



Contact: Jonathan Lewis
617.894.3788
jlewis@catf.us

EPA Rejects Industry Pressure to Ignore Important Climate Data on Biofuels

But Policy Still Fails to Promote Only Environmentally Friendly Biofuels

February 3, 2010 – For Immediate Release: The Clean Air Task Force commends the US EPA for taking an important step toward accurately measuring the full environmental impact of biofuels. In a final rule released today that revises the biofuel mandate under the federal Renewable Fuel Standard, EPA calculates the extent to which the production mandate indirectly affects land use patterns around the world by increasing demand for farmland. The resulting land use changes – especially deforestation – contribute to global warming.

“The decision by EPA to take indirect effects into account when calculating biofuels’ impact on global warming is strongly rooted in both science and law,” said Jonathan Lewis, an attorney with the Clean Air Task Force. “The Agency’s analysis refutes the common misconception that biofuels are uniformly beneficial, by showing that corn ethanol can be even worse for the environment than gasoline.”

The Clean Air Task Force has worked to convince Congress, EPA, and other policy-makers around the country that indirect – or market-mediated – impacts of biofuel production, especially indirect land use change, are significant and can no longer be ignored.

The federal Renewable Fuel Standard requires a drastic increase in biofuel production. But growing corn, soy, and even so-called advanced feedstocks like switchgrass to make biofuels can displace food crops from prime farmland. Additional farmland needs to be cultivated somewhere to accommodate the displaced food crops, and in an increasingly globalized food market the make-up food often will be grown overseas where land and other agricultural inputs are the most inexpensive. As farmers and ranchers around the world meet the new demand by converting forests, wetlands, and grasslands into farmland and pasture, enormous quantities of soil- and plant-carbon are released into the atmosphere.

In many cases, these indirect emissions of carbon dioxide are large enough to negate the climate benefits of switching from petroleum to biofuels. Under today’s rule, EPA will account for indirect land use change emissions when it measures the overall climate impact of biofuels like corn ethanol and soy biodiesel.

Unfortunately, EPA’s final rule also relies on some very optimistic assumptions about how biofuels will be produced more than a decade from now. As a result of the assumptions, the rule overstates the actual environmental benefits of many biofuels, including corn ethanol.

“EPA appears to have bent over backward to allow some highly problematic biofuels to meet the environmental criteria set by Congress,” said Lewis. “We’ll continue to work with the Agency to ensure its policies promote only fuels that truly benefit the environment. I’m afraid the Renewable Fuel Standard doesn’t do that yet.”

The Clean Air Task Force is a nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing atmospheric pollution through research, advocacy, and private sector collaboration. Visit us at www.catf.us.