



7. ALTERNATIVE FUELS: Energy companies seek to 'farm' gas from microbial action on coal (02/08/2011)

Two Colorado energy companies are pressuring Wyoming lawmakers to approve regulations that will allow both firms to use bacteria to harvest gas from underground coal deposits.

The method being promoted by Luca Technologies and Ciris Energy uses microbes living in coal to generate natural gas. It's also raising questions about its environmental impact. The microbes live in coal and create gas from their eating habits. The process could unlock millions of cubic feet of gas from old or abandoned coal-bed walls, which would provide a new source of natural gas.

"We are looking to transform the natural gas industry," Brian Cree, chief operating and financial officer at Luca, said last week in a presentation to the Wyoming Infrastructure Authority. "We think of ourselves not necessarily as a typical gas company, but as a company that farms natural gas."

But the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission stopped Luca's field testing in April because the state doesn't have a regulatory process for permitting and overseeing microbial conversion projects. In the field testing, Luca injected nutrients into old or abandoned wells and collected the gas emitted by the microbes.

Both companies went to the WOGCC and then the state's Department of Environmental Quality to get permits, but both agencies wavered, said state Sen. Kit Jennings (R-Casper).

"They really didn't have a clear-cut way to do it," Jennings said.

Jennings introduced a bill last month that would allow companies to seek permission from the WOGCC for well and reservoir injections, either for an individual lease or on a unit basis. It would require applicants to show that groundwater can't be "adversely influenced" by the injections and that all groundwater quality regulations are met.

The bill passed the state Senate last month with only one vote against it. Next week, the House Minerals Committee will take it up (Fugleberg/Pelzer, [Casper \[Wyo.\] Star-Tribune](#), Feb. 6). -- JJP

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