

Illinois DOC considers using alternative fuels at Menard

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SPRINGFIELD — One of the state's oldest prisons could be getting a little greener.

As part of a push to use alternative fuels, Illinois Department of Corrections officials are assessing whether Menard Correctional Center in Chester could be powered partially by waste products generated at other prisons.

Wood, paper and food products could be burned to generate an estimated 10 percent of the power used to operate the 3,600-inmate facility built in the 1870s.

"We're very much in the exploratory stages," said Jen Aholt, chief executive officer for Illinois Correctional Industries, which is a division of the state's \$1.3 billion prison system best known for putting prisoners to work making everything from eyeglasses to furniture.

As Aholt envisions it, waste products at other prisons could be transformed into dried, burnable pellets at each of those facilities. Correctional Industries could then use its fleet of trucks to transport the material to Menard for its use in the generator.

Corrections spokesman Tom Shaer said the agency has a sustainability plan which calls for energy diversification.

"This is all conceptual and general, but ICI would like to see something happen," Shaer said.

Converting public facilities to produce energy from waste products is not new. Companies have been brought in to build systems for public hospitals and colleges in the U.S. and Canada.

Gov. Pat Quinn has been calling for the conversion of state facilities to biomass for years. As lieutenant governor in 2007, Quinn touted the benefits of phasing out the use of fossil fuels to power state buildings.

In addition to the project at Menard, the state is studying the feasibility of powering at least one interstate rest area using a wind turbine.