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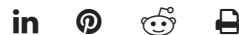
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Far from being a good energy source, biomass threatens Central Valley health, climate

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Mulched trees are converted by biomass plants into energy. Sstate Assemblymember Rudy Salas sees it as a key for California's power future, but Nayamin Martinez of the Central California Environmental Justice Network criticizes biomass as dirty and harmful to climate change. JOHN WALKER *Fresno Bee* file



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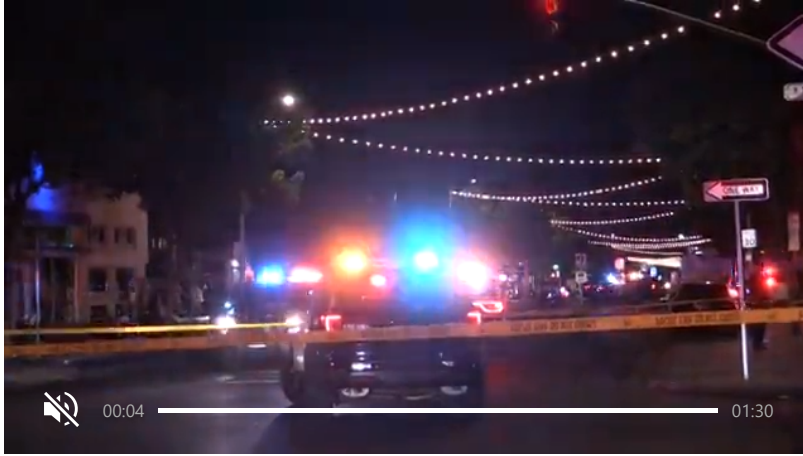
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Communities in the Central Valley breathed easier when the biomass power plant in Mendota was shut down in 2016, after years of being one of the biggest air polluters in the region.

It was a particular relief for residents of the mobile home park a quarter mile away, who'd been breathing the plant's dangerous fine particles for years.

This matters because fine particulate matter penetrates deep into the lungs, entering the bloodstream. These tiny particles are linked to [serious health problems](#) including heart disease, premature death, stroke and aggravated asthma.

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But our community health is still in danger, with Assemblymember Rudy Salas acting on behalf of the industry by [promoting](#) dirty biomass energy for the Valley and our state.

The truth is that biomass is a false solution that harms our health and our climate.

Contrary to industry claims, biomass power plants are major emitters of air pollutants, especially fine particulate matter and nitrogen oxides, and are guilty of [repeated air quality violations](#).

Before it was closed, the Mendota biomass plant was the largest stationary source of fine particulate pollution in Kings, Fresno and Madera counties combined. The Rio Bravo biomass plant in Fresno is the [second-largest](#) point source of fine particulate pollution in Fresno County.

Particulate pollution causes an estimated [1,200 premature deaths](#) in the Valley every year.

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In the San Joaquin Valley, four out of five active biomass plants are in [disadvantaged communities](#) with some of the highest air pollution in the state. The Rio Bravo biomass plant in Fresno is located less than a half-mile from Malaga Elementary School, Malaga Community Park and surrounding homes. It sits in a majority Hispanic neighborhood with the state's highest pollution score.

Like fossil fuels, biomass is a carbon-burning energy source that spews climate-heating carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. In fact, biomass power is more [carbon polluting](#) at the smokestack than coal.

Biomass accelerates the climate crisis at the exact time when we must rapidly cut carbon pollution to avoid devastating climate impacts like the drought that we're in now.



It's also not needed for stabilizing the electrical grid. Biomass power currently supplies [less than 3%](#) of the state's total electric power. Instead, [grid stabilization](#) can be achieved with truly clean and renewable solar and wind power, paired with energy storage.

Salas's claim that biomass is affordable is another inaccuracy. Biomass is California's [most expensive](#) electricity source, averaging more than three times the cost of solar or wind power.

This expensive and dirty business is propped up by subsidies paid for by taxpayers and utility customers, diverting investment away from genuine clean energy sources.

Salas claims that forests are not being chopped down and turned into power, but reports and [photo evidence](#) of whole trees trucked in and piled up at biomass facilities show that Salas is simply wrong.

Biomass energy is often promoted as a way to incentivize large-scale tree-cutting — using misleading labels like “thinning” — under the claim that this will protect communities during wildfires.

In reality forest cutting doesn't stop fire and can actually cause fires to burn [hotter](#) and [faster](#). Indeed, under a logging and thinning approach, California's communities have suffered unprecedented wildfire deaths and home destruction.

Instead, research and experience show that the most effective way to protect homes and communities in fire-prone areas is through home-hardening retrofits to make [homes themselves](#) more fire-safe and reducing vegetation in the 100 feet of defensible space immediately surrounding homes.

The bottom line is that burning wood for electricity is an outdated, dirty energy source that harms vulnerable communities, worsens the climate crisis, and diverts resources away from genuine climate solutions such as solar and wind.

We encourage lawmakers like Assemblymember Salas to get the facts and work towards a clean energy future for the Central Valley. Biomass is not it.

Nayamin Martinez is the executive director of the Central California Environmental Justice Network.

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