

Ireland must, in its own interests, strive to become a lower carbon economy - SEI

*- Energy Awareness Week 2003 kicks off
- Energy consumers urged to take "real action"*

In order to overcome the major environmental challenges facing the country, including the continued growth in emissions of harmful greenhouse gases such as Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), Ireland must become a lower carbon economy. That is according to David Taylor, Chief Executive, Sustainable Energy Ireland, who was speaking today in Dublin at the start of Energy Awareness Week 2003 which runs from 21st - 27th September.

Mr. Taylor said that moving towards a lower carbon economy means reducing our overall energy demand through a variety of energy efficiency measures while meeting more of that demand from renewable, non-fossil fuel based resources.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, Ireland has formal obligations to play its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from energy production and use. Despite this, the level of energy consumption in Ireland has continued to spiral, and this is particularly true in the domestic sector. This now accounts for 26% of total energy consumption and 28% of CO₂ emissions.

According to Mr. Taylor, "Concerted action is now required on several fronts. I would urge all consumers to become more aware of how the appliances and fuels they buy and use affect the value they get for their money and also how they impact the environment. Likewise, we should look to increase the proportion of that energy demand which is secured from renewable resources such as wind and solar. This will require greater individual, country and societal acceptance of these technologies. Small but consistent changes in our energy use behaviour can have a significant cumulative impact, including savings on energy costs and a healthier, cleaner natural environment".

Referring to the Government's proposed carbon/energy tax, Mr. Taylor said that a well-designed tax of this kind is likely to stimulate the desired changes in energy consumption

patterns. In time, the proposed carbon/energy tax will cause energy prices to increase. "This price signal, as the economists call it, will reduce demand for energy by prompting users to act in their own best interests by taking steps to reduce their energy use. Businesses that offer energy efficient products and services can expect a growth in market demand", he said.

Mr. Taylor added, "As most of us have the option of becoming more energy efficient in advance of the proposed tax, we can minimise our exposure to the tax, while at the same time contributing to Ireland's commitment to reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases. Energy Awareness Week is just one of Sustainable Energy Ireland's programmes aimed at raising awareness and understanding among consumers as to how they can take practical steps towards greater energy efficiency. Those of us, who by reason of limited income or resources, may expect help and count on the support of SEI and other government programmes promoting social inclusion".

Mr. Taylor concluded by saying, "Clearly, there is a challenge and an opportunity for all sectors of this economy in becoming involved in the drive for greater energy efficiency. We are appealing to all consumers in Ireland to throw their weight behind the Energy Awareness Week campaign and to respond with real action".

Throughout Energy Awareness Week, a series of initiatives will take place to help increase public awareness of the energy efficiency opportunities that are within most people's grasp. The Week is the single most important platform for promoting energy efficiency in Ireland, highlighting how individuals can inform their energy purchase and use decisions to their own benefit and that of the environment.

Sustainable Energy Ireland was established on May 1st 2002 as a statutory authority charged with promoting and assisting the development of sustainable energy in Ireland. Sustainable Energy Ireland is funded by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 with programmes part financed by the European Union.

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