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Residents alarmed over rulings allowing "zombie" biomass plant to be built in Springfield

More than 85 Groups Call on Legislature and Gov. Healey to Take Action

Springfield residents are sounding the alarm that a controversial wood-burning power plant, long opposed by the community, has once again come back to life.

Local Springfield health and environmental justice advocates, joined by groups from across the state, sent a letter today urging the state legislature to quickly pass legislation to end all clean energy subsidies for woody biomass energy.

Two recent court decisions have revived the state and local permits for the Palmer Renewable Energy (PRE) biomass plant, which, if built, would add significantly to the air pollution in a community that was ranked the fourth worst "asthma capital" in the nation in 2024.

"Every time we think this zombie plant is dead, it comes back to life," said **Naia Tenerowicz**, a Springfield resident and member of the Springfield Climate Justice Coalition. "We don't want more air pollution and asthma in Springfield. How many times do we have to kill this thing?"

In 2021, local activists celebrated after MassDEP rescinded Palmer's air permit and the Springfield ZBA revoked its local building permits. However, despite the clear desires of the community, PRE sued to reinstate its 15-year-old permits. In January, PRE won its case on the state air permit (MassDEP has appealed this ruling), and on May 7th PRE won its appeal to reinstate its local building permits.

A related effort that groups across the state fought for, and won, was the removal of subsidies for biomass energy in the state's renewable energy portfolio standard (RPS). **However, a similar incentive is soon to go into effect in the new greenhouse gas emission standard for municipal lighting plants (MLPs).** This could entice municipal utilities (MLPs) to enter into contracts with PRE to purchase its energy. Securing long term power purchasing agreements with MLPs could be key for financing this polluting facility.

The groups are urging the legislature to pass two bills to remove subsidies for wood-burning in MA's ratepayer-funded clean energy programs. **The priority bill (S.2288/H.3549) closes a loophole that allows MLPs to count biomass power toward their climate and clean energy goals, starting January 1, 2026.** (Governor Healey also included this

provision in her energy affordability package released last week). The second bill (**S2287/ H3548**) limits subsidies for wood heating in the state's alternative portfolio standard (APS).

Both bills are sponsored by Springfield legislators Sen. Adam Gomez and Rep. Orlando Ramos, who represent the community that would be most impacted by the polluting facility.

"It is long overdue that the legislature reaffirms our commitment to protecting the environment and removes subsidies from our clean energy programs that allow for wood-burning and woody biomass to continue polluting our environment," said **Senator Adam Gomez.** "I am proud to sponsor this bill in the Senate and fight for changes that directly impact my community, and hope that this will be the year we can get it over the finish line."

"For too long, Springfield has been one of the top "asthma capitals" in the US - communities challenged by asthma and other health issues," said **Representative Orlando Ramos**. "Our communities deserve a healthy environment and healthy air to breathe. That's why I am sponsoring legislation in the House that would prevent clean energy subsidies from going to support polluting biomass power."

"We are incensed to hear that after 15 years of sustained opposition from the people of Springfield, PRE is still trying to build this toxic power plant in Springfield," said **Susan Theberge**, co-founder of Climate Action Now Western Mass. "Climate Action Now stands with the people of Springfield to say no to this corporate bully. Burning wood for electricity is not only toxic to the people who live and work in Springfield. It is also an assault on our increasingly vulnerable ecosystem. People across the Commonwealth remain united in opposition and will continue to stand with Springfield until we win this last battle."

"The court decision is disappointing, especially considering that Springfield community members and elected officials have said no to this plant for more than a decade," said Conservation Law Foundation Staff Attorney **Suhasini Ghosh.** "The developer's permits don't reflect today's laws, and the facility will bring harm and pollution to a community that does not want or need more dirty air. CLF will not stop in its fight for clean air for everyone in Springfield."

"When the legislature took biomass out of the state's other renewable energy programs in 2022, they overlooked the MLP standard that would allow municipal utilities to count polluting biomass power toward their climate and clean energy goals," said **James McCaffrey**, New England legislative director for the Partnership for Policy Integrity. "We need to fix the MLP law now before it takes effect January 1, 2026."

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