

The Wood Heat Policy Institute

To the Editor:

*This article is written by John Gulland, Director of the **Wood Heat Policy Institute**. It is available for publication, free of charge. The Wood Heat Policy Institute (WHPI) supports the public interest in wood heating and advocates for the responsible use of this important renewable energy resource. WHPI is a source of credible information and analysis of wood heating related issues. It also supports government and non-governmental organizations in policy development related to wood heating. The Institute is an outreach initiative of the Wood Heat Organization (WHO). WHO has provided independent, non-commercial advice to householders interested in the use of wood heat since 1996.*

Heating With Wood Makes Families and Communities Richer

Chainsaws buzz and log splitters chug as people prepare next winter's firewood. Neighbours get together, sharing truckloads of logs and the cutting and splitting into firewood. It's hard work but it is fun too and there are smiles all around. The neighbours might even sit down with a beverage when the work is done and agree about how much money they save.

Some families buy their firewood already split so their work only involves stacking it to dry. They might spend \$250 for each cord (4'x4'x8'), the equivalent of almost \$600 in fuel oil, for a savings up to \$350 for every cord burned.

Outside town someone works in his woodlot, harvesting trees and processing them into firewood right on the spot. For this guy the cost of a winter's firewood is two week's work and a few gallons of gas for the saw, splitter and pickup truck. That's a pretty good deal compared to the roughly \$4,000 that oil heating would cost.

What if twenty households in this small town decided to save money by heating with wood instead of oil? If they bought their fuel from the local firewood dealer their combined savings could be up to \$50,000. That is a lot of money not bled out of the town's economy, not to mention out of province or out of country. The firewood dealer earns an additional \$28,000, part of which he pays to his young helper. Each of the twenty households will have almost \$2500 more to spend around town this year.

The work involved in heating with wood is usually shared among family members. Everyone chips in to stack firewood, and managing the fire might be done by mom or dad, whoever is handy. The job of keeping the wood box full might be given to one of the kids. Once they've learned the ropes, teenagers are allowed to load the stove, as a sort of right of passage. And everyone takes part in the family debates on how to load the stove and set the control to get the right amount of heat, while making no visible smoke at the top of the chimney. Minimizing smoke is how families show their concern for the environment and for their neighbours.

Heating with wood is more than a fuel choice, it is a lifestyle choice too. A household that heats with wood chooses to invest their labour in staying warm, which leaves more money in their budget for other things. The choice of wood heating also strengthens their local economy because their fuel purchase employs a neighbour instead of enriching a distant corporation.

The amount of economic activity related to wood heating is not trivial. At market prices, the value of firewood burned each winter across Canada is over \$2 billion. If all those households, most of them located in small towns and rural communities, burned fuel oil instead of wood, they

would spend over \$6 billion for home heating. Wood heating makes these families and the communities they live in richer.

For more information visit the Wood Heat Organization web site at www.woodheat.org.

**John Gulland
whpi(at)woodheat.org
613.757.2290 or 757-2208**