

Deferral for CO₂ Emissions from Bioenergy and Other Biogenic Sources Under the Prevention of Significant Deterioration and Title V Programs

NACWA Talking Points for Public Hearing April 5, 2011

- NACWA is the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, representing nearly 300 public wastewater utilities throughout the nation. Our members range in size from the smallest utilities, with a service population of under 2000, to the largest, with 7.5 million people served. Our members treat billions of gallons of wastewater each day.
- NACWA appreciates the three-year deferral of biogenic emissions from Clean Air Act permitting programs, specifically for combustion of biogas and biosolids from wastewater treatment. NACWA encourages EPA to finalize the proposed deferral and eventually to make the exemption permanent.
- All major regulatory and policy programs around the world, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and California's cap and trade program. These programs exclude biogenic emissions because they are deemed part of the natural carbon dioxide cycle and do not contribute to climate change.
- EPA's own Mandatory Greenhouse Gas Reporting Rule segregates the reporting of biogenic and anthropogenic emissions, and the annual EPA Greenhouse Gas Inventory omits biogenic emissions.
- NACWA would like EPA to be consistent in how biogenic greenhouse gas emissions are treated in all of its greenhouse gas and Clean Air Act programs.
- NACWA also asks EPA to recognize that biogenic emissions from wastewater treatment utilities result from a different process than emissions from harvested biomass and some other biological sources.
- Wastewater utilities treat human waste to protect the environment and public health, and are required to meet the standards of the Clean Water Act. Human waste is a product that is not going to go away, and will produce greenhouse gases as it breaks down whether or not it is treated by a utility. Utilities exist to manage the waste in an environmentally sound manner that protects human health.
- Through the wastewater treatment process, biogas is produced. This biogas consists mostly of methane, which is converted to carbon dioxide when combusted. This carbon dioxide should be considered carbon neutral, since it comes from a biodegradable organic material that absorbed the carbon dioxide from the atmosphere relatively recently.
- More and more utilities are using biogas to generate and recover heat and to generate electricity. This reduces – and sometimes eliminates – their reliance on fossil fuels and power derived from fossil fuels. Overall greenhouse gas emissions are therefore lowered through the use of biogas.

- Biosolids are another product that results from the wastewater treatment process. Some utilities are using energy recovery methods for biosolids as well, taking advantage of the fact that biosolids contain 10 times the energy needed to treat them.
- Wastewater utilities should be encouraged to implement and further develop their heat and energy recovery programs for biogas and biosolids, and emissions from these activities should not be counted in determining thresholds and requirements under Clean Air Act permitting programs.
- NACWA also asks that in the final rule, EPA exclude biogenic emissions that result from wastewater treatment processes in addition to emissions from the combustion of biosolids and biogas. In the proposed rule, combustion of biosolids and biogas are specifically listed as exclusions, but the wastewater treatment process is not.
- Again, wastewater treatment is a vital function that cannot be stopped, and emissions controls for wastewater treatment processes are difficult to install and prohibitively expensive. Utilities should therefore not be penalized for biogenic emissions resulting from the treatment process.
- EPA may need to consider non-optional biogenic emissions, such as those resulting from the wastewater treatment process and combustion of biogas and biomass, differently than other sources of biogenic emissions from energy production.
- We will provide more details in our written comments, and thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.