

Fuel preparedness is needed in Sweden

The coming winter's fuel situation is likely to be as difficult as the previous winter's, and possibly even worse. One cause is Britain's decreasing export of RT chips (recycled waste wood or recovered wood fuel). New suppliers and better-quality RT must be sourced to ensure energy companies won't go without fuel.

The Swedish Energy Bioenergy Association (Svebio) estimates that, during the winter of 2018/2019, Sweden will continue to experience strain within the biofuel market. Since 2011, Sweden has seen a downward trend in biofuels with the forestry industry having successfully delivered large quantities of by-products, while, at the same time, electricity prices have fallen. This has contributed

to decreased volumes of top cuttings and branches - known by their Swedish acronym, GROT - and poorer profitability.

"We needed GROT right now, and it takes time to rebuild production. We're also seeing decreasing quantities of recycled wood from the UK. We'll see if we can get recycled wood from any other market", says Gustav Melin, CEO of Svebio.

Last summer's forest fires will eventually give rise to larger quantities of wood fuel, but probably not until next winter. "Some of the thinner stems can be used for fuel, but forest owners haven't yet had time to fully manage everything in fire-ravaged areas. Currently the conversation is around not

Peat can act as a contingency fuel during hard winters. By using peat from already drained peat fields, greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced. Photo: Svensk Torv



having things cleared and delivered until March 2019.”

The need for preparedness for biofuels became apparent during the winter of 2017/18 when several combined heat and power (CHP) plants were permitted to use coal and oil to ensure district heating supplies throughout the winter, which was colder than normal. In several places in northern and central Sweden, peat was used as an alternative to oil and coal to secure electricity and heat production.

Local fuel from already drained areas

“Peat is a good energy alternative”, says Ingrid Kyllerstedt, CEO of the Swedish Peat Producers Association. “It’s far better that we use our domestic peat than using oil and coal that we need to import.”

According to the peat industry, peat also contributes to the security of Sweden’s energy supply, plus peat can be stored in stacks close to CHP plants. However, the peat industry is now facing major challenges that threaten its survival. Although there was a temporary rise



in demand for peat due to the winter’s biofuel shortage, general demand for peat is on the decline. This is due to several factors, specifically, the new legislation and provisions within the EU’s emissions trading system, which makes it even more difficult to obtain peat permits, as well as generally negative public opinion that considers peat as an unwise climate alternative.

“I understand that the public are not full acquainted with everything surrounding peat use. Peat should be eligible for electricity certificates and treated in the same way as wind, solar and other renewable fuels. The UN Climate Panel has also classified peat as an intermediate between renewable and fossil fuels, but what complicates the situation is that the energy consumer is also licensed with emission allowances. We are working hard to change the fact that it’s only the incineration of peat that is taken into account by the EU. Peat from drained land has major climate benefits, which the EU must also take into account”, says Ingrid Kyllerstedt.

Fewer CHP plants use peat. Municipal councils have decided to use only 100 per cent renewable fuels, which often doesn’t include peat, which Ingrid Kyllerstedt believes is unfortunate because it only takes into account emissions trading and not peat’s life cycle.

“Peat has many technical advantages. It reduces the internal coating in boilers and increases efficiency. Instead of peat, sulphur granules



Gustav Melin, CEO of Svebio.

are used, which have a negative impact on the environment. Many electricity companies would like to use peat, but its connection to emissions trading is difficult to explain to customers, and the climate benefits are therefore not visible."

Gustav Melin at Svebio believes that peat can play an important role in the energy mix, particularly over and above coal use. "There are many arguments for peat use. In my opinion, there are now slightly more positive winds blowing for peat use in Sweden, with many realizing that drained peat fields are already oxidizing, so that it's preferable if they do it in a CHP."

Many peatlands were ditched in the early 1900s to expand Sweden's soil and woodland. This means that over a quarter of Sweden's peat areas have been drained. "New research shows that drained forestry land releases greenhouse gases equivalent to 2.5 million cars driving a lap around the world - every year. We think we should harvest the peat and treat it as a practical alternative. In this way, we'd stop greenhouse gases leaking from drained peat fields", says Ingrid Kyllerstedt.

What does the future look like for peat?

"If nothing changes positively for peat use, we may have no industry left in five years. We need to see political initiatives quickly. We have seen initiatives for hydroelectric power, but not for peat. We need to raise awareness of the benefits of peat for consumers. The use of peat is needed in the biofuel mix and it's lack will certainly be felt this winter, if not before."

Translated from the Swedish article, originally published in Tidningen Energi.

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Energy peat was also a hot issue during the International Peat Congress in Stockholm, Sweden in 2012. Photo: IPS