

Beyond Economics: Other Reasons for Burning Biomass Fuels

- **Biomass fuel comes from a renewable, sustainable resource base.**
Fossil fuels will eventually run out, but with proper forestry practices, the biomass resource base can be sustained indefinitely.
- **The fuel is available in great quantity in every state of the Northeast and in other regions.**
There is an excess of existing biomass fuel in the Northeast now, and the forest resource can support a greater utilization of biomass in the future. Huge volumes of low-grade wood in the national forests of the western states pose a fire forest risk to communities; using this wood for energy both protects communities and reduces reliance on costly fossil fuels.
- **Biomass fuel dollars stay in the local and state economy.**
Biomass comes from in-state businesses that use local labor for cutting, hauling, chipping, and delivering fuel. The raw material - growing trees - is purchased from local landowners. Increasing the use of biomass helps the local tax base and builds tax revenues.
- **Biomass fuel prices have been stable historically and are not directly linked to national or global energy markets. Biomass fuels can be expected to increase in price more slowly than competing fuels.**
Over the last 15-20 years biomass prices have stayed level or decreased, regardless of the dramatic fluctuations in the prices of oil and gas.
- **Biomass systems are often capable of giving higher levels of comfort at a lower energy cost.**
Because biomass fuels are very inexpensive, many building owners feel they can now afford comfortable building temperatures in winter weather. With higher-priced conventional fuels, owners often reduce temperatures or reduce ventilation to save money.
- **Biomass pricing is not subject to monopolistic control.**
Because the fuel comes from scores of independent mills and chippers in every state of the Northeast, it is unlikely that any large fuel supplier could corner the market.
- **Future energy taxes, such as a carbon tax or a Btu tax, are less likely to impact the price of biomass fuels compared to fossil fuels.**
In national policy discussions, energy taxes generally give preference to renewable, locally supplied fuels that do not lead to global warming.
- **Biomass has a negligible sulfur content, so its combustion does not contribute to the atmospheric buildup of oxides of sulfur (SO_x), a cause of acid rain.**
- **When biomass is burned for energy, using wood from sustainable forestry practices, there is no net increase in the greenhouse gases that cause climate change.**
When biomass replaces fossil fuels, there is a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Using wood wastes from sustainable forestry as fuel increases the health of the forest resource.**
Forestry officials in the Northeast are looking for new markets for low-grade wood wastes from the forest, as a way to remove cull trees and improve forest health.
- **Biomass systems are relatively easy to convert to other fuels and so offer great flexibility for an uncertain energy future.**
Solid-fuel systems, particularly those made to burn chunky fuels like wood chips, can readily be converted to burn almost any other fuel.
- **In some regions, certain forms of biomass are considered waste products; burning them for energy can reduce disposal costs and free up landfill space.**
- **As public consciousness and information about environmental and resource issues increases, voters often see wood energy as an attractive choice over fossil fuels.**

Source: Fuels for Schools & Beyond
www.fuelsforschools.org
"Wood Chip Heating Guide" by Timothy Maker