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ROYAL OAK

Company remains silent

The Miami Herald contacted Royal Oak, the nation's second-largest producer of charcoal briquettes, by phone approximately half a dozen times between early March and early May.

Each time, the company declined to comment.

It would not even disclose when the Ocala plant opened, a detail readily available in state records.

The company's only response was to provide news releases issued in early December and late February announcing the factory's closure. The Miami Herald also faxed a list of questions to James Allen, Royal Oak's president, but did not receive a response.

NOT IN AGREEMENT

According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Royal Oak claims that the smokestacks at its Ocala plant functioned as afterburners to eliminate most fine particles from its emissions. But the DEP does not agree with the company on that point.

Royal Oak is based in Roswell, Ga. The privately held company operates plants in Missouri, Arkansas and Tennessee.

PAST PROBLEMS

It has been found in violation of air pollution laws before.

In 1999, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, the company agreed to pay \$450,000 to settle violations at its former Kenbridge, Va., charcoal plant. The government found that factory violated visible and particulate emissions limits over a four-year period.

Two years earlier, Royal Oak agreed to install afterburners to help control emissions from its Missouri plants to avoid paying a \$750,000 fine for violating two major pollution-reporting rules.