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Barre company converts oil heat to pellets

By [Daniel Staples](#)

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BARRE — For those who want to take the “buy local” movement just one step further, a Barre company is offering pellet-burning retrofit systems — replacing gas, oil, and wood burners — that are fabricated by NSA Industries in Lyndonville and assembled in Barre.

Andy Boutin, owner of Pelligy, said anyone who installs the systems use pellets from a local source like Vermont Wood Pellet Company in North Clarendon — which only uses woody biomass from a 30-mile radius — then everything is generated within 100 miles.

Boutin, a former marine engineer who studied combustion principles and technologies, said he decided to start Pelligy after he realized there were no wood pellet systems that could be used to retrofit the existing system he was using to heat his Montpelier home.

“I began researching and realized that in Europe they had been using wood--pellet technologies for more than 25 years,” said Boutin, as he showed a demonstration system he has set up on a trailer that is used for training heating technicians on installation and maintenance of the system.

When Boutin realized he could use a pellet burning system without having to replace his current oil-fired furnace, he bought one of the European models and had it imported.

In 2006, Boutin traveled to Sweden and Finland where the systems were being manufactured and then purchased the design and licensing from one of the European companies and decided to manufacture them himself in a small warehouse in Barre.

Boutin spent the next several years refining the design and installing them in several trial locations to make sure that all the bugs were worked out of the system before he began his marketing campaign.

In the last three years, Pelligy has installed systems in several homes, businesses, industrial complexes and greenhouses to make sure that they are reliable. Boutin said that he is now ready to take his systems to the public.

The Pelligy systems, which cost around \$5,000, are currently installed at locations in Maine, Vermont, New York and Alaska, where Boutin has found a distributor and installer.

The Pelligy system is comprised of a large hopper, an auger, drop tube, burner and digital interface unit. The hopper can hold 550 pounds of pellets, which will heat the average home seven to 10 days during the coldest months of the year.

Boutin said that there are several advantages to the pellet systems, including cost savings and significant pollution reductions.

In one home installation, the savings in fuel costs were nearly \$1,000 a year and the carbon dioxide reduction was 8 tons a year. In the industrial space heated by his system, the cost savings was \$4,500 a year and there were carbon dioxide reductions of 40 tons a year, Boutin said.

The savings that Boutin estimates are based on fuel oil being priced at \$3.25 a gallon and wood pellets being \$240 a ton, but if turmoil in the Middle East continues and oil prices continue to rise, the savings could be even greater, said Boutin.

Boutin said that burning wood pellets is carbon neutral because the carbon dioxide that is released during the combustion of pellets is still within the carbon cycle, whereas burning oil takes carbon that has been sequestered in the ground and releases it into the atmosphere.

"These units are 83 percent efficient and if you take pellets from sustainable forests and local pellet companies, this is an efficient use of our woody biomass resources," said Boutin.

Although many people associate pellets with the piles of bags on pallets, Boutin said there has been a shift to larger hopper systems that can be filled with bulk orders of pellets. There are currently several choices for homeowners including an outdoor metal hopper, which holds between three and four tons of pellets, and indoor hoppers that are fabricated from heavy duty bags that are

supported with a light framework and hold one ton of pellets.

The systems, which are fully automated, do have some regular maintenance requirements including removing the ash from the firebox, which is about one gallon per ton of fuel, and the occasional cleaning of the burner. Boutin said that all of the technicians who install the systems also offer service contracts to take care of the general maintenance of the systems.

Boutin said that he now has distributors and technicians in place and is ready to expand the business. Within the next year, he hopes to have three to five new employees for his Barre operation.

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