

CO2 storage technology crucial even as US cuts coal use: NETL chief

Beth Ward, Platts News Service, 10-28-10

Even though the US is starting to move away from coal, it will still need tools such as carbon capture sequestration to meet potential emissions reduction targets, National Energy Technology Laboratory Director Anthony Cugini told the Washington Coal Club on Wednesday.

The Washington Coal Club is a non-profit corporation whose members have diverse interests in coal, ranging from its production to utilization. NETL is part of the US Department of Energy's Office of Fossil Energy's research and development program for advanced carbon capture technologies for coal-based power plants.

Pending rules from the US Environmental Protection Agency have the potential to retire smaller units of coal-fired generation, Cugini said. "We are moving away from coal, we are not moving away from carbon emissions," he said. The North American Electric Reliability Corp. released an estimate Tuesday that up to 70 GW of electric generation could be required to meet retrofits or be retired as a result of pending EPA regulations.

Retired coal generation would likely be replaced with natural gas, according to Cugini. Although natural gas produces about half the emissions of coal, over the next 30 years the switch will result in about a 16% reduction in emissions, Cugini said during the meeting. The Waxman-Markey bill that the House of Representatives approved in 2009 required a 42% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.

"We still have to do carbon capture sequestration to allow us to meet CO2 reductions in the next 10 to 20 year period," Cugini said.

The challenges with current CCS technology are that it tends to cost more and is done on a smaller scale. Cugini said the goal of the NETL is to work to reduce those costs and scale up storage.