



January 9, 2021

Debra A. Howland
Executive Director
New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission
21 South Fruit Street, Suite 10
Concord, NH 03301

Re: Docket No. IR 20-192 Investigation into the Effects of the COVID-19 Emergency on the Renewable Energy Industry

Dear Ms. Howland,

Thank you for considering our response to this investigative docket. Tarm Biomass is an importer, distributor, and installer of wood, wood pellet, and wood chip boilers for heating homes, businesses, and industrial processes. Boiler sold by Tarm Biomass in the last 15 years provide over 10 Megawatts of renewable thermal capacity in New Hampshire.

Our company has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A combination of low oil and gas prices and consumer uncertainty have diminished sales by 23% compared to 2019. Our staff levels are currently the lowest they have been since 1995, the year we were founded. The drop in sales isn't only for new boilers. Spare parts sales and demand for service have also dropped, as we believe that consumers have chosen to operate their fossil fuel heating rather than wood fueled boilers and/or have forgone maintenance to hold onto as much cash as possible.

A key installation and service staff member retired from the heating trade this fall. For three months we tried to find a replacement, but were unable. Now facing declining seasonal demand (new installation demand declines after the holidays) and no certainty about how the COVID-19 pandemic will unfold, we have decided to stop advertising the position until the summer at earliest. The inability to fill a full position means that ownership, yours truly, is working tremendously long hours to serve our customers. We cannot rely on the skills of new part time help for our highly technical equipment. We have never had such a hard time filling this staff role in the past and must assume that COVID-19 is the cause.

We are fortunate to have large office space that allows us to work in person with plenty of distance. We wear masks and require visitors to wear masks. We run UV light HEPA filtration units, purchased specifically to increase office safety. Staff has remained healthy. However, we now face a situation when key staff has need to visit sick family outside of New England that will potentially prevent that staff from returning to the office for 10 days or more upon return. This situation causes stresses on staff, families, and on ownership to potentially cover for missing staff, who cannot be in the office.

In early summer we invested in a new virtual telephone system specifically due to COVID-19 that allows for seamless calling if an employee is at home, but we cannot provide the same level of service to our customers or communicate within the office if staff is remote.

Because of staffing challenges, despite our best attempts, we now have entered a situation when we are not providing the same level of service to our customers that they expect. This will endanger future sales.



Writing this letter is an interesting exercise, as it has shed more light on just how seriously impacted we are by COVID-19. The tentacles of COVID-19 seem to be negatively impacting almost everything we do.

Feeling good about wood and respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott W. Nichols', is written in a cursive style.

Scott W. Nichols