

For release: On 03/13/2025

Biomass instead of coal: Koehler Group christens its decarbonized combined heat and power plant

- **Total investment of over 70 million euros**
- **Pioneering project in the industry**
- **Decarbonization of energy production secures jobs in the medium to long term**
- **Reduction of fossil CO₂ emissions by around 150,000 metric tons per year**

Oberkirch, Germany, 03/13/2025 - After two intensive years of construction, Koehler Group christened its converted combined heat and power plant with a ceremony at company headquarters in Oberkirch, Germany. The conversion of the power plant is a pioneering project in the industry and marks a milestone on the road toward sustainable energy production for the family company. Instead of fossil fuels, the plant burns climate-friendly biomass to supply the Oberkirch site with energy for paper production. A total investment of over 70 million euros was needed for the mammoth project.

Benchmark for the future of paper production

Numerous project partners and political representatives were present at the christening ceremony. In his opening statement, Kai Furler, CEO of the Koehler Group, stressed the importance of the project for the family company and for future generations at Koehler. "The conversion of the plant is a clear sign of our commitment to protecting the climate and our support for Germany's energy transition. We are proud of the fact that we will reduce our fossil CO₂ emissions by 150,000 metric tons per year, while simultaneously ensuring sustainable production through the supply of green energy. This lays the foundation for our continued success in the market in the medium to long term.

With an approved rated thermal output of around 90 MW, the converted combined heat and power plant will make a direct contribution to the 2030 Koehler Promise. By the end of the decade, the Koehler Group intends to generate more renewable energy with its own facilities, on a balance sheet, than it requires for its paper production. As for direct emissions, the company plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from production by 80% by 2030 compared to 2022. By 2045, the Koehler Group hopes to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality. To reach this goal, each production location has developed its own strategy for decarbonization, i.e., a strategy to change the way energy is produced so that fossil CO₂ emissions are reduced or completely eliminated.

The switch to biomass is a vital step towards securing the Oberkirch site. Over 1,000 production jobs at the headquarters site alone depend on the company's sustainable approach.

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Challenging construction project involving up to 30 different trades at a time

The conversion of the combined heat and power plant involved more than technical conversion to biomass. It also required the extensive modernization of plant technology and infrastructure to ensure maximum efficiency and the highest environmental standards. At the highpoint of the work, up to 320 external specialists representing over 30 trades worked at the plant on the massive construction project. The plant ran in trial operation until official approval was granted by the Technical Inspection Authority (TÜV). Fine-tuning adjustments were continuously made during this phase.

According to Josef Hofer, project manager of the conversion, the many challenges faced included communication with the approval authorities and the municipality of Oberkirch, as well as collaboration with architects, civil engineers and many other trades. A significant share of the construction work and the installation of the fuel supply equipment, as well as the infrastructure measures required, had to be implemented while the power plant was operating in order to keep the plant standstill phase as short as possible.

In his speech, Furler thanked all those involved in the political, planning and implementation aspects: "We were able to complete the project on time thanks to the excellent cooperation of the regional council and district administration in advance and of the numerous trade representatives during implementation." He also expressly thanked the numerous employees of Koehler Innovation & Technology who were responsible for managing the project.

Carbon footprint further reduced by replacing overseas coal with regionally procured biomass

Until now, the Oberkirch site required about 55,000 metric tons of coal and 50,000 metric tons of paper and sewage sludge plus substitute fuels to produce the energy needed for production. Now Koehler uses wood chips, green waste, and mill residue as fuel. The advantage of using biomass as a fuel is that it is not only carbon neutral, but it is also widely available. We only use natural wood that comes from the surrounding region and that is at the end of its usability as a material. The short distances involved mean that the Koehler Group is reducing its carbon footprint even more.



Figure: Pressing the symbolic start button for the converted power plant together – from left to right: Frank Lendowski (CFO, Koehler Group), Kai Furler (CEO, Koehler Group), Dr. Nikolas Stoermer (First State Official of the Ortenau District), Dr. Stefan Karrer (COO, Koehler Group), Hartmut Felsch (Mill Manager Oberkirch, Koehler Paper) and Gregor Bühler (Mayor of Oberkirch).

Source: Koehler Group



2030 Sustainability Strategy

With its Climate Strategy, the Koehler Group is helping achieve sustainable development goals in the area of climate and environmental protection. The Climate Strategy sets out how the company plans to fully replace fossil fuels with renewable energy.

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About the Koehler Group

The Koehler Group was founded in 1807 and has been family-run from that moment to the present day. The group's core business activity lies in the development and production of high-quality specialty paper. This includes—among others—thermal paper, playing card board, beverage coasters, fine paper, carbon-less paper, recycled paper, decor paper, wood pulp board, sublimation paper, and also innovative specialty paper for the packaging industry. In Germany, the Koehler Group employs around 2,500 people across five production sites, with three additional sites in the USA. The group operates internationally, with an export share of around 70% in 2023, and brings in an annual turnover of around 1.1 billion euros.

As an energy-intensive company, Koehler invests in renewable energy projects such as wind energy, hydropower, photovoltaics, and biomass with its Koehler Renewable Energy business unit. The Koehler Group has set a goal of producing more energy from renewable sources by 2030 than is required for its paper production operations.

With its Koehler Innovative Solutions division, the Koehler Group is collaborating with start-ups to promote innovations in the core business segments “paper” and “renewable energy”.

Find more information at: <https://www.koehler.com>

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