

## Board of Health opposes Mohawk wood pellet burning

By Virginia Ray

BUCKLAND — Despite Buckland Board of Health members' "strong" objection to the Mohawk Trail Regional School Building Committee's notion to install a wood pellet boiler at the high/middle school, the Committee is apparently continuing to research the plan.

Others, like resident Janet Sinclair, also object to the plan, saying there will be more air pollution and more carbon dioxide emissions than if the boilers burned low sulfur oil or propane, and that there are unknown chemical contaminants in the pellets.

At the March 7 meeting a letter from the Board of Health was read by Chair Budget Litchfield. In it a "lack of documentation from the Biomass Boiler Study and subsequent portrayal as "clean energy" for the school has, said the letter, let the Board "doubting the truthfulness" of the study. The letter concludes asking the Subcommittee to "not go forward" with the proposal to replace the "exceptionally

clean-burning propane system" with a "much less clean-burning biomass pellet system, as it will put students' health in peril.

In addition to objections raised in the letter, the Buckland Board passed a regulation in January of this year that allows the board the right to require a "site assignment" by the entity wishing to do something, if the activity is deemed by the Board of Health to be potentially injurious to residents. Wood pellet boilers would ostensibly be subjected to this regulation and application to the Board would have to be made before they are installed.

Sinclair attended the meeting on the 7th, as did Board of Health members Richard Warner and Terry Estes. Sinclair noted that she had made calls that morning to Sandri Oil, the only pellet dealer in the area that can deliver in bulk, and was told the price went up about five percent last year. She has heard elsewhere, she said, that the price has climbed 10 percent in 2013 and in 2014. In addition, Sinclair reported that

the propane price at Sandri went down last summer, so she said the Mohawk analysis of cost-saving with wood pellet is "unreliable."

Another attendee who owns woodland in Hawley countered Sinclair, saying there's plenty of wood here and that 90 percent of residents there heat with wood.

Committee members said they will now ask Cooley Dickinson Hospital, reported to burn wood, about their system and will look for other studies.

Ellen Kaufmann and Jim Cutler of the Solarize Mass. local initiative were also invited to the meeting to answer questions about solar panels for the high/middle school.

Apparently, due to changing Massachusetts policies about solar and solar subsidies, it is difficult to know if Mohawk can pursue solar electricity and have it work out financially, because without the subsidies, it expensive. In addition, there are questions about siting; the roof situation needs to be evaluated by an engineer and the financial picture needs to be clarified.