

A BETTER BIOMASS PLANT

Controversy surrounds the proposed Seneca biomass plant, which would burn logging slash, releasing toxins into the air in Eugene. But there are other ways to create energy from waste, and a proposed bioenergy plant in Junction City seeks to offer a cleaner alternative.

Mike McKenzie Bahr, Lane County community and economic development coordinator, says the proposed bioenergy park that will produce energy from grass straw, a byproduct of the grass seed industry, and other wastes, will involve no burning. "Since we eliminated burning," he says, "why burn?"

The bioenergy park being developed by a team of people from Lane Council of Governments, Lane County, Oregon Seed Council and the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The park would be one in a proposed string of such facilities up the Willamette Valley that will produce energy from "problematic wastes that don't have a home," McKenzie-Bahr says. Milo Mecham of LCOG says a string of facilities instead of one large facility would cut down on the distances that grass straw and logging slash would have to be trucked.

According to McKenzie-Bahr, the goals of the bioenergy facility include not only not burning, but also not displacing foods, like corn-based ethanol does.

The facility would involve an anaerobic digester, which McKenzie-Bahr says in laymen's terms means that bacteria in a sealed container would digest material such as grass straw and possibly grape leaves from local wineries, among other wastes. "The bacteria does two things," he says. "It poops and it farts. It farts methane."

The methane would then be used to power diesel engines, also in a sealed-off area, to produce electricity. McKenzie-Bahr says that the CO2 byproduct of the engines would go back into digester to aid the bacteria. The heat from the engines would be used both in producing cellulosic ethanol from agricultural wastes, and in drying and compressing the "dirty wood" from logging slash piles into bio-bricks for home heating.

Mecham says that the bio-bricks burn cleaner than the more moist wood ordinarily used in fireplaces and wood stoves.

The other byproduct of the anaerobic digester, McKenzie Bahr says, is the "poop" from the bacteria. That becomes compost, which can then go back to the grass seed growers who can use it to replace the nutrients the field burning process gave the soil.

Lisa Arkin of Oregon Toxics Alliance, which has worked to end field burning and spoken out against the Seneca biomass plant, says, "At first glance, OTA is very supportive of an anaerobic digester; it's a fascinating thing for Lane County to investigate."

McKenzie-Bahr says another key component of the plant is maximizing local jobs out of the process. The funding, he says, will be based on an industrial park model with public financing to set up the grounds and private green energy companies paying for their facilities. They hope to break ground on the facility in 2010. — *Camilla Mortensen*



PERMACULTURE GATHERING BEGINS FRIDAY

The 12th Annual Eugene Permaculture Gathering runs Aug. 28-30 this year. The event was previously known as the Cascadia Ecofair and will take place at Maitreya EcoVillage, 1641 W. Broadway in Eugene.

The event features meals, entertainment, tours, and workshops on introductory gardening, soil fertility, food preservation techniques, swine flu, rainwater catchment systems, beekeeping, building sustainably with accessible materials, property conversion, neighborhood collaboration and much more, according to Clay Grantham, a UO sociology doctoral student who will speak on "The Truth About the Economic Meltdown."

Other speakers include Joshua Smith, Luna Lacy, Brian Basor, Rick Valley, Jude Hobbs, Heiko Koester, Heather Flores, Jan Spencer, Devon Bonady, John Sundquist, Taylor Zeigler, Nick Routledge, Mark Robinowitz, Matt McRae, Megan Hinkel, Indigo Ronlov, Aleta Miller, Charlotte Anthony, Dan Armstrong, Eric Meyer and Joshua Smith.

"Permaculture is a design system for creating sustainable human environments," Grantham says. "It is based on an ethic of interacting with the natural world in mutually beneficial ways, and meeting our basic needs closer to where we live, without dependence on extraction of resources from other locations."

Sliding scale ticket prices for the whole weekend start at \$30. Daily rates, work trades and scholarships are available. For more information or registration, visit permaculturegathering.org or call 345-6822.

news Briefs



CONFUSED ABOUT HEALTH CARE?

One thing is clear after Congressman Peter DeFazio's recent packed town hall meetings: Most people are unclear about the proposed health care plan. Attendees at the Aug. 18 meeting in Eugene came and stood in line in the hot sun to protest, counter-protest or sometimes to find out a little more about all of the brouhaha.

Eugenean Peggy Casper said she attended the meeting in order to find out more about co-ops. She said currently she and her husband have good health insurance, but they are looking into options for when he retires. Health care cooperatives began making news after the Obama administration indicated it might accept co-ops as a possible alternative should the public option get written out of the health care bill.

Sen. Ken Conrad (D-ND) is a strong advocate of co-ops. He has put up a website (at www.conrad.senate.gov) addressing many of the questions about how he proposes the co-ops be run under his "Consumer Owned and Operated Plan" (CO-OP). In his proposal, the co-ops would be nonprofits that would provide insurance to members and contract with provider networks for care. The federal government would provide the seed money for the co-ops, but after that they would be run by members and a democratically elected board that "would make decisions such as determining premiums, benefits covered, deductibles and co-pays."

Seattle-based Group Health Cooperative here in the Northwest is often cited as an example of a successful medical co-op, as is Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin, which ranked 8th in the nation in commercial health care plans, according to a National Committee for Quality Assurance study published in *U.S. News and World Report*.

Other town hall attendees came to express displeasure over issues they think are being raised by President Obama's proposal to reform health care. Sandra Hickey of Corvallis came to the meeting holding an "Obama Lies, Granny Dies" sign. She said, "I don't think we should give illegal immigrants health care, but Obama's going to give health care to the illegals, but not seniors."

Obama addressed that concern in his most recent weekly address on Aug. 22, when he said, "Let's start with the false claim that illegal immigrants will get health insurance under reform. That's not true. Illegal immigrants would not be covered. That idea has never even been on the table."

Francisca Levya-Johnson, a city human rights program staff member attending the

meeting, but speaking she said while "on vacation," said that those "afraid of a national health care plan," should know that "there are piles of research on how immigrants access health care services. They don't."

Obama's recent weekly radio address tackled other misrepresentations of the proposed plan including government funded abortions and so called "death panels." DeFazio also addressed such issues if they arose from a questioner at his meetings and handed out a fact sheet on the proposal to attendees, as well as a comment card and an invite to join in on his Sept. 3 "TeleTown Hall." Sign up by 5 pm Sept. 2 to participate. See www.defazio.house.gov for more information. — *Camilla Mortensen*

BIKE PROJECTS MAKE GOING GREENER

While billions of taxpayer dollars go into local freeways that throttle livability and the planet, a few million are being spent on greener, more human transportation.

Here's a look at some major upcoming bike projects based on documents from the Metropolitan Policy Commission. The MPC is the less known, less democratic interjurisdictional committee run by LCOG (the less known, undemocratic local planning bureaucracy) that oversees

WAR DEAD

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003
(last week's numbers in parentheses):

In Iraq

- **4,334 U.S. troops killed*** (4,331)
- **31,469 U.S. troops injured*** (31,463)
- **185 U.S. military suicides*** (185)

- **1,123 U.S. contractors killed**
(accurate updates NA)

- **101,388 to 1.2 million civilians killed***** (101,326)

- **\$676.5 billion cost of war**
(\$674.5 billion)

- **\$192.4 million cost to Eugene taxpayers** (\$191.8 million)

In Afghanistan

- **798 U.S. troops killed*** (783)
- **3,614 U.S. troops injured*** (3,522)

- **\$225.1 billion cost of war**
(\$224.5 million)

- **\$64.0 million cost to Eugene taxpayers** (\$63.9 million)

* through August 24, 2009; source: icasualties.org;
some figures only updated monthly

** sources: icasualties.org, defenseink.mil

*** highest estimate; source: iraqbodycount.org; based on confirmed media reports; other groups calculate civilian deaths as high as 655,000 (Lancet survey, 2006) to 1.2 million (Opinion Research Business survey, 2008)