

## Waking the Sleeping Giant

Written by Administrator

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I recently had the privilege of speaking at a three-day meeting of the Electric Power Research Institute in Austin, Texas. The topic was biomass (what else?).

For those readers not familiar with EPRI, it's the nation's leading collection of scientists, engineers, academicians and industry representatives who spend lots of time thinking about the generation, delivery and use of electricity. Unlike many of us in the "merchant" world of independent power production, EPRI is 90 percent comprised of utilities—think Duke Energy Corp., Southern Co., American Electric Power Co. Inc. and Tennessee Valley Authority. In other words, it's a sector of the economy with lots to say about the future of energy, and the political (and economic) clout to get it done.

Dave O'Connor, EPRI's go-to guy on biomass, organized the conference and asked me to speak. EPRI doesn't lobby, but figured I would provide an unvarnished view of how politics is shaping the biomass sector. As I sat waiting my turn at the podium, I heard that biomass represents one of the best opportunities for renewable base-load generation, particularly in the Southeast; that members were looking at cofiring, torrefaction, retirement of smaller coal plants; and that biomass is a way to complement local economies and provide jobs while also providing a disposal option for material that would otherwise generate methane in landfills. All good, except that in their perspective, regulatory uncertainty is causing a "chilling" effect on investment in the sector. Boiler Maximum Achievable Control Technology and carbon are their biggest concerns.

The old adage—"be at the table or run the risk of being on the menu"—couldn't be more appropriate as biomass is considered by federal and state policymakers. Like all of us on the merchant side of power generation, utilities seem to appreciate the opportunity of biomass. What we need now is their help. Before the U.S. EPA are two issues that directly affect our industry—revised boiler and Non-Hazardous Secondary Materials rules, and how the Tailoring Rule will regulate biogenic emissions. Many regulated utilities have yet to speak out on these important issues.

For too long, the sector has been balkanized into landowners, utilities, merchant developers and owners, paper mills, and the utility sector. To be sure, we serve different constituencies with sometimes conflicting views on national energy or tax policy. Despite these differences, we share the fundamental belief that biomass energy is critically important to our economy, our

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environment, and the health of our forests and farms. For that reason, we are coming together like never before. It's now time for all of the nation's utilities to join our effort in providing scientific support on the carbon benefits of biopower and to work with EPA on achieving sensible, science-based MACT and solid waste regulations.

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