

Energy institute: Springs Utilities on right track with coal emissions cleaner

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A homegrown technology designed to clean sulfur dioxide from coal-burning power plants works the way its inventor said it would, an independent research group has found.

Colorado Springs-based Neumann Systems Group, Inc., which developed an emissions-purifying device that's being tested at the city-owned Drake Power Plant downtown, recently received a favorable assessment from the Electric Power Research Institute.

"Our contractor found that it operated as Neumann had predicted" at the current scale of 20 megawatts, Jeff Brehm, a spokesman for the research

institute, said Tuesday.

Brehm said the research institute didn't study whether the technology will readily scale to commercial size or whether it was ready for full-scale implementation.

The so-called scrubber was developed by physicist David Neumann, an Air Force Academy graduate who hopes to expand the technology to remove carbon dioxide.

Neither Neumann nor a company spokeswoman could be reached for comment Tuesday. But in 2008, Neumann said the research institute's analysis had far-reaching implications.

"Getting somebody's stamp on this that's nationally recognized is critical to getting this adopted in the industry," he said at the time.

Brehm emphasized the research institute wasn't endorsing the technology.

"We don't endorse anything," he said. "We're just a technology validator and a research organization."

Colorado Springs Utilities, which owns the downtown power plant, has invested about \$17 million in the technology and stands to profit if it goes commercial. The technology could also help it meet increasingly strict regulations involving sulfur dioxide emissions.

"We are delighted in EPRI's independent assessment and conclusions, validating the 3-year-long progressive and prudent public-private partnership between the Drake Plant and Neumann Systems Group," Drew Rankin, Utilities' general manager of energy supply, said in an e-mail.

"Compared to conventional technology, deployment of NeuStream at the Drake and Nixon Plants will save our customers hundreds of millions of dollars, reduce water consumption by half, reduce power consumption by half, and allow 90 percent mercury removal over the next twenty years, while fundamentally lowering sulfur dioxide emissions by 97 percent," he said.

Utilities CEO Jerry Forte called the research institute's findings "a big deal."

"We're incredibly excited about the possibilities for our ratepayers in terms of saving them money," he said.

“The implications are the ability to comply with regulatory mandates in a way that costs our ratepayers significantly less. It also gives us the ability to comply in a way that’s very environmentally responsible. This technology appears to be a breakthrough in the industry,” Forte said.

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