

How can we be sure wood fuel source is legal? – Shropshire Star 12 June 2014



Europe's boom in biomass demand from electricity power plants, such as Drax, has led to a doubling of wood pellet exports from North America in just two years to reach 4.7 million tons in 2013, according to the latest data. European countries will increase imports of solid biofuels to 50-80 million tons by 2020. Britain, Denmark and Italy are the main consumers on the European pellet market. But, how can we ensure that this material being imported into the UK is legal and "sustainable"?

This year the new Timber Standard for Heat & Electricity was introduced, covering the sustainable forest management criteria for woodfuel, and draws upon the principles set under the UK Timber Procurement Policy (UK-TPP). These principles include a requirement for transparency in the form of documentary evidence demonstrating that the wood supplied is from legal and sustainable sources, and must include chain of custody from the forest source to the end user. Independent certification of the wood, by any of the forest certification schemes, such as FSC, PEFC etc., would satisfy these requirements.

Domestically, the legal and sustainability criteria will also have to be met under the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). From autumn 2014, all biomass fuel used by households, businesses and other organisations claiming the RHI must meet a greenhouse gas emissions target of 60% against the EU fossil fuel average. The way to meet this target will be for end-users to demonstrate that the source of their supply comes from registered biomass suppliers who must also demonstrate their material meets the sustainability criteria. Suppliers in the supply chain can register for free on the new Department of Energy and Climate Change's Biomass Suppliers List (BSL) and must complete a carbon calculator. Compliance will only be met if the List Manager is satisfied that each criterion is 'adequate'. Woodfuel will be deemed to be sustainable and legal if it has been grown on the same estate, where the biomass boiler which uses the woodfuel is housed, with the additional provision that the maximum heat generating capacity of the boiler (or the total generating capacity where the estate has more than one biomass boiler) is to be 1MW thermal or below. However, individuals and businesses that self-supply their own woodfuel are still encouraged to register as a "self-supplier" but will not need to do a greenhouse gas calculation. They will be asked though to provide "bespoke" documentary evidence by providing a UK Forest Standard-approved management plan, if the woodlands from which self-suppliers are sourcing their timber are not currently certified. The plan will demonstrate that the forest management on the estate meets the criteria covering sustainability and legality.

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