

Drax is Britain's biggest power station—and one of its dirtiest secrets. For years, it has sold the story that burning wood pellets imported from the US is "renewable." Ministers repeat the line. Billions in subsidies follow. But the truth is starker: Drax is torching forests, fuelling pollution, and cooking the climate while cashing in on public money.

In May 2025, Corporate Watch attended the Drax AGM. After being forced to wait outside and go through intense security checks for so long that we missed most of the meeting, the AGM was disrupted by campaigners, and the board abandoned the meeting. In many ways, this highlighted Drax's corporate humiliation, revealing just how fragile the company's social licence has become. However, ending the meeting so abruptly was also acutely convenient for the board because it allowed them to evade some of the most pertinent questions from campaigners Dr Krystal Martin and Kathy Eglan, who had travelled from Gloster, Mississippi – a small town that has been decimated by Drax's Amite BioEnergy plant, fined millions for breaking air-pollution rules.

Investigations have shown Drax pellets come from clear-cut forests in the US South and Canada, not just sawmill scraps. What's sold as waste wood is often whole trees, and the way this wood is processed for pellets decimates both climate and communities. The people of Gloster know all about this. Residents complain of dust, asthma, and hazardous fumes. When Drax tried to reclassify the plant to pump out even more toxins, the community fought back—and won.

We spoke with Kathy and Krystal, here they share the truth about Drax.

My name is Catherine Eglin, and I am from Gulfport, Mississippi. It's an extremely climate-vulnerable community. I'm a survivor of Hurricane Katrina. I'm a lifelong civil and human rights activist, but it was after Hurricane Katrina, where I lost two of my dearest friends to drowning, that I turned my human and civil rights focus to environmental and climate justice. I set out on this campaign against coal. I knew that we needed to transition our energy use from fossil fuel, and during this campaign, I found out that there was actually a coal plant less than five miles from my home, and we set out on this mission to close this coal plant.

Everybody told us we didn't know what we were doing, we should stick with civil rights, something we were familiar with, because we didn't know enough about environmental rights.

They told us we were going up against a powerful industry, and we would never win, but against all odds, in August of 2015, the same year that the Paris Climate Agreement was negotiated, the plant stopped burning coal.

I live in the ratepayer district of a carbon capture sequestration plant; I might say a failed carbon capture sequestration plant. So, I'm very familiar when it comes to false climate

schemes disguised as ‘quote, unquote solutions’ about six or seven years ago, it was brought to my attention by a partner organisation in the US, DogWood Alliance we found out about these wood pellets.

I didn't really know anything about wood pellets. I had to do quite a bit of research to find out about wood pellets. I was really horrified by what I read. I was horrified about all of the illegal admissions happening in the southeast, but what worried me most was what was happening in my own state. And that was when I read what was happening in Gloster, Mississippi, at that particular time, we just didn't know enough. We had written to our regulatory agency to find out what information can we get? What is happening in Gloster, with these emissions? We've been told that you've been presented evidence that the residents of Gloster have been exposed to very high levels of toxins.

So, we wrote to the regulatory agency, and we asked them about these illegal emissions. Now, all of this was happening during a time when we were trying to prevent another wood pellets corporation from locating in Lucedale, Mississippi. Enviva, who is the world's second largest wood pellets manufacturer, was able to locate what was at that time the world's largest wood pellet plant, but so we turned our focus to Gloster.

We found out right at the onset of COVID, when everyone was on shutdown, that our regulatory agency, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, had issued a fine to Drax, and then they hid it from us, but they gave us legal responses, such as, “we're in talks with Drax about their emissions”. And so, they hid the fine from us.

But we figured, look, if you hid it from us, you have undoubtedly hidden it from the residents who were exposed to these high levels of toxins. So, we immediately started trying to figure out how can we let these residents know. My concern at the onset of COVID wasn't so much about COVID, but it was about people in Gloster who have been exposed to these high levels of toxin, and how can we get word to them about these exposures? Because we found out that having environmental-related health diseases or co-morbidity factors would actually complicate COVID.

One of our colleagues knew a reporter at a very small-town newspaper. It was very difficult, because we were competing with information going out about COVID. But this reporter did report on what had happened, and we issued this joint press release, and from that time on, our goal was to try and educate everyone in Gloster, let them know that they had been exposed to these high levels of carcinogens. We knew that the level of toxins that had been emitted for eight years that people had to be having adverse health impacts. So we set out on a mission, a campaign to educate everyone. But it seems as if reading that article, people were able to make that connection that all these illnesses that they were having must have been coming from that plant. And I'll let Krystal go from here.

I'm Krystal Martin, and I'm from the Gloster community. About five to six years ago, as Kathy mentioned, we learned about the air pollution fine through the local newspaper. They shared an article that said the Drax industry, that was located in Gloster, had been fined \$2.5 million. So we started to do some research, trying to find out where did this \$2.5 million go, and why was this industry fined \$2.5 million.

It started between a conversation that I had with my mom. She had been in and out of the hospital multiple times for breathing-related issues, and the article came out right after she had been discharged from one of her stays in the hospital. And she said, "could this be the reason why I'm sick?"

A lot of people in the community at that time had been having breathing-related issues. People have asthma. We learned that adults in the community are now being diagnosed with asthma. We learned that a lot of people were on inhalers and nebulisers, and then from one conversation to the next conversation, we learned about people who were on oxygen, and from that conversation, we learned about people who also had been diagnosed with lung cancer, and we learned people had died from lung cancer and different breathing issues.

So it was just connecting the dots and meeting with organisations and people like Kathy to learn more about this biomass industry, to learn more about Drax. And just really for us, it was too many people in our community are sharing similar stories about health issues, like there are too many people with similar issues. And then as you learn more about the toxins that's in the air, and you hear these VOCs, and you hear about particulate matter, and you see all of this fugitive dust in our community, and you learn that they have different breathing related issues, or upper respiratory issues that they causes cause asthma and skin irritations, and it's like, wait a minute, this is what our community members are complaining about.

So, we just started to organise. We began educating ourselves, learning more about the issue, and really began to see that we need to start advocating for ourselves. We need to start advocating for the people in our community, and we need to begin educating our community on these issues so we can empower ourselves, so we can start using our voices to fight for justice.

Fast forward, we started working with Dogwood Alliance. We got connected to the EPA environmental justice team. We started learning more about the issue and really just making sure we had all the tools and resources that we needed so we can fight back. And that's where we are today.

There was one very poignant investigative report that was done by the [Environmental Integrity Project](#), an organisation that was made up of a group of former EPA enforcement officials. They did a fantastic job of investigating, and they published this

[report called](#) 'Dirty Deception: how the wood biomass industry skirts provisions of the US Clean Air Act'.

We found out that they lied on their permit application in Gloster, just as they were attempting to do in Lucedale, claiming that they would be emitting below 250 tons per limit of VOCs, volatile organic compounds. However, testing by EIP showed Drax was actually emitting [more than 900](#) tons of VOC, which is almost four times the legal limit in the US.

But our state is so poor. Most industries are allowed to self-monitor, self-report; they basically took Drax's word that they would be emitting below the 250 tons per limit. Because if they had told the truth, they would have been required to have more environmental protection, more oversight protection in place for the residents.

It wouldn't have cost but a few million dollars to put in better protection. But because they care so little about human life and welfare, they did not invest. They would rather lie and take a chance on getting caught.

And so, when this evidence was presented, they presented it our state regulatory agency presented the evidence from their testing to Drax. Drax said, 'Oh, no, that is not correct. We will do our testing, and we'll present it to you and prove to you that we're not emitting beyond our limits'.

So, they did some testing, some falsified testing. They presented falsified evidence; for eight years, they had been submitting falsified reports of their emissions. To me, all of this should be criminal.

People have gone to jail. I listen to some of the activists here who've been tossed in jail and had to be in court, that have done far less than what Drax has done: eight years of illegal pollution, eight years of falsifying reports, and the testing was so flawed. Drax lied until they were backed in a corner, and they didn't have any other choice, because the evidence was there that they were polluting well beyond their legal limits.

And that's when we really started the campaign of trying to educate, because when anyone comes to you and says, 'look, we've got this climate solution, it is great. It's clean. It's very clean'. And, you know, people don't feel that an industry would be so corrupt that they would participate in so much corruption. A lot of times, people will say, "Why? Why do they allow this? Why do they allow this in your country?" Because we're desperate everywhere for clean energy. We know we need to transition our energy use.

I have an organisation that's acronym is [EECHO](#), (Education, Economics, Environmental, Climate and Health Organisation) where we deal with mostly local or regional issues, and then also maybe issues on the state, but also I am the chair of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] environmental

and climate justice committee, so we do a lot of national and international work. And I realised that this was a local to global concern.

I do believe it was well-intentioned, that the UK wanted to transition its energy use in an attempt to get to the 1.5°C mandate of the [Paris Climate Agreement](#). I have to believe that, because to believe otherwise would mean this:

I always call Drax, corporate assassins or poverty pimps. They were just pure evil if they went into this type of deception, knowing that they were going to be harming people and planet, then that is worse than criminal.

But knowing the amount of subsidies they were getting if you do the math on [the fine](#), they were fined about one days of profit (or one day of subsidies) that they were getting from the UK and also from the US.

They were going to give all of these cities and states an economic boost while, you know, benefiting the climate. So it all sounded good, it was just that it was false. And so they paid the fine, and then they had to pay \$80,000 a month until they put in the better control technology.

I have been trying my best to create awareness within the greater global community about wood biomass. Every year, I'd go to these UN meetings, and you'd hear the talk about NDCs - nationally determined contributions - and how countries are having to report on their national determined contributions. And I'm looking at the UK's report, and it's saying they transitioned and they [lowered](#) their emissions. And that is not true. The emissions are actually not being lowered. They're just not being counted.

And so, because of the flaws in the Paris Climate Agreement that [prohibit](#) double counting of emissions, they're not being accurately accounted in the US, where the trees are being harvested and manufactured and shipped, and they're not being properly accounted when they're being burned in the UK. So, this gives this false sense that we're meeting the 1.5 °C goals of the Paris climate agreement when we're not, we're just not counting them.

We shouldn't be surprised when every year the planet is getting warmer; we should be bringing the temperatures down, but instead, we're getting warmer. But for them to come into these communities now, I know full well that they know better.

I know that they are blatant liars. When I came to my first Drax AGM, the CEO we had tried to set up a meeting with him for two weeks before we came. There was no time. and I asked, "Well, okay, what about the next week? Or the next week, or anytime? No, no time." And so, when we got up in front of the stockholders, then [Will Gardner](#) said, "Oh, I'll talk to you immediately after the meeting". So, then he had time, and then he came out and he said:

“Well, we thought we were emitting within our limits, and when we discovered we weren't, we immediately self-reported”. And he could tell by the look on my face, and he said, “well, at least, at least that's what we were told”.

And nothing could be further from the truth. Not only did you not self-report, first of all, there's no way for you to be emitting almost four times your limits and not know it. Next, not only did they not self-report, they denied [the report](#) that showed where they were emitting well above their limits, and then they tried to justify their lie with false reporting.

Gloster is a small rural community located in southwest Mississippi. The current population is under 900. 80% of that population is Black, and about 40% or so live in poverty.

We have no school system. We have no local school, and we have no local hospital. We do have a nurse practitioner that comes into the community, but we do not have a local medical centre to deal with all of the different types of illnesses that we are experiencing.

So, a lot of people have to commute anywhere between one to two hours just to see a health care specialist for the particular illness that they are dealing with. Now, prior to Drax coming into the community, we had [Georgia Pacific](#), and it's my understanding that they stopped operating in 2008, and then they officially closed by 2010. When Georgia Pacific was in the community, a lot of our local residents, not only did they work in Georgia Pacific but many of them held leadership positions, and they earned a really decent wage. They were able to afford to purchase their own homes and cars, and, you know, different things that you need for your livelihood. Unlike what we're seeing with Drax.

Drax is now in Gloster. They've been there for 10 years. I don't see where people from our small community being employed in that industry and making a decent living wage. I have spoken to people that used to work there. I don't see where Drax is investing in our local economy. I don't see where they are investing in our local workforce development.

When I think about Georgia Pacific, Georgia Pacific invested in our community at that time. We had a local school. We had an elementary school and a high school. We saw investment coming into our community. As a matter of fact, majority of the supervisors happened to be Black people at Georgia Pacific. And I'm happy to say that my auntie received a scholarship to attend college. I don't know that we can say that about Drax.

Drax like to boast about what they are doing in our community. We have a little small pavilion that sits in them on Main Street, Gloster. They painted the pavilion blue. They did buy paint, I don't see anything else that they did to like, modernise the pavilion, right? They paid for paint so they could spray paint our flowerpots. So Drax is leaving their mark. They bought blue paint in the spray can, and they allowed the residents to

spray paint those flowerpots, and then they put some not even real flowers inside the flowerpots. And they call that their beautification project, right?

We've been having Christmas parade since I was a little girl, and you'll see where Drax will purchase a float, and they do what Kathy is saying, they pimp poverty. They reach out to the community and say, "Hey, bring all the Black people and put them on the back of this truck that we have in the parade". That's their way of showing they're good neighbours in a community that's already 80% black. Because when you look on that, that float that they put in the parade, everybody up there is Black, and they probably don't even know anything about Drax, but they'll just reach out to different people, one of our elderly cousins, they'll call him and say, "Hey, will you ride in the parade? We want to make you the King". So, they made him the king of the Mardi Gras parade, that's their investment in our community, which is a big insult, is a big freaking insult to those of us that understand what's happening.

We understand that the industry is pimping us.

You know, they're pimping our poverty, and then they are using it as a PR stunt right to put on their social media page and on their website and say, 'Hey, we're good neighbours to the people in Gloucester', when all they have done is purchase paint, they have paid for the float to be in the parade.

We're a small community, so if the people in our community have a party, then Drax will have a big table and take a picture and put it all over, you know, social media and everywhere, and say, 'This is what we do to the community,' when we have a small library that's falling apart. The tables in the library are being held up by duct tape. If you're a good neighbour, the least you could do is say, 'we know this community does not have a school. We recognise this community don't even have an after-school programme. We recognise that the community could benefit from maybe a state-of-the-art library'.

Every day, it's so embarrassing to see people come and park their cars in front of the library at 5pm, 6pm, 7pm because they want to use WiFi. Why can't they go inside the library and check out a WiFi card and you can take it home with you. Why can't people from the community go inside the library and check out a laptop? The least they could do is invest in a state-of-the-art library for the community, right? That's the least they could do.

But again, when you are pimping poverty, people don't understand, because they have a poverty mindset. So, they don't understand there is a billion-dollar company housed in your community that won't even take care of the needs of the community.

I've seen on their social media page where they boast about investing in Mississippi and making sure students have access to STEM projects. Well, why don't they invest in them, same little Black children that they parade around on their floats? Why don't they

invest in making sure that they have a bus that comes into the community to pick up the children, because, you know, we don't have a STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] project, transport them so they can participate in weekly STEM projects on the Gulf Coast, or weekly STEM projects in Jackson, Mississippi. And if we don't have a local workforce, if we don't have the local training or the skills. They need to work inside that plant. Not just work inside that plant, but work as supervisors inside that plant. Work in leadership roles, in management roles. If we don't have that with our local workforce, then invest in it. That's the least Drax can do.

Oh, I insulted, all I could do was drop my head when that lady stood there and said “we are good neighbours, and we have had meaningful dialogue with the community”, and I'm thinking well, I'm part of the community. I'm the one that led the community all the way to Jackson, Mississippi in March and then again in April. We went to have advocacy day at the State Capitol. I took another bus load to go before the permit board, so we're the ones opposing this madness, this foolishness that Drax is doing. Why didn't they have meaningful dialogue with us?

As opposed to having dialogue with the people that they have given the crumbs to again. See people have a poverty mindset. I know this because this is my community. These are my family members, and if you've never been exposed to anything, right, you don't understand how people can dangle a carrot in front of you and you say, ‘oh that's gold that's gold. Drax got gold’ and it's like “sweetheart, that's fool's gold right, cause only a fool would run after these carrots that Drax is dangling in front of us”, but they don't know about that includes our mayor. He said, ‘you see this gold’, and he say ‘man and Drax is good to us’.

Drax is not good to us. Drax does not care that people in our community are on oxygen If they were such good neighbours, why don't they come and say you know what, Gloster is a community that has a transportation problem. We do. We have a transportation problem so why aren't they investing in making sure that they provide transportation so that our elderly people can get to the doctor or they could get to the pharmacy, so they can purchase their medicines or the things that they need, so that they can survive.

I'm I do a lot of recordings at night. I like to ride by Drax and take videos, and I turn on my phone so it can record the noise. The noise is a thumping all night long. You just hear them operating all night long. We record video sometimes at midnight, you can't sleep at night. So, I tell people that's mentally draining for people.

People lose their sleep. Some nights my mom don't even get to sleep until 4 o'clock in the morning because you got to hear that all night. And then you have to smell the tar, to me it smells like pine or something all night long. And some nights we all just walk out,

and you'll see different people in the community sending videos saying, 'what is all of that?'. And those are the plumes of smoke that you can see in the air late at night.

If they were monitored by the minute in the hour, right, you could see the fluctuation of what's happening. But I think they're only taking daily readings. And because they are taking daily readings, it's averaging out to be like a normal reading. It's at night when they're increasing their pollution.

So, I have pictures and videos of we can see the plume of smoke coming from those smokestacks. You can see it in the air. We have the pictures and the videos where you can begin to see the smoke as it settles right into your front door, and people in the community are calling and saying, 'come and look at this. What is this?'

So, if this um smoke is coming into your community, is getting in your front door, and this is happening on a daily basis, imagine how much of that stuff has been inhaled and ingested. Everybody in the community is complaining about the dust and the dust that settles on their front door, and it's all over the windows of their homes, and this same dust that's all over your car. But I also remind my community to think about the same dust that you are complaining about, you have to dust inside your home, this same dust also gets inside your body. It goes through your nostrils, and it enters into your bloodstream. And when we think about the number of people that's dealing with breathing-related issues, then that could potentially be the reason because that same dust, right, is in your nostrils.

I think there are more people affected by health issues than we really know, right? Because again, a lot of people don't like to talk about it. They don't like to speak up and speak out about it. But those people who have reported to us their issues, we know that there are people who have lung cancer that have died away from lung cancer. We do know that people have lung disease. A lot of people have COPD [Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease]. People have what they call black lung. I've heard some people talk about oesophageal issues, and then we have high rates of asthma.

We have a lot of people on kidney dialysis. Yeah, and then the number of people who are on oxygen, they go from being placed on oxygen till now they have to rely on it 24 hours a day. And these are people like in their 40s and 50s, and 60s. And this is unheard of. There are a number of people who also talk about not liking to be outside because they feel differently when they're outside than when they're inside. So, a lot of elderly people don't go outside like they used to.

The children, because of their asthma, they can't go outside and play like they used to. So, a lot of parents say, 'well, I don't let my children outside'. And that's not good for anybody. That is mentally frustrating, if I'm a child and I can't enjoy playing outside.

I will say, and I always say this, because whenever you talk about pollution, then industries will say, 'well, we're giving jobs'. And I always say a living wage should not have to kill or make people ill. I don't care; there isn't enough that you can do that would justify human lives.

And so, there's not enough money you can put into a community. And so, for the chairman of Drax board to boast about establishing a [\\$250,000 community fund](#), which is about £188,000, when she [Drax chair, [Antonia Bertone](#)] makes £313,000, which is the equivalent to about \$416,000, and she has not been exposed to the pollution. She has not been exposed to the illegal emissions that Gloster residents have been exposed. This is not just an injustice; people are poor, they are pressed, they don't know any better, so you can throw anything at them.

I know the reason that they have not called on Krystal to be a part of an advisory committee is because she is knowledgeable. They don't want to deal with people who are knowledgeable because it's easier for them to keep telling their lies and getting by with their lies than it is to do the right thing.

If they wanted to do the right thing, what they should have done and could have done was invest in protection, invest in health. Why not install barriers? insulated barriers that would cut down on the noise, because noise pollution causes a number of health concerns. So rather than doing that, rather than investing in people and protection, they invested in publicity.

They invested in something that would make them look good. And at the end of the day, profit and production, that's all they care about. They don't care about people and planet, and that is obvious because they wouldn't have rushed instead of giving free turkeys and paint spray paint cans and 250 dollars, which is pennies, it's just not enough.

I think the fine was almost an incentive for them to keep polluting. It's just not high enough, and there is no price; there is nothing that they can do that would justify the harm that they are doing to human health in Gloster or anywhere that they're operating. It is the very definition of environmental racism, because, first of all, all of their plants are situated in predominantly Black communities. Overwhelmingly, they were situated, but first and foremost, every single one is located in communities with very high rates of

poverty. And so, they are taking advantage of the lack of knowledge, taking advantage of the desperation. I would say communities that are felt to be dispensable.

And so, they are taking advantage of that, and they are doing whatever they need to do to continue getting subsidies for the UK. People don't like that. They don't like for you to bring up racism. But the fact is, you know, it's the truth.

If you compare a map of the current wood pellet trade, that is ruining the health and causing premature death in the predominantly Black community. If you compare the wood pellet [trade map](#) with the former [cotton trade map](#) in the US that was supplied by slavery, they are almost identical. So, these are the same states with the highest percentage of Black population and also the same states with the most climate vulnerable population. It is Blacks who contributed least to climate change on the fossil fuel use. And instead of making that right, the people who contributed least, but we're most impacted by fossil fuel use.

We are now imperilling the same population to a so-called 'climate solution', which is basically a false climate scheme just to get money just to be compensated. I've never seen an industry that has such massive profit get so much subsidies. This industry does not have a conscience.

To me, they don't have a soul because I don't know how anyone with any amount of morality, with any amount of ethical consciousness, can continue to do what Drax is doing.

I don't even know if there can be a win, right? So many people have died from my community. How do you win when you've lost so many family members?

My son lost his dad to lung cancer. His dad's property is adjacent to Drax, and he died, not even knowing that he had inhaled a lot of this dust and toxins. um and I'm convinced that this is what caused his death. So how can you win? You know, how can you win when uh mother Vele lost her life and then her daughter-in-law lost her life, and they live right, they share their properties adjacent to Drax.

How do you win when you hear about one family where four people die a mother die her son, her daughter, then her sister how, how do you win? How do you win when my mom lives with lung disease and my classmate reported that he had stage three kidney disease? You cannot reverse health issues. You can't correct that, so these are things that people are going to have to live with the rest of their lives.

Miss Carmella is on the oxygen tank, and then you have Miss Sheila, whose husband was on oxygen. He died, and now Miss Sheila is on oxygen. These people, every day, think how the crap do you win when so many people are struggling to breathe clean air every day?

You can't win it right, Drax can leave our community, but you still can't win. People are sick. People can't afford to go get health care.

There is no win in this. There is nothing you can do to bring about justice to Adarius, my son, who buried his dad before he turned 21. Adarius bury his daddy one day, and he turned 21 the next day. How the crap does Adarius recover from this, watching his daddy being diagnosed with lung cancer, and three months later, you bury your daddy.

How, how do you freaking win?

There is no way that you win, you can't give Adarius no amount of money like for the rest of his life, mentally all he sees is for three months I was at my daddy's bedside, and then I had to go and bury my dad and now I have inherited this property that I can't enjoy because of how my daddy died. Adarius would never experience any type of justice from what happened, and the people in that community that have lost people. They will never ever experience any type of justice. There's no justice for what is happening to the people in Gloster. There's no justice.

Share the truth. I think that the truth has to be told. I mean, the feelings need to come out. People need to know the pain. They need to hear the pain, and you can't soft-ball this.

I think this is what has happened. It's been softball for too long, and this is too it's too serious. It's too hurtful.

It can stop. It can stop it from happening. So, so yes, there is a way that you can stop the injustice from continuing and that needs to happen. You know, it really needs to happen, and it needs to be an example, you know, for any other industries.