



BIOMASS BUSTERS



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

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From the Editor

Rachel Smolker, Co-Managing Editor

The past few weeks have seen massive upheavals across North Africa, the Middle East, and even Wisconsin. The common theme? Ordinary citizens fighting for the right to decide their own futures.

As Congress pushes to cut funding for social services, public health, and the EPA, many cash-strapped communities around the U.S. must also shoulder the psychological and financial burdens that come from challenging biomass incinerators (funded, ironically, by their own tax dollars).

The powers that be might out-muscle and out-spend us, but never forget: we've got the numbers!

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

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State Lines

Green Groups File Lawsuit Against Lake Tahoe, CA Biomass Logging

February 14, 2011 *John Muir Project* of the *Earth Island Institute* and *Center for Biological Diversity* filed a lawsuit in Sacramento federal court to prevent National Forest logging in California's Lake Tahoe region. "Most" of the trees taken from this 1,398-acre parcel of forest would be utilized for biomass power incineration, according to the groups' press release.

Biomass power incinerators "are widely touted as a renewable form of energy," the groups say, "but the emissions associated with the logging, transporting and large-scale industrial processing of trees and other wood products for energy can in fact increase global warming pollution and worsen climate change."



GA Biomass Power Incinerator Held Up

January 31, 2011 *Oglethorpe Power Corporation*, the nation's largest power supply cooperative, has "deferred development" of a 100-megawatt biomass power incinerator proposed for Warren County, Georgia in order to "monitor regulatory and legislative developments related to biomass electricity generation."

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From the Forest

Climate Scientists Debunk Carbon Neutrality of Biomass Power

[Below are excerpts from a Feb. 2, 2011 letter to the Washington State Legislature from Mark E. Harmon of Oregon State University, Timothy D. Searchinger of Princeton University, and William Moomaw of Tufts University.]

Burning biomass emits 150 percent the carbon dioxide of coal, and 300-400 percent the CO₂ of natural gas, per kilowatt-hour of electricity generated.

The number and scale of biomass facilities proposed in Washington strongly suggests that new trees will have to be cut to provide fuel for these plants, because mill residues and logging residues are inadequate.

If fuel is obtained by harvesting trees that would

not otherwise be cut, then the carbon “payback period” is decades to more than a century, even if the harvested trees are replaced.

Using wood for power generation that would otherwise be added to forests thus not only increases the rate of CO₂ emissions per kilowatt-hour but also reduces the critical forest carbon “sink.”

Simply declaring biomass power to be carbon neutral does not make it so.



BIOMASS BUSTER of the Month *Alexandra Dawson - Hadley, Mass.*



“We should not be chopping down our public forests for inefficient power plants,” says *Alexandra Dawson*, a “mostly retired” environmental lawyer involved in Massachusetts’ anti-biomass fight for the past five years.

Alexandra has been a major force in convincing the state to rethink taxpayer and ratepayer subsidies to biomass power incineration.

But, like other biomass opponents across the state, region, and nation, Alexandra isn’t resting easy until the *Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources* gets those “blasted ‘regs’ enforced.”

Report: Forests Need Dead Wood

Feb. 15, 2011 Removing dead wood from a forest to burn for biomass could have negative impacts on carbon sequestration, water quality, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity, according to “*Ecology of Dead Wood in the Southeast*,” a report by *Forest Guild* and *Environmental Defense Fund*.

“There is increased interest today in dead wood for energy and fuel, and more intensive harvesting of biomass could have long-term consequences for Southern forests,” said Will McDow, manager of the *EDF Southeast Center for Conservation Incentives*. “Stripping the forest floor to create energy is imprudent.”

“Southern forests have less dead wood than other regions of the United States, yet it plays a crucial role,” said Zander Evans, research director of *Forest Guild*. ❖

Our Health

Particulate Matter Linked to Diabetes

(source: *Diabetes Care*, Oct. 29, 2010)

Researchers from *Children's Hospital Boston* released a study covering every county in the contiguous U.S. demonstrating a "consistent correlation between adult diabetes and particulate air pollution," or PM 2.5, a component of haze, smoke (including biomass incineration), and vehicle exhaust, even at levels deemed safe by the *Environmental Protection Agency*.



"From a policy perspective," said John Brownstein of the *Children's Hospital Informatics Program*, "the findings suggest that the current EPA limits on exposure may not be adequate to prevent negative public health outcomes from particulate matter exposure."

Among counties well within EPA limits for exposure to PM 2.5, those with the highest compared to the lowest measurements of pollution demonstrated a greater than 20 percent increase in diabetes.

For every 10 microgram per cubic meter increase in PM 2.5 exposure, prevalence of diabetes went up by 1 percent.

The findings of the report correlate with studies where mice exposed to PM 2.5 showed an increase in insulin resistance, a precursor to diabetes. ❖

State Lines (continued)

NY State Faces Biomass "Gasification"

(source: *Albany Times-Union*, Feb. 7, 2011)

Taylor BioMass Energy is proposing a 24-megawatt gas-fired electricity-generating gasification facility for Montgomery, NY that will burn 65% biomass.

"We don't combust, we don't burn," said company owner Jim Taylor of the gasification process, which involves exposing trash or biomass to extremely high temperatures to create a synthetic gas than can be used to make electricity or fuels.

Mike Ewall of *Energy Justice Network* explains that gasification is still incineration, citing concerns about the release of dioxins and other air pollutants, as well as the production of toxic ash.



U.S. Senators Host Biomass Boosters

February 17, 2011 U.S. Senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Max Baucus (D-MT), Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) invited members of pro-biomass groups to a Washington, D.C. briefing to discuss the future of burning forests for energy. Present were representatives from *Biomass Energy Resource Center*, *Forest Guild*, *Plum Creek Timber*, *New England Wood Pellet*, and other pro-biomass organizations.

Rachel Smolker of *Biofuelwatch* arranged a coinciding meeting with the D.C. staff of Senator Sanders to urge him to hold a similar briefing with biomass opponents. ❖

Trashing the Climate

Waste and Climate

Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA)

www.no-burn.org

Burning and landfilling waste releases greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide from incinerators and methane from landfills, that are significant contributors to global climate change. These methods of waste disposal also deprive the economy of reused, recycled and composted materials, requiring the constant use of energy and raw materials to fuel an unsustainable one-way production and consumption system.



When burning materials that could be reused, recycled, or composted, incinerators destroy the energy-saving potential of putting those materials to better use. Recycling, for instance, saves 3 to 5 times the energy that waste incinerator power plants generate. For these reasons, "waste-to-energy" plants would be more aptly named "waste-of-energy" plants. ❖

Legislation Watch

EPA's "Boiler Rule" Revision

Feb. 26, 2011 The *Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)* released revised "Boiler Rule" regulations establishing "Maximum Available Control Technology" (MACT) for industrial and commercial boilers, including those that burn biomass for electricity.

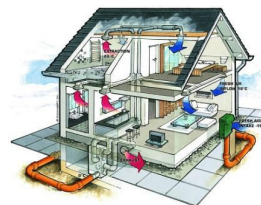
The rule sets guidelines for emissions of particulates, carbon monoxide, hydrogen chloride, mercury and dioxins/furans for "major source" emitters and particulates, and carbon monoxide for "area source" emitters (most biomass incinerators).

Alternatives

Passive House (Passivhaus)

www.passivehaus.us

The Passive House concept represents today's highest energy standard with the promise of slashing the heating energy consumption of buildings by an amazing 90%. Data from the *U.S. Energy Information Administration* shows that buildings are responsible for 48% of greenhouse gas emissions annually and 76% of all electricity generated by U.S. power plants goes to supply the Building Sector.



A Passive House is a very well-insulated, virtually air-tight building that is primarily heated by passive solar gain and by internal gains from people, electrical equipment, etc. Energy losses are minimized. Any remaining heat demand is provided by an extremely small source. Avoidance of heat gain through shading and window orientation also helps to limit any cooling load, which is similarly minimized. An energy recovery ventilator provides a constant, balanced fresh air supply. ❖

A new category combines coal and biomass boilers, allowing most biomass incinerators not to have to install scrubbers for mercury, hydrochloric acid, and some other pollutants. Smaller units will be required only to conduct regular "tune-ups" rather than being held to numeric emissions limits.

Biomass industry lobbying resulted in the weakened regulations, which have rolled back public health protections from air pollutants.

TAKE ACTION!

Please contact your U.S. Senators and Representative (www.contactingthecongress.org) and ask them to urge the EPA to enact stronger standards for biomass incineration.