

Energy project gains national interest

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A project to clear Southland skies and replace coal with wood waste is expanding - with five more biomass boilers to be installed this year. Venture Southland general manager of business and strategic projects Steve Canny says other regions were taking note.

Information from Wood Energy South was available for others nationwide, and was gaining international interest, Canny said. Another seven new or converted biomass systems were in the pipeline which would remove the CO₂ equivalent to the emissions from more than 7000 cars each year. These were on top of the five being installed this year.

"There's a strong desire across New Zealand to take on board what they [other regions] have learnt in Southland." Wood Energy promoted the use of wood waste, in the form of wood chips, for wood-fuelled boilers. Wood chips were used in place of coal.

"There was a lot of waste out of the province, and it didn't have a home." The aim was lower energy-related carbon emissions in Southland.

Wood-fuelled boilers were installed in businesses and schools throughout the region. One of the largest wood-fuelled boilers in Southland was at Splash Palace pool. Venture Southland, the Southland District Council and the Gore District council partnered with the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority to deliver the Wood Energy project. It sought to improve air quality and demonstrated the lower cost of using waste wood, from local suppliers, which would have otherwise been thrown away.

Southland harvested a million tonnes of logs annually. In turn, the region produced 200,000 tonnes of wood waste. The waste was forecast to increase to 600,000 tonnes per annum during the next 30 years - enough to heat 65 Olympic-sized swimming pools per year.

Wood Energy project co-ordinator Cathy Jordan said five biomass boilers marked for installation in 2017 would be in Milburn, Gore and schools throughout the region. Southland had two very strong wood suppliers - Niagara Sawmilling and Findlater Sawmilling, Jordan said. From outside the region, some pallet suppliers were supplying wood waste, she said.

Jordan said the technology was from Europe. Most who were interested would visit Splash Palace pool as a fine example. Typically, a boiler had a lifespan of 25 years. Many boilers in the region were due for replacement, she said. Schools and some rest homes were looking to replace with the wood system, instead of coal. Interest was growing because the government had "a real push" towards lower carbon and lower emissions. As a result, other regions were looking to establish similar projects, she said.

"We started at the start, and we can take those learnings and put them in to other regions."

At a city council meeting last week, Venture Southland chief executive Paul - Casson told city councillors the Wood Energy project was leading the country. "That could not have been done witho out the support of the councils," Casson said.