

ALA weighs in on wood burning school heating

This letter was sent to the Hawlemont and Mohawk Trail Regional School District committees. Another was sent to Superintendent Michael Buoniconti.

Dear members of the Committee:

The American Lung Association in Massachusetts sends this letter to speak to the health concerns we have with the proposed biomass heating systems for Mohawk High School and Sanderson Academy. We would urge the committee to consider the harmful health impacts for children and school staff by installing biomass heating systems in schools.

The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary health organization in the nation, and our mission is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. To this end, we work to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families, because we believe everyone has the right to breathe healthy air.

The Lung Association is concerned with negative health impacts from biomass emissions, and we do not support biomass combustion for electricity production. We certainly do not support incentivizing biomass as the Schools and Public Housing Integrating Renewables and Efficiency (SAPHIRE) program does. The emissions from biomass include harmful particle pollution, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxide.

While everyone is at risk from particle pollution, the youth, elderly, and those

with pre-existing respiratory diseases like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are a greater risk.

Massachusetts has higher asthma rates than the national average. When the Centers for Disease Control last estimated asthma prevalence among 38 states, including Massachusetts, the average for the 38 states was 9.0 percent, while Massachusetts was 9.8 percent. This average include many vulnerable children whose lungs are still developing. We do not want their lungs to be burdened at school where they spend the bulk of their time away from home.

The more we learn about air pollution, we find it is more dangerous than we previously thought and that health impacts occur at levels once thought to be "safe." In late 2013, the World Health Organization declared particle pollution to be carcinogenic.

The introduction of wood burning heating systems has the potential to bring harmful pollution to schools along with acute and chronic adverse effects.

The Lung Association urges the committee to reconsider applying and/or implementing biomass as the heating source for schools. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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of the Northeast