



# 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

While the scientific and public health data on the toxic impacts of biomass incineration continues to grow, industry backlash is accelerating. Right now, the biomass industry is attacking the U.S. EPA's efforts to reduce mercury pollution from biomass boilers.

Let's have a reality check here—why are we even talking about mercury emissions from a so-called “green energy” source? Why should clean energy tax money go to incinerators that emit mercury, one of the most toxic substances known to science?

The good news is that citizens with common sense are not fooled by the industry's greenwash and are stepping up their opposition to the biomass scam. Read more in this month's issue of **BIOMASS BUSTERS**.

*For submissions, feedback or to sign up for email version contact us at [biomassbusters@gmail.com](mailto:biomassbusters@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

- 1 State Lines
- 2 From the Forest
- 3 Our Health/State Lines (cont.)
- 4 Trashing the Climate
- 4 Legislation Watch/Take Action!
- 4 Solutions

## State Lines

### Massachusetts Proposes to End Subsidies for Big Biomass

**September 17, 2010** The Massachusetts *Department of Energy Resources* has proposed to deny Renewable Energy Certificates, or RECs (a taxpayer and ratepayer subsidy) to large-scale, electricity-generating biomass incinerators in its draft regulations for the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS).

Proposed regulations would require biomass incinerators to operate at 60% efficiency to qualify for full REC's and 40% for partial subsidies. Electricity generating biomass incinerators operate at less than 25% efficiency. Regulations would also require certification from a forester that “no more than 15 percent of the total weight of all forest products harvested from a given forest harvest area” be removed for biomass and that a forest impact assessment be conducted every five years.



“If these standards are enacted as proposed,” said Bob Cleaves, president of *Biomass Power Association*, “I'm quite certain that there will be no new development in New England,” calling standards “unachievable.”

If draft regulations are enacted, five out of six biomass incinerators currently proposed for Massachusetts would fail to qualify for RECs.

*Continued on page 3*

# From the Forest

## Study Shows Wood Ash is Radioactive

A study published in the *Health Physics Society's Newsletter* in 1991 [Vol. 18, No. 4] by Stewart Farber concluded that wood ash “is a major source of radioactivity released into the environment,” based on the presence of radioactive Cesium-137 (Cs-137) in New England wood ash samples.



*Logging for McNeil incinerator in Worcester, VT*

Forty-seven data sets collected by sixteen scientists in fourteen states concluded that, excepting California, wood ash samples with radioactive Cesium exceeded—*some by 100 times or more*—the levels of Cesium legally released from nuclear reactors. “Cs-137 was created and dispersed worldwide in the environment primarily from the open air testing of atomic bombs” in the US and Russia, said Farber.

According to Farber, federal law requires nuclear reactor byproducts to be disposed of as “radioactive waste” if Cesium levels reach even 1% of the levels found in wood ash samples. Proper disposal of wood ash from industrial burners would cost up to \$30 billion a year.

Biomass incinerators, such as Burlington, Vermont’s 50-megawatt McNeil incinerator, provide wood ash for farmers to use as fertilizer.

## Biomass Industry & NRDC Write EPA

**Sept. 15, 2010** *Natural Resources Defense Council* President Frances Beinecke and *Biomass Power Association* President Bob Cleaves co-signed a letter to U.S. *Environmental Protection Agency* Administrator Lisa Jackson asking the EPA to “establish a full-cycle carbon accounting system” for biomass emissions in order to “incentivize practices which lead to biomass utilization resulting in the maximum reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.”

Representing the “leading association of biomass to energy producers and the nation’s most foremost environmental groups,” co-signers Beinecke and Cleaves claim they are “confident that biomass needs to play a large role in our clean energy future.”

## Vermont’s McNeil Biomass Incinerator

The 50-megawatt McNeil biomass incinerator has operated for 26 years on the edge of downtown Burlington, VT, 200 yards away from the nearest residences. The incinerator, jointly owned by Burlington Electric Department and three partners, has been the source of multiple citizen complaints including breathing problems, “pungent” odors, “disturbing” noise, and dust.



*Logging for McNeil incinerator in Moretown, VT*

McNeil incinerator sources its wood from the forests of Vermont, New York, Quebec, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, including clearcuts up to 25 acres. *[Photos are from two logging sites in Vermont providing feedstock to McNeil.]* ❖

# Our Health

## Comments to EPA on “Tailoring” Rule for Greenhouse Gas Emissions

*Dr. Ron Saff, M.D., Florida*

If these biomass plants are allowed to continue to be approved, the consequences will be massive deforestation and an increase in death, disease and cancer.

Biomass plants release tons of particle pollution...According to the *American Heart Association*, there is no safe threshold for particle pollution, in other words, there is no safe level or number. The *AHA* states that the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) are not stringent enough to protect our health.

There is a linear relationship between the amount of air pollution and the amount of heart attacks and death, not only from heart disease but from *all causes*. In other words, the higher the level of particle pollution, the higher the death rate and the only safe level is zero.



In short, the hazardous health impacts including death, disease and cancer are well known and acknowledged by the medical community. Physician groups and medical associations representing tens of thousands of doctors across the U.S. have weighed in against the deadly impacts of biomass plants. ❖

# State Lines (continued)

## WA Citizens Sue on Incinerator Siting

**September 10, 2010** The state of Washington’s *Concerned Citizens of Mason County* filed a petition for review in Mason County Superior Court claiming that the Port of Shelton wrongfully signed a lease option with developer ADAGE before conducting an environmental review on the siting of a proposed biomass incinerator.

*Concerned Citizens’* spokesperson Fran Prescott said “the Port has inappropriately made the decision to obligate itself to lease land before knowing what the environmental impacts of that decision will be.”



## Vermonters Scrutinize Biomass Impacts

**September 25, 2010** Over 100 people from the southwestern Vermont town of Pownal and surrounding areas attended an open house held by Beaver Wood Energy on their proposed construction of a 29-megawatt biomass incinerator and wood-pellet facility.

The vast majority of attendees voiced concerns about the incinerator during a question and answer session on issues including air pollution, truck traffic, water use, property values, climate impacts and forest destruction.

Pownal resident Ray Bub, member of Pownal Fire District’s Water Board, said he was “very, very concerned” about the plan to cool the incinerator with an average of 500,000 gallons a day of river and well water. Bub spoke of local wells already running low and feared the project “might just pump this aquifer dry.”

Members of the *Concerned Citizens of Pownal* ([www.pownalbiomass.info](http://www.pownalbiomass.info)) distributed information during the meeting demonstrating the health and environmental impacts of biomass incineration. ❖

# Trashing the Climate

## Fibrowatt Defeated Again (and Again)

Mike Ewall, Energy Justice Network

Energy Justice Network's 11-year campaign against large-scale poultry litter (manure and wood) incinerators is having a banner year. In March, Fibrowatt's proposed incinerator in Page County, VA was defeated after a one-month fight. In April, one of Fibrowatt's three proposals in North Carolina was defeated after a 3-year fight when Surry County officials rejected it.



Most recently, in Hart County, GA, a rapid and massive citizen uprising drove Fibrowatt out of the entire region in only six weeks.

Another poultry waste incinerator, fought by NAACP in Steelton, PA, was stopped earlier this year before we even learned of the proposal. With the addition of a grassroots group fighting Fibrowatt in Chile, our global network against poultry waste incineration now spans four continents. To learn more please go to [www.energyjustice.net/fibrowatch](http://www.energyjustice.net/fibrowatch). ❖

## Legislation Watch

### Home Star Energy Retrofit Act

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-a-environment/96197-energy-efficiency-means-more-jobs-rep-peter-welch>

Rep. Peter Welch's (D-VT) *Home Star Energy Retrofit Act* (H.R. 5019), [passed in the House on May 6, 2010 and to be voted on in the Senate] is a common sense idea that would create jobs and provide a boost to local economies, while helping families afford their energy bills.

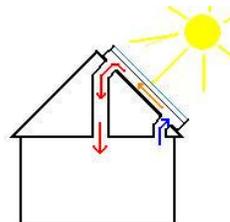
By encouraging homeowners to invest in energy efficiency retrofits, *Home Star* would create **170,000 manufacturing and construction jobs** that could not be outsourced to China. It

# Solutions

## Solar Hot Air Heaters

<http://www.energy4you.net/hotair.htm>

A solar hot air system's primary use is to provide heated air for home heating needs. This is done with a solar collector panel, which is mounted on a roof or wall with a clear unobstructed view of the sun. In northern climates a wall mount may be preferred.



**How it works.** The sunlight passes through the glass onto the absorber plate. A temperature sensor in the collector panel sends a signal to a differential controller, which compares the interior air temperature to the panel's temperature. When the sun has heated the panel's interior temperature above the home's air temperature, the controller turns on a circulation fan. Cool air is blown through the collector and heated by the collector plate. The heated air is then returned to the home. The fan continues to run until the home is sufficiently heated. ❖

would also help more than 3 million Americans invest in energy-saving technology, **saving families close to \$10 billion on their energy bills over 10 years.**

Expanded nationally, *Home Star* would save as much energy as taking three coal-fired power plants offline or hundreds of thousands of cars off the road.

## TAKE ACTION!

**Urge your U.S. Senator to support Home Star Energy Retrofit Act.**

**Find your Senator here:** [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) (upper right hand corner of webpage).