

Energy Justice Platform

www.EnergyJustice.net/platform/

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Preamble

We oppose all industrial, commercial and institutional burning of [biomass](#) and biofuels for energy. We call for deep reductions in energy consumption and a rapid phaseout of nuclear power and fossil fuels. Although there is an urgent need for rapid transition from fossil energy sources, plant-based alternatives for energy are not sustainable and are a dangerous false solution that threatens to worsen rather than resolve the problems we face.

Biomass and biofuels:

- Cause significant air pollution that threatens public health;
- Threaten forests and farmlands by consuming massive amounts of organic matter essential for maintaining soil fertility, forests and crop production;
- Require massive amounts of water, an increasingly scarce resource;
- Deplete and destroy soils, by permanently removing nutrients and beneficial microbes;
- Compete with other energy sources that are truly “clean and green”;
- Could never provide for more than a small portion of current overall energy usage;
- Encourage the further spread of dangerous genetic modifications;
- Encourage human rights abuses related to land access and usage.

We support strong, justice-based protections for ecosystems and people as a fundamental priority and “first line of defense” against the impacts of global warming. Creating huge new demands for biomass combustion is incompatible with human and ecosystem health and well-being and should not be supported and/or subsidized under the false pretense of providing “clean and green renewable energy.”

PLATFORM

Clean & Just Energy Solutions

A sustainable economy based on current industrial expansion on a finite planet is impossible. We support measures that move us in the direction of globally sustainable and economically just pathways, including a transition from large-scale globalized markets to democratic, community-scale and relocalized economies. In these endeavors we support the just transition of all workers employed by polluting, destructive energy industries towards long-term, family-supporting jobs in clean, safe and just energy alternatives, and their rights to collective association in a new energy economy.

We call for an end to subsidies for all dirty energy technologies, including nuclear power, fossil fuels, biomass, biofuels and other combustion technologies. We define subsidies broadly to include renewable portfolio standards, production mandates, grants, loans, loan guarantees, wars for oil, tax credits, tax breaks, research and development, regulatory exemptions and other forms of taxpayer-funded support.

Environmental and Energy Justice

Around the world, and in the U.S., communities of color, low-income communities, Indigenous Peoples and workers are the first and most impacted by polluting and exploitative energy industries, including biomass incineration. Biomass incinerators harm our communities, our health, our economies and the ecosystems we rely upon with a range of destructive and exploitative practices from industrial extraction, production, trade, waste and pollution, including climate-altering pollution and toxic emissions.

Frontline communities and workers – who benefit the least from, contribute the least to, and pay the largest price for the destructive practices of industrialized society – are among those leading the resistance to stop these industrial polluters and are cultivating sustainable community solutions for clean, just and localized economies that will benefit us all. Frontline communities and workers should play a leadership role in prioritizing and determining transitional strategies toward a community-led clean energy economy.

In organizing our opposition to the growing threat of biomass incineration, we support the fundamental Principles of Environmental Justice adopted by the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit of 1991 (www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.pdf), as well as the Principles of Working Together adopted by the Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit of 2002 (www.ejnet.org/ej/workingtogether.pdf). We seek to ensure that all members of our global society share the same rights to protect and democratically determine the sustainable use of our air, land, food, water and energy resources, so that future generations may thrive.

Taking Steps Toward Clean & Just Energy

The most important energy choice to make as a nation is how we can reduce our energy demand and consumption in a just and equitable manner, not which new energy sources should be developed. We strongly advocate focusing on energy conservation and efficiency measures, including community and worker-led initiatives that increase public transportation; food localization; zero-waste; and zero-emission, community-controlled energy.

Our electricity and nearly all other energy needs can be met without combustion technologies. All U.S. energy needs should be approached with conservation and efficiency as the first and second priorities, with the goal of cutting energy demand in half within 20 years, then in half again within 50 years. As we already consume about twice the per capita energy as other highly developed nations, the first cut would bring us to the efficiency levels already achieved by Japan and much of Europe.

After prioritizing demand reduction, electricity needs should be met only with non-combustion and non-nuclear technologies, with a focus on appropriate use of wind, solar and ocean power. Energy storage strategies should be used to handle any problems with intermittency. Energy production should be decentralized as much as possible to reduce the need for large-scale transmission.

Transportation energy needs should be met by transitioning from combustion engines to electric vehicles after cutting demand dramatically with an array of conservation and efficiency measures, including free public transit (see sidebar for more).

Heating energy needs should also be dramatically reduced, then met primarily with non-burn technologies. Residential and commercial/institutional heating needs should be addressed with conservation and efficiency measures first, then with solar hot water, passive solar technologies, and ground- and air-source heat pumps. Industrial heating needs – the largest portion of burnable heating fuel use – should be reduced with (in priority order): conservation (reducing use of unnecessary and non-durable products), efficiency (including combined heat and power),

Reducing Electricity Use

Conservation measures include: turning off lights when not in use and using only the lighting necessary; minimizing use of air conditioning, using fans or reasonable temperature settings; using power strips (avoiding 5-10% phantom draw); using most electricity during off-peak hours; using manual items instead of electric (i.e. clotheslines instead of dryers).

Efficiency measures include: using LED lights whenever possible; choosing Energy Star appliances when replacing old ones.

Reducing Transportation Fuel Use

Conservation measures include: mass transit (bus, light rail, trains); carpooling; car sharing; buying and working locally; telecommuting; city planning to reduce sprawl (urban growth boundaries); trails to rails (new rail lines for commerce & passengers); bicycling; walking; and localizing production of necessities.

Efficiency measures include: increasing motor vehicle fuel efficiency standards to 100 mpg; motorcycles/scooters; hybrids/electric cars.

Reducing Residential and Commercial Heating Fuel Use

Conservation measures include: dressing warmer; lowering thermostat; don't heat entire houses / buildings (close off rooms); planting trees (deciduous-summer shade/winter sun; conifer-windblocks).

Efficiency measures include: insulation / weatherization; energy-efficient windows (or adding storm windows); passive solar; per-room temperature controls in institutional buildings; stove maintenance/cleaning; insulating heating equipment.

concentrated solar power, ground-source heat pumps (geothermal), anaerobic digester gas, and electric heating (sourced from wind and solar power).

Waste-Based Biomass Feedstocks

We recognize that, as in nature, there is no such thing as “waste.” There are only “wasteful industrial practices.” By reducing and replacing such wasteful practices, we can reduce pollution, conserve resources and create many more long-term and local jobs. Hence, we believe that all forms of waste-based “biomass” should not be used as fuels, but should be handled by following an appropriate zero-waste hierarchy, prioritizing – as applicable – reduced consumption, highest-end use of local material resources; durable and non-toxic design; reuse; source separation; recycling; and composting.

Incineration is not recycling, is not compatible with recycling, and is a worse option than landfilling, which should only be used for those wastes that cannot be handled with the aforementioned solutions. We understand – and government regulations define – fluidized bed combustion, gasification, pyrolysis and plasma arc technologies to be forms of incineration.

Wood classified as disaster debris or construction and demolition debris should not be burned for energy, as these wood items can be recycled or re-used, and often contain highly toxic, yet hard-to-detect chemical compounds that cannot be adequately identified through sorting processes.

Gas-Based Bioenergy Technologies

Digesters: Organic materials – including those commonly considered to be food waste, animal waste or sewage sludge – should be aerobically composted (using latent heat recovery to meet on-site heating needs where possible) or anaerobically digested (allowing the use of digester gas as local heating fuel), depending on what is best for meeting local heating needs.

Digested organic material should only be used as fertilizer if the source is free of toxic contaminants. Sewage sludge and composted “biosolids” are too contaminated and should never be used as fertilizer or in other applications where humans exposure is likely. The same is true for some animal wastes from confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) where drugs and toxic feed ingredients may be present. Such wastes should be treated with non-burn methods that eliminate pathogens and reduce waste volume to minimize what may need to be landfilled.

Burning digester gas for electricity should not be subsidized as renewable energy. Organic waste streams should be managed according to the zero-waste hierarchy referenced above to minimize toxicity and production of these organic wastes and to ensure the composting and reuse of clean organic material.

Landfill Gas: Landfill gas should be handled as a waste management issue, not an energy issue. Burning landfill gas for energy causes the mismanagement of landfills, increases global warming pollution and toxic exposure to landfill communities. “Landfill gas to energy” projects should not be subsidized as renewable energy, since doing so harms both the wind energy market as well as recycling and composting markets.

All uncontaminated organic materials (which excludes sewage sludge) should be diverted from landfills and composted. Other wastes should be digested before landfilling, to reduce gas generating potential. Gas generated at existing landfills should be minimized, gas collection should be maximized, and the collected gas should be filtered to remove toxins into a solid medium like a carbon filter stored on-site and not subsequently burned. Methane and CO₂ in the remaining gas should be used for heating or for industrial feedstocks.

Forest Protection

We vehemently oppose the industrial extraction and burning of our nation's forests for energy generation purposes. The incineration of trees and forest resources currently is and is projected to be, the largest source of biomass energy generation in America. The burning of forests for energy is not "carbon neutral." It is one of the most short-sighted and destructive industrial practices occurring today. All subsidies and incentives for incinerating woody biomass must come to an end, and our state, local, and federal governments must act to protect our forestlands and the vital ecosystem functions they provide from the large and growing threat of industrial exploitation.

Woody material labeled as "waste" such as logging slash, right-of-way and yard trimmings should not be burned for energy or chipped/shredded and mixed with contaminated municipal sewage sludge. Instead, those woody materials should be retained in the environment for purposes of maintaining soil productivity and moisture and wildlife habitat.

All industrial-model forest workers and their communities should be ensured a just transition away from exploitative industrial models and toward long-term community-based forest economies that maximize local employment through economic diversification while ensuring the conservation of local forest ecosystems.

We support the rights of Indigenous Peoples around the world to protect and govern the use of their traditional forest lands, as defined by the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and Indigenous Peoples' rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) over all commercial activity in their traditional forest lands.

We support continuous and comprehensive monitoring of natural forest functions and carbon sequestration by forested lands. Natural forests must be considered the best available control technique (BACT) to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

We oppose subsidies or incentives for commercial development, resource extraction, clearcutting and other destructive logging, or monoculture tree farms on private forested lands. Policy support and incentives should focus on sustaining and expanding forests with native biodiversity and old trees and maximized soil and forest carbon.

We also oppose logging or road-building in existing virgin forests, roadless areas, and other core areas of biodiversity. Incentives and policies must promote: 1) conservation of public and private forested lands; 2) expansion of natural forests with native biodiversity and old-growth characteristics; and 3) restoration of ecosystem resiliency and connective forest corridors between fragmented forests.

We also oppose genetically modified trees on public or private lands.

We also oppose tree farms, monocultures and industrial or institutional extraction of resources for biofuels, minerals, or gas and oil on forested public lands.

Our local, state and federal governments must protect our forested lands and the vital ecosystem functions they provide from the large and growing threat of industrial exploitation. Policies and incentives must be put into place to restore, expand and designate far more public and private forest lands and other endangered ecosystems, to be incorporated into large protected areas throughout the U.S. that are off limits to logging, roads or other extraction via creation of new parks, wilderness areas, conservation easements, state natural areas or other designations. Policies for forested public lands also must protect and restore native biodiversity and native forests and restore natural, historic carbon sequestration. All such policies and incentives should support and remain subject to the aforementioned rights of Indigenous Peoples within their traditional forest lands as defined in UNDRIP and FPIC.

Sustainable Agriculture

We support food sovereignty – the rights of all small farmers, farm workers and farming communities and their collective associations to democratically determine the just, equitable, organic and sustainable use and protection of their food, water and agricultural resources, without interference from global markets, trade policies, and the industrial agriculture and petro-chemical corporations that threaten these resources.

We oppose the burning of agricultural residues and so-called “wastes” for electricity. Those practices result in increased demand for chemical fertilizers and pesticides and the depletion and contamination of our limited water resources.

Agricultural residues should be retained on site, used as mulch, for no-till farming, animal fodder or compost to reduce the need for irrigation and to recycle essential nutrients, which are depleted in current industrial plantation and agricultural practices.

Development of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs), including crops, microbes and algae, can have disastrous implications. The carelessness and recklessness of the GMO industry have led to cross-contamination of non-GMO organisms, herbicide resistant weeds, and have resulted in negative impacts (such as increased use of pesticides) that are harmful to soils, waters, biodiversity, human health and food sovereignty. Biotech and biochar cannot be considered viable alternatives to restoring and maintaining natural soil ecology.

Techno-fixes such as biochar should not be subsidized or included in carbon markets. Agriculture and soil carbon in general should not be incorporated into carbon markets.

We call for ending all public policy support and subsidies for unsustainable agriculture practices and a re-direction of these subsidies to sustainable agriculture practices.

Unsustainable agriculture practices for which subsidies should be ended include industrial monoculture production models that require intensive energy and chemical use, ethanol and biodiesel production, agricultural biotechnology, confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), industrial meat production, and subsidies for CAFO feedstocks like corn.

Sustainable agriculture practices to which subsidies should be re-directed include community-controlled organic farming practices, Community Supported Agricultural initiatives, heirloom crop diversity, organic, low external impact sustainable agriculture, biodynamic agriculture, permaculture, and the resilience of small farmers, farm workers and farming communities.

We support disincentives for industrial-scale animal agriculture, particularly confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and industrial meat production. Animal and plant agriculture should be integrated to ensure that animal wastes are returned to soils, reducing demand for finite, diminishing supplies of natural gas and mined mineral-based industrial fertilizers. We support an immediate ban of toxic additives and antibiotic-dependent CAFO practices that threaten human health and violate animal cruelty laws should be banned immediately. The cost of meat must reflect the total environmental and social costs to society and be paid for by the pound by consumers.

Use of water for agriculture and processing must employ the most effective conservation methods possible and be based on assessment of long-term protection of water resources. We support sustainable use of aquifers and surface waters. We oppose biofuel production, including processing facilities, which rely on groundwater or surfacewater resources or contribute to or cause thermal pollution of waterways.

We oppose biomass energy crops on CRP lands. These lands were marginal or damaged by previous agricultural practices and most importantly serve society as sources of clean water and biological diversity. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands must be kept in protective status.

Water

Water resources are predicted to decline dramatically in water-rich and other areas in response to global climate disruption, as is already evident in many regions. Careful allocation of freshwater reserves is therefore essential.

We support protection and conservation of freshwater resources.

We oppose thermoelectric-power, including biomass incinerators, because it requires massive amounts of water and is not compatible with protection and conservation goals. Thermoelectric-power accounts for 49 percent of total water use withdrawals, 41 percent of total freshwater withdrawals for all categories, and 53 percent of fresh surface-water withdrawals, largely for cooling. Much of this water is evaporated and what remains is warmed and contaminated, then dumped back into waterways.

We also oppose industrial agriculture and the required mining and processing of raw materials for the manufacture of industrial fertilizers because of the massive amounts of fresh water all of these activities use. Industrial irrigation is estimated to use approximately one third of the total fresh water used in the United States. Industrial agriculture has resulted in the depletion of numerous key aquifers and the contamination of many surface waters with runoff of industrial agrichemicals from croplands. The addition of large new demands for bioenergy crops would further deplete and contaminate our water resources.

We support the rights of Indigenous and small fisherfolk and their communities to protect and democratically determine the use of their traditional fish and water resources.

We also support the protection of natural forests, which are essential for ensuring an abundance of clean freshwater supplies by regulating rainfall patterns and protecting soils. Adding large new demands for forest biomass will diminish water supplies and water quality.

In conclusion, we support water use for essential needs such as environmentally compatible food production, human consumption and hygiene and maintaining our natural ecosystems – not irrigation of bioenergy crops and cooling of thermoelectric facilities.

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Definitions

Energy: includes three subcategories of consumption: **electricity, transportation and heating**. Electricity is 40% of total U.S. energy consumption in 2009. Transportation is 29%. Heating is 31%. Heating breaks down into 3 further subcategories of use: residential, commercial and industrial. Industrial heating is the largest (by far), making up 64% of heating fuel consumption, while residential is only 23% and commercial is 14%. “Commercial” includes businesses as well as government buildings, grade schools and colleges/universities. Electricity and transportation also break down by sector of use, but national data isn't available, since it's harder to determine.

Bioenergy: anything remotely “bio” that the industry or government has ever defined as biomass or biofuel feedstock, including [municipal solid waste \(trash\)](#), [tires](#), [sewage sludge](#), construction/demolition wood waste, other wood and paper mill wastes (even black liquor), crop and [animal wastes](#), energy crops, trees, [landfill gas](#) and gas from [digestion](#) of [sewage sludge](#) or animal wastes or other organic materials.

Bioenergy has two major subcategories: biomass and biofuels. **Biomass** involves burning for [electricity](#) or [heating](#). **Biofuels** involve turning the “biomass” feedstock into a liquid fuel (usually [ethanol](#) or [biodiesel](#)) before burning it as [transportation](#) fuel. Sometimes the gas-based forms of biomass ([landfill gas](#) and [digester gas](#)) are referred to separately as “**biogas**.” Biomass technologies can involve all forms of [incineration](#), including gasification, plasma and pyrolysis. Biofuels can be produced from the same set of feedstocks, but with a different assortment of technologies, such as pyrolysis, acid hydrolysis, [Fischer-Tropsch gas-to-liquids](#), [thermal depolymerization](#), [ethanol](#) conversion and [cellulosic ethanol](#).