Ann Rogers, BREDL Development Director

As both a BREDL employee and representative to a BREDL chapter (Virginians for Appropriate Roads – VAR -- founded in 1999 to fight a proposed interstate highway in Virginia), I am always astounded to learn how much BREDL spends each year in services supporting the chapters. Each year, BREDL must spend \$300 per chapter just to provide accounting services required for our joint nonprofit status with the IRS. There are many other costs, too, that BREDL provides, depending on the needs of individual chapters at various stages of our campaigns.

I think each of us will readily admit that the service provided to our chapters by the BREDL organization is worth its weight in gold. And yes, gold at today's prices! That's saying something.

As a BREDL chapter, VAR has admittedly taken for granted the priceless service provided by the BREDL organization.

Collectively, if all the chapters can pitch in during 2010 and donate to BREDL – in gifts at least equaling what BREDL pays for our share of accounting costs – it may make the difference between saving or losing valuable environmental protection programs currently being provided by the organization. That's right – the chapters have the power to keep BREDL's programs alive and healthy!

Please make your contribution as generous as you can. Thank you for all the hard work you are doing in your community, and for the love that we all share for our beautiful green Earth Mother.

Here's wishing you, your family, and your entire community a joyous and prosperous 2010.■

Violations and Negotiations Highlight Stop Fibrowatt Campaign

Minnesota Regulators Levy Fines Against Fibrowatt;

BREDL Provides Testimony To the NC Utilities Commission

By David Mickey Zero Waste/Clean Energy Campaign Coordinator



Fibrowatt's plans to build three poultry waste incinerators in North Carolina encountered new problems when the state's electric utilities sought to delay the renewable energy program's poultry waste mandate and news of violations at their Minnesota flagship plant finally reached the public. The Pennsylvania company's inside track-a special set-aside requiring poultry waste as a renewable energy resource-has turned into a rocky road. Events in both states raised new questions about the feasibility, safety and economic wisdom of burning poultry litter to generate electricity.

On December 17, after months of persistent requests from activists, the Minnesota Attorney General's Office released to the League details of permit violations at the Benson, Minnesota Fibrominn plant. This 31-page document portrays a company that, in addition to violating emissions limits, routinely overlooked its obligations to monitor and control emissions, conduct testing, and file reports on time. In response to Fibrowatt's record in Minnesota, the League has written letters to North Carolina regulators. The letters, to the Environmental Management Commission and to the Public Staff of the NC Utilities Commission, called for a re-examination of poultry waste incineration and the opportunity for public involvement in the development of renewable energy resources.

The settlement agreement, analysis, press coverage and many other Fibrowatt reports are on our website at www.bredl.org

Faced with a statutory requirement to provide electricity from poultry waste beginning in 2012, North Carolina utilities, led by Duke Energy and Progress Energy, filed a motion August 14 with the NC Utilities Commission asking for both a delay and a reduction in the poultry waste set-aside requirements. On September 1, BREDL and its Chapters in Duplin, Sampson, and Surry Counties filed a motion to intervene in the issue. The Commission granted the "Community Groups" permission to intervene and we subsequently provided comments and written testimony supporting the elimination of the poultry waste requirements.

Fibrowatt attacked the utilities and the Community Groups position. They were joined by their partners in Surry, Sampson and Montgomery Counties. Testimony by Fibrowatt reflected the company's frustrated attempts to negotiate power contracts with the utilities and repeated claims that Fibrowatt and Fibrowatt alone could meet the state's requirements. In their comments and testimony, the counties admitted spending millions of taxpayer dollars on Fibrowatt's behalf.

On December 16, 2009, the electric utilities withdrew their joint motion for a delay citing progress in negotiations with Fibrowatt and another potential supplier, Green Energy Systems. However, as 2009 came to a close, Fibrowatt still lacks a negotiated contract to sell electricity from any of its proposed plants. Financing, permitting, and construction will not move forward without these contracts. 2010 is a critical year for the Stop Fibrowatt Campaign and working with our chapters, BREDL will make it a successful year. ■



Matthews' Residents Back For Round 2 In Fighting For Clean Air

Four more years of breathing toxic air pollutants unacceptable

By Sue Dayton, BREDL NC Healthy Communities



For decades, the residents of Matthews, NC, have endured odors that smelled like “chemicals and burnt plastic,” and plumes of white smoke with ash raining down from the sky. They lived in constant fear that toxic air pollutants from the burning of waste from hospitals and other medical facilities at the BMWNC medical waste incinerator, which began in 1985, might be threatening their health.

In 2000, the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Occupational Environmental Epidemiology Division (OEEB), released a report on specific toxics found within a 1-5 mile range of the BMWNC medical waste incinerator. The survey detected arsenic, mercury, cadmium, chromium, nickel, benzene, formaldehyde and carbon tetrachloride. The OEEB concluded that the levels of arsenic, cadmium, chromium, benzene and carbon tetrachloride “indicated an increased lifetime cancer risk.” The levels of formaldehyde detected, although elevated, were reported as being “unreliable.” According to the Charlotte Observer, the study was deemed “inconclusive” because it did not specifically identify the incinerator as the source of the air pollutants.

Residents complained bitterly to the Mecklenburg County Air Quality (MCAQ), the agency responsible for regulation of the incinerator, but the MCAQ allowed the incinerator to continue to operate, despite numerous fines and penalties assessed against the incinerator by the MCAQ for numerous violations. Finally, amidst frustration, many residents gave up the fight, eventually leaving their homes to find safer places to live. Some residents died of cancer and other illnesses, which could not be directly linked with exposure to toxic air pollutants from the incinerator.

EPA cracks down on medical waste incinerators

In October the EPA issued new rules regarding incineration of medical waste. A number of BREDL's comments submitted at a public hearing hosted by the EPA were incorporated into the new rules. The new rules set more stringent levels of toxic air pollutants from medical waste incinerators that include mercury, lead, cadmium, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, acid gases, particulate mater and dioxins. Nationwide, this amounts to a reduction of 390,000 pounds of toxic air pollutants per year from medical waste incinerators.

The new rules require incinerators to develop waste management plans for the segregation and recycling of medical wastes. This will cut down on the amount of waste products being burned that don't need to be burned, such as plastics that result in the release of cancer-causing dioxins. Additionally, releases of toxic air pollutants from by-pass events, once exempt from the rules, are now included in the amounts of air toxics being released. The new rules also acknowledged the availability of cleaner technologies to dispose of medical waste rather than incineration, and compared incineration with autoclaving, a much cleaner alternative to outdated, toxics spewing, fire-breathing monsters like the BMWNC medical waste incinerator.

The new rules require existing incinerators like the BMWNC to be in compliance with the new air quality standards no later than October 6, 2014. However, the Mecklenburg County Air Quality has the authority to implement the new rules immediately. But instead of requiring the incinerator to comply under the new rules, the MCAQ has proposed that the permit renewal for the BMWNC is issued under the old rules!

After the public notice for the BMWNC's permit renewal was published, NC Healthy Communities contacted residents of Matthews and Mecklenburg County. Several residents sent letters to the MCAQ denouncing the MCAQ's decision to issue a permit to the BMWNC under the old rules and requesting a public hearing on the matter. BREDL's friends at Clean Air Carolina also joined the Matthews community in submitting letters requesting a public hearing on the permit renewal for the incinerator.

At this writing the residents of Matthews and Mecklenburg County who fought and lost against the BMWNC medical waste incinerator are back in the ring for Round 2. BREDL and NC Healthy Communities will continue to work with the Matthews' community to protect their air quality and their health by pressuring the MCAQ to do the right thing in requiring the BMWNC medical waste incinerator to abide by the new EPA rules. Stay tuned! ■

For more information contact Sue Dayton, (336) 525-2003 or sdayton@swcp.com



Today's Heroes

By Matthew Sands

*Matthew Sands is a 16-year old, 11th grade honors student
at Batesburg-Leesville High School in Leesville, South Carolina.*

He lives with his mother, Becky, father, Patrick, and 7-year-old sister, Santana.

His aunt is Sue Dayton, Statewide Coordinator for NC Healthy Communities, a project of BREDL.

In today's society when people mention a hero most people think of a soldier fighting in Iraq or a police officer. People such as these soldiers, police officers, firefighters, and other brave workers are heroes, but there are other kinds of heroes who get a lot less credit for their hard work and dedication. They work to stop the pollution of the Earth and without them the Earth would probably be in a lot worse shape. These people are environmentalists. They help stop improper use of farm chemicals and prevent wildlife from being negatively affected by pollutants such as fertilizers and raw sewage used to fertilize crops. My aunt is one of those heroes and every day she works towards making her community and the surrounding communities a cleaner and safer place to live. She is part of a group called the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League or BREDL. Three main issues that BREDL deals with are the incineration of toxic materials, the use of raw sewage on crops for fertilizer, and improper nuclear waste disposal.

One of the main issues that face BREDL is the use of incinerators to dispose of medical waste and other hazardous materials. Companies claim that the fumes are cleaned before being released from the plant, but this is often a lie to cover up the fact that the fumes are directly impacting people and the environment. There is an incinerator in my aunt's community and she has been working with other members of BREDL to help get rid of it. The main pollutant of incinerators is Carbon Dioxide, but other pollutants include Dioxin and furans. These incinerators cause many problems for people living in the area and cause a great deal of damage to the surrounding environment. BREDL is always working to get rid of the incinerator in the area and eventually work towards getting all incinerators banned. Many meetings and debates have been held about the benefits and hazards of incineration, but so far only stricter regulations have been placed on the companies. Without the hard work and dedication of my aunt and other environmentalists the incineration of waste would create many more pollutants and hurt many more people in the surrounding area.

Another main global issue is the use of raw sewage to fertilize crops. For farmers it is a cheap way to fertilize their crops and most of them don't care about the hazards involved. Farmers in the community near my aunt are using raw sewage and the runoff is causing environmental concerns. Raw sewage contains just about anything that gets flushed down a toilet. This includes any pharmaceuticals or drugs that get flushed. Often police departments will flush down large amounts of drugs seized during raids. All of these hazardous chemicals go onto these crops and then anything harvested ends up polluted by the contaminants and eventually ends up in your local grocery store. Without my aunt's commitment there would be more and more polluted crops producing more and more contaminated food.

Before moving to North Carolina my aunt had lived in New Mexico where one of the main environmental concerns was the improper disposal of nuclear waste. For years nuclear waste has been disposed of improperly and leaked out contaminating the surrounding area. One of the main threats of leaked radioactive material is the possibility of contaminated drinking water. She has worked extremely hard to get the waste disposed of properly and to make sure that stricter regulations are put out for the disposal of the waste. She has also worked towards cleaning up already contaminated sites. This is still a pressing issue and many environmentalists are still working to get it all sorted out.

Environmentalists are one of the least recognized heroes today. They have indirectly saved many people's lives. They have done this by preventing contamination of food and water and also by getting areas cleaned up before someone gets hurt. These three main issues; the incineration of toxic materials, the use of raw sewage on crops for fertilizer, and nuclear waste disposal; threaten our Earth and its inhabitants. Without the help of environmentalists we would be faced with many more serious environmental concerns. Thanks to these people we have safer food to eat, cleaner air to breathe, and cleaner water to drink. ■

Stericycle Awareness Campaign Update: January 2010

The Stericycle Awareness Campaign is gaining momentum. In an effort to stop the unnecessary incineration of medical waste at the large Stericycle Haw River incinerators, we are focusing on two goals:

Goal #1: Move Stericycle, Inc. to convert their incinerators to more environmentally friendly autoclaves at Haw River. The company built commercial autoclaves in St. Louis, MO and Gila River, AZ when citizen actions caused them to close their incinerators. Haw River deserves no less!

Goal #2: Encourage NC hospitals to pledge not to burn any more than they legally must burn (the bare minimum). NC hospitals alone send 62% of the waste burned in Stericycle's incinerators. We believe this represents an overuse of incineration for waste management. Other alternatives (like autoclaves) can safely handle much of the waste that now gets burned.

We are supported in our position on hospital waste management by the growing 'green' movement among hospitals across the US. Hospitals 'go green' when they consider the environmental and health impacts in all phases of their operations. The Green Guide for Health Care™ (<http://gghc.org>) is a key best practices guide and supports environmentally-considered purchasing, recycling, and significant incinerator reduction down to the minimum requirements.

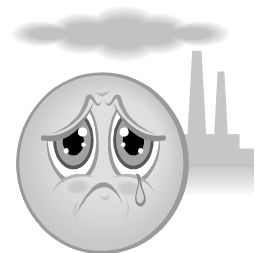
Currently, we are focusing on signature gathering for two petitions that support these goals. Petitions are one way to increase awareness and show the strength in numbers of concerned citizens. They can open the conversation for change.

We expect to be holding informational meetings in the near future for citizens to learn more about Stericycle and what can be done to promote progress on the two main goals.

We also expect to weigh in on the state's adoption of new rules on Hospital Medical Waste Incinerators. The state will be formulating new rules this year in response to EPA's revised rules published September 2009. The EPA's new rules reduce some of the toxic emission levels allowed and regulate how bypass emissions are considered.

BREDL testified at the EPA hearings on these rules. We encouraged stricter segregation of waste and more effective waste management plans to reduce both the volume and toxicity of medical waste. Our chief goal remains the same--the elimination of medical waste incineration. ■

Visit our website at <http://bredl-medwaste.org> for more information



A SCARY STORY FROM SURRY COUNTY

Guest Editorial By Sam Tesh



Since June 5th of 2008, when Fibrowatt, LLC announced that it had selected Surry County as the site for their second poultry litter incinerator/power plant and was warmly welcomed by the County Commissioners, citizens feel as if they have been in a story with a "big, bad wolf": company that purports to be "a pioneer in generating renewable energy from poultry litter...." but is actually a wolf in "alternative energy" clothing.

The story actually begins long before 2008, back when the state of North Carolina was first interested in cutting our dependency on foreign oil by looking into other forms of energy. As the legislature struggled with possible courses of action, Fibrowatt lobbyists were active in Raleigh, encouraging lawmakers to list "biomass" as a renewable energy source, with poultry litter being an emphasis. Thus it was that when Senate Bill 3 became Session Law 2007-397, the power companies were required by the year 2014 to supply at least 900,000 megawatt hours of electricity to retail customers obtained from poultry waste, combined with wood shavings, straw, rice hulls, or other bedding.

Thus Fibrowatt, who had only one plant in the United States, which was at that time out of compliance with EPS regulations, had the advantage of providing a state-mandated commodity. Never mind that NC farmers needed the fertilizer-power of chicken litter, never mind that the electricity produced was more expensive, never mind that poultry litter incineration is not good for the environment, and the "fertilizer" produced by the company requires that they use precious energy to replace the nitrogen they have burned away: Fibrowatt was welcomed into Surry County.

Not content to accept without question their elected officials regurgitation of the Fibrowatt "party line", citizens began to join together to learn for themselves. In November of 2008, a group of citizens presented an "information session" in the town of Elkin, which had been picked as the host for the plant site. From that information session, awareness was raised and people began joining forces.

The result was the formation of Citizens' Alliance for a Clean, Healthy Economy" or CACHE. This group has attended County Commissioners meetings to voice their disapproval of the commissioners' decision to re-zone the site from Agricultural to Heavy Industry, and to demand a public hearing. The commissioners did grant a public hearing, but would not allow the group to disseminate anti-Fibrowatt information, limited speakers, packed the speakers' list with pro -Fibrowatt speakers, and at one point, when a anti-Fibrowatt speaker was talking, one of the commissioners lay his head on the table and pretended to go to sleep. We have been described by one county commissioner as "spoiled children throwing a fit..."

Although at one point, three CACHE members were threatened with arrest for wearing identifying badges downtown during a "festival", the group has tried to respond with nothing but a positive attitude. During the Christmas parade, CACHE sponsored a float (which won first place in the "Unusual Floats" category), showing children gathered around a Christmas tree, holding signs that said, "increased tourism," "a growing economy" and similar items, with the title of the float being "Cache's Christmas Dreams for Elkin."

The Yadkin Riverkeeper has become an ally, conducting a poll that indicated that 80% of the respondents were opposed to Fibrowatt siting in Surry County.

David Mickey, one of BREDLs Community Organizers, has worked with the group, as well as Janet and Lou. David has also worked to coordinate communication between CACHE and their sister groups in Sampson and Montgomery County, sites selected by Fibrowatt for two additional plants.

The story is not finished yet. It may even be in its opening chapters. Still, we are not discouraged, and we are eagerly looking forward to the day Fibrowatt decides to leave North Carolina and we all can say,

"And we lived happily ever after."

Communities taken to the cleaners

Toxic dry cleaning solvents hit Durham hard



By Sue Dayton, BREDL NC Healthy Communities

Contamination from at least thirteen contaminated dry cleaning sites has hit Durham County hard. At the site of one former dry cleaning business in the Trinity Park neighborhood in Durham, contamination from a toxic, cancer-causing dry cleaning solvent known as perchloroethylene - or perc - is far worse than expected. Perc is associated with neurological effects, birth defects, and reproductive disorders, and it has been linked with liver and kidney damage, leukemia and breast cancer.

The "One Hour Martinizing" dry cleaners opened for business in 1963, amidst private residences and other small businesses in an area known as Trinity Park, in the City of Durham. The dry cleaner remained in business for approximately twelve years, closing its doors in 1975. During its twelve years in operation, large volumes of perc were either accidentally spilled or disposed of at the site.

In 1993, high concentrations of perc were discovered in the soil and groundwater at the site when an underground storage tank was removed. After an investigation by the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR), perc was found to have formed a 350-ft. plume in groundwater that had migrated away from the site and beneath the homes of adjacent property owners.

Luckily, the residents of Trinity Park were on city water. However, perc vapors can easily pass through floors and walls inside buildings posing a risk to occupants. A church congregation that had leased the former dry cleaner building was unknowingly exposed to toxic perc vapors that posed an "imminent health risk" for more than a year. In addition to the church, indoor air testing of two houses adjacent to the site has revealed perc concentrations at levels considered by the state to pose a potential health threat. Some residents may have been breathing toxic perc vapors for decades.

There are an estimated 2,000 contaminated dry cleaning sites in North Carolina, and to date over 200 have released perc contamination at various levels into soil, groundwater, and surface waters exceeding the state's drinking water and surface water quality standards.

In other parts of Durham the damage from perc contamination is no less extensive, and just as shocking:

- § Additional Durham residences may be impacted by contaminated dry cleaning sites and are scheduled for indoor tests.
- § Private drinking water wells in Durham have been contaminated by perc from at least two contaminated dry cleaning sites.
- § A day care center in Durham is at potential risk due to a fast-moving plume of concentrated perc in groundwater found moving towards the center.
- § Two surface water bodies, Ellerbe Creek and Goose Creek, have been impacted by perc above the state's surface drinking water standards.

Despite widespread environmental contamination, devaluation of homes and properties, and health risks to the public from the use of a toxic dry cleaning solvent, the use of perc by dry cleaners continues unabashedly in NC. This is partly because the Environmental Protection Agency refuses to take action on an outright ban of this dangerous chemical, and also because of lobbying efforts by the powerful dry cleaning industry. No warning labels or public notification about the potential health impacts of perc to dry clean clothing are required by the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

In 2010, NC Healthy Communities will be working with residents in Durham and other counties in instituting county-wide phase-outs of perchloroethylene with incentives for cleaners to make the switch to safer, greener alternatives such as wet-cleaning methods. ■

If you would like to get involved with the Phase-Out Perc Now Campaign
or find out about contaminated dry cleaning sites in your community,
contact Sue Dayton: (336) 525-2003 or sdayton@swcp.com

Who *are* all these people working for me ?

By Beverly Kerr, BREDL Development Director

Do you realize that you have a powerful and respected Board of Directors, a team of staff experts and community organizers working for you every day of every year?

You benefit from our clear and deliberate approach that ensures you are plugged into your own community organizing BREDL chapter. You are included in our incorporation and non-profit status. You are provided with technical, organizing and legal assistance. . With our help, you begin to change policies and promote long term solutions for the benefit of your community and the environment.

We firmly believe the best way to protect ourselves from polluting corporations is to organize the people most affected. This is not an easy task! That's why we are *always* on call to help answer your questions; How to go about attracting new members, holding meetings, organizing a successful action, dealing with elected officials, getting your message out to the public, how to knock on doors, negotiate with officials, work with politicians and experts, combat burnout and promote group diversity.

Your involvement and your donations are not only welcome, they are needed! We encourage you to attend Board meetings and to share your community activity with us. We urge you to submit pictures and articles that we will publish in The League Line newsletter and on our BREDL website. And please remember all of this when you send your donation to cover your fair share of your BREDL expenses. We are most grateful to you!

Who are we? Let's get to know each other better and let's stay in touch! We're waiting to hear from you!

James A. Johnson and Sam Tesh, BREDL Co-Presidents and Board Executive Committee

Janet Marsh, Executive Director

Lou Zeller, Nuclear/Clean Air Campaign Coordinator and Science Director

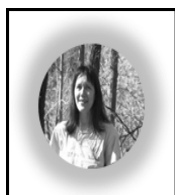
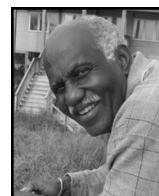
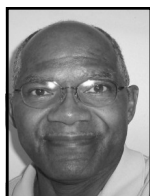
Charles Utley, Environmental Justice / SRS Campaign Coordinator

Sue Dayton, NC Healthy Communities Project Coordinator

David Mickey, Zero Waste/Clean Energy Campaign Coordinator

Ann Rogers and Beverly Kerr, Development Directors

Mark Barker, BREDL Webmaster



Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League Mission Statement

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is a regional, community-based non-profit environmental organization founded in 1984. BREDL encourages government agencies and citizens to take responsibility for conserving and protecting our natural resources. BREDL advocates grassroots involvement to empower whole communities in environmental issues. BREDL also functions as a “watchdog” of the environment, monitoring issues and holding government officials accountable for their actions.

We are a true league of grassroots chapters working in rural communities in the Southeast. For twenty-five years the same organizing principles have guided our work: public health protection, environmental democracy, earth stewardship and social justice. Our mission is to prevent harm from air and water pollution and to create sustainable alternatives for sound waste management and economic development. Protecting children’s health from environmental poisons, empowering whole communities to engage in crucial decision making, and changing the balance of power to prevent injustice are key components of our work.

Thank you for helping make our world safer!

Yes, I support BREDL’s work! Send your check to: BREDL PO Box 88 Glendale Springs, NC 28629

or use your credit card at **www.BREDL.org**. For more information contact BREDL at 336-982-2691.

All donations help BREDLs mission and are tax deductible.

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