

## **Biomass combustion beyond reasonable limits?**

The European woodworking industry (WWI) stands for well over 42,000 companies, two million employees and an annual turnover of 165 billion EUR. Sustainable availability of wood is crucial for the sector.

The need for an enhanced use of renewable energy sources (RES) as a significant means of meeting the Kyoto targets on reduction of greenhouse gases emissions, is fully acknowledged and supported by the WWIs and has already led to a substantial increase in the use of biomass. It is essential for all stakeholders to understand that, through extensive application of advanced production technologies in wood processing during the past decades, the WWIs are pioneers in the field of renewable energy generation. This represents a vital contribution to the mitigation of climate change.

Through practice, experience and acquired expertise, the WWIs are the most competent party to be consulted when it comes to following and respecting the wood-value chain in the cascade use of wood. Consequently, it is the WWIs that can best determine the extent and ratio to which woody-biomass should be utilised for thorough mechanical valorisation (which evidently is the primary objective) and energy generating combustion. The WWIs' competence and authority deserve full recognition in this respect.

However, the EC's 1997 White Paper on RES promotion calls for tripling biomass volumes for energy purposes by 2010, the equivalent of yet another 163 million m<sup>3</sup> of fuelwood! The vast negative impact of a measure of such magnitude on the Woodworking industry as a whole, has obviously raised considerable alarm in the industry's circles. CEI-Bois strongly objects to any ill-considered policy taking biomass combustion beyond reasonable limits, thereby forcing the WWIs to embark on a road to perdition.

Yes, to a cleaner environment, yes to a breathable world, but a clear no to any approach jeopardising the future of two million workers and their offspring! Surely, none of us want to imagine a world in which all woods are being burned to produce green energy so that we can breathe "crystal pure air"! Somewhere, there is a perverse notion in all this...

To avoid such a scenario, CEI-Bois wishes to stress that the WWIs are and have been for many years contributing to a sustainable use of energy and natural resources by:

- Important energy savings: modern heating and CHP (combined heat and power generation) installations generate the major part of the energy required for our industrial processes from woody biomass unsuitable for recycling;
- Active involvement in sustainable forest management: the European forests are expanding;
- Continuously improving recycling rates of wood and wood products through considerable investments in modern technologies.

CEI-Bois wants to ensure the continuous availability of wood raw materials on a sustainable basis, the safeguarding of the competitiveness of Europe's woodworking sector and job security. Therefore:

- Avoid massive burning of wood for purely energetic reasons;
- Respect the value chain of wood and wood-based products, as these have been proven to be long-lasting pools of carbon (sinks), hence substantially contributing to climate change mitigation...and isn't that what it's all about?
- Do not "subsidise away" wood as a raw material for durable applications by favouring the firing of trees!
- Recognise the superior eco-efficiency of wood-based products versus other materials and their supreme properties in recycling with minimal energy use;
- Reconsider and adapt the "163 million m<sup>3</sup> fuelwood-for-energy" target to a realistic volume; **only burn wood after it has been fully used**;
- Focus future EU policies in member states on research regarding efficient recovery of forest residues and development of biomass sources specifically grown for energy generation;

CEI-Bois, in representing the WWI's legitimate interests (parallel to those of the society as a whole in this matter), offers to co-operate with all stakeholders in elaborating the best possible solution for the climate change problem. This endeavour being by no means simple, requires a basic willingness to understand the fundamental role of wood and wood-based products in the process of monitoring and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. In fully validating the supreme qualities of wood in this respect, the EC already has a natural and invaluable tool in its grasp. Failing to recognise this one-in-a-lifetime-opportunity would be a historical error and a colossal injustice towards the woodworking industries and future generations on our (still green) planet. After all, favouring the "furnacing of forests", the lungs of our world, is so pitifully straightforward.