



For Immediate Release
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Sierra Club California Launches Advertising Campaign to Protect Air & Forests from Waste Industry Incinerators

Zeal for Incineration Threatens Air Quality, Forest Sustainability, Clean Renewables

SACRAMENTO – Sierra Club California launched an advertising campaign today that aims to push back against growing pressure by waste incinerators to extend and expand their industry, including in Fresno, in one of the most polluted air basins in the country.

A series of billboards and online ads in Fresno and Sacramento note that trees, dead or alive, are an essential component of a healthy forest ecosystem. The campaign promotes the hashtag #IAmNotFuel and implores that California stop burning trees in incinerators to create dirty, polluting energy.

In 2015, Governor Brown signed an executive order requiring utilities to purchase a minimum amount of electricity from biomass incineration facilities that burn dead trees from California's forests. This executive order and subsequent legislation saved five old, non-economic waste incinerators in California that were slated to shut down due to high energy costs and competition from cheaper wind and solar facilities.

About three years later, the biomass incinerator near the Malaga neighborhood in Fresno is still burning 24 hours a day. The facility features outdated emissions controls and releases pollutants that are linked to chronic bronchitis, lung cancer and heart disease. Nearly 30 percent of Fresno's population is under the age of 18 and at least one in five students in local school districts suffer from chronic lung ailments, such as asthma.

“The last place that should be increasing waste incinerator activity is California,” said Kathryn Phillips, director of Sierra Club California, the legislative and regulatory advocacy arm of the Sierra Club's 13 local chapters in California. “The California legislature has established goals to cut climate pollution and local air pollution and increase the amount of non-combustion, clean renewable energy we use. Waste incinerators undercut those goals even as they dirty the air.”

Drought and beetle infestation have contributed to massive tree deaths in forests around California, with the most impacted areas in the Southern Sierra. U.S. Forest Service estimates are that 129 million trees have died.

Most of those trees are in remote areas, away from roads or people. Dead trees near homes, powerlines or roads could be life threatening and should be removed. However, when dead trees are in the remote forest they provide habitat and soil nutrients and they sequester carbon. Additionally, a relatively short period after their death, the dead trees are no more fire-prone than a living tree.

Policy makers and others are debating what should be done with the trees that must be removed. The waste incineration industry has grabbed onto the debate to try to extend and expand their activity in California.

“The advertising campaign is intended to alert people that polluting waste incineration facilities are the worst use of the trees,” said Phillips. “We hope it will help open up the conversation so alternatives to burning the trees that must be removed—from processing for mulch or milling for lumber—get more consideration.”

The billboard artwork is available at <http://bit.ly/IAmNotFuel>.

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Sierra Club California is the legislative and regulatory advocacy arm of Sierra Club's 13 local chapters in California, representing more than 400,000 members and supporters.