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## **PUCO set to Make Historic Decision On First Energy Plan to Burn Trees in Name of “Clean Energy”**

### **Regulators’ decision could advance or deter renewable energy development for decades to come**

(Columbus, OH)—The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio is set to make an historic decision today that could advance or deter the clean energy industry that is just beginning to take root across Ohio.

On Wednesday, August 11, the PUCO is scheduled to rule on utility giant FirstEnergy’s proposal to convert the aging R.E. Burger power plant from coal to biomass. If approved, the massive Burger plant would be one of the largest biomass energy plants in the world.

“It could be game on or lights out for future clean energy development in Ohio, depending on how the PUCO rules,” said Will Reisinger, staff attorney for the Ohio Environmental Council. “Ohio could emerge with as a true leader or a phony pretender for clean energy.”

FirstEnergy has asked the PUCO to certify the plant as a “renewable energy resource facility.” Renewable certification would enable FirstEnergy to use the electric power produced at the plan to meet the company’s obligations under Ohio’s statewide Renewable Energy Standard (RES), which mandates that each investor-owned utility must obtain at least 12.5 percent of its power from clean energy sources by 2025.

Based on FirstEnergy’s own calculations, the electricity generated from the Burger facility, alone, could satisfy the majority, if not all, of the company’s renewable energy requirements through 2025. This means that FirstEnergy might never have to undertake any additional renewable energy projects to meet its legal requirements.

But at this point, there is no way to know whether the proposed conversion to biomass will result in any real environmental or air quality benefits.

The company has provided no detail regarding the source of its biomass fuel, how the biomass will be transported, or whether the biomass fuel will be obtained using sustainable processes.

FirstEnergy also has failed to demonstrate that converting the Burger plant from coal to biomass will result in less mercury, particulate matter, or carbon dioxide pollution.

While other states such as Massachusetts have reevaluated energy policies in light of new data regarding the environmental impacts of biomass generation, Ohio has yet to do so. With its decision, however, the PUCO has the chance to change that.

Experts believe two outcomes are likely in today's ruling: The PUCO may certify the plant as a "renewable" energy generating resource and allow the project to proceed. Or it could require FirstEnergy to answer questions about the sustainability of the plant, including the source of the biomass material and the total environmental impacts of the project.

By delaying the project and requiring FirstEnergy to answer questions about the sustainability and environmental impacts of its project, the PUCO can set a strong precedent ensuring that all future renewable energy projects are truly clean energy projects.

"This decision could set a precedent for decades to come. It's in the regulator's hands," said Reisinger.

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio's leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio's families and communities. For more information, visit [www.theOEC.org](http://www.theOEC.org).