

Demonstration turns methane gas to energy

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The United States is testing new technology that can convert methane from coal mines into clean energy.

The Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy and private industry are working together on a demonstration project in an abandoned West Virginia coal mine.

Coal mines are a significant source of methane, which is 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere, the EPA said Friday in a release. The EPA said ventilation shafts from underground coal mines produced an estimated 16.6 billion cubic meters of methane in 2000.

The technology being demonstrated is a thermal oxidation system that destroys methane in ventilated air by heating the gas to over 1,800 degrees, and converting it to carbon dioxide and water. The heat can then be used in mining operations or to generate electricity.

The EPA said the technology has already been successfully operated in Britain and Australia.

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