

OHA releases health consultation on J.H. Baxter and surrounding neighborhoods

KLCC | By [Brian Bull](#)

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Google Maps

A Google Maps view of the closed J.H. Baxter plant shows adjacent neighborhoods where the DEQ is trying to learn the extent of dioxin contamination.

The Oregon Health Authority has issued the “final release” of its health consultation for locals living near the old J.H. Baxter plant in Eugene.

The [OHA's report contains findings and safety recommendations](#) tied to the wood treatment facility, which operated for nearly 80 years in the Bethel area. It concluded that the general risk of dioxin contamination is low, and surface water and

But the report also says more residential yards could be tested, and that long-term consumption of eggs from backyard chickens living in the area could be harmful.

“People were shocked, and dismayed,” said Lisa Arkin, Executive Director of the environmental advocacy group [Beyond Toxics](#).

While Arkin told KLCC that she appreciated OHA’s report, she said much remains to be seen regarding the potential long-term effects of living near a site with decades of complaints and environmental violations.

“All of the folks that have been impacted by the fumes over these years, and the fact that the Oregon Health Authority—even though they downplayed it in their health consultation reports—did find higher incidents than normal of Hodgkin’s Lymphoma and lung cancer,” she said.

Two class-action lawsuits have been filed against J.H. Baxter, alleging gross negligence, trespass, and being a public and private nuisance.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Justice Department [announced a criminal investigation](#) into the practices of J.H. Baxter and its president, Georgia Baxter-Krause, specifically into how the wood treatment facilities retorts were used. In its statement, the Department Of Justice cites the two lawsuits as the basis for its criminal probe.



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“On 175 days from approximately December 2015 through October 2019, Respondent [J.H. Baxter] pumped approximately 1.7 million gallons of liquid process waste containing the chemical mixtures described above to retorts 81, 82, 83, and 85 at the Facility, bypassed the pollution controls on the retorts, and operated the retorts to heat and 'boil off,' or evaporate, the waste,” the DOJ’s statement reads.

“At all material times, the retorts were not dedicated for process waste evaporation. Between events of evaporating waste, the retorts were used for wood treatment,” the statement continues. “Respondent does not have a hazardous waste treatment permit for the facility.”

J.H. Baxter has declined comment on the pending lawsuits. Arkin is urging residents who feel their health and property have been affected by the Baxter plant to submit a [Victim Impact Statement](#) with the DOJ.

Tags

[Health & Medicine](#)[OHA](#)[jh baxter](#)[Bethel](#)[Beyond Toxics](#)

Brian Bull

Brian Bull is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Oregon, and remains a contributor to the KLCC news department. He began working with KLCC in June 2016. In his 27+ years as a public media journalist, he's worked at NPR, Twin Cities Public Television, South Dakota Public Broadcasting, Wisconsin Public Radio, and ideastream in Cleveland. His reporting has netted dozens of accolades, including four national Edward R. Murrow Awards (22 regional), the Ohio Associated Press' Best Reporter Award, Best Radio Reporter from the Native American Journalists Association, and the PRNDI/NEFE Award for Excellence in Consumer Finance Reporting.

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