

Wood panel workers plan biomass subsidies protest

Thursday, October 28, 2010

Over 600 workers at one of the largest wood panel plants in the UK are set to down tools tomorrow (October 29) in protest at "unfair" government subsidies for biomass energy - which they claim are driving the use of virgin wood for energy generation rather than manufacturing.

The action will see a two hour shutdown at Kronospan's plant at Chirk in North Wales, which is designed to coincide with a 'European Day of Action' to highlight a predicted shortfall in available virgin timber for the wood panel sector.

Kronospan also claims that biomass should be considered as the last option for 'end-of-life' waste wood and states "wood products should be reused and recycled before being turned into fuel". This, it claims, will limit the carbon impact of wood products.

The coordinated protests are intended to alert European legislators to the consequences of European Union Climate Change Directive, which requires electricity suppliers to increase their renewable energy generation and has led to a surge in virgin wood being used as feedstock.

In North Wales, Kronospan workers will halt operations between 11am and 1pm tomorrow, with the demonstration also being attended by Susan Jones, Member of Parliament for Clwyd South, and Mark Isherwood, Welsh Assembly Member for North Wales.

Gavin Adkins, director of Kronospan, said: "Paying subsidies to burn virgin timber rather than manufacture with it, damages wealth creation, the economy and the environment. It's pushing up prices, creating a shortage in raw material and inevitably threatens millions of jobs."

Kronospan also claimed that the potential impact on virgin wood availability could have a knock-on effect for associated industries - such as furniture makers and the construction sector.

WPIF

Trade association Wood Panel Industries Federation (WPIF) has lent its support to Kronospan and the Europe-wide efforts. The WPIF has called on the government to reverse the consequences of the Renewable Obligations Order (ROO) 2006, which places an obligation on licensed electricity suppliers to generate a proportion of their output from renewable sources.

The WPIF claims that biomass demand for wood feedstock could lead to a shortage of around 400 million m³ of wood in Europe by 2020 - according to research carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the University of Hamburg.

Furthermore, the trade association - which represents 100% of wood panel sector companies across the UK and the Republic of Ireland - claims that due to the carbon storage of wood and wood products, burning it before it reaches its end-of-life is "not sustainable".

Alastair Kerr, director-general of the WPIF, said: "It should be obvious, but legislators across Europe are failing to appreciate the carbon storage of wood and wood products. Allowing wood to be burnt before the end of its useful life is a waste and risks damaging the environment."

"Wood panel manufacturing companies and other wood processing companies are seeing wood prices being up and are experiencing shortages in supply of their primary. This day of action will see companies taking symbolic stoppage time and/or events with MPs, MEPs and the media."