

Thurrock Council's approval of RWE's plans for Tilbury Biomass Power Station will seriously harm forests, the climate and local people's health, campaigners warn.

- for immediate release-

14th February 2013 - On Valentines Day, Thurrock Council's Planning Committee approved RWE's application to allow them to extend the life span of the Tilbury B power station by burning 7.8 million tonnes of wood a year. Campaigners warn that this is bad news for the climate, forests and the environment. It will also mean many years more of high air pollution and threats to local people's health.

RWE claims burning wood reduces pollution and carbon emissions and is '100% sustainable'. In fact it is a way of extending the life of a highly polluting and inefficient power station and exploiting public subsidies of around £290 million a year.

Kenneth Richter, Friends of the Earth's biofuels campaigner said:

"Burning millions of tons of imported wood poses a threat to the world's forests and the impact on climate change could be even worse than when burning coal. Outdated and polluting power stations like Tilbury must be phased out in accordance with European air quality legislation."

Forests:

Tilbury B will burn the equivalent of more than three-quarters of all wood produced in the UK every year. They are currently importing wood from US and Canada. Highly biodiverse, often ancient forests are being turned into pellets to make profits for the European power industry. As demand grows forests fall to be replaced by tree monocultures that destroy biodiversity and soils and deplete freshwater.

Carbon emissions:

Power stations burning wood emit around 50% more carbon from their smokestacks than ones burning coal for the same amount of electricity. Companies such as RWE ignore this carbon, claiming that new trees will grow back and absorb the carbon emitted from cutting down and burning mature ones. Yet this would take decades – 70 years for UK conifers. Such a carbon spike is a disaster at a time when scientists have shown that emissions must be reduced rapidly if we want to have any hope of avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

Pollution:

Burning wood causes similar levels of air pollution to burning coal overall and keeping the power station running will mean continued high levels of pollution and health threats locally. Compared to coal, wood burning releases more small particles, known as PM2.5s and nanoparticles, that get deep into the lungs and the blood where they can cause serious problems including heart and respiratory disease. Current particulate levels around Tilbury already exceed World Health Organisation recommended levels. Wood pellets also present a far greater fire and explosion risk as witnessed by the serious fire in February 2012.

Duncan Law of Biofuelwatch said: *"We don't need this. It is RWE cynically maximising profits at the expense of local people's and the planet's health by burning global forests at just 37% efficiency. Thurrock Council should have let this monster die."*

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Notes:

+For background information about the planning application being considered for Tilbury B, see: <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2012/tilbury-alert/>

+ For a list of scientific studies which show that burning wood from whole trees for electricity results in a carbon debt higher than that from coal for a period of at least several decades, see <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/resources-on-biomass/>

+ RWE have disagreed with the findings of this large volume of peer-reviewed scientific studies by pointing to unpublished work by two PhD students in the Netherlands whom they have been sponsoring.

+ See here for evidence that pellets exported from RWE's pellet plant in Georgia, US come from whole trees and that they threaten highly biodiverse forests:
<http://www.dogwoodalliance.org/2012/11/new-report-discredits-uk-energy-company-claims-that-pellets-come-from-wood-waste/> and
<http://www.dogwoodalliance.org/2012/10/tour-of-destruction-following-the-trail-of-the-newest-threat-to-southern-forests/>