

# How polluting is the Dutchess County trash incinerator in Poughkeepsie?

The “Dutchess County Resource Recovery Facility” trash incinerator in the Town of Poughkeepsie, NY is the largest air polluter in Dutchess County. It is owned by the county, but operated by Wheelabrator (now WIN Waste). Based on data reported to the state, they release more pounds of health-damaging air pollution than any other facility in the county.

| <b>Pollutant</b><br>(in pounds except CO <sub>2</sub> e)             | <b>2017 Emissions</b> | <b>2018 Emissions</b> | <b>Rank in County</b> | <b>Health Effects</b>                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Global Warming Pollution<br>(in tons of CO <sub>2</sub> equivalents) | 109,085               | 93,554                | 1                     | Extreme weather, disease, crop damage, species extinction                                                                    |
| Nitrogen Oxides                                                      | 296,925               | 272,523               | 1                     | triggers asthma attacks, chronic respiratory disease and stroke                                                              |
| Sulfur Dioxide                                                       | 12,890                | 4,310                 | 1                     | triggers asthma attacks; chronic respiratory and heart diseases; stroke                                                      |
| Carbon Monoxide                                                      | 180,912               | 137,808               | 3                     | headaches and dizziness; increases risk of heart disease                                                                     |
| Hydrochloric Acid                                                    | 4,112                 | 13,977                | 1                     | irritates eyes, skin, and nose, damages lungs                                                                                |
| Volatile Organic Compounds                                           | 46,418                | 45,571                | 1                     | eye, nose and throat irritation, headaches, loss of coordination and nausea, liver, kidney and nervous system damage, cancer |
| Particulate Matter                                                   | 589                   | 5,669                 | 4                     | heart attacks, stroke, irregular heartbeat, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function, difficulty breathing                 |
| Chromium                                                             | 6.4                   | 6.2                   | 1                     | The Chromium (VI) fraction causes lung cancer, shortness of breath, coughing, and wheezing                                   |
| Lead                                                                 | 5.8                   | 4.3                   | 3                     | damages nervous system and kidneys, lowers IQ, increases likelihood of antisocial behavior                                   |
| Mercury                                                              | 4.1                   | 7                     | 1                     | damage to nervous, digestive, and immune systems, lowers IQ                                                                  |
| Arsenic                                                              | 0.4                   | 0.4                   | 2                     | lung, skin, bladder, and liver cancers; irritation of the skin and mucous membranes; affects the brain and nervous system    |
| Cadmium                                                              | 0.4                   | 0.5                   | 2                     | kidney disease; lung cancer                                                                                                  |

To put the smaller numbers in perspective, mercury is one of the toxic pollutants for which there is no known safe level of exposure. Lead and dioxins also have no “safe” level. [Dioxins](#) are the most toxic chemicals known to science – 140,000 times more toxic than mercury – and incinerators are a major source (but good data is lacking). The incinerator reported releasing 5.55 lbs of mercury into the air annually, on average in recent years, not counting that which gets into the air and water via the ash. A highly cited Minnesota [study](#) found that if approximately one gram of mercury (the amount in a single fever thermometer) is deposited to a 20-acre lake each year from the atmosphere, this small amount, over time, can contaminate the fish in that lake to the point where they should not be eaten. 5.55 pounds of mercury equals 2,517 grams. That means the incinerator, in a typical year, is releasing enough mercury sufficient to keep over 2,500 20-acre lakes so contaminated that the fish are not safe to eat. In addition to PCB contamination, the state [advises](#) to limit fish consumption from the Hudson River due to mercury, dioxin, and cadmium contamination. The Dutchess County incinerator is one of three Wheelabrator-run trash incinerators on the Hudson River, each of which are large air polluters, and the largest in their counties.

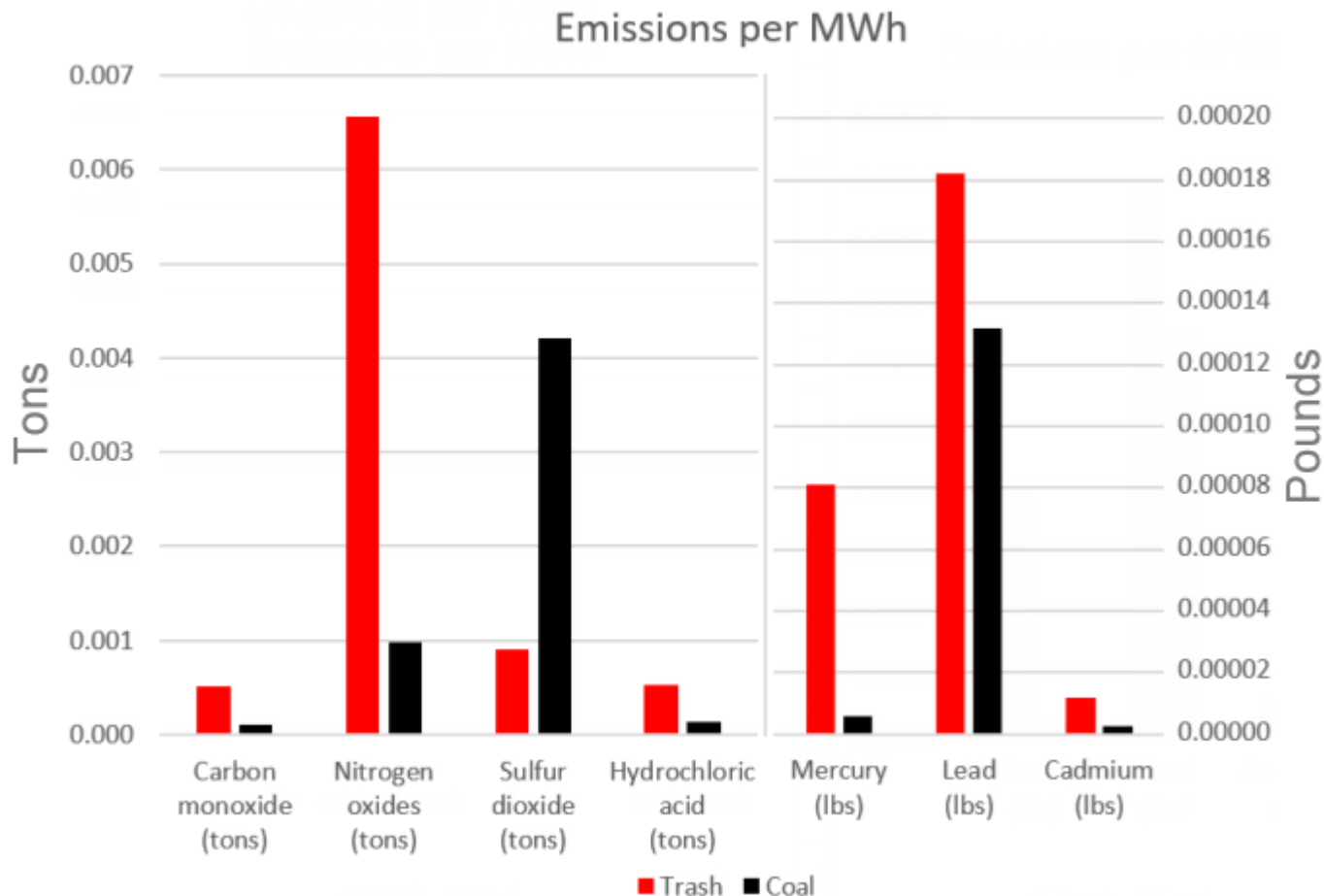
## But what about buildings and mobile sources? Aren’t they a bigger source of pollution to worry about?

For some pollutants, fossil fuels burned to heat buildings or move vehicles are the largest share of pollution compared to industry. However, the Dutchess County incinerator is the largest industrial air polluter in the county, and a big share of the total even when compared to mobile sources and buildings. For the most toxic pollutants (dioxins, acid gases, and toxic metals), these other sources do not contribute in a significant way, and the incinerator’s role is still huge. For example, the incinerator emitted 93% of the mercury released in the county in 2017.

To get involved in the movement to end trash incineration in New York, contact Mike Ewall at 215-436-9511 or [mike@beyondburning.org](mailto:mike@beyondburning.org).

## Trash incineration is dirtier than coal

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, when arguing that trash incineration should not benefit from renewable energy subsidies, proved that the state's 10 trash incinerators are dirtier than the 8 coal burning power plants that were still operating when they did this [analysis](#) in 2011. Except for sulfur dioxide, incinerators are dirtier than coal on all other pollutants the state compared.



## It's time to move on!

The Dutchess County Resource Recovery Facility went online in November 1987. It is now 35 years old. Of the 50 trash incinerators in the U.S. that closed since 2000, their average age at closure was [just 25](#). Few incinerators last beyond a 40-year lifetime and usually break down and become prohibitively expensive before then. It's time to move on.

## Where does the waste come from? Where does the ash go?

In 2020, the incinerator burned 151,099 tons of waste in Poughkeepsie and produced 53,521 tons of toxic ash which was dumped in landfills in Ontario, Albany, and Chemung Counties.