

Sustainability of Wood Products: The Westervelt Company

Background

Identifying and implementing alternatives to fossil fuels is not a new practice. In fact, options like water (hydropower) can trace its history as far back as 200 B.C.; wind, similarly, was first documented in the 10th century A.D.* Since 1997, however, when the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change finalized the Kyoto Protocol which set internationally binding emission reduction targets for its Parties, this topic has dominated the global fuel consumption and environmental impact conversation. A highly charged topic woven throughout its manufacturing history, The Westervelt Company is no stranger to public outcry regarding emissions and environmental impacts, and has proactively implemented and maintained best management practices over the past 40 years, as outlined in its [Environmental Policy](#).

This evolved perspective led the organization to enter the renewable fuel source production industry, constructing a manufacturing facility in 2013 that converts a percentage of its sustainable fiber resources (aka “biomass”) into pellets, an alternative fuel source used by utilities in Europe to reduce their fossil fuel-based greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as defined by the Kyoto Protocol.

Position

The Westervelt Company embraces biomass as a renewable fuel source and believes it is a sustainable industry. The organization is compliant to a system of standards outlined by a variety of regulatory agencies and third-party certifications including: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), Alabama Forestry Association, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Forest Stewardship Council®, Sustainable Forestry Initiative®, and Green Gold Label (GGL) program.

*Source: <http://alternativeenergy.procon.org/view.timeline.php?timelineID=000015>

Current Outlook; Demonstrated Successes

The biomass industry received considerable news coverage in 2013. Much of this coverage questioned the sustainability of U.S. forests as pellet exports to Europe increased, and though European countries are concerned the raw material and products they use are derived from a legal and sustainable source, the bulk of the news coverage was factually incomplete and/or inaccurate and initiated by special interest Environmental Non-Government Organizations (ENGOS).

Social and environmental criteria in the growth and harvesting of wood are used to define forest sustainability: European utilities want their wood pellet suppliers to treat their workers respectfully regarding safety, work environment and compensation. Wood must be grown in an environmentally conscientious manner that does not endanger rare habitats or species.

Although some parts of the world have trouble meeting these criteria, the United States maintains favorable status regarding legality, social and environmental protection. Our country's system of laws allow for protection of property rights and social rights of workers. Federal environmental laws around clean water and endangered species have been applied for over 40 years. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and US Forest Service have systems of protected reserves that contribute to species and forest conservation. The US Army Corps of Engineers has strict regulations which protect threatened habitats in our country.

Abundant forest resources in the United States, particularly the Southeast, are another contributing factor to forest sustainability. Forests have been stable for the past 100 years, and the volume of growing stock continues to increase as more fiber is grown than is harvested. Our free-market system in the US encourages investment in forestry as strong markets for products provide incentives to landowners to replant and keep the land they own in trees.



Our Federal laws have been the basis for state laws and regulatory organizations. In Alabama these include the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and the Alabama Forestry Commission, among others. Regulations require the state to develop Wildlife Action Plans and Forest Assessments to aid in planning. These organizations also help protect our environment by authorizing and monitoring forestry best management practices (BMP's), which provide for clean water and protect soil productivity. Effective implementation is evidenced through monitoring conducted by forestry commissions in Southeast states.

As a company with a strong commitment to environmental stewardship, The Westervelt Company has self-imposed other levels of protection and verification. We have diligently sought and maintained third-party certification to sustainable forestry standards. These standards require us to develop management systems and have exacting processes to complete our work and monitor and achieve successful outcomes. The company became certified to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) standards in 2004, and became certified to the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) standards in 2011.

While these programs verify the environmental management of our own forest, the SFI® program also reaches out to landowners and loggers in our procurement system who supply our lumber and wood pellet production facilities. This procurement system standard requires we educate the landowners and loggers - and provides for our monitoring of suppliers performance - with BMP's. Our certifications also include Chain of Custody, which allows our facilities to pass claims of certified products onto our customers. From a manufacturing standpoint, Westervelt Renewable Energy received third-party certification to the European Green Gold Label (GGL) Standard at the Aliceville Pellet Mill.





As you can see, these multi-layered, complex efforts to provide sustainable products to our customers around the world are substantial. The transparency created by the global microscope requires we communicate and provide evidence that the products meet a matrix of sustainability requirements and expectations now and in the future.