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## Hidden costs of dirty energy are high

America's economic "success" has been powered by fossil-fuels that cause a range of harms that were ignored or poorly comprehended. By leaving damages to public health and the environment out of the price, these fuels were deceptively cheap and unfairly profitable.

A recent article in Atlantic Monthly estimates that problems caused by using coal cost Americans some trillion dollars a year. Yet these consequences were not – and still are not – included in the price of energy generated by coal-fired power-plants.

One penalty from burning coal that raises justified alarm in South Georgia is the toxic, cancer-causing residue of coal ash – being buried at landfills that are dangerously close to wetlands, rivers, and groundwater.

Similar conclusions have been reached in analysis of petroleum impacts. Studying neglected costs in extracting and burning oil, energy experts say that the price of oil would be more than double market rates if hazards to public health and environmental quality were included.

Now we're being misled by false claims that burning wood pellets is "carbon neutral" and thus environmentally benign. EPA's Scott Pruitt declared this well-lobbied position in a recent visit to timber-intensive Georgia. While the asserted carbon neutrality has an element of truth with obvious advantage to Georgia's \$40 billion timber industry, it deceptively cherry-picks science

to reach a dangerously deceptive conclusion.

Wood-pellet assessment has two main factors: carbon emitted in combustion; and removal of much-needed carbon-storing capacity when timberland is clear cut. It's well established that burning wood emits as much carbon as coal. And, contrary to Pruitt's claims, wood consumed in producing pellets is not primarily deadwood, but harvested healthy timber.

Due to the urgency of reducing greenhouse gases to curb accelerating climate-change, using fuels that release enormous volumes of atmospheric carbon must be curtailed. Moreover, timberland carbon-storage is vital to reducing harms of ongoing carbon emissions. Cutting carbon release as much as possible while maximizing carbon storage is vital. Burning wood defeats both these imperatives.

Accurate evaluation of fuels to account for all significant consequences is essential to making rational decisions in the public interest.

If these factors were reflected in fuel costs, converting to "clean energy" technologies that avoid such destructive impacts – foremost solar – would have greater market incentives. With responsible pricing, Americans would be given better energy choices that favor our nation's future.

Georgians should insist that clean energy is given priority in improving energy policies.

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