

Harsh winter conditions fuel the use of energy wood

Fuel shortages combined with extreme cold weather conditions during the winter 2005/2006 in the Northern Hemisphere attracted the attention of the media, the public and, in consequence, the policy community, leading to an intense discussion about energy security. Harsh climatic conditions were reported in Europe, predominantly in the Russian Federation but also in other parts of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. In addition to the climatic conditions, increased demand for energy resources led to high prices for gas, petrol and coal on the global market. The impact was most significant for those countries with a relatively low GDP. Furthermore some countries experienced political distortions with other states and some pipelines came under terrorist attack.

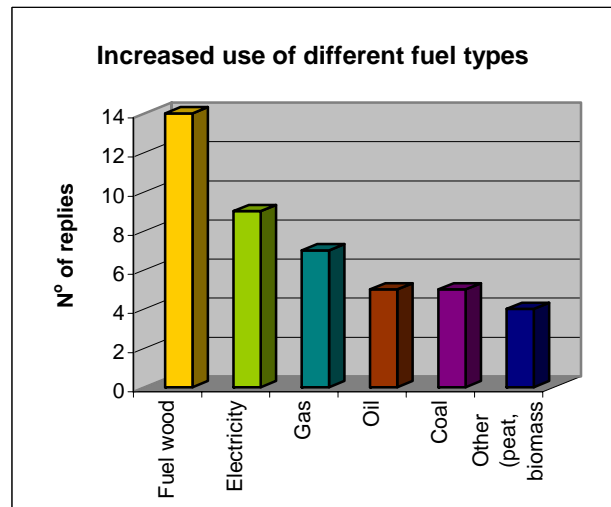
The Timber Section of the UNECE¹/FAO² in Geneva unsure of the implications for forests in the affected regions launched an informal investigation, to find out how serious the situation was and to make policy makers aware of the possible consequences.

In consultation with the bureaux of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission a simple enquiry (see below) was sent to national forest administrations and ministries asking if they had seen an increase in the use of wood for energy and what effect this was having on their countries' forest sector. While the results are not scientific or statistically representative, they do at least give a picture of the conditions in the 20 countries that replied out of the 42 that were approached³.

Main results:

The winter of 2005/2006 has been significantly colder than usual. In more than half of the countries the heating period was much longer and snowfall was heavier and more prolonged than normal⁴.

The use of all fuel types increased (see box). The pattern of increase differed between countries.



- 14 countries reported increased use of wood energy of which 9 considered the increase as “significant” (>10%): Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland, and Ukraine.
- In 17 countries wood is a significant source of energy in rural areas.

Even where wood energy increased significantly, its share in meeting national energy needs remains small and negligible. It does however become significant in certain circumstances, notably in poor rural areas where alternative fuel sources are limited or uncertain.

Despite the changes that have been seen this winter, only 5 countries have adopted measures to improve or regulate wood energy supply and use.

Preliminary conclusions:

This rapid survey confirms that wood energy is a significant source of energy, especially in rural areas:

- Wood energy use responds to changes in demand, without any significant policy direction: in the harsh winter of 2005/6, wood energy use rose in 9 countries by more than 10% above normal level.
- Wood can be a useful reserve fuel in times of energy supply problems.
- Few countries have systems in place to monitor or control wood use for energy.

¹ UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

² FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

³ Canada, the US, Great Britain and Israel were excluded as the winter in these regions was reported to be much warmer than average.

⁴ www.wmo.ch/meteoworld/en/northern.htm

Question N°	EU 15 / EFTA							NEW EU Member states					SE-Europe				EECCA			Analysis									
	Belgium (Wallonie)	Denmark	Germany	Liechtenstein	Luxembourg	Norway	Switzerland	Cyprus	Czech Republic	Latvia	Poland	Slovakia	Slovenia	Croatia	Montenegro	Romania	Turkey	Belarus	Ukraine	Uzbekistan	Yes	No	No reply	Increased	Decreased	Same			
1. What is this winter 2005/2006 like in your country?																													
A Colder than normal	N	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	16	1	3			
B A longer heating period than expected			Y	Y		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y						10	0	10			
C More snowfall than normal		Y	Y	Y	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y								Y			10	0	10			
2. Please indicate the energy source(s) for heating in your country and estimate the tendency of its use in comparison to other years. Has one sector or another changed during the last months:																													
A Gas		S	I	I/S	S	S	I	S	I	I	I	D	S	I			S	S	I								7	1	7
B Coal		S	D	D/S	D	S			I	S	I	I	S	S	S		I	S	I								5	2	6
C Oil		S	S	D	I	S	S	D	I	I	I	D	D	I	S												5	4	5
D Fuel wood		S	I	I	I	S	I	I	I	I	I	I	I		S		I	I	I	I							14	0	3
E Electricity		S	I	S	I	S	I	I	I	I	S	S	S	I	S		I	I									9	0	7
F Other (peat, biomass from agriculture etc.)		S	I	S	I	S		I	S	S	S	S	S	S		I										4	0	9	
3. To what extent has wood energy consumption changed this winter																													
A Increased significantly (more than 10 % over normal)			Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y							Y				9		11				
B Roughly unchanged		Y		Y		Y						Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y				10		10				
C Decreased																							0						
4. Have energy supply problems affected																													
A Rural areas			Y	N						Y					Y				Y				4	1	15				
B Urban areas				N															Y				1	1	18				
5. Have policy measures been taken linked to wood energy? (e.g. measures to increase supply of substituting fuels, support for organised wood harvesting or transport, measures to prevent over harvesting.)																													
Yes	Y		Y									Y		Y	Y								5						
No		Y		(Y)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y			14						
6. In normal years, is wood a significant part of energy supply, in your country?																													
Yes, in rural areas		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	17		3				
Yes, in urban areas		Y				Y	Y								Y								4		16				
No									Y														1		19				
7. If wood fuel use is significant, could you please indicate which supply structure can be found?																													
A Auto consumption/self cutting (Rural/Urban)	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/?		Y/?	Y/?		Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	13	2					
B Small scale local market (Rural/Urban)	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/Y		Y/?	Y/Y	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	15	9					
C Organized supply structures (Rural/Urban)		Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/?		Y/?	Y/Y		Y/?		Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	Y/?	12	8					
D Other (short description) (Rural/Urban)						Y/Y																							
8. Has the supply pattern changed this winter? Please describe.	Y	N		N		N		N	N	N	N	N		N	N	N	N					1	11	8					
9. Are there reports and articles about the impacts of energy supply problems on forest resources?																													
A Yes (Before this winter / This winter)	Y/?								Y/?					Y/?		Y/?	Y/?					4	0						
B No (Before this winter / This winter)		Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/?	Y/Y	Y/Y		Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y			16	18					
10. If yes, could you describe the kind of impact, please? (If reports are available could you please send them to the UNECE/FAO Timber Section.)																													
11. Have you information about increased theft of wood or illegal logging by individuals or groups, or over harvesting?		N		N		N	N				N	N		N	N	N						10	10						
12. Please add any other observation about the forestry sector in your country that may seem pertinent																													