

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2015

The Honorable Gina McCarthy  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Ariel Rios Building  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy,

As strong supporters of the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan (Plan), we write to express our concern that any decision by EPA to treat bioenergy as having zero emissions under the Plan could undermine the Plan's intended purpose of reducing power sector carbon emissions. EPA needs time to develop a robust method of accounting for bioenergy emissions at the facility level. Accordingly, we recommend a temporary moratorium on the use of biomass combustion as a method of complying with the requirements of the Plan.

Although we understand that the Plan is not yet final, aspects of the proposed plan indicate that EPA may decide to treat all bioenergy generation as having no greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the equation that EPA used to calculate state-level emissions rate goals includes all of the energy, but none of the emissions, associated with renewable generation—including bioenergy, which is not a zero-carbon technology. Furthermore, EPA Assistant Administrator Janet McCabe suggested in a memorandum issued in November 2014 that EPA may allow states to utilize bioenergy from "sustainably harvested" forest materials as compliance under the Plan. While we support efforts to promote sustainable forestry practices, forest sustainability standards do not typically include carbon accounting as a component.

As EPA knows, wood-burning power plants emit around 3,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt-hour. A growing body of scientific evidence, including a study commissioned by the State of Massachusetts,<sup>1</sup> has found that it takes decades of forest regeneration to offset these emissions. In response to these findings, Massachusetts eliminated renewable energy subsidies for utility-scale wood-burning power plants, finding they compromised the state's ability to achieve its emissions reduction targets. Massachusetts' renewable energy portfolio is now focused on the technologies that produce the most immediate reductions in power sector emissions.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Walker, Peter Cardellichio, John S. Gunn, David S. Saah & John M. Hagan (2013): Carbon Accounting for Woody Biomass from Massachusetts (USA) Managed Forests: A Framework for Determining the Temporal Impacts of Wood Biomass Energy on Atmospheric Greenhouse Gas Levels, *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 32:1-2, 130-158

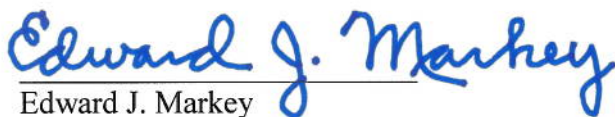
We are concerned that including bioenergy as a compliance measure in the Plan could similarly compromise the Plan's ability to achieve emissions reductions by 2030. The EPA has not determined that any form of biomass combustion is carbon neutral within the compliance timeframe set by the Plan. The Scientific Advisory Board Biogenic Carbon Emissions Panel only just held a meeting at the end of March to review the Framework for Assessing Biogenic CO2 Emissions from Stationary Sources released in November 2014 and the agency has stated that the review of EPA's biogenic carbon accounting framework will not be completed by the time the Plan is finalized this summer.

The EPA should not approve biomass combustion as a compliance method under the Plan until the agency has a method in place to account for facility-level emissions and a means of ensuring that emissions offsetting actually occurs in an appropriate timeframe. Accordingly, we suggest a moratorium on the use of bioenergy as a compliance measure under the Plan, extending to 2020, when states will have the opportunity to apply for modifications to their implementation plans. This approach has a number of advantages:

- It gives EPA time to finalize a biogenic carbon accounting framework, develop a tool for assessing net carbon emissions at the facility level, and determine how best to count bioenergy emissions under the Plan.
- It avoids incentivizing a carbon-intensive energy source that works against the Plan's objectives and that emerging evidence suggests is contributing to unsustainable deforestation and.
- It focuses near-term state efforts on wind, solar, and other zero-carbon renewable energy technologies whose contribution to the Plan's objectives are well understood.

We urge EPA to complete the process it began several years ago of developing a robust, policy-relevant method of accounting for the net atmospheric impact of bioenergy generation. It is critical that EPA get the accounting right before states commit to measures that could aggravate rather than alleviate climate concerns. A temporary moratorium on using bioenergy as a compliance measure in state implementation of the Clean Power Plan will give the agency time to do so.

Sincerely,

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator