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**To:** Judith Judson, Commissioner, and John Wassam, Department of Energy Resources

**From:** Sofia Owen, Legal Director and Eastern Massachusetts Community Organizer for Toxics Action Center

May 13, 2019

### **In opposition to the Proposed Rule Changes to the 2012 RPS Regulations**

Good afternoon. My name is Sofia Owen. I am the Legal Director and the Eastern Massachusetts Community Organizer for Toxics Action Center. I am here today to express my opposition to the proposed rule changes to the 2012 RPS regulations and to any subsidies or incentives for wood and waste burning.

At Toxics Action Center, we work side by side with community groups to tackle environmental threats and develop and train new leaders to strengthen the environmental and social change movements. From our work in frontline communities, including more than fifteen years supporting groups fighting the continued use and the expansion of wood burning power plants and incinerators, we know that we have every reason to be concerned about the effects of these facilities on public health and the environment. I'd like to share three of these reasons with you this afternoon.

First, burning wood and trash makes people sick and degrades the environment. When waste is burned, not only do the dioxins, heavy metals, and other toxins in ash particles cause cancer, reproductive problems, and learning disabilities, but they also build up in the environment and magnify in the food chain, posing serious developmental and health threats to wildlife and people.<sup>1</sup> Just ask anyone who lives in the area surrounding any of the seven incinerators in Massachusetts. The EPA has linked particulate matter created by burning wood to difficulty breathing, aggravated asthma, and heart attacks.<sup>2</sup>

Second, we need to be charting a path to zero waste, not incentivizing so called waste to energy facilities that are not carbon neutral. Take the Wheelabrator facility in Saugus, for example: Wheelabrator currently buries 100,000 tons of ash each year, but

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<sup>1</sup> David Suzuki Foundation, et al., 2007. Incineration of Municipal Solid Waste: An Update on Pollution. Available at <http://www.glu.org/en/node/154>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution/health-and-environmental-effects-particulate-matter-pm>

according to the company's own records, about 80 percent of the materials being burned are recyclable or compostable.<sup>3</sup> Instead of allowing the wood and waste burning industries to continue to trash our environment and health, DOER should be working with the DEP to aggressively pursue policies that will reduce waste, spur local green economic innovation and offer safe and well-paying jobs to local residents.

Finally, burning trees and trash is an environmental justice issue. Communities of color and low income communities are already overburdened by the cumulative impacts of pollution from power plants, incinerators, landfills, and transportation. For example, Springfield is the site of a trash incinerator and a proposed biomass incinerator. This year, the city was rated the worst place in the country to live if you have asthma by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.<sup>4</sup> Rather than caving to industry and perpetuating environmental racism, DOER should be listening to the frontline communities who have fought for years to ensure that their communities can breathe cleaner air.

For all of these reasons, I ask you to protect Massachusetts residents' health and the environment by not implementing the proposed rule changes to the 2012 RPS regulations and removing any subsidies for wood or waste burning facilities.

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.clf.org/blog/saugus-ma-landfill-dangerous/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aafa.org/asthma-capitals-top-100-cities-ranking/>