



SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MARCH 22, 2019 / 11:19 AM / 2 DAYS AGO

## France's EDF in race to convert Cordemais plant from coal to biomass

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CORDEMAIS, France (Reuters) - French utility EDF aims to convert its 1,200-megawatt (MW) Cordemais coal-fired power plant by spring 2022 into one that burns pellet fuel made from discarded wood, giving the unit a new lease of life.

Densified biomass pellets are pictured at the Electricite de France (EDF) coal-fired power plant in Cordemais, near Nantes, France, March 21, 2019. REUTERS/Stephane Mahe

If successful, the process - known as Ecocombust - could be exported and adapted to other coal plants, saving jobs, while Cordemais would boost France's security of supply in winter.

But EDF must convince the government by autumn that the project is financially and environmentally viable. French grid operator RTE is also expected to determine by April whether the plant is surplus to requirements.

In its long-term energy plan, France has laid out moves to phase out electricity generation from coal by 2022, with the goal of decarbonizing energy production by 2050.

The decision sounded the death knell for the five remaining coal-fired generators in France, with an installed capacity of around 3,000 MW. Three of the generators - Cordemais 4 and 5, and Havre 4 - are operated by state-controlled EDF.

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Cordemais in western France was overhauled two years ago to meet new emissions and safety standards at a cost of several million euros, and could keep operating until 2035, EDF says.

France's two other coal generators, Emile Huchet 6 and Provence 5, with a combined installed capacity of 1,200 MW, are operated by German utility Uniper.

EDF executives said the Ecocombust project, already in an advanced test phase, would burn pellets made from discarded "class B" wood and garden waste, for large-scale power generation. The project is the first of its kind, they say.

Although pellets from wood chips and sawdust are widely used for heating, Eric Bret, EDF's head of thermal power generation, said the process was different because the company would not cut down any trees.

"The pellets are made from ... everyday objects such as beams, doors, window frames and furniture, which until now are mostly recycled or buried in landfill," he said.

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Lionel Olivier, director of the Cordemais and Havre power plants, said the pellets would be 70 percent "class B" wood and 30 percent residue from grass, tree branches and garden waste, all sourced within a radius of 150 km (93 miles).

He said EDF was setting up a supply chain that included municipal waste authorities and companies, but would need state aid.

EDF declined to say what the conversion would cost and how much it had invested in the process.

At capacity, it aims to replace around 1.3 million to 2 million tonnes of coal imported annually from Poland, Australia and the United States, with about 700,000 tonnes of biomass.

Tests carried out in August with 80 percent pellet fuel and 20 percent coal to generate electricity for over four hours were successful, Olivier said.

The pellets have 20 percent less energy or caloric value than coal, which could reduce each generator's output capacity to 530 MW from 600 MW currently, he added.

Cordemais' production would focus on periods of peak power demand in winter. After the conversion, output would be reduced to 800 hours annually from 4,000 hours, he said.

Slideshow (3 Images)

"Runtime would be five times less than the current production using coal but it will focus on a period when power prices are higher and more profitable," Olivier said.

He added that the plant would also use five times less coal and emit five times less carbon dioxide.

Reporting by Bate Felix; Editing by Dale Hudson

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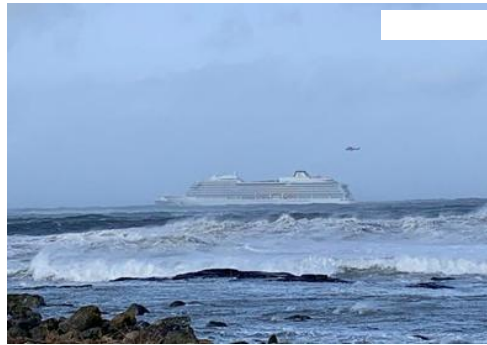
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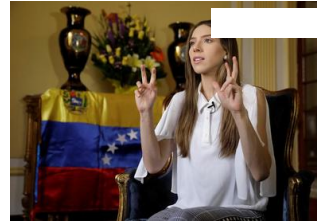
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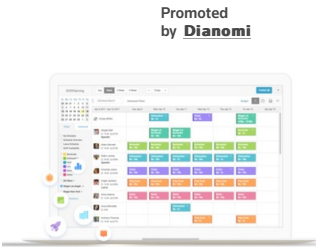
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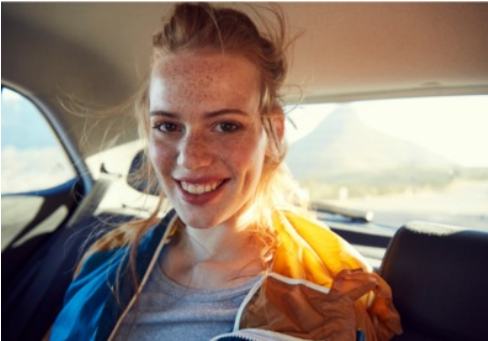
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