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Press Release

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New REF Database Shows that Coal and Imported Electricity Keeps the Lights On

The Renewable Energy Foundation, a UK charity publishing data on the sector [1], today published a new freely accessible and user friendly web application allowing users to view and analyse the fuel mix generating Great Britain's electricity for every half hour since the 1st of January 2009. [2]

This web application accesses public market data that has been formatted and aggregated to allow users to home in on and graph periods and technologies that are of particular interest. It provides a uniquely usable interface for analysts and interested members of the public getting to grips with our electricity markets.

REF publishes this information as part of its ongoing initiative to improve energy market transparency in the UK. REF believes that far too much of the critical information about UK electricity is difficult or expensive to obtain, and that some of the most important, relating to charges made on the consumer, is simply not made public.

Today's publication addresses part of this problem by improving the ease of access to historical data on the GB electricity fuel mix from 2009 to the present day.

As an example of the insights that can be gained, we note that the application reveals two major trends over the last year:

1. GB is becoming increasingly dependent on coal to fuel the generation of electricity [3];
2. GB is now importing a significant fraction of its electricity from France and from Holland [4].

We can also observe that dedicated biomass is becoming much more significant in the renewables sector with a single biomass fired power station, Tilbury, providing nearly 2% of net generation on 9 September [5].

Dr Lee Moroney, director of planning at REF, and the lead data analyst behind the project, said: 'Access to good basic data is important for healthy public debate on any subject, but in the energy sector it is absolutely essential, and our new web application gives the public a powerful tool to hold government and the energy industry to account.'

Dr Moroney continued:

'The increasing dependence on coal and the striking share of demand now met by imports from neighbouring countries, is sobering, not least because it is happening in spite of rapid growth in renewable generation.'

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Notes for Editors

1. The Renewable Energy Foundation (REF) is a charity registered in England and Wales (1107360) publishing information and analysis on the energy sector. REF is not in receipt of state funding, has no political affiliation or corporate membership, and is not a trade lobby.

2. The new application can be found by clicking on the 'Electricity Fuel Mix Data' menu item on www.ref.org.uk/energy-data

3. Coal fired electricity has increased by more than 30% in the first three quarters of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011.

4. Volumes of electricity imported from France increased by approximately 20%, and from both France and the Netherlands by approximately 65%, in the first three quarters of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011.

5. For a graph of renewable generation on 9 September 2012 see <http://www.ref.org.uk/fuel/graph/index.php?valdate=2012-09-09&source=getdatabyspshare&search=BWH>