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Union pleads for government help to save biofuel jobs



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Argent Energy is mothballing its facility in Newarthill, near Motherwell, on 31 May.

Unite had demanded action from the Scottish government including grants from its just transition fund.

The Scottish government said it was "always stand ready to discuss difficulties being faced by businesses, and to explore possible solutions with them".

The company supplies biodiesel to Stagecoach England, Metroline buses in London, and Eddie Stobart.

It also supplies biofuels to oil and gas companies, including Shell and BP, to blend with conventional diesel.

Its plants in Ellesmere Port in Cheshire and Amsterdam will remain open.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said the union was exploring every option to keep the plant open.

"Argent Energy workers based at Newarthill are exactly the type of workforce supposed to be spearheading the march to greener jobs," she said.

"The Scottish government needs to step in now or else its green jobs strategy will be in ruins."

The union said Scotland's £500m just transition fund and low emission scheme grants could be used to keep the plant open.

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The spokesman said: "The proposal, subject to the consultation, is for Argent to stop the plant and for redundancies to be effective from 31 May."

The company previously confirmed it would be expanding its operations in Holland amid severe economic pressures on biodiesel production.

A statement from the company said there had been "unprecedented competition" from imported subsidised Chinese biodiesel and cited the UK's inability to import category one tallow - the company's main feedstock - from the EU due to regulations.

Esther O'Hara, Unite industrial officer, said closure would be a "devastating blow" to the workers, and Scotland's just transition ambitions.

"There is £500m set aside for green jobs and there are also low emission scheme grants worth tens of millions which this plant should be able to access," she said.

"It would be a cruel irony that one of the reasons given by the company for the plant's closure is down to other governments subsidising biodiesel imports into the UK, yet our own governments in Edinburgh and London seem incapable of lifting one finger to support these jobs."

Post-Brexit trading conditions

The Newarthill plant has the capacity to produce up to 50 million litres of biodiesel a year.

The company was founded in 2001 and began production in Lanarkshire four years later.

The Scottish government said: "It was disappointing to learn of Argent Energy's situation, which we understand has been influenced in part by challenging post-Brexit trading conditions.

"First and foremost, this is a concerning time for the company's staff and their families, and supporting affected staff members must be the immediate priority.

"The Scottish government's PACE team provided on-site support last week and continues to engage with the business."

The statement added: "While we have no formal role or power in trade remedy investigations or decisions highlighted by Argent Energy, we are aware of and

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