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Bioenergy front and centre at Share Society meeting

The theme at the 17th annual meeting of Share Cariboo Chilcotin Resources Nov. 22, was bioenergy.

Guest speakers included Michael Towers, energy manager for Tolko Industries, Peter Brand of Pinnacle Pellet Ltd, Geoff Wagner, plant manager for EPCOR Utilities Ltd, Leslie Lax, regional project manager for the Ministry of Economic Development, and Katherine Gizikoff, manager of government and environmental affairs for **Taseko** Mines. Share chair Bill Carruthers said water and energy are key success factors for industrial development. He said Share's mandate is to assist in the region's wise use and choice of resources.

Biofuels are the source for transforming woodwaste into energy, he said.

Michael Towers explained how Tolko's Heffley Creek plywood plant generates enough methane gas from its gasification plant to completely run its veneer drying operation and heating its log conditioning ponds.

He said the gasification project utilizes hog fuels that come from bark and other waste wood products to produce methane.

"It displaces 235,000 GJ of the 600,000 GJ of natural gas we require for the plant," Towers said. "It reduces our natural gas cost by 15 per cent."

Before the automated, low particulate gasification project was developed, he says the company spent \$4 million per year on natural gas. Now they save \$1.4 million on natural gas.

Peter Brand said Pinnacle Pellet got started in Quesnel in 1990, before setting up additional plants in Williams Lake, Houston and Armstrong. He said 80 per cent of the company's annual 500-tonne production goes to Europe, where he says countries are much more advanced in meeting Kyoto targets.

He says the company will be using the Prince George container service

to send pellets to Japan next April.

In Williams Lake he says a \$5-million expansion will increase production from 110,000 tonnes per year to 170,000 tonnes. Brand said his company utilizes wood wastes from other manufacturing plants. While it is technically possible to produce pellets by hauling in raw logs from the forest, the economics based on the value of pellets doesn't make it economically possible.

Wagner said EPCOR has produced power and managed water and waste water resources for more than 100 years. He said the 66 megawatt power plant in Williams Lake is still the largest bioenergy plant in North America.

He says the plant handles 80 to 100 truckloads of waste wood products a day and in a year burns 600,000 tonnes of wood waste. "We're the bottom feeder in the wood industry," Wagner joked. Last year the Williams Lake plant generated 552,000 megawatts of electricity, enough to supply the needs for 60,000 homes. "Bioenergy is a viable way to deal with waste and we're looking at expanding what we burn in there."

He said the Williams Lake plant burns ground up railway ties from CN Rail, but says it is such a tiny percentage of the biofuels being consumed and the fire is so hot that the creosote in the ties is totally consumed.

Wagner says the challenge of bioenergy is recovery of waste material. "There's more and more competition for it, and the forest tenure system is not designed around the bioenergy industry."

He said EPCOR uses about 30 per cent of the city's water consumption, despite recycling the water anywhere it can. He noted that the steam is recoverable and could be used for municipal or industrial heating. Ash from the burner is being stockpiled in the company's own landfill site beside the Soda Creek Road but could be utilized at some point for fertilizer, he added.

Lax from the Ministry of Economic Development told the Share members that bioenergy is one of several alternative energy resources the province is considering, along with small hydro, wind, ocean wave

and tidal, solar, geothermal and hydrogen fuel cells.

He said bioenergy is key, with the opportunity more defined by the bioenergy strategy.

“Reduced energy costs, integrated systems, creation of 1,500 well-paying jobs, improved air quality.” He said B.C. leads the field in bioenergy.

“There’s a great opportunity to expand in the beetle-kill area, and a whole range of products that can be developed. The challenge is to develop markets for them in North America.”

He said the key to making bioenergy viable is having BC Hydro pay the right price for the generated electricity. He said it takes about two years for a bioenergy plant to get up and running once all the approvals and financing are in place.

Gizikoff, manager of government and environmental affairs for **Taseko** Mines Limited, brought Share members up to date on the Prosperity Project. She said the company hasn’t submitted its environmental report yet, though it’s ready to go.

“We’re waiting for a decision by the federal and provincial governments.”

Asked about options besides the contentious issue of draining Fish Lake, Gizikoff said there is an environmental advantage to draining the lake, because it means the mine’s whole infrastructure could be contained in a single drainage system.

“That makes it easier to manage to protect the **Taseko** River.” She said fish would be transported from Fish Lake to Wasp Lake if the company gets the go-ahead to build the mine.