



## Support the Forest Biomass Emissions Act!

**H.R. 8618/S. 4153: Forest Biomass Emissions Act**— Introduced by Senator Cory Booker [D-NJ] on April 17, 2024 and Rep. Bennie Thompson [D-MS-2] on June 4, 2024.

### Background

Forest biomass, in the form of industrial-scale wood pellets, serves as a supposedly “renewable” electricity source that is harvested from American forests and shipped overseas to be burned in Europe and Asia.<sup>1</sup> Production has significantly expanded in the United States over the past decade, driven largely by the rising global demand for “clean” energy sources.<sup>1</sup> As these demands rise, forest biomass production plants have proliferated in the United States, particularly across the Southeast and Pacific Northwest.<sup>1,2</sup> This rapid expansion has raised substantial ecological, public health, and environmental justice concerns.<sup>3</sup>

Forest biomass production facilities manufacture wood pellets from small diameter trees and forest by-products, including sawdust, logging residues, and wood waste.<sup>2</sup> However, the industry’s sourcing is more harmful than companies like Drax and Enviva claim. The heightened international demand for forest biomass has intensified logging activities in the US, leading to deforestation and habitat loss for wildlife.<sup>1,4</sup> Moreover, biomass production facilities emit significant—and often noncompliant—levels of air pollutants, posing respiratory and cardiovascular health risks to nearby communities.<sup>5</sup> Despite being labeled as “renewable,” burning wood pellets for energy releases carbon dioxide and other pollutants into the air, contributing to climate change and degrading air quality.<sup>5,6</sup> At the smokestack, wood pellet combustion produces more carbon dioxide than coal.

The negative ramifications of the wood pellet industry disproportionately affect low-income communities of color,<sup>7</sup> and **there has been significant backlash from both communities and scientists** against the counterintuitive nature of the wood pellet industry. Therefore, enhanced regulation on tracking forest biomass emissions is crucial to mitigating environmental and public health harms from domestic pellet production.

### Summary

The Forest Biomass Emissions Act of 2024 aims to address these issues by mandating that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) evaluate the lifecycle of greenhouse gas emissions from forest biomass combustion for electricity when developing relevant rules and regulations.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the bill would require the EPA to conduct a comprehensive study on the impacts of the forest biomass industry on communities living near pellet production facilities. This study would include data collection on noise and air pollution, with a focus on the socioeconomic status of affected individuals. The findings would be submitted to Congress to inform future policy decisions aimed at minimizing environmental and public health harms associated with the forest biomass industry. This act seeks to ensure that the expansion of the forest biomass industry does not come at the expense of vulnerable communities and American forests, promoting a more equitable and sustainable approach to the energy transition.

<sup>1</sup> Ireland, Robert. “International Trade in Wood Pellets: Current Trends and Future Prospects.” U.S. International Trade Commission, Executive Briefing on Trade (September 2018).

[www.usitc.gov/executivebriefings/pellets.pdf](http://www.usitc.gov/executivebriefings/pellets.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Davis, M., L. Lambert, R. Jacobson, D. Rossi, C. Brandeis, J. Fried, B. English, R. Abt, K. Abt, P. Nepal, C. O’Dea, J. Prestemon, & M. Langholtz. “Biomass from the Forested Land Base” 2023 Billion-Ton Report, U.S. Department of Energy (2023) <https://doi.org/10.23720/BT2023/2316181>.

<sup>3</sup> Tran, Huy, Edie Juno, and Saravanan Arunachalam. “Emissions of Wood Pelletization and Bioenergy Use in the United States.” *Renewable Energy* 219 (December 2023): 119536.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.renene.2023.119536>

<sup>4</sup> Schulze, Ernst-Detlef, Christian Körner, Beverly E. Law, Helmut Haberl, and Sebastiaan Luysaert. “Large-Scale Bioenergy from Additional Harvest of Forest Biomass is Neither Sustainable nor Greenhouse Gas Neutral.” *GCB Bioenergy* 4, no. 6 (April 2012): 611–616. <https://doi.org/10.1111/g.1757-1707.2012.01169.x>

<sup>5</sup> Karanasiou, Angeliki, Andres Alastuey, Fulvio Amato, Matteo Renzi, Massimo Stafoggia, Aurelio Tobias, Cristina Reche, Francesco Forastiere, Sophie Gumy, Pierpaolo Mudu, and Xavier Querol. “Short-Term Health Effects from Outdoor Exposure to Biomass Burning Emissions: A Review.” *Science of The Total Environment* 781(August 2021):146739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2021.146739>

<sup>6</sup> Bhatt, Arpit, Vikram Ravi, Yimin Zhang, Garvin Heath, Ryan David, and Eric C.D. Tan. “Emission Factors of Industrial Boilers Burning Biomass-Derived Fuels.” *Journal of the Air And Waste Management Association* 73, no. 4 (February 2023): 241–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10962247.2023.2166158>

<sup>7</sup> Koester, Stefan, and Sam David. “Siting of Wood Pellet Production Facilities in Environmental Justice Communities in the Southeastern United States.” *Environmental Justice* 11, no. 2 (April 2018): 64–70. <https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2017.0025>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Forest Biomass Emissions Act, S.4153, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., introduced in Senate April 17, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/s/4153.pdf>