



Written Testimony in Opposition to the Building of the
Palmer Renewable Energy Biomass Plant
Presented by Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition
Springfield Public Health Council
November 18, 2009

The Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition (MBCC) is the largest breast cancer organization in the state representing over 10,000 members. MBCC is dedicated to challenging all obstacles to the eradication of breast cancer. In particular, MBCC is concerned about the link between environmental toxins and the extremely high rate of breast cancer in the state and as a result, is in opposition to the burning of construction and demolition debris at the proposed Palmer Renewable Energy biomass plant.

Massachusetts has the 4th highest breast cancer rate in the country, almost 10% higher than the national average. Cities within a 5 mile radius of the proposed Springfield biomass site have a slightly higher aggregate breast cancer rate than the state average.

Of particular concern to the breast cancer community about this plant is the release of toxic chemicals like dioxin and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's) into the air in communities already experiencing needlessly high rates of breast cancer. Furthermore, Springfield already has a disproportionately high number of polluting facilities contributing to higher rates of disease.

Dioxins, known human carcinogens, are a class of endocrine disrupting compounds linked to the development of breast cancer, formed by the incineration of many products and will be an air polluting byproduct of the proposed biomass plants. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, PAH's, again are a class of endocrine disrupting compounds linked to the development of breast cancer and are a byproduct of combustion that will also be released by the proposed plant.

Both dioxins and PAH's are endocrine disruptors that are lipophilic and accumulate in the fat tissue of the breast and may cause various mammary cell mutations that might lead to breast cancer. Furthermore, exposure of children and fetuses to these chemicals, while their cells are still forming and growing, may have profound health effects and may lead to development of breast cancer later in life.

Dioxins and PAH's are chemicals for which some health and safety information is available. Unfortunately, less than 10% of the almost 100,000 chemicals in existence have ever been tested for impact on health, and even few of those have been tested for impact on long term health. This, coupled with the fact that construction products may be manufactured with chemicals and contaminants that are largely undisclosed to contractors and other consumers creates a dangerous situation where the impact of incinerating these unknown materials is unquantifiable. The U.S. has significantly fewer regulations on chemicals and quantities of chemicals allowed in products. For instance, the level of formaldehyde allowed in pressed plywood is upwards of 9 times the level allowed in other countries and regions such as Japan and the European Union. The U.S. has become the toxic dumping ground of the world and the consequence on our health is palpable. It simply does not make sense to burn materials for which little is known about the content or the consequence of the resulting pollution.

The proposed Palmer Renewable Energy biomass plant is not the "green" answer to the dilemma of renewable energy. Burning construction and demolition debris releases toxic chemicals into our air, which ultimately can lead to diseases such as breast cancer. In a state which is already afflicted with higher than average breast cancer rates, we believe that not one more woman and not one more generation should be needlessly affected by a breast cancer diagnosis. Opposing this biomass plant is one place to start.