
Environment Committee

ESSB 5709

Brief Description: Concerning a pilot program to demonstrate the feasibility of using densified biomass to heat public schools.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Smith, Ericksen, Sheldon, Holmquist Newbry, Dammeier, Brown and Roach).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Directs the WSU Extension Energy Program to develop and initiate a pilot program to use densified biomass to heat two public schools meeting certain criteria, by December 1, 2013.

Hearing Date:

Staff: Jacob Lipson (786-7196).

Background:

Densified biomass, or wood pellets, is a heating product manufactured from condensed sawdust and chipped wood. Among other materials, densified biomass can be sourced from residual woody biomass from construction or forestry activities.

The Washington State University Extension Energy Program (WSU energy program) is a self-supported department within the university that provides research-based services and products for public, private, and non-profit partner organizations. The 2012 Legislature appropriated a total of \$75,000 in supplemental operating budget to the WSU energy program to study densified biomass as a renewable fuel used for heating homes, businesses, and other facilities. As required by this appropriation, in December, 2012, the WSU energy program submitted a preliminary report to the Legislature of its findings. The WSU Energy program report identifies certain carbon emission, forest health, waste diversion, and economic advantages to the use of densified biomass for energy, as well as identifies certain challenges, including those posed by both competition for woody biomass source materials and competition from other sources of energy.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill:

By December 1, 2013, the WSU energy program is directed to develop and initiate a pilot program to demonstrate the feasibility of using densified biomass to heat public schools. The development of this pilot program is subject to the WSU energy program's receipt of federal and private funds for purposes of the pilot program. The WSU energy program may contract with other entities in order to implement the pilot program, and must submit a report to the Legislature by December 31, 2015 at the conclusion of the pilot program. The pilot program must include the following activities at two public schools:

- the replacement of a school's current heating system with a densified biomass heating system;
- the measurement and evaluation of the heating system, including a cost-comparison with conventional fuels; and
- the measurement of emissions from the heating system.

The two public schools chosen to participate in the pilot program must meet certain qualifying criteria. One school is to be selected based on the following factors:

- its proximity to a currently operating densified biomass manufacturer;
- the age and condition of the school's current heating system; and
- the similarity of the school's design to other schools of its class.

The second school must be located in a rural county bordering Hood Canal, the Olympic National Park, and southern Puget Sound.

The bill also makes certain findings related to the logistical, environmental, and economic advantages of using densified biomass as a heating source for schools and other buildings.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.