

Biomass Task Group Recommendations

Revised to 11-4-22

1. New electric-led generation biomass facilities in the State of Vermont should not be used.
2. The Ryegate and McNeil facilities should not be expanded to increase the currently permitted hourly output capacity physically or otherwise. Furthermore, the facilities should strive to use less biomass than they are currently permitted.
3. The Vermont Climate Council recommends that the State plan and prepare for the phase out of wood biomass electricity generation at the McNeil and Ryegate facilities and the phase up of other energy sources, complemented with other important actions such as efficiency and consumption reduction. To inform the phase out, the State must advance an evidence-based study immediately to be completed expeditiously by an independent expert that would be managed within the Climate Action Office in coordination with the Public Service Department. The study(ies) should include:
 - investigation of if, when, and how to phase out Vermont's two existing biomass electricity facilities;
 - how a phase out or lack thereof could impact Vermont's 2025, 2030, and 2050 GWSA greenhouse gas emission reduction requirements;
 - the health, air quality, climate, cultural resources, and financial costs and benefits that could accrue to different sectors and constituents (*e.g.*, local communities, landowners, ratepayers, etc.);
 - traditional ecological knowledge;
 - an investigation of a just transition for Vermont's Forest Economy that plant closures could necessitate, acknowledging the sensitivity around market conditions for the material inputs currently employed at the plants, and the importance of those markets in supporting private landowners maintaining Vermont's forests, ensuring that the management and ultimately the enhancement of Vermont's forests to support biodiversity, carbon storage and other benefits, and support for the associated enterprises and rural communities that depend on them, remains viable. Investigation shall consider alternate markets for Vermont wood and/or income streams for forest landowners, aligned with climate objectives and how to secure them in conjunction with plant closures;
 - implications for phase out in relation to the long-proposed McNeil plant expansion for co-generation of thermal heat for district heating. This review will need to include as part of that scope reviewing the long-proposed expansion of the McNeil facility to accommodate wood combustion for thermal heat

production - whether as co-generation from electricity production or as a thermal-only replacement for a phased-out electricity generating plant. In addition to climate and forest implications, the investigation must examine impacts on air quality, emissions, and the health of residents of the adjacent communities. If a thermal-only alternative is advanced, siting should be considered particularly in relation to over-burdened communities. It must also include a full equity assessment which will involve the Just Transitions Subcommittee and the tools developed in support of the Climate Action Plan. McNeil is on land that is listed on the state historical site for the most highly sensitive archaeology in the state so cultural resources must be addressed as well; and

- The study should clearly look at the timeline of a phase out and the attendant ramp-up of what kind of clean energy replacements that would be needed to maintain Vermont's electricity reliability.
4. The Vermont Climate Council should further explore the role of Heat at a Residential and Commercial Scale as a climate solution, the impact on Vermont's forests, and other impacts such as public health.
 - The Vermont Climate Council should form a new task group to consider this topic explicitly, the right composition needed to do so, and the right process to ensure a clear directive and the capacity to support the task group. If a new task group is formed, members from this task group should be invited to participate so that the learning done through this process is carried forward into the new work. Additionally, consideration should be given to including representation from outside state government and the Climate Council process to have diverse opinions represented and the expertise needed.
 5. The state should assess GHG emissions from various technologies for burning biomass at the point of combustion. GHG sequestration should be assessed so that those different numbers can be compared accurately over time. The Task Group also recommends that a lifecycle GHG assessment provide sensitivity analysis around wood biomass GHG emissions relevant to the 2025, 2030, and 2050 timelines required by the GWSA.
 6. Engagement must occur with the residents of Burlington's Old North End, Winooski, and other neighborhoods exposed to ambient emissions and other adverse exposures related to the plant for some time. The Just Transition Subcommittee, in partnership with the relevant Subcommittees and Task Groups of the VCC, should lead such efforts in a respectful, consistent, and ongoing manner and consider the range of issues and needs for these communities that may extend beyond biomass. Adverse impacts to public health from particulate matter, quality of life, and cultural resources should be assessed and quantified pursuant to the study discussed in recommendation number three and in conjunction with the appropriate Agencies such as the Department of Public Health and the State Historic Preservation Office.

7. Additional public health and air quality monitoring must occur (immediately or as soon as practical) in and around the neighborhoods adjacent to McNeil and Ryegate and sited in the areas most sensitive to pollution. Relevant state Agencies, such as the Department of Environmental Conservation Air Quality and Climate Division and the Department of Public Health, should be engaged in the design and implementation of any targeted air monitoring. The Inflation Reduction Act makes funds available for such monitoring and should be utilized. Public health impacts should be an indispensable component of informing any future actions taken regarding biomass electricity generation in Vermont.

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