

Rachel Wormer

I am a Minneapolis resident who lives within walking distance of the Hennepin County trash burner (HERC).

I am trained in public health. I have worked closely with communities caring for peoples' reproductive health needs. Through that experience, I have seen the implications of toxic environmental exposures upon the health of people of reproductive age, pregnant and birthing people, infants, and school-aged children — people who are also living near the HERC.

While I am appreciative of the opportunity to comment, I am deeply concerned about the following:

The Metro Solid Waste Plan does not include a closure plan for the HERC trash burner.

For example, MPCA states:

"The MPCA understands and acknowledges the concerns of potential impacts expressed by residents near WTE facilities...Once a system is developed that does not need to rely on WTE facilities, then it would be appropriate to look at taking them off-line."

This statement shows a blatant disregard for Hennepin County residents, including me — a person of reproductive age, who have real concerns about living within just a few miles or less of the HERC's pollution radius. My neighbors and I are being dismissed. This is unacceptable. The MPCA can and must do better for Minnesotans.

The toxins produced by trash incinerators are widely known to include the following: lead, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, fine particulates (PM2.5), particulate matter (PM10), Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), arsenic, mercury, dioxin, and others. Anyone who lives near the incinerator is chronically exposed to these emissions.

While the HERC's emissions currently "meet EPA standards," that does not account for the existing levels of other sources of pollution in the area. These existing pollutants, combined with the HERC's pollution, are not being carefully considered by the MPCA. Further, there is no such thing as a 'healthy' consumption of toxins.

As a public health professional with multiple years of rigorous scientific training, I am deeply concerned. The MPCA and Hennepin County officials need to stop forcing Minneapolis' overburdened communities to accept health risks the scientific community doesn't fully understand yet. Our communities should not be testing labs to find out what the negative health consequences of living near the HERC actually are years down the road.

Additionally, the state legislature has directed Hennepin County to close the HERC. That means the HERC will now count against renewable energy commitments. With closure increasingly imminent, the MPCA needs a clear, actionable plan to shut down the HERC by 2025 and 2030 — not decades from now.