



Press release

November 9th 2006

Clean energy at half the price? Is it too good to be true?

A group of Parliamentarians responded with great interest at a recent meeting when the All Party Group for Earth Sciences learned that the dream of cheaper, carbon-clean energy might become reality within the next few years.

The subject of Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) has been around for almost a century but recent technological advances mean that the chances of producing up to a third of the nation's energy needs from its own coal resources, for less than half the current price is close to reality. 'And that's not all,' says chairman of the Group, Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP. 'The figures quoted include the capture of greenhouse gases which, coupled to the fact that the supply is domestic and not imported, means security of supply that is both green and assured.'

Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) is the process of extracting the energy from coal seams without the need to mine it, using underground partial combustion. The resultant gas is brought to the surface through a borehole and the CO₂ can then be removed and channelled into safe storage.

Resources that cannot otherwise be used are available - coal seams that are either too deep or too difficult to access (e.g. under estuaries or just off-shore) by conventional mining, and the surface disruption is temporarily and fairly minimal. Field trials conducted over the last 20 years show that a typical 'panel', using around a million tonnes of coal, can produce up to 100 megawatts over a period of three years. Four or five injection wells are used to access a network beneath the surface. The actual collection of energy can take place many kilometres away from the place of use like an existing power station, and the whole process is served by pipelines. After, for example, three years, the whole technical sequence is removed, the small areas of disruption made good and the equipment used elsewhere. Subsidence potential is also low compared with conventional mining.

Up to ten trillion tonnes of coal resources exist across the world, and of this less than one-sixth (one trillion tonnes) is economically accessible to conventional mining, thus neutralising huge potential resources which, using UCG can be safely and cleanly accessed. The main resources are in China, USA and Europe but most countries with coal resources can benefit from UCG.





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In Britain digitised maps prepared by the British Geological Survey show reserves of 17m tonnes - enough to supply 28 gigawatts of energy - approximately one third of the nation's energy requirement - for 40 years. The main areas of UK potential are Firth of Forth, where research is already underway, the north-east coast, east Yorkshire, the Dee, Mersey and North Wales areas and South Wales.

Researchers and developers assured MPs that costs of the gas would be around £1.5 - £2 per gigajoule, rising to £2 - £2.5 per gigajoule if CO₂ extraction is taken into account. This compares with industrial level gas usage costs of around £6 which rose to a massive £11 last winter.

Ends

EDITORS NOTE:

Speakers were:

Kenneth J. Fergusson, former chief executive of the Coal Authority.

Dr. Michael B. Green, former director of the European Field Trial of UCG and advisor to US, Chinese and European organisations.

Mr. Rohan Courtney, senior independent director of Tullow Oil plc and former energy banker.

Michael and Rohan are the co-founders of the UCG Partnership.

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For further information about this or future meetings of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Earth Sciences contact Cally Oldershaw, Group Administrator, on earthsciencesgroup@btopenworld.com. The next meeting will take place on November 21st and will focus on Geothermal energy with presentations from the British Geological Survey and their French counterparts, the Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières (BRGM).

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR EARTH SCIENCES

the voice of earth sciences in Parliament

release prepared by Hilary J Heason on behalf of the Group

