



Renewable Energy: The facts.

Biomass

What is biomass?

There are two main types:

1. Animal wastes and by-products of the food industry: These can be converted into methane, but are not covered in this fact-sheet.
2. Crops which are grown specifically for their energy content are known as biomass. In the U.K, common sources are wood and straw. Willow is becoming particularly popular as a biomass crop, and can be harvested on a regular basis. This type of biomass is covered in this fact-sheet.

How is the biomass used?

Although it is possible to process biomass in a number of ways, 'direct' burning is still the most common. The most common forms of fuel are woodchips, wood pellets or logs. Wood pellets are good for use in auto-feed systems, but manufacturing facilities in the U.K are still somewhat limited. Wood chips are becoming more widely available as forestry-based enterprises expand. Moisture content must be carefully controlled, however, to ensure efficient and clean burning.

Is biomass a good thing? Surely burning is damaging to the environment?

Burning biomass is regarded as 'carbon neutral', as the CO₂ released in burning it is equal to the CO₂ consumed as it grows. If local supplies of timber are used, there is an environmental benefit in cutting the amount of road transport used and, potentially, a contribution to local employment. Finally, if the use of wood for heating cuts down the amount which is disposed of in landfill, it is a long-term benefit to us all.

Can I get a wood-fuelled boiler for my central heating system?

Yes. A number of models are being produced which are efficient and easy to use. You will have to ensure that you have sufficient dry storage to allow you to stockpile fuel as required.

I live in a smokeless zone. Can I use a wood-fuelled boiler?

Some types are permitted. Consult your local authority.

Can I get a grant?

Yes. The Low Carbon Buildings Programme (LCBP) currently offers grants for domestic installations. The LCBP free phone help-line is 0800 915 0990, and the website www.lowcarbonbuildings.org

For non-domestic installations contact Phase 2 of the Low Carbon Buildings Programme: 08704 23 23 13 or email info@lcbpphase2.org.uk

Local schemes offering further discounts may also exist. Contact your local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on 0800 512012.

For further advice on this and other renewable energy technologies contact SYEC on 0114 2584574 or nick.parsons@syec.co.uk