

Forest Biomass Resources for Media at COP28:

Background Materials and International Experts

Compiled by Stand.earth
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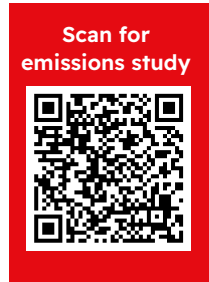
Wood pellet mill yard in Burns Lake on the unceded traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en
British Columbia, Canada



BEYOND BURNING

At COP28, climate experts, community groups, NGOs, and scientists are calling on the UNFCCC to update carbon accounting mechanisms, which represent industrial logging and utility-scale exported biomass as carbon neutral. Burning wood pellets for energy is a false climate solution that emits more CO₂ at the smokestack than coal. The global forest biomass industry logs primary forests pushing biodiversity thresholds to the point of no return, and creates an environmental justice disaster for impacted communities.

Decades-old guidelines about biomass carbon accounting are now questioned by some of the very United Nations experts who wrote them.



From left to right: Drax Burns Lake plant (2021), Drax Meadowbank plant (2022), Drax Meadowbank log stack (2022), cancelled Pacific BioEnergy cutblock (2022)

Resources courtesy of



Biomass Action Network (BAN)

Dubai, 1 December, 2023 – We need a Global Renewable Energy Target without Big Biomass Energy Expansion

As climate COP28 convenes in Dubai, the Biomass Action Network of EPN warns that burning forest biomass at scale for centralised energy generation is at least as emissive as coal per unit of produced energy. It undermines the ability of forests to keep carbon out of the atmosphere and sequester more, and is increasingly implicated in human rights abuses and untenable claims of “abatement” via co-firing wood with coal in coal-fired generators.



2023 BRIEFING: Biomass carbon accounting not fit for purpose (available in English, French, Spanish)

Failure to account for emissions from burning biomass in the energy sector is resulting in:

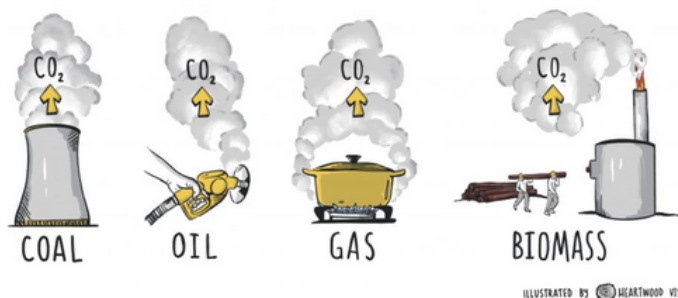
- Dramatic expansion of the biomass energy industry with wood pellets comprising the major commodity supplying it. Having already doubled to 14 million tonnes in the preceding decade, global supply and demand for biomass will exceed a 250% increase by 2027, to well over 36 million tonnes.
- Harm to the clean energy transition. Biomass energy dominates ‘renewable’ energy production, dwarfing wind and solar and undermining their prospects by soaking up subsidies and incentives that should be applied to genuinely low emissions technologies.
- Global inequity and injustice. When biomass is traded from one country to another, responsibility for emissions is externalised from the biomass consumer to the biomass producer. This trend will escalate as biomass is increasingly sourced from outside the big biomass energy consuming blocs of Europe, the UK, South Korea and Japan, and the Global South is drawn into the supply chain. In this situation, countries in the Global South will bear responsibility for the emissions from biomass burned in the Global North, who in turn will be able to claim emissions reductions.



Biomass Action Network (BAN)

How UNFCCC carbon accounting has created a biomass delusion and is contributing to climate change and global inequity (2023)

THE CARBON EMISSIONS REALITY



OFFICIAL CARBON ACCOUNTS FOR THE ENERGY SECTOR			
COAL	OIL	GAS	BIOMASS
LOTS OF CO ₂ EMISSIONS	LOTS OF CO ₂ EMISSIONS	LOTS OF CO ₂ EMISSIONS	NO CO ₂ EMISSIONS



Co-firing with biomass in Indonesia: Debunking Emission Reduction Claims (2023)

Co-firing coal with biomass in power stations is claimed by Indonesia's state electricity company (PT PLN) to be a necessary part of the country's transition to renewable energy. Currently, 52 coal power stations plan to co-fire with 5-10% biomass in order to meet the countries Nationally Determined Contributions, as outlined by the Paris Agreement. However, research by Trend Asia has found that co-firing even just this amount will lead to the deforestation of millions of hectares of land.

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Open letter to Government of Canada from 27 organizations

November 2023: Canada is currently the third-largest exporter of forest biomass in the world. The forest biomass industry depends on millions of dollars in public subsidies from Canadian and foreign government bodies to fund their operations. Members of the industry like international energy giant Drax, which owns the majority of facilities in British Columbia, produce wood pellets that power utilities burn for energy in the United Kingdom, Japan, and other countries in Europe and Asia.

Climate experts worldwide warn that burning wood pellets for energy is a false climate solution that emits more CO₂ at the smokestack than coal. There is clear evidence that wood pellets are increasingly produced from logged whole trees from primary forests in British Columbia, when the world is already losing forests at a catastrophic rate.

On the international stage at COP28, Canada should advocate for an update to global carbon accounting mechanisms to close loopholes that falsely represent industrial logging and utility-scale exported biomass as carbon neutral. At home, Canada should redirecting funding to Indigenous land use, stewardship, or restoration projects, and wind and solar energy; and revise national carbon accounting methods in line with recommendations from leading scientists.



Signatories include: Stand.earth, David Suzuki Foundation, Nature Canada, Wildlands League, and Wilderness Committee.

Stand.earth

Investigative report: Canada's growing wood pellet export industry threatens forests, wildlife and our climate (2020)

Forests in Canada are fueling high-emissions energy plants in Europe and East Asia as a replacement for coal. Governments are promoting large-scale biomass energy projects as renewable and clean, obscuring the true impacts of the sector on emissions and forests – including globally rare rainforests. Canada and British Columbia are supporting and subsidizing the development of the wood pellet industry as a climate solution based on faulty carbon accounting, poor scientific evidence, weak regulations, and land use planning that is failing to protect old growth forests or threatened species habitat.

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Drax faces environmental and human rights condemnation at AGM (2023)

Community leaders, scientists, and forest experts attended the London, UK meeting to question Drax's Board of Directors.

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WATCH



"Forests have the most advanced carbon capture technology on Earth, but their fate is in grave danger."

Cut Carbon Not Forests

Coalition of environmental organizations
from the U.K., U.S., and Canada

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Scientists' Letter to President Xi, President Biden, Prime Minister Trudeau, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, President von der Leyen, President Yoon Suk-yeol, and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (2023)

Logging for bioenergy is accelerating the threat to forests and wildlife while scientists are calling for “transformative change” – not business as usual – if we hope to avert climate disaster and biodiversity collapse. If the global community endeavours to protect 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030, it must also commit to ending reliance on biomass energy. The best thing for the climate and biodiversity is to leave forests standing – and biomass energy does the opposite.

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Investigations Booklet: Global Markets for Biomass Energy are Devastating U.S. Forests

Global demand for wood pellets to burn for biomass energy – primarily in the UK and Europe – is devastating forests in the Southeast United States. Investigations by media, independent watchdogs, and NGOs over the past decade expose the damaging logging practices used by Enviva – the world’s largest wood pellet manufacturer – to supply wood pellets to the biomass industry, including the clearcutting of iconic wetland forests.

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Written Evidence Submission to UK Parliament Committee (September 2023)

Even with carbon capture technology, bioenergy does not result in negative emissions, and so would make it look like the UK is achieving net zero, while in fact it is increasing greenhouse gas emissions. The Government’s own analysis suggests that the price of wood pellets could significantly increase in the coming years.

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Insight: Biomass Threatens Global Biodiversity

Logging to feed the UK biomass energy market is harming forests around the world, including in the United States, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Canada, further threatening already-imperiled wildlife and ecosystems.

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What is Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage?

The BECCS for power basics.

Get an overview of the whole picture with BECCS: what it is, what projects are happening, and why it might not be such a good thing for the planet.

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Bioenergy Explained

Bioenergy already accounts for around 60% of all the renewable energy in Europe. As the world begins to phase out coal power, some countries see biomass as its successor fuel – but is burning trees and plant matter really a renewable and low carbon energy source?

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Dogwood Alliance, EEECHO, and NAACP - United States

NowThis Earth video: Why Biden Should Take a Stand Against the Biomass Industry

“The biomass industry is an environmental injustice, disproportionately harming Black and Brown communities in the South.”

- Kathy Eglund, Co-founder of Education, Economics, Environmental, Climate and Health Organization (EEECHO) and Chair of NAACP Environment Committee

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video



Dogwood Alliance, EEECHO, and NAACP - United States

Wood pellet facilities and environmental justice communities

Wood pellet mills emit thousands of tons of particular matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) each year. All of these air pollutants can cause or worsen a range of health conditions, from asthma and heart disease to cancer.

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In the US South, wood pellet mills are often placed in low-income communities of color, which are more likely to experience environmental injustice.

STATEMENT: The Future of Enviva (November 2023)

On November 9, 2023, Enviva, the world's largest manufacturer of wood pellets, announced doubts about its survival. They shared this on their quarterly call with shareholders. The company cited:

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- 3rd quarter losses of almost \$100M
- bad long-term contracts
- operational challenges

They are projecting even greater losses in the 4th quarter.

Drax Facility fined \$2.5 million for major pollution violations

February 2021: Mississippi regulators fined the Amite wood pellet production facility, owned by Drax, \$2,500,000 for breaking environmental rules, the largest known penalty against such a facility in an industry rife with environmental violations.

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Global Forest Coalition

Analysis: Delay, Distract and Deceive: BECCS Developments in South America, Africa and Asia (November 2023)

Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) technologies are among the most problematic in carbon removal geoengineering. This two-part series analyses the status of BECCS in South America, Africa, and Asia and shows that BECCS is far from being the silver bullet to climate change that some actors portray it to be.

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analysis



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Mighty Earth - Japan, Southeast Asia, and United States

Wasted: How Japan's Biomass Push in South Asia Lays Waste to Forests, Undermines Climate Progress and Drowns Recipients in Debt (November 2023)

Japan's strategy of promoting biomass diverts critical resources away from truly low-emissions energy sources such as wind and solar. By examining more than 100 projects across Southeast Asia, findings show that these subsidized projects are not the realistic energy transition solutions they claim to be. The main issue encountered over and over in these projects is the difficulty of securing a sufficient and affordable supply of feedstock and need for perpetual subsidy.

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NGO Joint Statement: Co-firing of Biomass in Coal Plants or Conversion of Coal Power Plants to Dedicated Biomass

In Japan, the co-firing of biomass in coal power plants and conversion of coal-fired power plants to biomass are currently taking place at a rapid pace. Statement from 90 global organizations.

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statement



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Solutions for Our Climate - South Korea

Bioenergy Policy Report (December 2023)

This report scrutinizes the outcomes of 10 years of South Korea's biomass policy. Solutions for Our Climate's study reveals that, contrary to its green credentials, biomass emits significant levels of carbon dioxide, drives deforestation and forest loss, and crowds out genuine renewables such as solar and wind. The authors lay out a set of policy recommendations calling for an immediate reevaluation of energy and forestry policies to ensure South Korea meets the climate challenge.

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report



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Logs piled outside of Drax pellet plant near Burns Lake, B.C. Photo taken May, 2022.

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