Flameless vents are part of the new addition at Pinnace Renewable Energy in Williams Lake. (photo submitted)

Multi-million dollar upgrades completed to Pinnacle Renewable Energy in Williams Lake

The bed dryer can run at a lower temperature and remove more moisture

MONICA LAMB-YORSKI / Jun. 18, 2020 6:00 a.m. / BUSINESS / LOCAL BUSINESS

Pinnacle Renewable Energy Inc. has been running the new bed dryer at its pellet plant in Williams Lake for almost a month now.

“It’s not running at main plate, but it is certainly running and is in the commissioning stage,” said chief executive officer Rob McCurdy, noting the upgrade is part of a $30-million investment at its plants in Williams Lake and Meadow Bank near Quesnel.

Crews are running fibre through, testing and doing minor tweaks, and McCurdy is happy with what he is seeing so far.

The bed dryer replaces the old drum dryer and can handle and evaporate more water from fibre.

It is also cleaner for the environment and ultimately safer because it operates at a lower temperature, reducing the risk of fires and explosions, he said.

Describing how the new bed dryer works, he said air goes through it the same time as the fibre to dry it.

Noise coming from the plant in the past has been an issue for local residents, but McCurdy said noise levels should be reduced with the new system, as well as the blue haze that can be seen coming out of the stacks at times.

“It helps with the blue haze because you are using much lower temperatures on the dryer.”

When asked about fibre supply McCurdy said it is solid, but the upgrade will be a big help.

“We were always limited by how much material we could dry and now that we have more drying capacity with a bigger and different type of dryer we can bring in wetter and more diverse fibre. It helps on fibre security.”

They can bring in bush grind for fibre now as well.

Initially the plant was designed to run on shavings, then evolved to use sawdust but was limited because sawdust is wetter.

“Now we can put in shavings, sawdust and bush grind, instead of burning the bush piles in the forest.”

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Sawdust is typically about 50 per cent moisture and to make a pellet it has to be less than 10 per cent water.

More steam is visible from a stack when more water is being extracted, he explained, noting nothing else is added such as chemicals.

Pellets are made from squeezing out the moisture under pressure.

During the construction phase, the plant workers and contractors worked well together, McCurdy said.

They were almost at the point where the job was finished when, due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, experts from the U.S. couldn’t travel to Williams Lake to do the last bit of testing on the equipment they’d supplied, as well as two experts from Germany.

Instead the plant continued to operate without the upgrade and the project team began working with the experts remotely, McCurdy said.

With a computer belonging to the U.S. experts that was sent to Williams Lake, testing of the addition was conducted.

McCurdy confirmed there is still more paving and landscaping to do at the site.

Similar technology was installed in two other Pinnacle plants already and will be going into a plant being built at High Level, Alta.

Fabrication for the equipment at Meadow Bank is underway for a different type of renovation, he added.

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The in-feed to the new bed dryer at the Pinnacle Renewable Energy Plant in Williams Lake. (photo submitted)