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Underground Carbon Dioxide

Though the connection between climate change and man-made production of greenhouse gases is disputed by many scientists, much of the public at large has become convinced that burning fossil fuels inevitably must lead to a rise in our Earth's temperature.

Efforts to prevent global warming have produced some unorthodox proposals, including one to capture the CO₂ emitted by new coal-burning power plants so it can be stored underground. Proponents of the idea have set 2020 as the target date to bring new plants using this technique online. Among these is John Thompson, who directs work on this issue for the Clean Air Task Force, an environmental group. Without capturing CO₂ and storing it underground, claims Thompson, "we're not going to have much of a chance for stabilizing the climate."

One major corporation that is developing CO₂ capture-and-sequestration equipment is G.E., which signed a partnership on May 28 with Schlumberger, an oil field services company headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands. An item posted on Schlumberger's website notes: "Schlumberger Carbon Services provides comprehensive geological storage solutions for carbon dioxide (CO₂), consistent with care for health, safety, and the environment."

One attempt to build a plant using similar technology ended in failure. In 2003, President Bush announced plans to build a plant, known as FutureGen, in Mattoon, Illinois. According to plans, the plant would test advanced techniques for converting coal to a gas, capturing pollutants, and burning the gas for power. After spending \$50 million on the plant, of which about \$40 million was federal money, the federal government withdrew when projected costs nearly doubled, to \$1.8 billion.

In "Coal in Your Car's Tank," an article in the June 9 issue of THE NEW AMERICAN, science writer Ed Hiserodt described a more ambitious (and cleaner) way to derive energy from coal, turning it into liquid fuel using the proven direct liquefaction process developed by Nobel Laureate Friedrich Bergius.





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