

Media Information

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Wood energy could help alleviate problem of volatile oil prices in Ireland - SEI

Wood energy has potential to contribute €70 million to rural economy in Ireland

The developing wood energy market in Ireland could help provide a solution to the problem of ongoing oil price volatility, as people look to cheaper and more sustainable sources of energy. That is according to Paul Kellett of Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI), who was speaking on the opening day of 'Wood Energy 2005', the annual wood conference and study tour, organised jointly by SEI and Coford.

According to Mr. Kellett, Ireland's favourable growing climate means there is great potential to develop an indigenous fuel supply from forestry and wood industry waste for domestic and industrial markets. SEI estimates that by 2020, refined wood fuels produced in Ireland could be meeting 3 - 5% of our heating needs and contributing approximately €70 million per year to the rural economy.

Delegates at the conference will hear that the EU has experienced strong growth in wood pellet production, with a doubling in the number of production plants since 2003. There are currently over 220 plants in the EU. Established wood energy markets in the EU include Austria, Sweden, Germany and Italy, while, new markets undergoing increasing development are Spain, Ireland, France and Norway.

Mr. Kellett said, "Given the volatility of oil prices, Ireland's rising energy demands and the need to find additional secure and affordable sources of energy, refined wood fuels in the form of wood pellets are an attractive fuel for the Irish heat market. The development of a wood energy industry in Ireland could also play a significant role in rural regeneration, putting millions of euro back into rural economies".

Currently, wood pellets are used in applications ranging from pellet stoves to automatic wood-fuelled boilers heating homes and public and commercial buildings including hospitals, schools, hotels and leisure centres. Other potential industrial and commercial markets in Ireland include the food and drink, pharmaceutical and wood processing sectors as well as the housing and commercial building sector.

Also addressing the conference, Mr. John Browne T.D., Minister for State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, said, "I have no doubt that the development of a wood fuel industry would have major economic and strategic benefits. In addition to reducing CO₂ emissions it would reduce our dependence on imported fuel, sustain and create rural employment and introduce a new, sustainable industrial process to Ireland using Irish grown materials to

displace imported fossil fuel. Each of these objectives is important to this Government and to my Department in particular. There is a limited supply of fossil fuels. It is therefore imperative that we explore alternative, sustainable sources of energy".

During the two-day conference and study tour, leading wood energy technology experts from Ireland, Austria, Germany, Finland and Denmark, will share their experiences and expertise. The conference will focus on wood fuel supply markets, address the important issue of quality both in terms of the fuel and technology, take a closer look at Irish success stories, unveil plans for a Renewable Energy Installers Academy, and feature a session on financing bio-energy projects.

Commenting, Dr. Eugene Hendrick, Director of COFORD, said, "Refined fuels such as wood pellets (processed sawdust), offer many advantages being compact, clean, easy to store, and they have a very high energy content. It is an emerging industry that offers benefits for forest owners and managers, project developers, consumers, local communities and the environment. Wood biomass from sustainable sources is carbon neutral and its more widespread usage can make a significant contribution to our greenhouse gas emissions reduction target as set out under the Kyoto agreement on climate change."

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Notes to Editors:

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

COFORD, the National Council for Forest Research and Development coordinates and funds research to secure long-term industrial viability and optimise social, environmental and cultural developments associated with forestry. Supported under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 it also engages in international networking and monitors progress to ensure effective technology transfer.