

Bates: Sustainability

By Sustainable Abigail. Published on March 7, 2018

Issue #12: Renewable Fuel Oil?

Dear Bates Community,

We Eco reps have been hearing a lot of talk about some confusing sustainability terms that are often thrown around Bates and can be quite frankly isolating to those who aren't as familiar with sustainable practices and processes. For that reason, I wanted to take this opportunity to explore one term that is particularly relevant to the Bates campus: "RFO," or "Renewable Fuel Oil." Renewable Fuel Oil is a relatively new energy source derived from burning wood or wood-based feedstock. It is a term that is particularly relevant to Bates because it is a source of energy that our Campus has relatively recently begun to utilize, and plays a large role in keeping all of us warm during these winter days! This oil, also referred to as "biocrude," actually has had past lives in a variety of products such as the food seasoning liquid smoke. So, if you spend any time near Merrill and the Maintenance building, don't be surprised if you catch a whiff of barbeque, it's from the RFO boiler!

The coolest part about RFO is that it is 100% renewable and has much lower carbon emissions than other energy sources. On January 10, 2017, Bates became part of the renewable energy movement by switching from natural gas to RFO for our primary heating, and has since cut down our campuses emissions by around 83%! This is an incredible number, and is made even more exciting when put into the context of Bates actually being at the forefront of this new energy wave as the first educational institution and only college utilizing RFO! So, how are we able to do this? Well, Bates works with the only commercial producer of this oil, a Canadian-based company called "Ensyn." Ensyn was established in 1984, with hopes to explore the field of carbon-based feedstocks. Through the years, the company established a series of relationships that eventually led to a successful entry into the renewable fuels business, and today they produce 10 million gallons of Biocrude per year at a facility in Port Cartier, Quebec. While right now Ensyn is focusing on the U.S. Northeast as their primary consumers, hopefully their reach will continue to expand and contribute to a widespread transition to cleaner energy.

I had the chance to talk to the Bates energy manager John Rasmussen, a key player in Bates' conversion to RFO, and he shared with me some of his excitement about this project: "the most exciting thing about [our campus conversion to RFO] is its impact on sustainability. This plant was the major source of emissions for the campus, and so that's the major reason why we did this: it reduced the emissions by 80%!" Rasmussen's enthusiasm is shared by all of the Eco reps, and is hopefully also shared by the entirety of the Bates community! If you're interested in learning even more about the Bates conversion process, or even just the company Ensyn, here are two helpful links to explore:

<https://www.bates.edu/news/2017/01/26/campus-construction-update-jan-27-2017/> and <http://www.ensyn.com/environment.html> . Also, be sure to check out the EcoReps latest newsletter for even more data on the impact of RFO on the Bates Campus. I encourage you to look more into Renewable Fuel Oil, and other alternative energy sources as well, as it is important to stay connected with and reflect on where our energy that we often take for granted it coming from!

-Sustainable Abigail

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