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OAQDA approves OSU mine reclamation project funding

(Columbus) An innovative project aimed at reclaiming abandoned mine lands around Ohio was authorized for funding at the October 13 meeting of the Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA).

The project also will test a potential, environmentally friendly method for using and disposing of byproducts created during combustion at Ohio's coal-based power plants.

The OAQDA grant of \$1,436,035 will come from the agency's Ohio Coal Development Office and will contribute to the total project cost of \$5,052,397. The project will create five new full-time jobs and six new part-time jobs and will retain an additional 12 full-time jobs.

Other funding partners include The Ohio State University (OSU), American Electric Power (AEP), Ohio American Energy, Inc. (OAEI), the Electric Power Research Institute, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), the U.S. Department of the Interior and Environmental Protection Agency, the American and Midwest Coal Ash Associations and the Ohio Mine Land Partnership.

The project will utilize 1.2 million tons of flue gas desulfurization (FGD) solids will be used to reclaim two highwalls – one near AEP's Conesville power plant and one near AEP's Cardinal power plant at a mine near Brilliant, Ohio operated by OAEI.

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The FGD solids will be used to eliminate the cliff edges of the highwalls. With the successful demonstration of slope stability and ground water quality, the project could lead to the use of five to 10 million tons of FGD solids per year in mine land reclamation. Estimates show that as much as 490 million tons of FGD solids would be needed to reclaim existing highwalls around the state that remain from pre-regulation mining operations in Ohio.

“This project has the potential to be a major win-win for Ohio,” said Mark R. Shanahan, OAQDA executive director and Governor Ted Strickland’s energy advisor. “On the one hand, it holds the promise of reclaiming large amounts of currently unreclaimed mine lands. In addition, it may well provide operators of coal-based power plants with an ideal solution for the disposal of FGD solids, which otherwise would need to be discarded in landfills.”

According to Shanahan, the proliferation of sulfur scrubbers at power plants could cause the amount of FGD solids produced annually to increase from the current 3.5 million tons per year to as much as 10 million tons by 2012. Dealing with increasing volumes of this material will be a major challenge for the electric utilities that own and operate coal-based power plants around the state, he said.

The project marks the second phase of a prior project conducted by OAQDA, OSU, ODNR and other entities that reviewed the past and current state of mine land reclamation in Ohio. The use of FGD solids in the current project was a recommendation suggested by the earlier review.

The project also includes an application of FGD solids to pilot-test the recovery of additional coal from seams within the highwalls. The typical final step in the removal of coal from a strip mine is the auguring of horizontal holes into the highwall to remove coal that otherwise could not have been mined, he said. Shanahan added that the current project will fill those holes with FGD-based grout to determine if it possesses sufficient strength to hold the highwall in tact while any remaining coal between the augur holes is removed.

“If this project demonstrates that additional coal can be extracted from these highwalls prior to their reclamation, then we end up with several positive impacts for mine land reclamation in Ohio,” Shanahan said.

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The Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) is a non-regulatory government agency created to help Ohio businesses comply with clean air regulations. Through its Ohio Coal Development Office, OAQDA also oversees the State of Ohio's coal research, development and technology deployment efforts. Since its creation in 1970, the Authority has provided technical and financial help to hundreds of large and small Ohio businesses, awarding more than \$7 billion to finance air quality projects. In addition, the OAQDA Executive Director was appointed the Governor's Energy Advisor in January 2007. Subsequently, in 2008, OAQDA was named as administering authority for the \$150 million Advanced Energy Job Stimulus Program. For more information about OAQDA and its services, please visit its web site, at www.ohioairquality.org.