The Associated Press reports that Lindt USA (that's right, the chocolate company) and Public Service of New Hampshire (PSNH) served up a new form of fuel on Tuesday when they mixed 18 tons of crushed cocoa bean shells with 600 tons of coal to power an electric power plant. The shells are a byproduct of chocolate production, and Lindt anticipates having quite a few of them when it opens up its new processing plant near Schiller Power Station in 2010. Yesterday's trial burn will provide data regarding emissions as well as the compatibility of the shells with the existing coal plant equipment. PSNH anticipates that emissions from the plant will be largely unchanged or perhaps even improved a bit.

Cocoa bean shells have been long recognized as a biomass fuel, but aside from some limited application in Europe, they have not been a major player in the electric utility industry. And while chocolate can solve many problems, given the 1 to 33 ratio of beans to coal it does not appear that chocolate will replace coal any time soon. Nonetheless, use of the shells will likely divert them from landfills.