

Northwest Territories Biomass Energy Strategy

Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, later today I will be tabling the Northwest Territories Biomass Energy Strategy.

Biomass energy is renewable energy derived from organic plant materials produced by photosynthesis. Essentially, it is solar energy stored in the mass of trees and plants. Biomass energy is available in the NWT in the form of wood and wood pellets. An increased use of wood and wood pellets as an alternative source of energy supports the Government of the Northwest Territories goal of an environment that will sustain present and future generations.

Given the increasing cost of heating our homes and businesses, our growing concern about the impacts of climate change and the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, wood and wood pellet heating is an economically and environmentally friendly alternative.

Mr. Speaker, climate change remains a serious issue for the people of the Northwest Territories. Our government continues to support, investigate and implement initiatives that will assist in adapting to and mitigate the impacts of climate change in the NWT. The sustainable and wise development of forest resources will help us achieve this.

The Biomass Energy Strategy is an integral part of the Greenhouse Gas Strategy as any progress away from fossil fuel consumption towards a carbon-neutral fuel will dramatically reduce emissions. By using carbon sources that already exist in the ecological system, we use energy without adding new carbon into the system, which has been the largest factor leading climate change.

We hope this strategy will lead to an increase in the use of biomass products, such as wood and wood pellets, by promoting the use of local and important biomass products and reducing our dependency on diesel fuel.

Mr. Speaker, more than 33 hectares of land in the NWT is covered by forests. With careful planning, our forests have the potential for the sustainable harvest of biomass energy because the forest industry currently operates at very low levels.

As advances in new technology bring new furnaces and boilers to market to replace or augment oil as a fuel source, wood and wood pellet heating is becoming more and more popular. Wood pellets are a Canadian renewable resource made from forest industry waste wood and are used in wood pellet stoves, boilers and furnaces. Burning at a very high temperature, wood pellets eliminate the waste product often associated with wood heat.

Biomass is also available in the NWT from: wood resident in the form of woodchips from forest fire burn areas; forest thinning for community protection; road building and maintenance and pipeline or seismic line cutting; cardboard, paper or construction and demolition waste; and fast growing willow or poplar.

When a tree is harvested and burned as biomass energy, it is considered carbon neutral as long as the forest is regenerated, both naturally and with silviculture. This cycle results in tree replacement and greenhouse gases neutrality. The department is currently drafting an implementation plan for forest renewal in the Northwest Territories to ensure the sustainable use of our forest resources. It will focus on planning processes and harvesting guidelines that are created to promote natural regeneration and minimize site disturbance.

Timber harvesting continues in the NWT and may expand with recent interest in the potential of harvesting for biomass crops. While ENR will continue to actively reforest harvested lands, the management methods incorporating natural regeneration are expected to become even more important.

By adapting our usages of energy and carbon, we are beginning to reduce the negative effects on the overall world climate and the NWT. The strategy will guide our actions to reduce emissions, and the costs associated with home and business heating, through the increased use of wood and wood pellets. It also established the conditions necessary to enable biomass energy to become an integral part of the energy is in the NWT.

We will continue to work very closely with the NWT communities in both the implementation and planning of biomass initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the NWT is working to become a leader within Canada on alternative, sustainable energy. The Biomass Energy Strategy should help us achieve this goal.
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