Energy policy: renewable sources, biomass action plan

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PURPOSE: to present the Commission's biomass action plan.

CONTENT: the Commission has prepared this report on biomass fuels within the context of a wider debate on the EU's energy policies and its shift towards the use of renewable energy. The report reminds readers that in Spring 2006, the Commission will present a Green Paper on its Energy policy in which three key objectives will be outlined. They are, competitiveness, sustainability and the security of supply. The need to reduce energy demand combined with an increased reliance on renewable energy sources are key to meeting these three objectives. Biomass plays a vital role in all of this given that it presently accounts for about half of all EU renewable energy use.

According to this report, measures spelt out in the proposed action plan could lead to an increase in biomass use. Although less than its full potential the increase in use would be in line with indicative renewable energy targets. In numbers, the increase in biomass use could result by 2010 in the following benefits:

- diversification of Europe's energy supply and an increase in the share of renewable energy by 5%. Such steps would effectively reduce current reliability on imported energy from 48 to 42%.

- A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 209 million tonnes CO2eq a year.

- Direct employment for up to 250-300 000 people, mostly in rural areas.

- Potential downward pressure on the oil price as a result of lower demand for oil.

- An extension of the EU's technological leadership in these sectors.

In its conclusions the Commission notes that Europe needs to break its dependence on fossil fuels. Biomass is one of the main alternatives. As such, cost-effective measures need to be developed at a European level in order to draw a maximum advantage from national and local innovation, in order to provide a clear way forward for major European industries and in order to share the burdens equitably. This Communications sets out a co-ordinated programme for Community action, including measures to improve demand for biomass, improve energy supply, overcome technical barriers and to develop and encourage research initiatives. The next step is to put the action plan into practice. The forthcoming Green Paper on a coherent European energy policy will offer additional benefits in terms of progress and future developments.