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Community-Centric Approach to Biomass Energy Necessary

Boston --

A biomass energy approach that stresses multiple, smaller generation plants scaled to make use of local fuel supplies harvested sustainably would make biomass projects more appealing to communities and more beneficial to local economies over the long haul, said Bill Gabler, Project Director of New Hampshire-based Clean Power Development at a Biomass conference in Boston yesterday.

Gabler stressed distributed generation, i.e. smaller biomass power plants that are scaled to meet the needs of communities and use biomass resources that are available locally and harvested sustainably in his remarks to the conference attendees.

He also said that projects should harness heat from plants whenever possible in order to maximize their efficiency. Heat, steam, and hot water can be used in mills or greenhouses, for example, Gabler pointed out.

An example of this approach can be seen in the planned 29-MW Combined Heat and Power (CHP) biomass facility in Berlin, NH, which is being developed by Clean Power Development. The plant will employ up to 23 people, will be located a green field site away from the town's center and will use biomass fuel from within a 30-mile transport basis. The plans call for the plant to look like a New Hampshire farm, complete with a large red barn and two silos.

"Communities want the jobs, and they want the power from biomass generation," noted Gabler. "But residents are justifiably worried about the impact on their quality of life. They see a potential threat to air quality, the water and local forests. And they worry about the noise and heavy truck traffic associated with large generation plants," he said.

In line with Clean Power's model of selling both thermal and electrical energy to nearby or co-located industries, the planned Berlin facility is only three quarters of a mile from the local Fraser/Gorham paper mill, a ready customer for the biomass plant's steam. Moreover, the Berlin plan offers a cost-effective thermal source for a city-wide District Heating System in Berlin.

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