

Rural Communities Learn the Benefits of Renewable Energy

14th June 2011



Experts from the University of Ulster's Ulster Business School have teamed up with the Causeway Rural and Urban Network (CRUN) to highlight the potential benefits of increased energy efficiency to rural communities – and offer them a chance to experience how they can improve their carbon footprint.

Field visits were organised by the University of Ulster Business School and the Causeway Rural and Urban Network (CRUN), who are working closely together in a ground-breaking initiative to help communities in rural areas reduce energy costs.

They are involved in the SMALLEST (Solutions of Microgeneration to ALLow Energy Saving Technology) project, which is designed to stimulate interest in converting from traditional to renewable energy generation.

Representatives from rural communities were given the opportunity to see at first hand the success of three different ventures, which have each reduced their dependency on fossil fuels.

The information events took place at:

- Eglinton Community Hall, (near Londonderry) which has installed solar thermal panels and was recently awarded Big Lottery funding to conduct an energy audit and install loft insulation;
- Rural Generation Renewable Solutions, (Brook Hall Estate, Derry) which provided information about how communities can become more self sufficient (www.ruralgeneration.com);
- Ballyhenry House, ast Limavady which gave visitors the chance to experience how a farmer/businessman is successfully relying on a biomass boiler to provide environmentally sustainable fuel to heat a farmhouse, self-catering apartments and nearby properties(www.ballyhenry.co.uk).

Dr John Gilliland, Chairman of Rural Generation Renewable Solutions said his company was an example of how **“good renewable ideas” could be turned into “reliable projects”**.

“We have installed over 150 biomass boilers across the British Isles servicing both rural and urban communities and businesses.

“Our visitors are able to see, at first hand, how successful these renewable energy projects really are and that is a key element in influencing others to convert to renewable energy generation.”

Lynsey McKitterick, University of Ulster Research Associate and SMALLEST co-ordinator, explained the importance of reaching out to the communities with guidance and information.

“We have carried out a number of interviews with people from community groups across Northern Ireland who have installed renewable energies in their properties or businesses,” she said.

“Our research has highlighted that there are a number of barriers that people are experiencing in managing renewable technologies.

“For example, one significant issue is that they do not know where to go for advice or to find out information and the SMALLEST project will seek to identify ways to overcome these stumbling blocks.

“Today’s event was a great networking opportunity which gave our visitors the perfect chance to ask questions and to discover the feasibility of renewable energy generation.”

Ann McNickle, CRUN Manager, said: “We are noticing that more and more community groups are developing an interest in the area of renewable energy.

“There are a great deal of opportunities, support and momentum to be gained from acting collectively within the community sector in addressing how best to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels.”

The SMALLEST project is a €3m EU-funded, three year scheme, designed specifically to help rural communities develop and use renewable energy technologies.

A number of University of Ulster academics are involved in the project including Professor Paul Humphreys, Derek Bond, Dr Norry McBride and Dr Elaine Ramsey.

The project is part of a Europe-wide project which involves partners in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Greenland and The Faroe Islands.

Representatives from 10 local community organisations attended the event.

TOP CAPTION: Ms Lynsey McKitterick (University of Ulster, Research Associate - Renewable Energies, Department of Business, Retail and Financial Services), Dr John Gilliland, OBE (Rural Generation Ltd) and Ms Ann McNickle - CRUN)



Ann McNickle (CRUN), Dr Norry McBride (University of Ulster, Department of Business, Retail and Financial Services), Dr John Gilliland, OBE (Rural Generation Ltd), Professor Barry Quinn (Head of Department of Business, Retail and Financial Services) and Ms Lynsey McKitterick (University of Ulster, Research Associate - Renewable Energies, Department of Business, Retail and Financial Services).

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