

**Tryon’s Efforts Aim to Reduce Mercury:
Article 6**

The Town of Tryon’s mercury issues started in February 1994 when the State of North Carolina issued the town a new wastewater permit that included a limit on mercury. The Town of Tryon’s wastewater plant processes about half a million gallons per day which is discharged into Vaughn Creek. The State’s Division of Water Quality’s permit requires mercury concentration in the treated wastewater not to exceed 30 parts-per-trillion before entering the creek. Since February 1994, Tryon has exceeded this mercury limit numerous times.

As a result, the Town has enacted a number of measures to reduce and better control mercury in the wastewater collection and treatment system.

As part of a “Special Order by Content” (SOC) issued by the State’s Water Quality Division, the Town began a program to better identify and control sources of mercury that were entering its sewerage system.

Beginning in the spring of 1996, Tryon inventoried sources of mercury. Work first began with Carolina Yarn Processors, the system’s largest contributor. Mercury monitoring limits were added to CYP’s discharge permit. The Town required CYP to implement several best management practices to reduce the potential for mercury in the industrial effluent. These measures included better cleaning of sampling equipment, review and substitution of mercury containing products used at CYP, cleaning of treatment basins, and a pollution prevention audit of the CYP plant. CYP also implemented “ultra-clean” wastewater sampling techniques recommend by the auditors. The improved practices have enabled the CYP to

<u>Chronology of the Mercury Issue in Tryon</u>	
3/94	State issues mercury limit in wastewater. Town begins having trouble meeting mercury water quality standard.
94-96	Town changes its analytical laboratories 3 times – searching for better quality control.
03/96	Town adds a mercury limit to Carolina Yarn Processors (CYP) sewer discharge permit.
10/96	American Canoe Association files third party lawsuit against Tryon for mercury permit violations.
12/96	State requires fish tissue study to determine if wastewater is affecting fish. Study results are negative.
7/97	America Canoe Association’s Consent Decree requires 18 months of “clean” wastewater samples without a mercury limit violation.
8/97	Town begin monitoring sewer discharge from dentists
1/98	Tryon enters a “Special Order by Consent” (SOC) with State to address mercury violations. SOC requires Town to take several actions to reduce mercury.
8/98	Best management practices implemented at CYP and dentists.
3/99	Town cleans and purges sewer trunk lines and wastewater plant systems.
3/99	State SOC is lifted.
1/01	Tryon adopts “ultra-clean” sampling techniques.
1/01	Town launches a public education effort about mercury awareness with the help of Waste Reduction Partners and NC Div. of Pollution Prevention.
2/01	13 Tryon business commit to become “mercury free.”
4/01	Tryon Daily Bulletin runs mercury education article series.
5/19	Tryon to hold Mercury Collection Day to reduce mercury sources in the community (free to the public).

meet the 30 parts-per-trillion permit limit – which is met before its wastewater enters the town’s sewer system.

Tryon also worked with the dentists in town to implement best management practices of their office wastewater discharges. Dental offices are a known but minor source of municipal wastewater mercury – which comes from work with mercury amalgam tooth fillings. Both dentists cooperated with the Town by replacing internal plumbing where mercury may have accumulated and installed additional mercury removal systems.

The Town also turned its scrutiny to its own wastewater treatment plant operations. The plant underwent purging and cleaning to remove potential mercury sources. Operational improvements were made to better control and treat wastewater. Wastewater sampling improvements were made to collect and handle sampling without contamination. Just last month, the State’s Division of Water Quality modified Tryon’s wastewater permit to better utilize an “ultra-clean” sampling technique.

Through the use of sewer truck line sampling, the Town identified an old type of wastewater pipe that contained measurable amounts of mercury. This pipe is replaced as it is encountered during projects.

Even with all these efforts through the late 90’s, the Town still sporadically exceeded its mercury limit. Late last year the Town joined forces with a Waste Reduction Partners, (WRP) a non-profit, technical assistance group in Asheville. In conjunction with WRP staff and the State’s Division of Pollution Prevention, a public education campaign was launched to better inform Tryon businesses and residents about this wastewater issue. Fourteen Tryon businesses have already signed a “Silver Star” voluntary pledge to reduce the use of mercury containing items in their business. The Tryon Daily Bulletin has published a series of educational articles about mercury, including uses in the home and the safer alternatives.

The public outreach effort about mercury will culminate in a Mercury Collection Day on May 19, 2001 where residents and businesses can bring mercury containing items to be properly managed and recycled – all for free. The objective of this initiative is to remove common mercury containing items from the community such as thermometers and thermostats

Tryon has met the stringent mercury standard for the past six months. The Town will need its wastewater to be “mercury free” for another 12 consecutive months to lift the present American Canoe Association consent decree. The Town has already paid \$68,000 in penalties on the ACA agreement. These penalty dollars go to the Pacolet Area Conservatory. Town officials estimate that over \$150,000 has gone toward addressing this mercury issue.

Keeping Tryon’s wastewater mercury free will take everyone’s awareness and participation. For more information about what you can do, signing the Silver Star Pledge, or about the May 19th Mercury Collection Day, call the Town Hall at 859-6654.