



BIOMASS BUSTERS



Volume 2, Issue 1

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

January 2011

From the Editor

Meg Sheehan, Managing Editor

As we face the New Year's challenges in fighting biomass incinerators, it's heartening to look back at what our grassroots advocacy has accomplished—not only in 2010, but over the past several decades. According to *Energy Justice Network*, grassroots organizing has stopped 60-90% of all proposed dirty energy and waste facilities since the 1970's!

By exposing the dirty truth about today's incinerators disguised as "green" and "renewable" energy, the grassroots are forcing the corporate speculators and opportunists to fold up shop. Each day our network grows stronger and industry proposals are exposed for the greenwashing scams that they are. Read on to learn more.

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

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State Lines

Biomass Moratorium in Washington December 21, 2010 Thurston County Commissioners in Washington State have enacted a year-long moratorium on the construction of new biomass facilities in the county "for the preservation of the public health, safety and general welfare of Thurston County residents." The action was in response to a controversial proposal for a biomass gasification facility for Evergreen College.

Burning biomass "could be terribly unhealthy for us. It's about clean air in many ways," said County Commissioner Sandra Romero. "We have very little wiggle room before we're not in compliance with the Clean Air Act."



Big Biomass Loses Steam in Ohio

December 2010 Nine proposals to co-fire forest biomass with coal totaling 2,210-megawatts are losing momentum in Ohio. Biomass burning "is an option, but one that's on the back burner for us," said Sally Thelen, a spokesperson for *Duke Energy*, which has proposed burning biomass at three existing power stations along the Ohio River.

"The cost [of biomass] has not been competitive with the other options for renewable energy," said Melissa McHenry of the Columbus-based *American Electric Power*, which had recently proposed burning forest biomass at three facilities.

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From the Forest

IPCC Member Opposes Incinerator

October 12, 2010 *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)* member William Moomaw sent a letter to the Williamstown, Massachusetts Board of Selectmen warning that a 29.5-megawatt biomass incinerator (and adjacent wood pellet facility) proposal for nearby Pownal, Vermont “could be a source of major problems for our town and region.”

Moomaw, who is Professor of International Environmental Policy and Director of the *Center for International Environment and Resource Policy at Tufts University*, wrote that “to support a plant of this size will require the cutting of massive amounts of trees.” According to Moomaw, the claim that burning biomass for electricity is

‘carbon neutral’ because the new trees use the same carbon dioxide to grow that they released when burned is false as has been recognized by both US scientists and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on which I serve.

\$100 Million of Stimulus to Biomass

Samantha Chirillo, Cascadia’s Ecosystem Advocates

In 2009, Congress passed the *American Reinvestment and Recovery Act* (“stimulus bill”) Section 1603 program for capital investment of the U.S. Treasury Department in “renewable” energy projects. Between then and December 2010, the taxpayer-funded 1603 program amounted to \$104,208,944 in cash grants specifically toward 10 biomass facilities that generate electricity, 7 of them (163.8 MW) wood-burning, of the total \$5,794,909,024 allocated to eligible projects.

Passed on Dec. 13, 2010, Section 707 of the *Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization and Job Creation Act of 2010* (HR 4853) extended for one year (through December 31, 2011), the eligibility deadline for 1603 applicants to begin



Willamette National Forest, Oregon

facility construction. As of Oct. 26, 2010, Forisk Consulting reports 234 announced, wood-burning electricity projects nationwide.

The electricity-generating capacity of proposed and expanding wood-only biomass facilities across the U.S. currently totals about 2,367 MW, which would equate to an estimated 29,918,880 tons per year of CO₂ emitted.

Biomass Incineration Competes With Composite Panel Industry

The USDA’s *Biomass Crop Assistance Program* (BCAP) would provide \$461 million worth of incentives over 15 years for biomass burning. Representatives of the composite panel industry worry about competition for a limited supply of forest products.

“BCAP would redirect wood from the manufacture of valuable wood products that supports 350,000 American jobs,” according to John Bradfield of the *Composite Panel Association*, “to an industry that supports a fraction of the jobs to burn it.”

Bradfield’s powerpoint presentation, *BCAP Unwound: What Can Happen When Government Policies Impact Competition For Wood*, criticizes the USDA for having “redirected fully utilized materials already in the stream of commerce to lower value uses,” as in burning mill waste for electricity. ❖

Our Health

Pediatrician States Biomass Concerns

Marc McDermott, M.D.

[Below are excerpts from Dr. McDermott's December 6, 2010 letter to the Berkshire Eagle in Pittsfield, Massachusetts]

As a local pediatrician, I have concerns about the proposal to construct a factory to produce electrical power by burning wood and wood products in Pownal, Vermont. The issues are complex indeed; the pros and cons are many and I will not review them here. The issue of air pollution, however, is fairly straightforward.



Combustion will lead to particulate matter air pollution in our valley and that air pollution will lead to disease. Many studies have shown that air pollution of various kinds, especially fine particulates (soot) leads to pediatric asthma exacerbations, school absences, deaths in adults and other bad health outcomes.

I am personally not reassured by the idea that our air here is currently clean and that the added pollution from the biomass combustion plant will not put us over "EPA limits." There is no reason to believe there is an obvious "threshold effect" or safe lower limit in this case. Added air pollution will add to disease and it will be the people in the valley that runs from Bennington to Pownal and Williamstown [Mass.] that bear that burden.

Air pollution shouldn't be added to our valley unless there is a truly compelling reason or unless there is very convincing data to suggest that the change in air quality will be minimal. ❖

State Lines (continued)

Wisconsin Biomass Plans Withdrawn

November 29, 2010 Xcel Energy has withdrawn plans to build what would have been the largest electricity-generating biomass incinerator in the Midwest, on Lake Superior in northern Wisconsin. The company cited increasing costs for large-scale biomass incineration compared to other renewable energy sources.

"Based on those costs, and the fact that other renewable resources are becoming more cost effective, and natural gas prices are dropping," said David Donovan, Xcel manager of regulatory policy, "it was real hard for us to go ahead and push the project through now, when we could get other renewables in a much more cost-effective manner."

Xcel also blamed "considerable regulatory uncertainty at the state and federal level" for their decision not to build.



Logging virgin white pine in Wisconsin, late 1800's
www.ci.green-bay.wi.us

Missouri Nixes Biomass Power

December 6, 2010 Salem, Missouri aldermen voted unanimously to end negotiations with ProEnergy services for an electricity-generating biomass incinerator. The facility would have required 315,000 tons of green trees a year and 500,000 gallons of water a day, according to Salem Mayor Gary Brown. ❖

Trashing the Climate

Incinerators in Disguise

Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives

Dozens of start-up companies are working to site a new generation of toxic "incinerators in disguise" in communities throughout the world. These are incinerators with names like gasification, pyrolysis, and plasma arc that are promoted by waste companies as "safe" and "green" for community health and the environment. Many of today's incinerator companies claim that they can safely, cost-effectively and sustainably turn any type of material such as household trash, tires, medical waste, biomass, refuse-derived-fuel and hazardous waste into electricity and fuels like ethanol and bio-diesel.



However, all of these technologies emit dioxins and other harmful pollutants into the air, soil and water, and they are defined as incineration by the *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*. ❖

Legislation Watch

Tax Bill Extends Biomass Grants

A provision of the new tax bill signed into law in December by President Obama will extend cash grants in lieu of investment tax benefits for 30% of the cost of the construction of new biomass incinerators—as well as other “renewable” energy projects—until the end of 2011. Section 1603 of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* had been set to expire at the end of 2010.

Biomass Crop Assistance Program

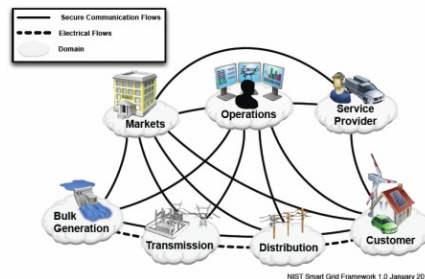
A Senate vote on the *Omnibus Appropriations Act* that would have removed funding from the *Biomass Crop Assistance Program* (BCAP) has been postponed. Biomass proponents hope that the future

Alternatives

Smart Grid

<http://www.pattonboggs.com>

Smart Grid involves technologies to improve the way electricity is supplied, transmitted, distributed, stored and consumed, (including, for example, new sensor, communication and information-sharing technologies).



Smart Grid advancements will apply digital technologies to the grid, and enable real-time coordination of information from generation supply resources, demand resources and distributed energy resources. This will bring new efficiencies to the electric system through improved communication and coordination between utilities and with the grid, which will translate into savings in the provision of electric service. Ultimately the Smart Grid will facilitate consumer transactions and allow consumers to better manage their electric energy costs. ❖

bill will extend funding for biomass incineration. The final rule provisions of BCAP issued by the *U.S. Department of Agriculture* in October would allot \$461 million to biomass over 15 years.

“BCAP lives for another day and it’s going to be a big part of [our] agenda in 2011 to keep that program going,” said Bob Cleaves, president of *Biomass Power Association*.

TAKE ACTION!

Urge your U.S. Senators (www.senate.gov) to remove all funding for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program from the Omnibus Appropriations Act and instead support efficiency measures along with appropriately sited and scaled, community supported solar and wind.