



July 15, 2021

To: Attorney General Maura Healey

Re: DOER proposed RPS subsidies for biomass electricity generation

Your office issued a strongly worded statement in December 2020 to the TUE Chairs protesting the proposed Palmer/Springfield power plant and the relaxation of the Renewable Portfolio Standards to allow subsidies for electricity generated from burning woody biomass. Although the permit for the Palmer/Springfield biomass power plant has been revoked, the DOER has now released its revised RPS, allowing subsidies for low-efficiency energy generation using woody biomass, as "renewable energy", whether generated in Massachusetts or imported by electric utilities.

We urge you once again to issue a strong condemnation of the proposed RPS changes and demand public hearings. A well-publicized statement from your office that is reported by the media will help alert the public to the danger posed by the new rules.

In addition to all the well-researched reasons enumerated in your December 23 letter, we add the following comments:

1. The Legislature has now passed, and Gov. Baker has signed, a comprehensive next-generation climate plan. DOER's relaxed biomass standards flaunt the intention of this plan, if not the literal wording.
2. Subsidies for biomass burning directly contradict the Biden Administration's goal of CO₂ emission-free electricity generation within the next 12 years. Shouldn't Mass. be a leader?
3. Maine's Gov. Paul LePage began pressuring Gov. Baker in 2016 for Massachusetts to change its emission rules to allow Maine's wood-burning power plants to qualify for our subsidies. Patrick Woodcock, the current DOER Commissioner, was formerly the Director of Maine's State Energy Office. He has nearly achieved LePage's goal to shift these subsidies to us.
4. This year, we are seeing the extreme environmental and economic impacts of climate change across the U.S., adding urgency for us to do all within our power to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration, not encourage forest destruction.

The economic well-being of the logging industry should not have a higher priority than the economic well-being of Massachusetts residents faced with impacts of climate change to agriculture, fishing, maple sugaring, and other industries. There are better methods of supporting private woodlot owners; several bills, such as PILOT programs, have been introduced to the Legislature this year.

Here in Western Massachusetts, we are concerned about protection of mature forests and the threat of clear-cutting to produce wood pellets or to site biomass-burning power plants.

Thank you for your attention.

Jessica Ryan, for
Amherst LWV

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