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CLEAN AIR TASK FORCE RELEASES INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS OF MANOMET BIOENERGY STUDY

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NOTED BIOMASS SCIENTIST DETERMINES THAT MANOMET CENTER UNDERESTIMATES CARBON IMPACT OF BIOENERGY PLANTS

BOSTON, July 9, 2010 – In an effort to better understand the climate impact from greenhouse gas emissions from bioenergy power plants, Clean Air Task Force today released its analysis of a recent, highly-publicized report from the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences. The timing of today's announcement from CATF, a Boston-based NGO with extensive scientific and legal expertise in the bioenergy field, is particularly critical as just two days ago, the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs for Massachusetts ordered state regulators to develop strict limitations on facilities that generate electricity from biomass, in an effort to ensure that these facilities do not exacerbate global climate change.

The state's about-face was prompted by a report last month from the Massachusetts-based Manomet Center, which found that when biomass is used to generate electricity in utility-scale plants, the net carbon dioxide emissions would exceed those from a coal-fired power plant for more than 40 years and would exceed the carbon dioxide emitted by natural gas-fired power plant for more than 90 years – even after taking forest regrowth into consideration.

To provide an independent assessment of the Manomet study, the Clean Air Task Force asked Dr. Mary Booth, an ecosystem scientist and an expert on the environmental impacts of biomass power facilities, to conduct a comprehensive scientific review the MCCS analysis. Dr. Booth determined that the main conclusion drawn by the Manomet Center – that net emissions from biomass-fired power plants are greater than from coal and especially natural gas even after decades of regrowth by forests – is qualitatively correct, but likely underestimates the magnitude of total biomass emissions.

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The reason the report underestimates the emissions, Dr. Booth found, is that the Manomet Center made a number of assumptions that minimize the calculation of net carbon emissions from biomass power, meaning that actual emissions are likely much greater than calculated in the report. Dr. Booth's full report can be found at www.catf.us/resources/whitepapers/.

"While directionally accurate, the Manomet study has underestimated the net carbon emissions of biomass power," said Dr. Booth in her report. "Policy-makers in Massachusetts and elsewhere should be extremely cautious about accepting the study's optimistic conclusions concerning the point in time when biomass can start providing net reductions in carbon dioxide emissions."

Jonathan Lewis of the Clean Air Task Force said, "Dr. Booth's study has national ramifications, as Congress wrestles with a climate and energy bill that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, and other stationary sources. We've also just filed a motion to help defend the U.S. EPA against a lawsuit seeking to exempt bioenergy plants from more stringent GHG controls. The time is now to fully understand the climate impact from all power sources, and particularly bioenergy plants which, until now, have not been well studied for their long-term climate effects. With her review, CATF and other parties will continue to critically examine policies that promote biomass power, and continue to look for truly clean energy sources."

Additional findings by Dr. Booth include:

- The Manomet Center's suggestion that small-scale thermal and "Combined Heat and Power" biomass facilities may yield a carbon "dividend" relative to fossil fuels after forty years is based on overly optimistic assumptions and is likely to be incorrect.
- The Manomet Center's conclusion that net emissions from biomass power emissions are substantially higher than those from natural gas-fired facilities is particularly relevant to the Northeast, where the majority of electricity is generated from natural gas.

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