

PM+: Sustainable Energy Week: Fuel for rural Europe

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Opinion Plus

Liquefied petroleum gas can reach isolated rural communities and benefit millions of people, writes Samuel Maubanc.



This week Brussels plays host to EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW), turning the Belgian city into the world capital of sustainable energy.

During these four days an impressive array of events will take place, discussing the greatest challenges that lay ahead for the European energy sector.

The official programme of the EUSEW is varied and it is with great satisfaction that I see many events focusing on rural and sparsely populated areas. These areas are often overlooked but EUSEW has rightly chosen to look into the challenges they face.

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Many of the EU's rural and sparsely populated areas fall off the natural gas grid as the number of potential clients does not justify investment, or because the geographic hurdles are too difficult for natural gas networks to overcome.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), as a versatile and easily transportable gaseous fuel, is available everywhere, even in remote regions such as mountains and islands.

This makes it an effective complement to natural gas which is constrained by its reliance on a piped network.

As appliances are almost identical for both fuels, LPG enables households and business outside the natural gas network to use efficient and clean technologies such as condensing/hybrid boilers, gas heat pumps, micro-cogeneration, and thermo-solar installations.

Though it is rarely analysed as an independent entity, Off-Grid Europe (OGE), areas outside the natural gas network - is comprised of 40.7 million households, making it a significant and distinctive part of the residential energy system.

Indeed, in 2010, OGE's residential sector accounted for 50.8 million tonnes of oil equivalent (Toe) of energy consumption and generated 82 million tonnes of CO2 emissions.

On a related note, OGE is a part of the European residential energy system in which carbon intensive and polluting energy sources such as heating oil and coal play the most significant role.

The continued presence of these fuels - and the related possibility of replacing them with more sustainable alternatives, is both a problem and an opportunity for European policy-makers and citizens alike.

LPG can play a strategic role in the decarbonisation of OGE's residential sector because it is a clean burning, lower carbon gaseous fuel.

According to the PRIMES model, an energy modelling system developed by the Technical University of Athens, increased use of LPG in OGE could lead to the removal from the energy mix of 18.5 Toe of solid fuels and 20.9 million Toe of heating oil by 2030.

This would result in significant CO2 savings, as OGE would produce 184 million fewer tonnes of CO2.

Increased use of LPG would also give a boost to energy efficiency in these areas, and result in large reductions of emissions of local air pollutants.

Rural and sparsely populated areas should not be overlooked when deciding on something as essential as energy solutions for European consumers.

Due to its physical characteristics and ease of use, LPG can reach isolated communities and provides clear and identifiable benefits to millions of people.

EUSEW, and more generally all policy debates currently going on in relation to the implementation of the EU Energy Union, is a unique opportunity to discuss possible solutions and we at AEGPL are delighted to be able to contribute to the debate.

About the author

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