



B.C. is investing \$3 million into the study of carbon capture and storage at the Spectra Energy plant in Fort Nelson. Dec. 2, 2009.

Can a green future still include fossil fuels?

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While the provincial government is pushing hard to be a leader in green energy and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, B.C. is still very reliant on fossil fuels.

Take the Spectra Energy plant in Fort Nelson, in northeastern B.C. It has the dubious title of single worst polluter in the province, accounting for about a third of the province's natural gas production.

However, the company and the province are looking at ways to curb emissions belched out of the Spectra plant. The province is investing \$3 million and the company is putting in \$9 million to study a technology called carbon capture and storage.

Instead of being spewed into the sky, the carbon dioxide would be captured and injected more than two kilometers into the ground.

Carbon dioxide has been safely stored in the ground for millions of years, said Gary Weiling, vice president of Spectra Energy's western operations.

"And were putting the CO₂ back into the same formations, same type of formations, where it came from in the first place."

If the project goes ahead, it would be equivalent to taking 250,000 cars off the road and would be the largest of its kind in North America.

The province of Alberta -- Canada's biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions -- has committed \$2 billion for carbon capture.

Mark Jaccard, a leading environmental economist at SFU, supports the concept.

"If the fossil fuel industry wants to extract resources, it's got to capture the carbon," he said.

But some environmentalists question whether it's money well spent.

"To date it's largely been used as an excuse to continue business as usual and continue polluting," said Ian Bruce, a climate change specialist at the David Suzuki Foundation.

"Although this technology may have promise in the future, we need stronger laws and regulations in place to make this technology more economically viable and to get it into use. ... We need a stronger economic incentive for companies to invest in this technology."

B.C. Energy Minister Blair Lekstrom acknowledges that the project is expensive, "but we think the potential is there."

"We think the development of our natural gas fields in British Columbia can go hand in hand with our commitment to the environment," he said.

With a report from CTV British Columbia's Mi-Jung Lee