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IEA expert calls for tougher air-quality standards

AN EXPERT from the International Energy Agency (IEA) yesterday projected rising coal usage in Asia with an increasing role being played by high-efficiency and low-emission (HELE) technology, while urging Thailand to introduce a stricter air-quality standard and inspection regime.

The Energy Ministry currently intends to increase the proportion of the nation's energy produced by coal-fired power plants to 23-25 per cent, as laid down in the Power Development Plan 2015 (PDP 2015).

Speaking during an energy seminar on the impacts of electricity generated by HELE-technology coal, organised by Banpu, Andrew Minchener, general manager of the IEA Clean Coal Centre, explained that developing countries still had strong coal demand for power production, in parallel with their promotion of renewable energy.

Sixteen East Asian countries - Asean members, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, South Korea and India - intend to use coal for about 40 per cent of all fuel for power generation by 2035, he said, adding that Thailand's requirement for coal is expected to increase from 19 per cent currently to 20-25 per cent over the period.

HELE involves technology that enhances efficiency as a way of reducing coal usage in the generation of the same number of kilowatts, and of lowering non-greenhouse-gas pollution, he said.

Supply stability and competitive electricity prices are cited as key factors behind coal demand, but the environmental impact remains a concern, said the expert.

However, coal-fired power production can be made consistent with development issues via the use of clean coal technology, he said.

At present, coal-fired power plants employ ultra-super-critical combustion technology that strictly limits dust to no more than 10 milligrams per cubic metre, sulphur dioxide to no more than 35 parts per million, and nitrogen oxide to no more than 50 parts per million, he explained.

Minchener said the promotion of coal-fired power production in Thailand should be undertaken together with a higher environmental standard and controls on the release of carbon dioxide, in order to ease environmental concerns.

Chanin Vongkusolkit, director and chief executive officer of Banpu, said most of the higher coal demand in Asia was from China and India, which continue to see increases in power-production capacity at coal-fired plants employing clean technology, given the lower costs than for those fuelled by liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Although the investment cost in coal-fired plants is higher, the fuel cost is cheaper at about 30 per cent of the total outlay, against LNG-fired power plants, where the figure is 70 per cent, he said.

Chanin told the seminar that based on Thailand's economic structure, the country could not shoulder a situation where all its electricity was generated from LNG.

