



# BIOMASS BUSTERS



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Clean energy doesn't come out of a smokestack...

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## From the Editors

Meg Sheehan & Josh Schlossberg

The ground has been shifting under the biomass industry since the publication of our first issue of *Biomass Busters* last month! A few significant developments include: the EPA's decision not to exempt biomass emissions from its greenhouse gas regulations; a letter from ninety scientists to Congress urging our Legislature to close the "biomass loophole;" and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's suspension of the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, following pressure from forest advocates.

Scientists and medical doctors continue to be galvanized by the public health and climate change threats from biomass incinerators, communities across the country keep fighting against incinerators proposed for their towns, and a national grassroots campaign is bringing together biomass opponents from sea to shining sea. Read on to find out more!

For submissions and feedback contact us at [stopspewingcarbon@gmail.com](mailto:stopspewingcarbon@gmail.com).

*Biomass Busters* is a project of the Biomass Accountability Project, Inc., Energy Justice Network, Biofuelwatch, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, and Save America's Forests.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Our Health
- 3 From the Forest
- 4 Trashing the Climate
- 4 Legislation Watch
- 4 Take Action!
- 4 Solutions

## State Lines

### North Carolina Nixes Incinerator

**May 2010** Surry County Commissioners ended negotiations with Fibrowatt LLC for a proposed chicken waste incinerator outside Elkin, NC—the result of strong grassroots pressure by *Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League*, *Citizen's Alliance for a Clean, Healthy Economy (CACHE)*, and *Energy Justice Network*.



### Michigan Pushes Back Against Biomass

*Michigan Citizens for Energy, the Economy and the Environment (MCE3)* continue to fight a proposal by Traverse City Light and Power (TCLP) to build up to four ten-megawatt whole tree burning plants, which would devour 133,000 tons of trees per year.

Over a dozen local medical professionals sent a May letter asking Traverse City commissioners to vote against funding TCLP for the June budget "until further specific data regarding emissions is provided and the potential human health and local air quality impact is analyzed." ❖

# Our Health



## American Lung Association vs. Biomass

The *American Lung Association* is a leading voice on the health impacts of biomass incineration. In 2009, the *Association* wrote to Congress:

*The Lung Association urges that the legislation not promote the combustion of biomass. Burning biomass could lead to significant increases in emissions of nitrogen oxides, particulate matter and sulfur dioxide and have severe impacts on the health of children, older adults, and people with lung diseases.*

## Doctor's Orders

The *Massachusetts Medical Society*, publisher of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, insists that "biomass power plants pose an unacceptable risk to the public's health by increasing air pollution."

Jefferson Dickey, M.D., internist at the Community Health Center of Franklin County, states that air pollution from biomass...

*is associated with an increased risk of a broad range of medical problems, from asthma attacks and decreased lung growth in children to increased lung disease exacerbations, emergency room use, hospitalization rates, heart attacks, and death rates in adults.*

## Cancer Risk

Burning biomass releases known carcinogens such as formaldehyde, benzene, naphthalene, styrene, and acetaldehyde. According to the *Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition*:

*Of particular concern to the breast cancer community about this [biomass] plant is the release of toxic chemicals like dioxin and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's) into the air in communities already experiencing needlessly high rates of breast cancer.*



*Biomass burning causes asthma*

## Threat to Children

Board certified pediatrician William Sammons, M.D. is one of a growing list of health care professionals opposing new biomass incinerators.

Dr. Sammons states in a 2009 letter to the U.S. Senate on climate legislation:

*These power plants, promoted as "clean energy," will have a direct negative impact on the health of our Nation's children: both immediately and cumulatively throughout their lifetimes, and for generations to come.*

*At a time when our nation is struggling to meet the challenges of rising health care costs, the U.S. Senate climate change legislation provides federal taxpayer money to subsidize and promote biomass burning to generate energy.*

*The consequence will be the increased incidence and severity of multiple cardiopulmonary diseases, premature birth, developmental disabilities, and cancer. ❖*

***"Less than 4 cents of every health care dollar is spent on prevention and public health. Our health care system has become a disease care system and the time for change is well overdue."***

***-President Barack Obama***

## From the Forest

### Scientists Track Biomass Emissions

Ninety scientists wrote to the U.S. Congress in May urging that climate and energy legislation not automatically consider burning biomass to be “carbon neutral:”

*clearing or cutting forests for energy...has the net effect of releasing otherwise sequestered carbon into the atmosphere...That creates a carbon debt, may reduce ongoing carbon uptake by the forest, and as a result may increase net greenhouse gas emissions...and thereby cut greenhouse gas reductions needed over the next several decades.*

The scientists state that biomass emissions compared to fossil fuels emissions “may be even higher per unit of energy because of the lower energy to carbon ratio of biomass.”

### Frankentrees On The Loose

Anne Petermann, *Global Justice Ecology Project*

On May 13, the U.S. Department of Agriculture approved a request by ArborGen, a multinational transgenic trees company, to plant 260,000 cold-tolerant genetically engineered eucalyptus trees in 28 “field trials” across seven states along the U.S. Gulf Coast. ArborGen’s next step will be the commercial release of GE eucalyptus for planting on millions of acres in the U.S. South for lumber, paper pulp, and biofuels production.

Eucalyptus plantations are notoriously destructive—causing deadly wildfires, depleting fresh water, and escaping into native ecosystems, where they displace biodiversity and wildlife. GE eucalyptus trees are just the beginning: if allowed to mass-plant GE eucalyptus, industry will soon be ready to deploy GE versions of native trees like poplar and pine, that would inevitably and irreversibly contaminate native forests.

Please join the campaign to stop this unprecedented-



*GE trees: our future forests?*

Photo: John Blair

ed threat to native forests and biodiversity. Go to: [www.nogetrees.org](http://www.nogetrees.org).

### Biomass Bill Bleeds Oregon’s Forests

Samantha Chirillo, *Cascadia’s Ecosystem Advocates*

Biomass extraction handouts in the nation’s top carbon-storing state pose a global threat. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) has proposed Senate Bill 2895 to massively ramp up logging in dry, pine-dominated older forests in eastern Oregon and set 20-year biomass extraction contracts with timber companies. Alarmingly, several conservation groups, particularly *Oregon Wild*, are promoting the bill, inviting more biomass incinerators into the state (i.e. a 38.5 megawatt biomass incinerator recently proposed for Klamath Falls).

Opponents at the S. 2895 hearing in Bend, Oregon on June 4 included the *Oregon Sierra Club* and *Cascadia’s Ecosystem Advocates*. Contact Carl Ross ([carl@saveamericasforests.org](mailto:carl@saveamericasforests.org)) to sign your group (if you have one) on to a letter opposing this destructive bill. ❖

# Trashing the Climate

## Recycling Dumped for Incineration

**April 2010** Ocean City, Maryland terminated its recycling program in favor of sending its trash (full of recyclables) to the Covanta trash incinerator in Chester, Pennsylvania—one of the nation’s largest, burning 2,688 tons of trash a day.

Anti-incineration advocates have claimed for decades that burning trash for electricity—aside from creating serious air pollution issues— incentivizes over-consumption and waste. Mike Ewall of *Energy Justice Network*, who has worked against environmental racism in Chester since 1994 says, “this arrogant and racist decision is yet another slap in the face to Chester residents, who are now organizing to get Ocean City to reverse this awful decision.”



Visit [www.ejnet.org/chester](http://www.ejnet.org/chester) for more information and to sign a petition urging Ocean City to reinstate recycling and keep their waste out of incinerators. ❖

## Legislation Watch

### American Power Act Pimps Biomass

On May 12 the U.S. Senate unveiled the *American Power Act* and—as expected—this short-sighted bill is chock full of subsidies for polluting, trash and tree burning biomass incinerators disguised as “clean and green” energy.

The supposed purpose of the *American Power Act* is to reduce pollution, improve the health of families and the environment, and ensure that the U.S. leads the global community in combating the threat of climate change. Promoting biomass

# Solutions

## “Green” Footprint



Not all fossil fuels alternatives are created equal. The table below estimates the environmental impact (after construction) of several so-called “green” energy sources.

	CO2	Air	Land	Water
Wind				
Solar				
Wave/Tidal				
Small Hydro				
Geothermal				
Big Hydro				
Biomass				
Garbage				
Coal				
Nuclear				

Estimates gathered from:  
[http://www.ucsusa.org/clean\\_energy/technology\\_and\\_impacts/impacts/environmental-impacts-of.html](http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_energy/technology_and_impacts/impacts/environmental-impacts-of.html) ❖

incineration is directly contrary to each one of those goals. Instead of biomass, we must invest in zero-waste, zero-emission renewable energy such as wind, solar, small hydro and wave power.

A network of environmental, health, social justice, governmental accountability and community groups has drafted a letter to Congress requesting the removal of biomass subsidies from the *American Power Act*.

## TAKE ACTION!

**Sign your organization on to the letter to the U.S. Congress demanding the removal of biomass subsidies in the American Power Act by contacting Rob Mida at [mida@energyjustice.net](mailto:mida@energyjustice.net) or 215-743-4884.**