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Boilers are a way to utilize wood

By Larry Banman

The use of wood-fired boilers in Grand County is likely to increase as people look for more economical and efficient ways to provide heat.

What makes the choice even more logical is the abundance of woody biomass fuel for the boilers, with virtually all of the lodgepole pine trees in Grand County either dead or dying, due to the mountain pine beetle epidemic.

The Grand County commissioners gave their blessing to a wood-fired central boiler to Grand Lake Log Homes to use in their business operation. It is the sixth device they have given approval to in the county. Those devices are located in each of the major areas of the county (Fraser Valley, west Grand County and the Granby/Grand Lake corridor). The first device was approved in June 2005.

The county's planning and zoning department has been monitoring two of the devices which were active last winter and again this year.

Michael Carter, of planning and zoning, told the commissioners that the devices are burning very cleanly. "I have been to each device at least five times," he said. "I have seen the effects of the heat, but there is virtually no smoke."

The Grand County commissioners have been giving permission for the installation of the devices as a pilot program to see how they work and if they produce enough smoke to produce air-quality concerns.

Commissioner Daune Dailey said the pilot program is starting to answer some of the questions about the operation of the devices.

The reason the installation of these devices has to be approved by the commissioners is that the county currently has a ban on the installation of any solid-fuel devices which are not approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Those bans were put into place in 1997.

The devices which have

been approved in Grand County have not yet been approved by the EPA, even though industry data indicates they burn more cleanly than other solid-fuel devices which are EPA approved. Scott Penson, chief building official for Grand County, told the commissioners that the wood-fired boilers which have come to the BOCC for approval fall under a category listed as EPA-exempt.

With the county regulations as they currently stand, Penson cannot give approval or even a recommendation for their installation.

The goal of the Grand County commissioners has been to enact a resolution which would give Penson the ability to evaluate the wood-fired boilers which homeowners wish to install and then provide a recommendation to the commissioners.

The basic theory of a wood-fired boiler is that it is installed from 30 to 200 feet away from the building which it will heat and it can

work with any existing heating system.

A water jacket surrounds the furnace firebox and heated water is circulated to the home or building through insulated underground

tubes. Advantages of the system include: the ability to use large chunks of wood that can sustain a fire for longer periods of time; there is less of a threat of a chimney fire which threatens a home or building; it is

cleaner than an in-house system; it also eliminates the smoke, ashes, odors and soot buildup on walls and ceilings inside your home that indoor burning creates.