



## **HAMPDEN DISTRICT MEDICAL SOCIETY**

**1111 ELM STREET, SUITE 22, WEST SPRINGFIELD, MA 01089-1540**

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January 20, 2016

In late 2009, the Hampden District Medical Society (HDMS) and the Massachusetts Medical Society established policy (attached) against the building of biomass plants for the generation of electricity.

On January 19, 2016, the HDMS Executive Committee reviewed the policy and reaffirmed its position against biomass plants.

Considering the advances in technology in solar and wind power, as well as renewed and urgent concern of climate change, burning of plant materials appears an even less attractive energy source.

Given the improvement of our local air quality, which is attributed to the closure of the coal fired plant, it should be considered a set back if Palmer Biomass was allowed to reverse the positive trend. If there have been no improvements in their clean air technology or change in their proposed fuel sources, we could expect a return of particulates and the introduction of toxins into our air.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin O'Callaghan".

Dr. Kevin O'Callaghan, M.B., B.Ch., B.A.O., F.A.A.P.  
President-Elect, Hampden District Medical Society and,  
Executive Board, Hampden District Medical Society



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November 18, 2009

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: CO<sub>2</sub>, CO, SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, 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.



James K. C. Wang, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., C.C.D.  
President, Hampden District Medical Society and,  
Executive Board, Hampden District Medical Society

## **Massachusetts Medical Society adopts policy opposing biomass power plants**

Waltham, Mass. – Dec. 9, 2009 – On the grounds that biomass power plants pose an unacceptable risk to the public's health by increasing air pollution, the Massachusetts Medical Society has adopted a policy opposing three currently proposed large-scale biomass power plants in Massachusetts and urging state government to adopt policies to minimize the approval and construction of new biomass plants.

The policy, proposed by the organization's Committee on Environmental and Occupational Health, was approved by the Society's House of Delegates at its interim meeting on December 4. The MMS House of Delegates, comprised of physician members from across the state, sets policy for the 22,000-member statewide physician organization.

Currently, three large-scale plants are being proposed for western Massachusetts, in Russell (Hampden County), Greenfield (Franklin County), and Springfield (Hampden County). The plants propose to burn wood from harvested trees and/or construction debris and will be situated near neighborhoods, schools, and homes.

Jefferson Dickey, M.D., an internist at the Community Health Center of Franklin County in Turners Falls and a former chair of the committee, was one of the authors of the resolution adopted as policy.

Dr. Dickey said "Air pollution is a common and noxious mixture of gasses, particles, liquids, the vast majority of which comes from power plants, industrial furnaces and high-temperature industrial processes, and transportation, such as buses, trucks, cars, and small engines.

"Epidemiologists have long recognized that air pollution is associated with an increased risk of a broad range of medical problems," Dr. Dickey continued, "from asthma attacks and decreased lung growth in children to increased lung disease exacerbations, emergency room use, hospitalization rates, heart attacks, and death rates in adults."

"Recent research and medical literature reviews provide graphic confirmation of the seriousness of the issue," he said. "The equation is simple: the more air pollution, the higher the mortality rate. Research has shown that lowering air pollution levels is associated with better health outcomes."

Current state policy considers biomass fuel renewable, because trees consumed as fuel are assumed to re-grow, and biomass electricity generation is eligible for financial incentives under the state's Green Communities Act, which mandates that an increasing proportion of the state's power be generated from renewable sources.

The policy adopted by the Medical Society's contained four points:

- urging state government to adopt policies to minimize the approval and construction of new biomass plants, and instead promote energy efficiency and conservation and zero-pollutant emissions renewable energy technologies;
- opposing the three currently proposed large-scale biomass power plants in Massachusetts on the grounds that each facility poses an unacceptable public health risk;
- urging state and federal government through appropriate channels to remove large-scale biomass electricity generation plants from the list of technologies eligible to receive renewable energy credits, federal stimulus funds, and Massachusetts Technology Collaborative loans, and thereby remove these incentives for their existence; and
- urging state government to extend Department of Environmental Protection regulatory authority to small-scale biomass facilities to ensure that the most protective air pollution emissions controls are utilized.

The Massachusetts Medical Society, with more than 20,000 physicians and student members, is dedicated to educating and advocating for the patients and physicians of Massachusetts. The Society publishes the New England Journal of Medicine, a leading global medical journal and web site, and Journal Watch alerts and newsletters covering 13 specialties. The Society is also a leader in continuing medical education for health care professionals throughout Massachusetts, conducting a variety of medical education programs for physicians and health care professionals. Founded in 1781, MMS is the oldest continuously operating medical society in the country. For more information, visit [www.massmed.org](http://www.massmed.org), [www.nejm.org](http://www.nejm.org), or [www.jwatch.org](http://www.jwatch.org).