



How polluting is the Wheelabrator Westchester trash incinerator in Peekskill?

The “Wheelabrator Westchester” incinerator in the City of Peekskill, NY is the largest air polluter in Westchester County, based on data reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Pollutant (in pounds except CO ₂ e)	2020 Emissions	Rank in County	Health Effects
Global Warming Pollution (in tons of CO ₂ equivalents)	650,724	1	Extreme weather, disease, crop damage, species extinction
Nitrogen Oxides	1,782,591	1	triggers asthma attacks, chronic respiratory disease and stroke
Sulfur Dioxide	191,784	1	triggers asthma attacks; chronic respiratory and heart diseases; stroke
Carbon Monoxide	96,774	4	headaches and dizziness; increases lifetime risk of heart disease
Hydrochloric Acid	70,634	1	irritates eyes, skin, and nose, damages lungs
Volatile Organic Compounds	66,014	1	eye, nose and throat irritation, headaches, loss of coordination and nausea, liver, kidney and central nervous system damage, cancer
Particulate Matter	12,143	2	heart attacks, stroke, irregular heartbeat, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function, difficulty breathing
Fine Particulate Matter	10,523	2	same as above, but worse, gets deep into lungs and into blood stream
Benzo[a]Pyrene	154	1	skin, lung, and bladder cancers
Lead	31	2	damages nervous system and kidneys, lowers IQ, increases likelihood of antisocial behavior
Mercury	11	1	damage to nervous, digestive, and immune systems, lowers IQ
Cadmium	4	1	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 10.63 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. 10.63 pounds of mercury equals 4,822 grams. That means the incinerator, in a typical year, is releasing enough mercury sufficient to keep over 4,800 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. Wheelabrator Westchester is one of three Wheelabrator trash incinerators on the Hudson River, each of which are large air polluters, and the largest in their counties.

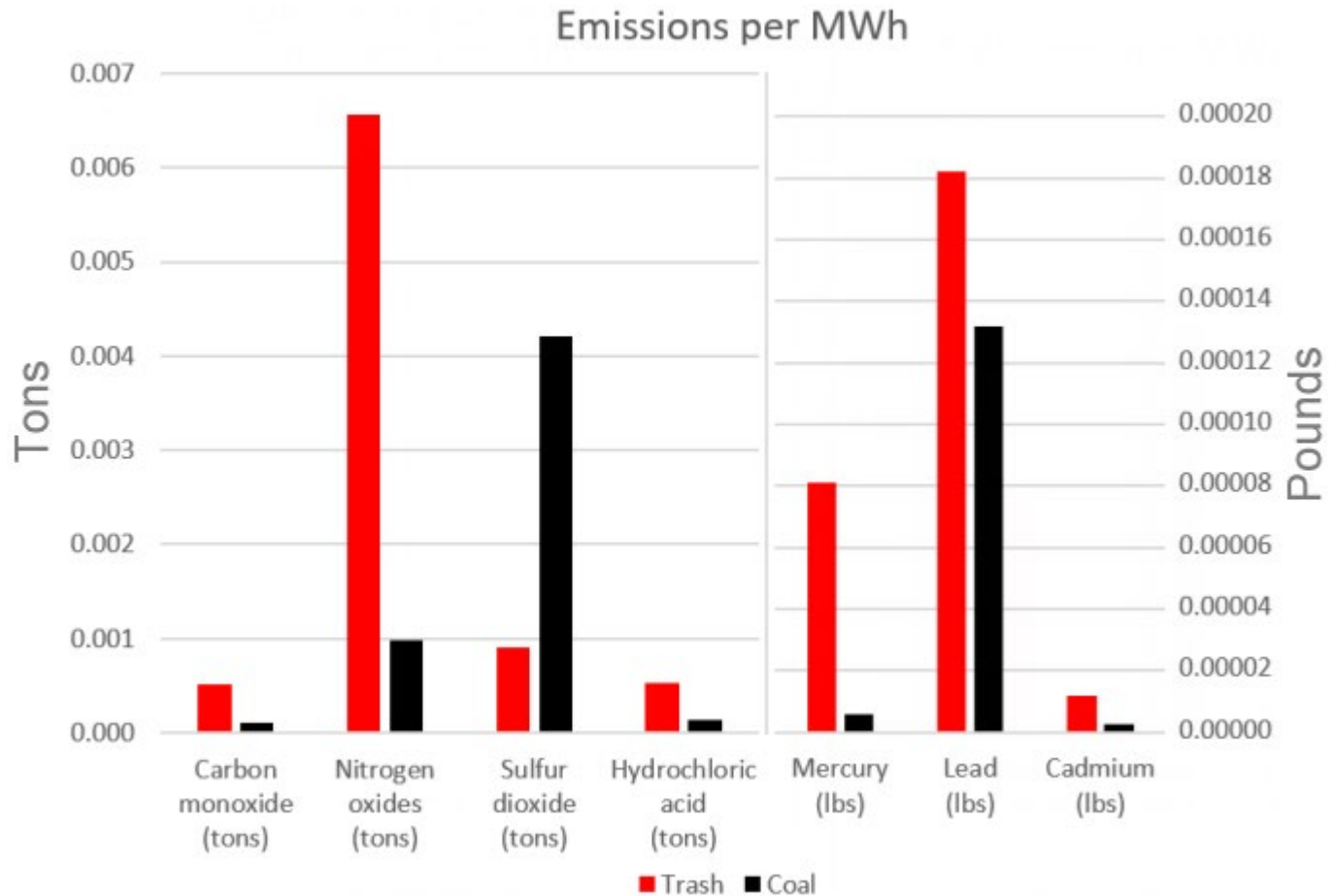
But what about buildings and mobile sources? Aren’t they a bigger source of pollution to worry about?

For some pollutants, fossil fuels burned to heat buildings or move vehicles are the largest share of pollution compared to industry. However, Wheelabrator 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 Wheelabrator’s role is still huge. For example, Wheelabrator Westchester emitted 95% of the mercury released in the county in 2020.

To get involved in the movement to end trash incineration in Westchester County, contact Vanessa Agudelo at 914-482-1241 or vanessa@energyjustice.net, and follow Westchester Alliance for Sustainable Solutions, www.wasspeekskill.org & www.facebook.com/WASSPeekskill Learn more about incineration at www.energyjustice.net/incineration

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!

Wheelabrator Westchester went online in October 1984. It is now 39 years old. Of the 50 trash incinerators in the U.S. that closed since 2000, their average age at closure was [just 24](#). 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, Wheelabrator burned 659,116 tons of waste in Peekskill and produced 152,613 tons of toxic ash. All of the ash was dumped in Wheelabrator's mega ash dump in Putnam, CT, where residents are fighting a massive expansion right now, and have been resisting this landfill for decades. The science shows that incineration is far worse than landfills for the climate, human health, and environmental justice. Incineration does not replace landfills. It makes landfills, smaller, but more toxic.

80% of the trash burned in Peekskill is from Westchester County. Another 19% is from Connecticut, 4% is from Brooklyn, and the remaining 1.6% is from Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, and Rockland counties.