

International Conference In Gillette Fosters Collaboration On Coal



(Gillette, Wyo.) Gillette was ground zero today for an international collaboration on coal technologies.

Leaders in academia, government, and industry from across the United States and Japan met today at the Cam-Plex for the Future of Coal Conference.

In 2016, Gov. Matt Mead signed a memorandum of understanding with the Japan Coal Energy Center (JCOAL), agreeing to cooperate on technology development, share research, exchange information, and facilitate coal export and sales. The memorandum was the basis of today's conference.

Mead was the keynote speaker at the event, and provided a presentation on the importance of coal to the state and the world.

"Wyoming is an energy state. I should rephrase that: Wyoming, in my mind, is the energy state," the governor said.

To illustrate the revenue the industry generates, the governor said 194 million tons of coal were mined in 1991, which produced \$262 million in taxes and royalties for Wyoming. In 2012, those numbers had grown to 400 million tons mined and \$1.3 billion to the state, respectively.

While illustrating the benefits of coal, the governor also acknowledged the industry faces large challenges. He said solutions to these problems should not limit the poor to a lower “quality of life than we’ve enjoyed.”

To that end, he said the state is committed to clean coal technologies. He pointed to his Economically Needed Diversity Options for Wyoming (ENDOW) program, which seeks to facilitate innovation in clean coal technology and partnerships similar to that between the state and JCOAL.

Collaboration

Gillette Mayor Louise Carter-King said the conference and the collaboration it embodies are ideal for the state’s coal industries.

“It’s very exciting. This is what we need,” she said.

She said Asian markets are primed for Wyoming coal, and these kinds of collaborations will facilitate that.

“Our coal is the perfect coal for that,” the mayor stated.

Osamu Tsukamoto, president of JCOAL, also spoke at the event. Tsukamoto said he was pleased with the quality of the venue and preparations that were made for the conference.



Osamu Tsukamoto speaks about the goals and objectives of JCOAL at the Future of Coal Conference



Matt Mead and Osamu Tsukamoto exchange gifts at the Future of Coal Conference

“That’s given me lots of confidence for this collaboration,” Tsukamoto said.

In his speech, which was delivered through a translator, Tsukamoto talked about JCOAL’s efforts to improve coal’s “negative image” by promoting clean technologies.

“We believe it is our responsibility,” he said.

Carbon capture

He also discussed one of the primary concerns regarding coal.

“Global warming is a global issue,” he said. And as such, its solution would require international cooperation with realistic measures.

Like the governor, Tsukamoto discussed the benefits which coal brings, especially to emerging economies in Asia and elsewhere.

“We can’t just look at the negative image of coal, and we can’t just say ‘no more coal,’” the president of JCOAL said.

Lynn Brickett, technology manager for the carbon capture division of the Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory, discussed various carbon capture technologies, from those in research to those in the demonstration phases.



Lynn Brickett speaks on a variety of carbon capture technologies at the Future of Coal Conference



Audience members listen to speakers at the Future of Coal Conference

She also spoke of the challenges these technologies face, some of which are financial seeing as carbon capture is a very expensive process.

Just recently, Brickett recounted, General Electric pulled out of the research they were doing on the technology.

“We are losing researchers and bright minds,” she said.

Tough market

Market penetration for the products produced is another barrier to the full realization of the technology. They already have the resources for materials, however, there is not yet incentive to make the switch switch.

She suggested regulatory measures might be needed to get the market flowing, as was done with fly ash use in concrete.

Speaking after his presentation, Mead disagreed with this approach to developing the market in carbon products.

“I don’t think that’s where I’d start out,” Mead said.

He cautioned against laws that “force feed” these products, and said a better way to get them to market is through innovation which make the products attractive.

The conference continues through Friday, with expert panel discussions and technical tours of Atlas Carbon, Eagle Butte Coal Mine, and Dry Fork Station.