

BIOMASS COGENERATION: BENEFITS & CONCERNS

An educational forum on the use of biomass in the generation of electricity is being presented on Monday, March 28, 7-9:15 PM, at the Port Townsend Community Center. The forum is sponsored by Local 2020 Energy Action Group.

Recently biomass has become a subject of much controversy. Some people see it as offering the promise of using less fossil fuel to generate electricity and creating new jobs in the process. Others consider it to be a non-sustainable source of energy that threatens the health of our forests and ourselves.

Meanwhile, numerous plants using biomass to produce energy are being proposed for Western Washington and the Olympic Peninsula, encouraged by government subsidies. The expansion of the PT Paper Mill's capacity to burn biomass has been approved by the state, but is being challenged on the basis of air emissions by a consortium of concerned Peninsula environmental organizations.

Is the burning of biomass a sustainable alternative source of energy for the generation of electric power? What will be burned? Can particulate pollution be controlled? Will forest health be affected? Is the use of biomass carbon neutral? Is there a net benefit for the local economy? Should we encourage its development in our communities? Should we be concerned?

In addressing these questions, the forum will present three speakers. Larry Bonar, retired biophysicist, will present an overview touching upon the history of biomass and explaining some of terms involved with its use. Bill Wise, a local energy activist, will present the case for biomass and cogeneration, especially as it relates to the PT Paper Mill and the Olympic Peninsula. Diana Somerville, environmental journalist, and spokesperson for the environmental groups appealing the permits for the proposed

biomass facility in Port Angeles, will explain the problems associated with biomass as an energy source. Moderator for the forum will be Helen Kolff. After the talks, there will be a time for questions from the audience. Those interested in a follow-up discussion are invited to a meeting on Wednesday, April 6, also at the Community Center.