

Cookerly Lights up Press Coverage for Oglethorpe Power's Biomass Initiative

Overview

Oglethorpe Power Corporation (OPC), the nation's largest power supply cooperative with approximately \$5 billion in assets, plans to build as many as three 100 MW biomass power plants in Georgia. OPC retained Cookerly Public Relations to launch a high-profile public relations campaign that would secure positive media coverage and approval from OPC member utilities and their customers, community leaders and government officials.

Objective

As OPC worked to finalize the power plant sites and permit applications from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Cookerly was directed to implement a coordinated and comprehensive roll-out of the biomass plants with Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue and the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority. The media blitz was designed to generate excitement about OPC's announcement of the largest biomass power initiative in the U.S. -- and to position the company as a leading proponent of conscientious energy development.

Strategy & Tactics

To secure favorable visibility and awareness, Cookerly conducted a thorough media relations campaign to coincide with Governor Sonny Perdue's announcement of the biomass plants during a speech on clean energy and conservation. The strategy called for a wide-ranging media push directed at local, state, national and social media, and outreach to applicable industry and state organizations.

Cookerly was also responsible for developing communications materials and presentations about the plants to educate government officials and the cooperative's members. Additionally, the firm developed key messages that positioned OPC as a proponent of conscience energy development by balancing reliable and affordable electricity with environmental responsibility.

Results

Cookerly's press blitz secured more than 100 placements in less than two weeks with favorable coverage of the biomass power plants in print, online, television and radio media. Articles were featured in local, state, national and trade publications (including energy/utility trades) -- with an advertising equivalency of more than \$2 million -- and reached more than 60 million readers/viewers.

Media placements included *Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Florida Times-Union*, *Morris News Service*, *Macon Telegraph* and more.



Highlights

Cookerly successfully launched one of the largest biomass power generation initiatives to date.

In two weeks, the firm secured more than 100 placements for OPC with state, national and trade media, and positioned the company as an environmentally conscientious energy provider.



Utility exec: Georgia fertile field for biomass

By Dave Williams
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Georgia isn't alone in developing technology for producing electricity from biomass, but abundant forests will give the state a huge leg up, a top executive with Oglethorpe Power Corp. said in an interview.

The Tucker, Ga.-based utility was scheduled to announce plans Sept. 18 to build up to three 100-megawatt power plants fueled by woody biomass.

The first two are scheduled to go on line in 2014 and the following year at a cost of \$400 million to \$500 million each. The company decides to build the third, it would also begin production in 2015.

"The first two plants would increase Georgia's planned biomass-fired power generating capacity to nearly 600

"We did an intensive study of the forestry industry and got very comfortable that we could build three plants, maybe even four."

Oglethorpe is the nation's largest power supply cooperative, providing electricity to 4.1 million Georgians through 38 electric membership corporations scattered across the state.

The utility's energy portfolio includes interests in both of Georgia's nuclear power plants, two coal-burning plants, a half-dozen gas-fired plants and a hydroelectric facility.

Price said Oglethorpe has purchased options on five potential sites for the biomass plants in Appling, Echols, Warren and Washington counties, all in the east timber belt south of Interstate 20.

Price said utilities in other states also are working on biomass projects, but most of those plants would have much smaller capacities.

He said Oglethorpe officials believe 100 megawatts is "a good place to be," taking into account the characteristics of the technology, the available fuel supply and costs. "You get economies of scale with your infrastructure when you go up to 100 megawatts," he said.

Georgia Power Co. also is an active player in the biomass movement.

The utility has committed to purchasing half of the power produced at the Fort Calles plant from Yellow Pine Energy Company LLC.

Georgia Power also filed an application with the state Public Service Commission last month to convert its Plant Mitchell, a 100-megawatt coal-burning plant near Albany, to a 100-megawatt biomass unit.

Spokeswoman Lynn Wallace said the utility expects to win state approval of the conversion next March or April.

Wallace said Georgia Power, like Oglethorpe, is investing in biomass in part because fossil fuels are getting more expensive.

"The costs of coal and natural gas have gone up dramatically," she said. "Biomass is becoming much more affordable."

Price said price volatility and changing environmental regulations have made it more important than ever for utilities to diversify their power generation portfolios to include renewable sources of energy in Georgia, that means biomass.

"It's the only alternative you can really turn to to have a sustainable project," he said. "You can't get there with wind or solar."

According to a project overview released by Oglethorpe, each of the two 100-megawatt plants would employ up to 40 full-time workers. In addition, the more than \$200 million each plant would spend annually on fuel would support hundreds of jobs in the forest industry, including harvesting and processing the wood and transporting the fuel to the plants.

Dave Williams is a reporter for abcnews.com.