UK: No need to burn wood to create energy

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With the government set to turn away from its controversial policy of subsidising UK power stations to generate electricity from burning wood, the European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI), based at Aston University in Birmingham, has emphasised that there is no need to burn wood to create energy and that instead it can be derived from domestic, agricultural and industrial waste and residues.

The world-leading institute believes that there are alternatives to burning wood as a solution to UK energy needs and that its own groundbreaking Pyroformer™ technology, demonstrates that energy can be generated from multiple waste feedstocks rather than simply using woodchip.

Tim Miller, Director of Operations at EBRI, said: "There has been a noticeable public outcry recently surrounding news that millions of tonnes of wood have being shipped from the US to help meet Britain's renewables targets. However we firmly believe that there is no need to burn wood to create energy in this way and that it can be derived from waste and residues from within the UK instead.

"Many people believe that biomass equals woodchip, however our own technology proves that tangible domestic solutions are well within our grasp. In the future it will be crucial for us to generate energy from many alternative domestic biomass sources, including algae, residues from composting, sewage sludge and wheat."

This Pyroformer™ technology, developed by Professor Andreas Hornung at EBRI, is unique in its use of multiple waste and residue sources, to generate cost-effective heat and power and is the first of its kind in the UK. An industrial scale demonstration plant is currently being installed on the Aston University campus, following initial installation and testing at Harper Adams University in Shropshire.

Extensive research has demonstrated that this technology is a low carbon, renewable and sustainable energy source. Tests have shown that unlike other bioenergy plants, the Pyroformer™ has no negative environmental or food security impacts. It can use multiple waste sources and therefore does not require the destruction of rainforests or the use of agricultural land for the growth of specialist bioenergy crops. In fact biochar - one of its by-products - can even be used as a fertiliser to increase crop yields. As well as generating heat and power, the Pyroformer™ also dramatically reduces the amount of material sent to landfill.

It was also recently announced that it is being made available as a pilot phase in three villages of the Ropar District in India, to help transform the lives of rural farming communities.

Tim Miller added: "We believe that this is more than just energy provision. Bioenergy technology could be a key stimulator of growth and jobs. We are working closely with businesses in the West Midlands region and the reaction of the business community so far has been very enthusiastic. If you are looking for a clean energy source that ensures energy security without damaging people or planet, we already have the solution."

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Companies wishing to find out more about EBRI's work and how they could benefit from bioenergy can email bioenergy@aston.ac.uk.