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## Proposed Biomass Energy Facility Likely to Improve Air Quality, Reduce Risk of Wildfire, Health Impact Assessment Finds

HIA also investigated potential changes to noise, water quality, local economy and access to affordable energy

Placer County— The proposed Cabin Creek Biomass Energy Facility will likely improve community health through improvements in air quality and reductions in risks from wildfires, an independent health impact assessment (HIA) found. The Sequoia Foundation, a public health research nonprofit, conducted the HIA, which looked at air quality, wildfires, traffic, water quality, noise, greenhouse gas emissions, and economic and energy security. The purpose of the study was to take an independent and objective look at both the positive and negative aspects of a biomass facility.

Placer County is proposing a biomass energy facility in an effort to reduce wildfire risk. Wildfire as a threat to people is ranked as 'very high' in the Lake Tahoe region. The biomass facility would turn wood biomass into energy. It would have gasification technologies, which use extremely high temperatures to produce a fuel similar to natural gas. The wood to supply the facility would be solely "woody biomass" derived from maintenance and restoration activities from nearby forestland within a 30-mile radius and wood residuals from forest fuels reduction and defensible space activities that would otherwise be burned in open piles. The Placer County Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) states that there is enough woody biomass within a 30-mile radius to power facility for 40 years, the projected lifespan of the facility. The objectives for this facility, as stated in the EIR, are to improve regional air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions due to open pile burning of biomass waste and support of healthy forest management practices designed to reduce catastrophic wildfire risks.

"This health impact assessment by the Sequoia Foundation is to be applauded for its independent, third-party analysis," said Placer County Fifth District Supervisor and Chairwoman of the Board, Jennifer Montgomery, whose district includes the site of the proposed facility. "The issues reviewed in the assessment were submitted by community residents who live in the surrounding fire-prone areas. The report's findings will not only inform those local communities, but other communities across the country that are considering similar alternative energy technologies."

The Community Collaborative of Tahoe Truckee facilitated three community meetings around the proposed facility. Local residents shared their concerns about the biomass facility, and the HIA team included those issues in their assessment. "The HIA process allowed us to learn about local community concerns, so we could address them in a systematic way. Issues such as economic and energy security, water quality, and traffic would likely have not been assessed in this HIA if community members had not expressed these as concerns at community meetings," said **HIA Program Manager Bindi Gandhi of Sequoia Foundation**.

The key recommendations Sequoia Foundation included in the HIA are:

- 1) The County should develop a communications plan between residents and facility operators to address air quality and noise concerns.
- 2) The Placer County Air Pollution Control District should increase the number of surprise on-site inspections.
- 3) The County should prioritize the hiring of local contractors for both facility construction and operation.

The Placer County Planning Commission will be considering the proposed Cabin Creek Biomass Energy Facility minor use permit on Dec. 20, 2012 at Planning Commission Chambers, 3091 County Center Dr, Auburn, CA 95603.

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Sequoia Foundation was formed in 1983 to sponsor and conduct primary research in the area of environmental public health. As reflected in its mission statement, the foundation is organized to identify important issues of public health for which focused research and scholarship are most likely to yield meaningful results of direct applicability to policy solutions.