

H.468 Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards Committee on Senate Natural Resources and Energy

The American Lung Association of the Northeast and in Vermont urges you, as you deliberate on renewable energy policy, to consider the health impacts of these policies, especially on our children, the elderly and those living with chronic disease. The health impact on Vermonters should clearly be in the equation as you calculate the life cycle costs of different forms of energy.

Not all renewable energy is clean energy. Not all renewable energy is healthy energy, particularly if it involves combustion. For example, although wood is a renewable resource, like all forms of combustion, burning wood for any reason creates significant airborne emissions, and wood produces more harmful particulate matter than equivalent amounts of oil or gas. There is extensive evidence demonstrating that exposures to fine particulate matter, designated as PM2.5, generated from combustion – like that from a smokestack or chimney– can cause premature death and increase rates of heart disease, lung cancer and asthma exacerbations. **Vermont has the highest rate of adult asthma, and though there are probably a number reasons, locally high concentrations of wood smoke may be responsible.**

With this in mind the ALA makes the following specific recommendations:

- **We do not support biomass combustion for electricity production;**
- **We do not support the expansion of the current use of biomass for thermal energy,** and that you consider a change out program to encourage the replacement of thousands of uncertified residential outdoor wood boilers and old wood stoves in the state, none of which burn cleanly or efficiently.
- If biomass boilers are installed in schools in the future, we recommend air quality permits and specific emissions standards. For those units already in use, we recommend particulate matter monitoring, especially in the schools with boilers that did not require an air quality permit. Of the 44 K-12 schools in Vermont that heat with woodchip boilers, only five boilers were large enough to require a state air quality permit. This is a loophole in the permitting process which allows for boiler installation with minimal pollution controls.
- **We support policies and incentives that will encourage development and use of clean, renewable energy resources that are not combustion-based, including hydro, wind, solar and geothermal.**

Finally, H. 468 should be developed consistent with the approved Comprehensive Energy Plan and encourage public health impact assessments (PHIAs) before advancing energy policies. Public Health Impact Assessments can evaluate the potential public health and safety impacts of energy policy, and identify opportunities to maximize benefits and minimize risks. These analyses are imperative before any expansion of biomass energy, because in the end, the people of Vermont are its most important resource.

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