

Coast Guard Looking Toward Wood to Heat Alaska Bases

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The United States Coast Guard, like all federal agencies, is under a new mandate from the White House to be more energy efficient. In that vein, the Coast Guard in Alaska is going to study the feasibility of using bio-fuels at some of its bases, including here in Kodiak.

Jay Barrett has more:

The sprawling Coast Guard base in Kodiak - the largest in the nation - needs a lot of energy to make it run. Lieutenant Roger Mason, the chief of construction and planning, says about 1-million gallons of fuel oil is burned each year just to heat the base facilities and some of the housing. If another fuel - perhaps a renewable one - can be utilized, it would go a long way toward cutting costs and reducing the base's carbon footprint. That's why the Coast Guard is looking at using locally-sourced woodchips or pellets here in Kodiak, as well as at bases in Ketchikan and Sitka.

Mason said a feasibility study will get underway soon.

-- (USCG Wood 1 12 sec "Department
of Energy ... here in Kodiak.")

Robert Deering is the chief of the Environmental and Engineering Branch with the Coast Guard in Juneau. He said there are many reasons for considering the change.

-- (USCG Wood 2 42 sec "One
is cost ... to just to chip it up.")

Pumping oil up from underground adds new carbon to the atmosphere when it's burned, while wood is considered a carbon-neutral fuel source. Deering also says that wood doesn't have a lot of the other pollutants common in fuel oil:

-- (USCG Wood 3 28 sec "In
some ways burning ... added to these systems.")

Mason says there would definitely need to be changes to the base's boiler system, but he says the new burners might function a lot like wood pellet stoves for the home:

-- USCG Wood 4 29 sec "I
think you could ... existing distribution system.")

Deering says it could still be two to four years before the bases are ready to start retrofitting their boilers, if the study shows it's feasible.

With help from Deanna Garrison in Ketchikan, I'm Jay Barrett.

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