

Lily Hawkins

Food & Water Action

Committee: Senate Finance

Testimony On: SB903 Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Qualifying Biomass and Thermal Biomass Systems

Position: OPPOSE

Hearing Date March 1, 2022

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Food & Water Watch, on behalf of its 40,000 members in Maryland, writes to express our strong opposition to SB903, which would loosen the definition of “qualifying biomass” and “thermal biomass system” to include the burning of “silvicultural products” and “natural wood waste” in the Renewable Portfolio Standard.

This is a big step in the wrong direction for Maryland’s renewable energy program, allowing more greenhouse-gas-emitting facilities to soak up Maryland ratepayer dollars that are intended to help move us to clean energy.

Allowing these products to be burned directly as fuel 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 . Please

oppose SB903 and do not make the problem of pollution from inaccurately classified "renewable" options in our Renewable Portfolio Standard even worse.

Sincerely,
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