

IMPROVING COAL'S IMAGE: A NATIONAL ENERGY STRATEGY IMPERATIVE JANUARY 1992

PURPOSE

That coal has a poor image is indisputable. Its importance to our nation's economic and energy future is equally clear. That the majority of people, including those in government, have a poor attitude toward coal based upon misconceptions and a lack of knowledge is unmistakable. Each Secretary of Energy since 1986 has voiced concerns about the public attitude toward coal use.

FINDINGS

Coal has a dismal image. Its supporters view coal as a maligned and misunderstood fuel. Its detractors feel contempt for coal's reputation for being dirty and for causing pollution and human tragedy. Most Americans do not think about coal at all.

Rehabilitation of coal's image depends upon increased general awareness of coal, the nation's economic reliance upon it, and its environmental acceptability. *Education is the key.*

Coal has an impressive story of achievement and innovation to tell. Well told, this story may help repair the damage to coal's image.

The importance of coal to our nation's economic and energy future is clear, yet it is not well understood or appreciated. Informing the public on these points may enable coal's acceptance over the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the Council is an advisory body to the Secretary of Energy, the Council recognizes that in this special circumstance its recommendations to the coal industry are at least as important as those to the Secretary to assure coal's improved image and continued utilization.

For purposes of these recommendations, the Council defines "coal industry" as coal producers, coal transporters, coal users, and firms that supply equipment and services to each. These are the principal stakeholders in coal's future --those who are impacted directly by what happens to coal.

The Council recommends that the Secretary of Energy:

- Sustain the excellent work under the Clean Coal Technology Outreach program and consider its expansion to help assure public acceptance of these environmentally acceptable methods of coal preparation, combustion, and emissions reduction.
- Identify a group of scientific and engineering professionals who are recognized as experts by their peers, and encourage their participation in *ad hoc* task forces or advisory panels to whom the media may turn for the latest in factual information on coal-related subjects.
- Develop a strategy that targets state regulatory officials – both elected and staff – for continuing briefings on energy options available to the United States, making certain that coal remains among those options.
- Convene a meeting of coal industry leaders for the purpose of discussing the report's findings and recommendations, stressing the urgency of getting coal's message across to the public.

- Identify an audience of policymakers within the Executive Branch whom the Department will keep abreast of information concerning fossil fuels, with the purpose of urging that an available option be left open in the interest of maintaining a vigorous economy and national security.
- Impress upon education leaders and educational institutions the importance of science and energy education in maintaining an informed public.
- Develop a public service outreach program concerning all energy sources available to this nation.

The Council recommends that the coal industry:

- Implement a coal industry coalition to change public perception and public acceptance of coal.
- Use the coalition to develop and implement a public information campaign with the goal of improving the image and public acceptance of coal.
- Direct the coalition to develop a strategy for use when called upon to support the licensing of new coal facilities where they are challenged at the state or local level on the basis of environmental externality issues.
- Assist in developing materials which can be readily adapted for use by all entities within the coal industry to provide their individual stakeholders useful information about coal.
- Direct the coalition to develop a strategy for communicating useful information to specific audiences within the business community, media, and government.
- Provide sufficient resources to the coal industry coalition for the implementation of a detailed plan of action which assures coal's message will be delivered throughout the education systems.
- Carry out a strategy developed by the coalition which targets state regulatory officials both elected and staff – for continuing information as to coal's role as an option in meeting new energy needs.