

## **Spartanburg residents speak against medical waste facility**

### **DHEC considers permit for Cannon's Campground site**

*By Stephen Lorgen*

*[stephen.lorgen@shi.com](mailto:stephen.lorgen@shi.com)*

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Community members and a handful of local interest groups delivered a shared message to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control at a public hearing on a proposed medical waste treatment facility, and it wasn't one company officials had hoped to hear.

One after another, residents, an attorney and officials from groups such as Upstate Forever and the League of Women Voters, comprising about 80 attendees, laid out their opposition to TreatMed's plans to open a facility on Franke Drive near the Cannon's Campground community.

DHEC is considering a permit for the company.

Most of the objections raised Tuesday were similar to those raised at an informal DHEC community meeting held in late October: The technology that would be used at the facility is unproven and could be unsafe, and allowing the facility to open would negatively affect quality of life and property values in the community.

Other concerns brought up at Tuesday's hearing at Mary Black Memorial Hospital included questions of the need for another waste treatment facility in South Carolina and whether most of the waste that would be handled at the TreatMed facility would be transported into Spartanburg from out-of-state.

"We do not want you as a neighbor," said Lisa Nielsen, a former Cannon's Campground resident and community advocate. "You have come to the wrong place at the wrong time."

TreatMed wants to open a facility about a mile from Cannon's Campground, where many families blame previous chemical dumping by another company for dozens of cancer cases.

Company officials say their technology is safe, many of the arguments made against opening the facility are off base and that they've done everything in their power to reach out to community members.

"We have given them all the assurances that it is safe," TreatMed President David Squalli said.

Squalli said his company's plan is to start small and contract to handle waste with smaller medical facilities in the region, eventually hoping to land contracts with larger clients such as hospitals.

If approved, the DHEC permit will allow the company to store and treat infectious medical waste that will be shredded and sterilized using pressurized steam.

According to DHEC and TreatMed, the process uses no chemicals or burning, and the water used in the process will be sterilized before disposal.

DHEC officials have said the technology, known as autoclaving, is a generally accepted method in the scientific community of sterilizing surgical tools and infectious waste.

DHEC already has approved of TreatMed's technological processes.

The permit TreatMed is seeking would not allow the company to accept radioactive or chemical waste, and would be effective for a decade.

What happens next is unclear.

DHEC has extended the public comment period, during which residents and others can submit statements to DHEC in writing beyond those entered into the record at Tuesday's hearing, through the middle of the month.

And while technical questions raised through the public comment period will be factored in by DHEC staff as it considers whether to approve the permit, the weight of public opinion won't factor in.

"Really, it's not about a popularity contest," DHEC spokesman Adam Myrick said. "It's about does the application meet the regulatory requirements?"

By law, DHEC must issue the permit if their staff deem that regulatory requirements have been met.

DHEC also can't do anything to dictate or hinder interstate commerce should TreatMed seek to handle out-of-state waste, a concern brought up by residents Tuesday but one that Squalli said is not in the company's plans.

DHEC doesn't anticipate deciding on the permit before the end of the year, and will wait for Spartanburg County Council to consider third reading on an amendment to the county's Unified Land Management Ordinance.

Council members said Tuesday the amendment was initiated not to block TreatMed but to bring the ULMO in sync with the county's solid waste management plan, which was amended last summer.

If council passes the amendment to the ULMO, an action that could come at their Dec. 19 meeting, TreatMed's proposed facility would not meet the new requirements because it would fail to clear lengthened spacing guidelines in relation to the property line.

DHEC is not yet sure how or whether it will factor in council's decision in considering approval for TreatMed's permit.

"We're not really sure," Myrick said. "We're not going to have a decision until Spartanburg County makes its decision."

A pair of council members have spoken out in opposition to the permit.

TreatMed's facility would fall in Councilman David Britt's district.

"My constituents have made it very clear to me they don't want the facility, and I'm going to represent them 100 percent," Britt said.

"This isn't a statement about TreatMed, the company or the management; it's just the wrong time and the wrong place. The people in Cannon's Campground have suffered enough. They're going through a difficult time."

Britt expressed optimism that DHEC would factor in whether the proposed facility meets county requirements in considering whether to approve the permit.

Councilman O'Neal Mintz, an opponent of TreatMed's plans, thinks the county should have the final say on whether a permit is issued or not.

"It's not going to help this county down the road to be the dumping ground for infectious waste," he said.