

## **Energy Policy Recommendations: Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League**

Energy policy is not easy. As our economy, and indeed our way of life, inevitably shifts from the cheap energy of stored solar power in ancient plants-coal, petroleum, natural gas-we must decide what new sources of energy we will use and how it will be shared. Will energy come from centralized power plants, the current system, or be decentralized in a way that communities can generate much of their own power? Will energy conservation take priority over energy consumption? Will today's rush to burn resources continue or we will recognize in time the need to slow extraction and conserve what is left?

Three hundred years of accelerating fossil fuel consumption have left us with contaminated land and water, polluted air and an unacceptable level of global warming gases in the atmosphere. Continuing down that same road with nuclear power and biomass fuel switching will only lead to an increasingly dangerous planet.

The following *Clean Energy Policy Recommendations* reflect both the League's past campaigns and our current work in the communities we serve. Energy policies, like energy habits, are difficult to change. Politics and private corporate interests often override science, ethics and common sense. These recommendations provide our members and others with a reference point to continue this challenging but essential discussion about our energy future.

### **Stop Incineration; Phase Out Nuclear and Coal:**

- Exclude all waste combustion as eligible renewable resources and eliminate mandates such as the North Carolina swine waste and poultry waste set-asides.<sup>i</sup>
- Ban the disposal of organics in landfills for the purpose of landfill gas generation.
- Require methane gas collection from all existing landfills and wastewater treatment plants.
- Encourage source separation of food waste and other organics for composting and anaerobic digestion.
- Eliminate all government subsidies, tax breaks and public incentives for coal, nuclear, landfill gas and biomass<sup>ii</sup> incineration.
- Oppose cap and trade, carbon offsets and carbon trading programs.
- Oppose large-scale base-load biomass power plants and the co-firing of biomass in existing coal-fired power plants.
- Oppose the development and construction of "new nukes", nuclear waste depositories and irradiated fuel reprocessing.
- Encourage the development of community-based, decentralized solar, wind, geothermal, small hydro and anaerobic digester facilities at an appropriate scale.
- Encourage the use of combined heat and power with proper safeguards to protect public health and the environment.
- Ban the use of genetically engineered crops and trees to generate electricity or produce biofuels for transportation.

- Implement a moratorium on new biomass incinerators, co-firing of biomass with coal and new biofuels refineries.

**Promote Energy Conservation and Efficiency:**

- Support third-party independent energy efficiency programs.
- Adopt Zero Waste goals and policies to reduce consumption and conserve energy.
- Eliminate toxics and contaminants in products to facilitate reuse, recycling and composting.<sup>iii</sup>
- Encourage local agriculture and economic development at a scale that reduces energy consumption and supports sustainable communities.<sup>iv</sup>
- Support mass transit, land use, and zoning ordinances that encourage pedestrian-friendly communities and lower dependence on motorized transportation.

**Restore and Preserve Natural Ecosystems and Watersheds:**

- Ban new offshore drilling, hydrofracking natural gas extraction wells and end mountain top removal coal mining.
- Support the restoration of natural forests and eco-systems:
  - to protect watersheds and assure water quality and water supply in periods of extensive drought;
  - to reduce the threat from catastrophic floods; and
  - to enhance the ability of forests and other ecosystems to store additional carbon from the atmosphere.
- \*\*\*\*Oppose the replacement of natural forests and traditional agriculture with energy crops and tree plantations.<sup>v</sup>

**Enforce Federal and State Environmental Laws, such as NEPA and SEPA, and Adopt a Limit on Carbon That Includes All Emissions In Greenhouse Gas Regulations:**

- Eliminate all exemptions to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State Environmental Policy Acts (SEPA).
- Count all greenhouse gas emissions from all sources in the production of energy and biofuels-no “carbon neutral” exemptions.
- Make environmental justice the common denominator in energy policy, regulations and permitting.

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<sup>i</sup> Current biomass proposals in North Carolina plan to use poultry litter and wood waste to generate heat for industrial plants and electricity for the grid.

<sup>ii</sup> Biomass is most often described as organic materials such as paper, wood waste (including whole trees) food waste, and agricultural and animal waste, but regulators frequently add waste materials like sewage sludge, tires, railroad ties and municipal solid waste to the biomass category.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, arsenic in poultry litter can potentially impact the environment when it is either land applied directly or composted.

<sup>iv</sup> Industrial agriculture relies on confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) that are energy intensive and have major environmental and public health consequences.

<sup>v</sup> “Tree farms” are a major part of the biomass issue and are heavily promoted and subsidized by industry and government. Many BREDL members are currently growing trees in plantations.