

Coal reemerges as important raw material in chemical manufacturing industry

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With oil prices hovering around \$100 per barrel, coal is reemerging as a key raw material in the manufacture of the basic chemical materials used to make plastics, fertilizers, and hundreds of other products, according to an article scheduled for the March 17 issue of *Chemical & Engineering News*, ACS' weekly news magazine.

The article, written jointly by C&EN Senior Editor Alex Tullo and Hong Kong-based senior correspondent Jean-Francois Tremblay, notes that coal has been used in the chemical manufacturing industry since the 19th century.

Over the years, oil and natural gas gradually eclipsed coal to become the raw materials of choice for manufacturing a wide range of high-volume chemicals. But these days, the high prices of oil and natural gas have given coal — which costs a fraction of the price of crude oil — a substantial cost advantage, the article notes.

Coal's potential as a raw material is greatest in China, the United States, and India, the article points out. These countries have about half the world's coal reserves. Coal can be transformed into a gas and subsequently into basic chemical ingredients like ethylene and propylene that are used in the manufacture of hundreds of products, according to the article. Coal "is a relatively cheap feedstock," declares one expert cited in the article. "It certainly has the ability to compete in today's world."

Source: ACS

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