

Testimony Opposing SB903
Senate Finance Committee
March 2, 2022

Position: OPPOSE

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Clean Water Action and the Reclaim Renewable Energy Coalition strongly oppose SB903, which would loosen the definition of “qualifying biomass” and “thermal biomass system” to include the burning of “silvicultural products” and “natural wood waste.” This is a drastic move in the wrong direction for Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard, allowing more greenhouse-gas-emitting facilities to soak up Maryland’s renewable energy money just when we need to be putting it into emissions-free technologies to face the climate crisis.

Allowing these products to be burned directly as fuel, expanding the types of combustion-based facilities allowed in the RPS, would generate more greenhouse gasses than allowing wood waste to decompose naturally on the forest floor. Although trees can ultimately regenerate and replace themselves in the long term, that does not mean burning them helps with greenhouse gas emissions in the short term - quite the opposite. Newly planted trees have far less benefit to the climate and local air quality than a mature tree or a fully-functioning forest ecosystem. Burning trees releases CO₂ into the air immediately, and the carbon isn’t recaptured unless and until newly planted replacement trees grow to maturity over many decades. Just this week, the IPCC released a new report declaring that many human and natural systems are already buckling under global warming’s impact, and some are already approaching the limits of their ability to adapt. We need to invest in energy infrastructure that is truly emissions-free, today.

Expanding the definition of qualifying biomass in the RPS would also put Maryland dollars behind pollution that harms local communities. A recent [Harvard School of Public Health Study](#) found that biomass and wood have the fastest-growing share of early deaths in the major energy-consuming sectors; burning wood for electricity produces as much or more pollution than fossil fuels, including coal. Biomass facilities emit high levels of particulate matter (PM), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), lead, mercury, and other hazardous air pollutants than coal. We would never include burning coal in the Renewable Portfolio Standard, so we should not include burning silvicultural products and wood waste, either.

With the urgency of the climate crisis and the knowledge that people’s health will be harmed by biomass facilities, we must not expand the definition of qualifying biomass in the RPS - quite the opposite. When the Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Working Group of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change is currently conducting a study on woody biomass energy sources’ true greenhouse gas impacts, passing this legislation now before that process is completed would be especially ill advised. Please oppose SB903 and do not make the problem of pollution in our Renewable Portfolio Standard even worse.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kunze
Maryland Coordinator
Clean Water Action

Reclaim Renewable Energy Coalition