

OEC, a network of 85 green energy businesses – innovative marketing of biomass products and services

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Background

Upper Austria is one of Europe's leading regions regarding the use of renewable energy sources. 30% of the total energy consumption (about 84 PJ) is already covered by renewable energy and 13% of this is provided by biomass. A number of companies producing technologies and equipment in the field of biomass and other renewable energy sources established themselves in Upper Austria. They are one of the most important driving forces for the market development as they achieve a total turnover of about 145 million Euro and employ more than 1,100 people. 46 % of the production is exported, the regional value added amounts to 57 %!

Usually these companies are small, frequently even very small (less than 50 employees). Whereas the small size presents an advantage in term of flexibility and innovation, there are also severe disadvantages, especially regarding R&D, marketing and export markets. The aim of the network is to support especially small companies in overcoming these barriers by providing well-targeted services to foster their internal and external development and make them more professional. The network supports research and development efforts, promotes export chances and provides staff training and marketing activities. The OEC is managed by the O.Ö. Energiesparverband, the regional energy agency, and financed by the Regional Government of Upper Austria.

Members of the new network

The network consists of 85 companies and entities which are active in the field of renewable energy technologies (from biomass, biogas, solar thermal, PV, to wind power). Out of the 85 companies that have joined the network, 36 are active in the field of biomass technologies. The structure of the energy technology companies ranges from small to medium sized enterprises, many companies are even very small businesses.

Their market positions vary greatly, ranging from production companies to suppliers of components. Sometimes there are only few companies in one segment. On the other hand the companies have much in common as for example low prices of the respective energy, no lobbying, lack of information, lack of identity, small production quantities. Most of the companies are active in the biomass energy field, followed by thermal solar and heat pump companies.

All companies and organisations in Upper Austria producing renewable energy technologies or providing related services can become Cluster partners. Partnership is free and starts with a declaration of partnership. So far, as many as 85 companies and organisations have joined the OEC (as of March 2001).

Some examples for members of the OEC:

- ?? **ABEX:** An internet-based Austrian biomass exchange which started up in spring 2000 and will be up-scaled to an European biomass exchange in the summer 2001.
- ?? **Fröling:** Austrian market leader for wood heating system (200 staff, 35 Mio Euro turn-over) of the whole range of biomass heating systems like wood chips, saw dust, wood-pellets and log wood in a power range from 5 up to 1500 kW. The newest development is the full automatically operated wood-pellet heating system "Pelletherm P2" which was awarded the Austrian innovation prize "Energie Genie 2001".
- ?? **ÖkoFEN:** Austrian market leader for wood pellets heating systems in the range of 3 to 32 kW.
- ?? **Huemer Solar:** Another example for the success story of Upper-Austrian innovative renewable energy-technology: Huemer Solar produces high efficient heating systems including all

components of solar technology and pellets heating technology. The prefabricated compact solar installation was awarded the Austrian innovation prize "Energie Genie 2000".

Main areas of co-operation

The Cluster's activities cover the following areas:

- ?? Information and Communication: A data base containing information on the OEC partners, presentation of the OEC on the internet, an English/German catalogue of products and services offered by the OEC partners, on-going information services for its members
- ?? Training: Organisation of training courses, business events and workshops
- ?? Co-operation: Development, launch and support of co-operation projects of network partners and technology transfer facilities (such as universities or research institutions), co-operation with other networks
- ?? Research and Development: Development, launch and support of research projects of OEC partners
- ?? Export: Representing the OEC internationally, supporting export activities (together with the Chamber of Commerce), networking with energy agencies from other countries
- ?? Marketing and PR: Compiling information material on green-energy, marketing the OEC in Austria and other countries, PR activities, market research and development.

Examples of activities carried out by the OEC

So far, the activities of the Oekoenergie-Cluster include:

- ?? Workshops and seminars, e.g. "Wood Pellet Heating Systems – Promotion Strategies"
- ?? Market research on wood pellets (concerning consumers/producers)
- ?? A catalogue of products and services offered by the Cluster partners
- ?? Preparation of a purchase co-operation
- ?? Compilation of a technology guide
- ?? Lectures by marketing specialists
- ?? Presentations at international trade fairs and meetings
- ?? Launching of co-operation projects and finding co-operation partners
- ?? Creation of an information platform (e.g. "Cluster-News")
- ?? Evaluation of instruction manuals of wood pellet heating systems.

OÖ. Energiesparverband

The OÖ. Energiesparverband is responsible for the management of the "Oekoenergie-Cluster" network. The regional energy agency was founded by the Regional Government with the aim of promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy sources as well as innovative energy technologies. It is the central institution for energy information and one of Europe's largest energy advice and information providers. The main services are:

- ?? Providing information on energy related topics and increasing public awareness of green energy issues: various information tools, seminars, conferences
- ?? Offering energy advice to private households, businesses and institutions
- ?? Programmes to promote and support low energy buildings and retrofitting
- ?? Training and education: training programmes for energy advisors, plumbers, related fields
- ?? Management of support programmes: ETP - Energy Technology Programme (R&D), Third Party Financing Programme
- ?? European projects (member of FEDARENE, EUFORES and the OPET networks).