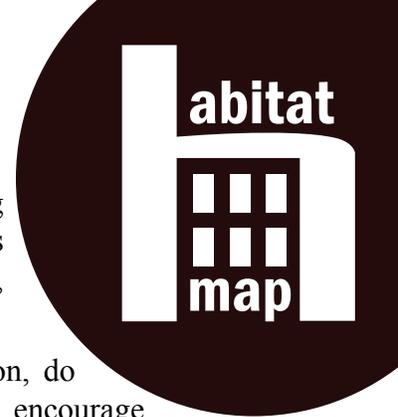


Heating New York With Biodiesel, A Bad Idea.



The New York City Council is currently considering legislation that would require heating oil include biodiesel – a fuel primarily derived from vegetable oils. Bioheat proponents claim that substituting biodiesel for petroleum can reduce oil imports, improve air quality, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In reality, a biodiesel mandate will increase heating oil costs by 15-30 cents a gallon, do little to improve air quality beyond what can be achieved with ultra low sulfur diesel, encourage environmentally destructive farming practices, have no impact on foreign oil consumption, drive up food prices, devour millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies, and increase greenhouse gas emissions (see the latest report from *Science*, “Land Clearing and the Biofuel Carbon Debt”¹ and *The New York Times* coverage, “Biofuels Deemed a Greenhouse Threat”²).

Rather than require biodiesel, **City Council should authorize an ultra low sulfur diesel (ULSD) heating oil mandate.** ULSD will improve air quality in the city dramatically and reduce heating oil consumption without raising the cost of home heating or requiring government subsidies.

One million households and thousands of businesses in New York City consume approximately 500 million gallons of high sulfur heating oil annually. Because the sulfur content of fuels is directly related to emissions of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), heating oil ranks as the largest source of PM_{2.5} in the city.³ Able to penetrate into the deepest portions of the lungs, PM_{2.5} contributes to premature death from heart and lung disease, cardiac arrhythmias, heart attacks, asthma attacks, and bronchitis.⁴

By mandating ULSD we can remove sulfur from our heating oil thereby reducing PM_{2.5} emissions by more than two-thirds.⁵ In addition, ULSD improves furnace efficiency, decreasing fuel consumption and reducing maintenance.⁶ Onroad vehicles are already required to fill up with ULSD; why should our homes be an exception?

Biodiesel is a renewable fuel made from non-renewable resources

Biodiesel can be refined from a wide variety of vegetable oils and animal fats, but in the US, subsidies and tariffs make soybean oil the dominant feedstock. Soybeans may be a renewable resource but America’s industrial-scale farms devour and destroy enormous quantities of non-renewable and irreplaceable resources.

Powering the machines that plow, plant, harvest, cast fertilizers, spray pesticides, pump irrigation water, etc. is energy intensive. The fossil fuels consumed by on-farm operations release significant quantities of greenhouse gases and toxic air emissions.

Adding to soybean agriculture’s formidable fossil fuel tally, large amounts of natural gas are needed to produce the nitrogen based fertilizers that promote their growth. These fertilizers break down in fields releasing nitrous oxides, a global warming agent hundreds of times more potent than CO₂. When these fertilizers leach from farm fields they poison drinking water and ravage marine ecosystems. Run-off from Midwestern farm fields ends up in the Gulf of Mexico where it contributes to a New Jersey-size “dead zone” almost entirely absent of marine life.⁷

A toxic rainbow of pesticides are sprayed on soybeans in an effort to combat weeds and insects. Making matters worse, 91 percent of the US soybean acreage planted in 2007 was genetically engineered to tolerate herbicides,⁸ a development that has boosted glyphosate applications several fold.⁹ Glyphosate, a powerful weed killer, is the third most common cause of pesticide illness in farm workers; exposure has been linked to rare cancers, miscarriages, and premature births.¹⁰

Biodiesel will increase greenhouse gas emissions & raise food prices

The US is on track to produce 3.3 billion gallons of biodiesel in 2009.¹¹ A quantity of fuel that would consume nearly every acre of US soybeans, yet meet only 6 percent of our diesel demand.¹² That 6 percent is not going to secure our energy independence but it will increase greenhouse gas emissions and raise food prices.

Clearing new land for energy crops releases up to 420 times more CO₂ than the fossil fuels they displace.¹³ Low-income countries offer cheap land and labor and tropical crops such as palm can yield eight times more oil per acre than soybeans. If we continue to mandate the consumption of biodiesel we will exhaust domestic soybean acreages and the economics of vegetable oil will shift production to the tropics. Grasslands, wetlands, and forests will be cleared to make way for palm plantations destroying wildlife habitat and releasing millions of tons of greenhouse gases.¹⁴

Switching land from food to fuel raises food prices. In late 2006, the US demand for corn based fuels contributed to a dramatic spike in the price of corn, pushing up the cost of corn-intensive foods such as dairy, eggs, and meat.¹⁵ And in Europe, the enormous demand for biodiesel stimulated by the 2003 Biofuels Directive has pushed up the cost of palm oil in Southeast Asia threatening the food security of millions living on less than a dollar a day.¹⁶

And we're paying for all this?

Hundreds of government programs have been created to support virtually every stage of production and consumption relating to biodiesel. Everyone from soybean farmers to biodiesel distributors get handouts compliments of the taxpayer. Every year grants, tax breaks, cheap credit, and regulatory mandates funnel hundreds of millions of dollars into promoting biodiesel, doling out around \$2.00 for every gallon consumed.¹⁹

What we can do

Contact your [City Council member](#) and [Mayor Bloomberg](#) today in support of a ULSD heating oil mandate that does not include biodiesel. Let them know that by simply switching to ULSD heating oil we can dramatically improve the quality of the air we breathe daily while reducing oil consumption, and we can do it without raising the cost of home heating or depending on unsustainable and environmentally destructive biodiesel!

Notes

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