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Seneca Sustainable Energy Benefits of the Plant January 26, 2009

Seneca Sustainable Energy, a renewable heat and power facility, will generate up to 18.8 megawatts of electricity – enough to meet the annual energy needs of more than 13,000 homes – and provide heat for Seneca Sawmill's dry kilns.

Taking a step toward energy independence

Biomass is recognized as an important component to our country's energy independence (notably by President Barack Obama and Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski). The more energy we produce locally, the less natural gas and coal we need to import to Oregon.

Eliminating use of natural gas

Each year, Seneca burns about 70 billion BTUs of natural gas to produce steam to dry lumber in its dry kilns. For every 20 million BTUs of gas burned, one metric ton of carbon is released. Thus, using this fossil fuel currently releases 3,500 tons of carbon per year, which will be reduced to zero once the project starts up.

Making best use of wood residue

Seneca can supply 100 percent of the woody biomass to fuel this facility from its own sources: by-products (bark, sawdust and shavings) from mill operations and forest residue from its sustainably managed forestlands. Approximately 75 percent of the biomass will come from its mills. Since this project will reduce by-products sold to other companies, truck hauling trips will be reduced by two-thirds.

Having a positive effect on reducing greenhouse gases

Those charged with the responsibility of designing carbon-regulation programs, such as the California Air Resources Board (CARB), the Western Climate Initiative (WCI) and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), consider biomass carbon neutral, similar to other renewable technologies. When biomass power offsets carbon emissions from either natural gas or coal plants, there is a net positive impact on reducing greenhouse gases.

Woody biomass lessens greenhouse gas emissions when it replaces fossil fuels, because live, carbon-sequestering trees balance the carbon dioxide released when woody biomass is burned.

Creating 11 new permanent family-wage jobs and employment for some 90 craftspeople will build the new facility.