

Groups say EPA's Clean Air Act rules should prohibit burning forests for "green" energy

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A national network of health, social justice, community well-being, and forest protection organizations opposed to burning trees and trash for so-called "clean and green" energy, today vowed to challenge U.S. EPA's November 10, 2010 Clean Air Act guidance as it relates to "biomass." The group also voiced sharp disagreement with Secretary Vilsack's support for burning America's forests for electricity, expressed in a USDA Press Release November 10.

In Massachusetts, Meg Sheehan of Biomass Accountability Project said, "We applaud EPA for moving forward on greenhouse gas regulation despite industry criticism, but the agency's claim that burning "biomass" could qualify as "best available control technology" for greenhouse gas emissions is contrary to established science. Burning wood biomass for electricity emits 50% more greenhouse gases per unit of energy than coal and is horribly inefficient. The Clean Air Act is supposed to ensure that all Americans have healthy air to breathe. Burning biomass is contrary to that goal," Sheehan added.

According to pediatrician William Sammons, biomass burning emits the most toxic chemicals known to science, including deadly dioxin, mercury, fine particulate matter, and others. "These emissions cause asthma, heart disease, diabetes and other illnesses in children as well as adults, and should never qualify as the "cleanest" technology under our Clean Air Act," Sammons said. Over 77,000 doctors, the American Lung Association, Massachusetts Medical Society, North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians and others oppose burning wood biomass on health grounds. In Ohio, plans to convert coal plants to burning trees threaten both forests and public health, according to Buckeye Forest Council Executive Director Cheryl Johncox. "Ten coal fired power plants in Ohio plan to burn over 25 million tons of wood a year to generate energy – that's one in ten of our trees which would result in the clearing of Ohio's forests in a decade," she said. "Cutting down forests, which absorb greenhouse gases, is not a climate solution but a climate disaster, and it's happening now, not in the future," she said. "We urge EPA to ensure that biomass burning is not allowed to be implemented as "best available control technology" for greenhouse gases," Johncox added.

"It is unconscionable for the USDA and Secretary Vilsack to promote economic and environmental subsidies for an industry which will result in the release of "a carbon

bomb” that will last for decades,” said Denny Haldeman, a spokesperson for the Anti-Biomass Incineration Forest Protection Campaign. “The biomass incineration industry is carbon intensive, unsustainable, and dirty, and it cannot exist without massive tax-payer subsidies,” he added. “The “best available control technology” for clean air and reduced carbon emissions is more forests and less burning, not biomass incineration," said Haldeman.

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