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Oregon company ready to license its biomass technology

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Biomass briquettes made from logging slash can be burned like coal to power electrical plants. An Oregon company says it has perfected the technology to produce the briquettes.

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HM3 CEO Hiroshi Morihara, left, and Sen. Ron Wyden spoke at a biomass briquette news conference Oct. 18 in Troutdale, Ore.

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TROUTDALE, ORE. — An Oregon company showed off a demonstration facility where it converts *forest slash* to biomass briquettes, and said it is prepared to license the technology and sell it world-wide.

Hiroshi Morihara, an Oregon developer and engineer who is CEO of HM3 Energy Inc., also announced the company has found a “big fish” investor: A Japanese energy company that wants to use the briquettes to fire electrical power plants in Japan and replace coal and nuclear facilities. New Energy Development Co. has invested \$2 million in HM3 and plans to build a briquette production plant at an undisclosed location in Oregon. The briquettes would then be exported to Japan.

Using logging debris or agricultural crop residue to make biomass pellets is an idea that has had numerous starts and stops over the years, as developers and investors have struggled to make the process pencil out.

The upside has always been appealing from a rural economic development perspective. Using forest slash to produce biomass energy reduces wildfire risk, restores forest health and puts people to work in the woods and in production facilities, backers say. An economical technical solution, however, has been slow in coming.

HM3 believes it has refined the process to the point it can license and sell the technology.

“We were able to say, hey, we can do this,” Morihara said during a news conference and media tour of the company’s \$4 million demonstration plant in Troutdale, east of Portland.

The company, and others working along the same line, uses a process called torrefaction. They essentially roast wood debris in a controlled environment and temperature range, which removes moisture and volatile compounds. The finished product is a light-weight, brittle cube that can be pulverized and burned



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like coal, but much cleaner. At the news conference, Morihara displayed briquettes made from juniper trees.

Portland General Electric is interested in converting its coal-fired power plant in Boardman, Ore., to operate on biomass. Later this year, a company called Oregon Torrefaction will supply PGE with enough briquettes to operate the power plant for a day, considered a key test of the technology.

Oregon BEST, an arm of the state business department that provides funding and university research expertise for a variety of energy projects, estimates Oregon, Washington and British Columbia could provide 35 million tons a year of biomass material to torrefaction plants.

The event at HM3 included an appearance by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, Oregon’s senior senator. He said HM3’s progress demonstrates that politicians don’t generate jobs themselves but can best help by creating a good business climate through such things as research and development tax credits.

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