



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 fairy tale that we can incinerate trees and other “biomass” to produce “clean and green” energy is one with a nasty ending: wasted tax dollars, a hotter planet, and sick and dying Americans. Luckily, committed grassroots activists are exposing this biomass greenwash for what it truly is and some government regulators are starting to “get it.”

On the federal level, the U.S. EPA proposes to require biomass incinerators to comply with new controls for hazardous air pollutants – but industry is calling foul, asking instead to emit dirtier air pollution than coal. The EPA wants to hear from citizens about whether biomass incineration should be considered “carbon neutral.” (Of course, the answer is NO!) Make your voice heard on this important issue in the “Take Action!” section (p. 4) of this month’s **BIOMASS BUSTERS**.

For submissions, feedback or to sign up for email version contact us at 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.

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State Lines

Anti-Biomass Lawsuit in Gainesville, FL

August 25, 2010 Citizens have mounted a legal challenge to a Florida State agency approval of the Gainesville Renewable Energy Center incinerator, proposed by the Massachusetts-based American Renewables, LLC. The citizen leading the coalition, former mayor of Gainesville, Dr. Thomas Bussing, intervened to enter testimony in the trial to prevent harm to human health and the environment from the incinerator, which would burn trees to make electricity.



Dr. Ron Saff, a medical doctor from Tallahassee, FL who specializes in asthma, testified that “the pollution from biomass plants causes asthma and heart attacks, cancer, shortens lives and poses a health risk to Gainesville residents.”

According to permit applications, air pollution from the incinerator will include particulate matter, including PM 2.5, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), acid gases, sulfur compounds, PCBs, and dioxin-like compounds. The opponents’ expert testimony demonstrated that these toxins are a danger to children, will be airborne and deposited on local residents and agricultural crops, and that the incinerator will violate state laws prohibiting objectionable odors, poses a risk of fires in the wood chip piles, and will emit dangerous greenhouse gases.

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From the Forest

Petition Filed with EPA Challenges “Carbon Neutrality” of Biomass

July 28, 2010 The *Center for Biological Diversity* filed a petition with the Environmental Protection Agency claiming its recently released *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks* wrongly classifies forest biomass incineration as “carbon neutral.” The petition cites numerous recent scientific studies that demonstrate that not only isn’t burning forests for electricity carbon neutral, but is in fact a significant source of greenhouse gas pollutants.

“Burning America’s forests for energy isn’t clean, isn’t green and certainly isn’t carbon neutral,” said *Center* attorney Kevin Bundy. “Biomass emits as much or more carbon dioxide than coal, and forests can take decades or even centuries to pull that carbon dioxide back out of the atmosphere after being logged.”

New York State Restricts Biomass

August 2010 The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation released a draft policy defining what would constitute “sustainably harvested” forest biomass in order to qualify for carbon credits under the *Northeast’s Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative* (RGGI).

Despite recent science demonstrating forest biomass emissions to be greater than coal, RGGI regulations—encompassing 10 northeastern states—consider “sustainably harvested” biomass as carbon neutral, leaving each state to devise its own standards.

New York State criteria claims forests must be “maintained in a forested state for a time period of 100 years,” accompanied by a forester-approved “timber harvest plan,” or certified by an entity like Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) [see accompanying photo].



Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) logging in Washington
Photo: Steve Ringman, The Seattle Times, www.seattletimes.com

Biocharring the Planet

Rachel Smolker, Biofuelwatch

Charcoal (aka biochar) is being touted as the next climate savior. An article published in *Nature* argues that burning biomass to make charcoal and then burying it under soils will sequester 12% of global greenhouse gas emissions, all without interfering with food production, habitat or soil conservation! The catch? To make the numbers work (hidden in the 40 pages of supplementary materials), they include growing dedicated energy crops on at least 200 million hectares of “abandoned and degraded” land and converting an additional 170 million hectares of tropical grasslands to “silvoculture” (woody shrubs for cow fodder instead of grass).

This is a déjà vu for veterans of the biofuels debate, where a slew of studies pronounced large tracts of land—in other people’s countries—available for growing crops to fuel our SUVs.

Besides this conversion of land for biochar crops (over an area greater than the continent of India), our knowledge about the impacts of biochar on soils, climate, crops, etc. is far too limited. Embracing global, large-scale biochar at this stage would be a huge, risky experiment! Meanwhile, the biochar enthusiasts have a new “protocol” for getting their baby into the carbon markets...with an eye to providing offsets for the Alberta tar sands extraction. ❖

Our Health

Report on Pollution and Children's Health: "The Price of Pollution"

June 2010 A new report "conservatively" estimates the true cost of childhood diseases caused by environmental pollution in the state of Michigan to be between \$3.65 and \$6.68 billion. *The Price of Pollution*, released by the *Michigan Network for Children's Environmental Health*, a coalition of health and environmental organizations, and the *Ecology Center*, measures direct and indirect costs to the state from childhood asthma, lead pollution, pediatric cancer, and some neuro-developmental disabilities.

"A substantial amount of solid evidence shows that children are being harmed by environmental exposures to toxic chemicals," Dr. Ted Schettler, a member of the *Network*, said in a press release. "This report demonstrates that there is a cost not only to children and their families, but also to the state from inaction. Increased State and Federal efforts to protect children are long overdue."



The full report can be found at: <http://www.mnceh.org/documents/The%20Price%20of%20Pollution.pdf>

Pro-Biomass Doctor worked for BP

July 22, 2010 Dr. Mark Roberts, a scientist promoting biomass incineration at a public hearing for an incinerator proposed for Rothschild, Wisconsin was Corporate Medical Director for BP (British Petroleum) until 2003. ❖

State Lines (continued)

Traverse City, MI to Vote on Biomass

July 15, 2010 Two petitions have been approved by Traverse City, Michigan, giving citizens a chance to vote on whether Traverse City Light & Power (TCL&P) would operate under city control and an option to demand a vote on any future proposed construction of power-generating facilities, including biomass incinerators.



The petitions were circulated by a citizen coalition including former Traverse City Mayor Margaret Dodd, following a TCL&P proposal for up to four ten-megawatt tree-burning incinerators.

Fierce citizen opposition by groups such as *Michigan Citizens for Energy, the Economy and Environment* had resulted in a TCL&P decision to "shelve" construction plans for the incinerator back in June. The successful passage of these ballot measures would ensure that any decisions regarding biomass incineration in Traverse City will be made by citizens.

Arizona Incinerator Goes Bankrupt

July 9, 2010 The sole biomass incinerator in the state of Arizona, sited outside of the north-central town of Snowflake, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy following a notice from Salt River Project to terminate its contract to purchase power from the facility.

Biomass Greenwash in Washington

Two tree-burning biomass incinerators are proposed for Mason County, Washington in the town of Shelton—a 60-megawatt incinerator proposed by ADAGE and a 40-megawatt burner proposed by Simpson Timber Co. ❖

Trashing the Climate

Trash Incinerator Sued by Connecticut

August 18, 2010 Waste-to-energy incinerator company Covanta Energy is being sued by Connecticut State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal for emitting twice the legal limit of cancer-causing dioxins from its facility in Wallingford, Connecticut. Dioxins are one of the most toxic chemicals known to science.



Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Amey Marrella said the lawsuit “is sending a clear message that violating the state’s environmental laws will not be tolerated.”

It is the second time Covanta’s Wallingford incinerator has exceeded legal limits for dioxin in the past three years. In November 2009 Covanta paid out a \$355,000 settlement.

Legislation Watch

Sen. Harry Reid’s (D-NV) Renewable Energy Standard

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is considering a renewable electricity standard that would include biomass incinerators in legislation (S. 3663) to tighten up offshore drilling regulations.

Urge your U.S. Senator to insist that any renewable energy standards in *Clean Energy Jobs and Oil Company Accountability Act* (S. 3663) **NOT include the incineration of any form of biomass, construction & demolition debris, or trash.** Find your Senator here: www.senate.gov (upper right hand corner of website).

Solutions

Efficiency Vermont: A National Model?

<http://www.encyvermont.com>



Efficiency Vermont is the nation's first ratepayer-funded energy efficiency utility providing energy efficiency services statewide. *Efficiency Vermont* provides technical assistance and financial incentives to help Vermont households and businesses reduce their energy costs with energy-efficient equipment and lighting. *Efficiency Vermont* also provides energy-efficient approaches to construction and renovation.

In 1999, the Vermont Legislature passed a law creating the energy efficiency utility. An energy efficiency charge on ratepayers' electric bills provides the funds for delivery of energy efficiency services in Vermont.

Vermont businesses and homeowners who have used *Efficiency Vermont's* services to make cost-effective efficiency investments have saved more than 660 million kilowatt hours (kWh) in annual electric energy. ❖

TAKE ACTION!

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is making new *Clean Air Act* rules to regulate greenhouse gases from industry smokestack emissions, like those of biomass and garbage incinerators.

Please send an email to the EPA by going to:
<http://www.votervoice.net/link/target/sscc/c23Nq7cW.aspx>
by Monday, September 13, 2010 insisting that biomass smokestack emissions are not carbon neutral and should be subject to the law like other sources of CO2!

Fax: (202) 566-1741

Mail: EPA Docket Center, Attention Docket OAR-2010-0560, Mail code 2822T, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20460