



HAMPDEN DISTRICT MEDICAL SOCIETY

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Last month, the Executive Committee of the Hampden District Medical Society determined that the Russell Biomass the power plant presents an unacceptable public health risk, and announced opposition to that project.

Last night, the committee met again, and reviewed information regarding the proposed biomass plants in Western Massachusetts, including the Palmer Biomass Plant. As a result of those deliberations, the Hampden District Medical Society has expanded its opposition to construction and operation of this and all other biomass power plants in Western Massachusetts, again citing unacceptable health risk to the population.

There are over 800,000 people living in the four counties of Western Massachusetts, and nearly half of them are at increased risk for health related complications related to air pollution. In April 2009, the American Lung Association rated the air quality in Hampshire and Hampden Counties as "F" based on levels of smog, short-term particle pollution and year-round particle pollution for the period 2005 to 2007. According to the *Republican*, EPA data reported Hampden County had 36 days which exceeded health standards in that period.

The Palmer Biomass Plant appears particularly heinous, in that its primary source of fuel is determined to be construction and demolition waste. Waste - defined in Massachusetts as refuse resulting from construction, remodeling, repair or demolition of buildings, pavements, roads or other structures. Waste that may include adulterated wood containing paint, lead, glues, chemicals including copper, chromium, arsenic, lead, PCBs, dioxin, and chlorine. Waste that is considered "toxic" in many states.

These toxins are to be released in addition to the usual pollution of wood fired plants: CO₂, CO, SO₂, NO_x, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), acid gasses, polycyclic hydrocarbons, and particulate matter.

The medical and scientific evidence associating air pollution with a range of health problems is irrefutable. We live in an area that is already failing in air quality. The ramifications of an increase in health problems related to increased air pollution would be far reaching in terms of personal loss, decrease in the quality of life, loss of productivity, and increased healthcare expenses.

Hundreds of well designed medical research studies clearly link air pollution with significant health problems. Detrimental long-term health effects of air pollution include chronic respiratory disease, lung cancer, and heart disease. Air pollution has been linked with damage to the brain,

nerves, liver, and kidneys. The elderly and children are especially susceptible to the effects of air pollution.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), the prevalence of asthma in children living in Springfield is significantly higher than the state average. Additionally, children living in Springfield have about twice the level of lead in their blood compared to the state average.

In 1995, Dr. David Bates, an internationally recognized pulmonologist, published a study concluding “air pollutants have been documented to be associated with a wide variety of adverse health impacts in children. These include increases in mortality in very severe episodes; ... an increased general rate of mortality in children; increased acute respiratory disease morbidity; aggravation of asthma... increased prevalence of respiratory symptoms in children, and infectious episodes of longer duration; lowered lung function in children when pollutants increase; lowered lung function in more polluted regions; increased sickness rates as indicated by kindergarten and school absences...”

Of particular note is the fact that the location of the Palmer plant will result in an effect on people of color disproportional to the general population. In addition to the already immense impediments to success for people of color, how can it even be considered that their health and education be put at risk by allowing an increase in air pollution?

In January 2009, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published “*Fine-Particulate Air Pollution and Life Expectancy in the United States*”. Springfield, MA was one of the 51 U.S. metropolitan areas that were included in the study. There was a correlation between higher levels of particulate air pollution and decreases in life expectancy. The authors concluded “A reduction in exposure to ambient fine-particulate air pollution contributed to significant and measurable improvements in the life expectancy in the United States.”

To allow any extra amount of pollution into our already tenuous air would be similar to throwing gasoline on a fire. It would be dangerous, irresponsible, and foolish.

The nation looks upon Massachusetts as a model in providing healthcare for all of its population. It would be a shame and ironic to also have us looked upon as a state that neglects providing a healthy environment in which to live.

Thank you.



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