

Either Way—? It's A Green Initiative

Some interesting releases hit my desk as of late. They stand out because their relevance not only impacts the processing industry, but also demonstrates what I believe to be a great representation of a green vs. green battle.

First, we've got a debate over a natural gas deposit in Colorado. Proponents of harvesting the reserve point out that this 9 trillion-cubic-foot supply could heat as many as 4 million homes for up to 20 years and avoid the impact of rising oil costs. Yet Colorado Senator Ken Salazar is not only trying to block this development, but he is also working to prevent the leasing of public lands for commercial oil shale processing.

Similarly, the Independent Environmental Integrity Project (EIP) has unveiled a report critical of U.S. oil procurement from Canadian tar sands. To accommodate the extraction of oil from these tar sands, refining activity would have to increase significantly, which the EIP states would have a far-reaching negative environmental impact, either in increasing the capacity of current U.S. refineries or in the construction of additional facilities.

While neither situation offers an original context, what is interesting is that they're both "green" issues. Green in that the extraction and processing of these untapped energy sources would stimulate economic conditions with the hiring of more workers, procurement of additional equipment and, ideally, the lowering of energy costs through increased supply. Significant financial benefits could be realized on multiple levels. It's also a green issue in that the environmental effects of strip mining oil shale, processing tar sands and developing natural gas reserves would release more greenhouse gases into the environment, and potentially place non-fossil fuel developments on the backburner.

In the middle of this controversy are those in the refineries, mining operations and processing plants who welcome the opportunity to tackle these energy sources, but are also very cognizant of the potential negative environmental impact. So which green initiative is more important? Are we being short-sighted in tapping these reserves and potentially suffering long-term environmental side effects? Could the development of these resources place greater onus on the development of pollution mitigation technologies?

I think the key is balance. I feel that these untapped energy sources are there to be utilized, but in a responsible manner. U.S. manufacturers are all too often placed at a competitive disadvantage due to stronger legislative controls from bodies like OSHA, the EPA and other entities that, although important and valid, add costs to the production process and overall operation.

I believe that commercial dollars should be allowed to finance the development of

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Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

these natural resources, and more government support should be given to plants and refineries for researching and developing safer, cleaner production processes. Then maybe we can have less regulative agency involvement and more profitability for a greater number of processing plants, which have been given the appropriate resources necessary to be both operationally sound and environmentally responsible.

Oil shale, tar sands, biofuels, etc. all offer a great opportunity—not just for the processing industry, but for this country as a whole, and we can realize these opportunities without sacrificing the environment. The key is understanding that both types of green initiatives are important in meeting our energy needs and staying competitive in a global economy. n?

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Source URL (retrieved on 04/21/2014 - 7:32am):

<http://www.chem.info/articles/2008/07/either-way%E2%80%94it%E2%80%99s-green-initiative>