

it. "I'd rather they'd be burning coal," Nathaniel said of Seneca, because "then you could see the pollution."

A controversial 2010 study on biomass by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences commissioned by the state of Massachusetts showed that burning wood initially emits more greenhouse gases than fossil fuels. Some scientists say the emissions are balanced when the forest is replanted, but others say the carbon cycle is far more complex than that (see *EW*'s cover feature "Biomass," 2/22/2010).

The biomass we breathe

While forest advocates debate whether biomass extraction is actually "renewable," social justice advocates such as Lisa Arkin are concerned with the effects that burning wood will have on the lungs of the elderly and those of young children.

Seneca has argued in editorials and in meetings — the company did not respond to requests for an interview for this story — that burning logging slash in a factory with pollution controls is healthier than burning it in the forest and that it is using the best available technology. Arkin said that the LRAPA permit and pollution controls "don't mean that the air coming out of the stacks is clean air; it's actually highly polluted air." And the burning will go on every day, she said, constantly affecting those who live nearby, as opposed to rotating through the forests outside the city. Forest advocates argue the slash shouldn't be burned at all, but left in the forest for nutrients and as habitat.

And Arkin said, when Eugene has a bad air day, "People can't burn their woodstoves, but Seneca can keep burning."

OTA has fought successfully for better air quality monitoring in west Eugene, and LRAPA got a federal grant in 2010 to help pay for increased monitoring. OTA also fought Seneca's LRAPA permit and lost. The group argued that Seneca cogeneration should not have been given a separate air pollution permit from Seneca Sawmill.

LRAPA Director Merlyn Hough said that the cogen plant "met the requirements for a separate permitted facility." LRAPA addressed the issue in its responses to public



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comments on the SSE permit and wrote that the criteria pollutant levels from the plant did not trigger LRAPA or a federal "new source review." Hough said even if the facilities were combined "the combined emissions of hazardous air pollutant (or HAPs, and also referred to as air toxics) must still be below the 10/25 tons per year thresholds."

LRAPA's decision to permit SSE separately from the sawmill was based on the plants having two different standard industrial classifications (SIC) codes, despite the fact that the facilities are located on contiguous or adjacent properties and owned and operated by the same corporation. LRAPA saw SSE not as a support to the sawmill but as an independent power generator. LRAPA's arguments appear to be based on the arguments made by Seneca itself in its 2009 permit application.

But the question of whether Seneca is ripe for a citizen

lawsuit under the Clean Air Act lingers. One could argue under the act that the incinerator is in fact a support facility for the mill and that the combined facilities emit enough particulate matter to trigger a new source review under the Clean Air Act.

For example, in 2009 Seneca Sawmill said it would be emitting fewer hazardous air pollutants, and Seneca Vice President Rick Re wrote on the application to modify the permit, "With construction of the new SSE cogeneration plant, the natural gas boiler only will be used when the power plant is not operating," which arguably means the cogen plant operates in support of the sawmill. Something perhaps for a judge to decide.

But until that happens, protesters say Seneca will continue to come under fire for polluting Eugene's air and cutting down Oregon's forest



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