Peak coal review

Contributed by Tom Whipple
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USGS officials project peak coal in Appalachian Basin in ten years. Could we be wasting money on very expensive carbon sequestration schemes? China thinks carbon sequestration is prohibitively expensive and instead is focusing on vehicle and building efficiency and alternative power sources.
Peak Coal in Appalachia

(Excerpt from Peak oil review - Aug 10 by Tom Whipple)

Last month the Geological Survey published a new study that attempts to quantify US coal reserves. An important part of the study was an effort to determine how much of the nation's coal resources can be mined at current prices and how much sulfurous coal can be legally sold to users that are not equipped with the necessary scrubbers.

Although not using the term "peak coal," USGS officials project that the key Appalachian Basin which produces the bulk of coal used in eastern power stations may reach peak output in as little as 10 years. Production of low and medium sulfur Appalachian coal has been increasing steadily as the favorite source for generating electricity after nuclear power went out of favor 30 years ago. About 40 percent of the remaining coal in the Appalachian basin is high sulfur coal that is not useable without EPA waivers or expensive modifications to coal plants.

With some sort of restrictions on carbon as well as tightened sulfur emissions in the offing, the future of coal production in the Appalachian and Illinois basins is very much an open question.

One of the key issues is whether to proceed with very expensive carbon sequestration at coal fired electrical generating stations or to put the resources into increasing the production of power from renewable sources. Last week the Chinese weighed in by saying that the cost of carbon sequestration was prohibitive and that China can obtain larger emission reductions by investing in efficiency of vehicles and buildings and alternative power sources.

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