

January 20, 2016

Springfield Public Health Council
95 State Street, Room 201
Springfield, MA 01103

Dear Members of the Committee:

The American Lung Association in Massachusetts is grateful for the opportunity to speak on the health concerns we have with the proposed biomass plant. We would urge the committee to further examine potential harmful health impacts during a formal site review. The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary health organization in the nation, and our mission is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. To this end, we work to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families, because we believe everyone has the right to breathe healthy air.

The Lung Association has been involved in the process for many years. Back in 2009, we submitted comments to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection outline our concerns with negative health impacts from biomass emissions. In the subsequent years, our resolve has only been strengthened – we do not support biomass combustion for electricity production.

The emissions from biomass include harmful particle pollution. While everyone is at risk from particle pollution, the youth, elderly, and those with pre-existing respiratory diseases like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are a greater risk. Massachusetts has higher asthma rates than the national average. When the Centers for Disease Control last estimated asthma prevalence among 38 states, including Massachusetts, the average for the 38 states was 9.0% while Massachusetts was 9.8%.¹ For the same year, 2008, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health estimated the rate in Springfield to be significantly higher - 16.4%.² These averages include many vulnerable children whose lungs are still developing.

The more we learn about air pollution, we find it is more dangerous than we previously thought and that health impacts occur at levels once thought to be “safe.” In late 2013, the World Health Organization declared particle pollution to be carcinogenic. The introduction of this biomass plant has the potential to bring harmful pollution to Springfield along with acute and chronic adverse effects.

Additionally, if a site review is ordered, the impact of the diesel trucks making deliveries should be factored in. Previous estimates had over 160 diesel trucks making one way deliveries a day to keep the plant burning. Diesel emissions, and that particle pollution, adds to the emissions from the plant – producing more carcinogenic pollution in our air. No idling must be strictly adhered to.

The Lung Association urges the Public Health Committee to consider the public health impact that the emissions of the proposed plant will bring to Springfield. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Casey Harvell
Director, Public Policy, American Lung Association of the Northeast

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/stateprofiles/asthma_in_ma.pdf

² www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/.../asthma/burden-in-mass.doc