

‘Don’t burn our jobs’ say Wrexham factory staff

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MORE than 100 Kronospan workers stopped production on Friday with the stark message – ‘Don’t Burn Our Jobs’.

The factory came to a complete standstill for two hours as workers protested about subsidies being given to electricity companies to burn virgin wood.

Virgin wood is the raw material which Kronospan needs for production and workers fear an increased demand for it will push up prices.

About 120 workers who were on shift on Friday protested with placards reading ‘build not burn’ and ‘don’t burn our jobs’.

The day was part of a European Day of Action to campaign against the use of burning virgin wood, rather than recycled wood, for energy.

Gavin Adkins, director of Kronospan, estimates that if the subsidies continue, it could affect the 600 workers at the Chirk factory, within four or five years.

Other factories in Europe have had to close because of it Mr Adkins said. He added the subsidies are being funded mainly by the taxpayer.

Process Worker Paul Watts said: “I think it’s crazy. We’re having to pay extra for timber and I think people are genuinely fearing for their jobs.”

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Vice Chair of Unite the Union, Malcolm Roberts, said: "This pushes up the price of timber and we can't compete, and we can't run without the raw material. It will also have an impact on the hauliers and sellers."

The subsidies come from the Renewables Obligation Order which is a result of European Union Climate Change Directives.

Branch Secretary Tony Clarke said: "It's terrible when you think about jobs in the area. Wood should be used first and have it's life before being used for energy."

"Workers here are disappointed and the campaign is only going to get stronger."

Christian Pugh, a line operator for the sawmill plant, said: "It's going to wreck our plant."

"We depend on the logs and the cost is a lot now."

"Some of the workers are worried and thinking about what is going to happen."

Politicians and visitors were given the rare chance to take a tour of the factory site as the production stopped between 11am and 1pm.

During a presentation director general of the Wood Panel Industries Federation (WPIF) Alastair Kerr said it was 'ludicrous' to allow virgin wood to be burnt in the first instance.

Susan Elan Jones, MP for Clwyd South and vice chair of the wood paneling industry group, said: "Kronospan is a very important employer around here and provides good skilled and stable jobs. We don't want to be in a position where the plant has to reduce jobs or even close."

"This is an unintended consequence from a European Directive and I will do as much as I can to influence ministers because this is important."