

Drax Briefing



Industrial scale woody biomass burning is just as bad for the planet as fossil fuels. In February, the Government made the decision to extend subsidies for Drax from 2027-2031. Drax has also submitted a bid to build an AI data centre, powered by burning trees for electricity. Following a whistleblower employment tribunal, Drax is now under investigation by the [Financial Conduct Authority](#) over their sourcing and annual reports. Both new subsidies and a successful bid will result in more forests felled, communities polluted and added strain on bill payers.

Burning wood for electricity is not 'low carbon'

- Drax Power Station in Yorkshire is the [UK's single largest carbon emitter](#) and the biggest tree burner in the entire world. In 2024 alone Drax emitted over 13 million tonnes of CO₂ - approximately 3% of UK total emissions - and burned 7.3 million tonnes of wood, much of it from the clear-felling of biodiverse forests in the Southern USA, Canada and Europe, with catastrophic impacts on forests, wildlife, communities and the climate.
- Burning wood for electricity releases significant CO₂ that isn't offset for decades until trees eventually regrow, if ever. [Hundreds of scientists](#) warned: 'this burning of wood will increase warming for decades to centuries... even when the wood replaces coal, oil or natural gas.'
- The new subsidy supply chain emission threshold is more than Drax's current supply chain emissions; overriding a [2019 decision](#) for a much stricter limit on the supply chain emissions. Drax would not have been able to meet the 2019 limit.

Subsidising Drax is the opposite of 'value for money'

- Last year, Drax received [£869 million in subsidies](#) from UK energy bill payers whilst making almost £1.1 billion in profits.
- In the new arrangement, Drax would burn around half as much wood as in 2023, but at a higher 'strike price'.
- In contrast to the savings which bill payers would receive if wood-burning subsidies end as planned in 2027, they could now pay up to £628 million or more per year for Drax. This also means less money available in the green energy budget for genuine climate solutions like home insulation or wind and solar power.
- There is no time limit in the legislation for these new subsidies, leaving the door open for subsidies far past 2031. The [Public Accounts Committee inquiry](#) into woody biomass highlighted severe concerns over value for money.

Drax's tree burning is not sustainable

- The government says it will review biomass sustainability standards but is handing Drax new subsidies prior to this review. As remarked by the Public Accounts Committee, the woody biomass industry is currently 'marking its own homework' when it comes to sustainability, and it is unclear that there will be any tangible changes to this arrangement.
- Drax has been repeatedly exposed for sourcing from [primary and old-growth forests in Canada](#); mature, biodiverse hardwood forests within a [Global Biodiversity Zone](#) in the Southern US and contributing to forest degradation around the world.

- The proposed changes to sustainability requirements for Drax's new contract are an admission that the current requirements are inadequate. They do nothing to address the real climate impacts of tree burning nor the significant health problems suffered by people who live close to pellet production plants in the US supplying Drax.

BECCS is a false solution

- BECCS is not inherently carbon-neutral or carbon-negative and instead relies upon faulty carbon accounting logic.
- There are no known examples of functioning or scalable BECCS projects involving woody biomass combustion.
- Neither Drax nor anyone else has the technical know-how to capture carbon from woody biomass burning at scale, nor does the infrastructure for transporting and storing CO2 exist in the UK.
- Ember estimates BECCS at Drax would cost the public £43bn over its lifespan.
- Drax's carbon capture partner C-Capture recently made nearly all their staff redundant, while Drax paused BECCS investment until subsidies are agreed.

Drax harms communities

- Drax has violated environmental regulations 11,378 times from 2014-2024 at its pellet production facilities in the USA, and pellet mills Drax now owns in Canada have breached environmental laws 189 times since Drax started sourcing from them in 2012.
- In the U.S., where most of Drax's wood pellets are sourced, communities suffer from air pollution caused by pellet mills, emitting harmful PM2.5, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds linked to cancer, respiratory and pulmonary issues.
- Pellet mills are 50% more likely to be located in low-income, non-white "environmental justice" areas. Drax has faced multiple fines and has been repeatedly accused of driving environmental racism after settling numerous air pollution violations.

Just Transition

- Drax claims BECCS will create 10,000 jobs, but this figure only applies to peak construction. Once operational, it would require just 375 staff while costing the public £43.3bn.
- Drax's proposed data centre would not create the green jobs Yorkshire needs. AI data centres are typically highly automated, requiring relatively few long-term staff (primarily in IT, facilities and security).
- Research shows that there are over 73,000 direct green jobs needed to decarbonise Yorkshire over the next 10 years. Communities don't need to remain tied to polluting industries - future employment lies in renewables, grid upgrades, energy storage, retrofitting, regenerative farming, and recycling. These sectors offer lasting, well-paid work and benefit the local economy.

How MPs can take action

There should be no new money for Drax Power Station. Please take action by:

- Writing to Ed Miliband opposing subsidies for Drax and BECCS
- Writing to Liz Kendall calling on her to reject Drax's AI Data Centre proposal
- Sign the #StopBurningTrees MP pledge