

Co-op gets \$100M for CO2 research

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Wednesday, July 1, 2009 10:07 PM MDT

BISMARCK, N.D. -- A North Dakota utility cooperative with two Wyoming power plants will receive up to \$100 million in federal aid to finance research into an experimental process to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, Energy Secretary Steven Chu said Wednesday.

Chu, during a visit to Bismarck State College, said stimulus money from the U.S. Energy Department will help pay for a project to reduce carbon dioxide pollution at a Basin Electric Power Cooperative plant in west-central North Dakota. The Bismarck-based cooperative provides power to more than 120 rural electric systems in nine states.

The process uses an ammonia solution to remove most carbon dioxide from vapors that normally would go up a giant chimney. The removed gas, estimated at 1 million tons annually, would be available to pump underground for storage or to help oil production, while the ammonia would be processed for soil fertilizer.

The cooperative's general manager, Ron Harper, said the project will cost close to \$300 million. The research will be done at Basin's Antelope Valley power plant near Beulah, about 65 miles northwest of Bismarck.

Chu said such research is essential because of coal-fired power plants' leading role in generating the nation's electric supply. He said hundreds of coal plants are being built to feed the world's energy needs, and it is important to reduce their carbon dioxide output to lessen the risk they will contribute to global warming.

"There are many coal plants in the United States that we should not be shutting down," Chu said. "They are modern coal plants ... they're efficient coal plants."

Basin Electric owns two electric power stations in west-central North Dakota, capable of generating more than 1,500 megawatts of electricity, that get their fuel from nearby lignite mines. It also is a joint owner of the 1,660-megawatt Laramie River Station plant in southeastern Wyoming and is building the 385-megawatt Dry Fork Station plant near Gillette.

The cooperative's operating coal plants generate enough electricity to power 2.7 million homes for a year.

Chu said the Energy Department is supporting a variety of research projects aimed at reducing carbon dioxide output. Coal is used to produce about 50 percent of the nation's electricity.

The Basin Electric project "is the first step in getting this deployed," Chu said. "We've got to get it out there ... figure out how well it will work, and get the industrial experience. It is part of a wide portfolio."

Chu announced the funding during an event at Bismarck State College that was also attended by the state's two U.S. senators, Democrats Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan, and Republican Gov. John Hoeven.

"The future really requires that we find the technology that will allow us to sequester carbon," Conrad said. "We simply must reduce the carbon levels being emitted, and the question is, how do we do that in a cost-effective way ... This \$100 million will hopefully go a long way toward helping to answer that question."