

Fargo Forum

A sustainable future for ND energy production requires an end to coal

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By: **Verle Reinicke**, Bismarck

The future. Very often we talk about and plan for the future by starting with what already is, the present. The result is that the future is more about the present than a real future. The Synapse Report for 2011, "Toward a Sustainable Future," calls this "Business As Usual" (BAU).

BAU is about an energy future that is merely a repackaged use of coal, gas and nuclear energy for decades to come. Its buzz word is "clean" coal: carbon capture, retrofitting existing plants, new generation plants as well as increased use of natural gas, liquefied natural gas and continued use of nuclear fuels. In short, the future is merely more of the same!

"Toward a Sustainable Future," on the other hand, envisions a real future. It looks to the year 2050 and asks realistically what kinds of energy sources will be needed for energy production then.

At Underwood, N.D., is Coal Creek power station. Thinking about 2050, this question comes to mind: "Factoring in increased cost of coal, future regulations for coal, and construction costs for new plants, will that plant still exist in 2050?" Most likely not.

A sustainable future for electrical generation will mean a reliance instead on renewables, like wind and solar. Renewables have often been treated as the Cinderellas of the energy household. To realize a sustainable future for 2050, however, means that they must become the darling children.

The Synapse Report, published by the Civil Society Institute, makes the strong and credible argument that all coal-fired power plants can be phased out, replacing them with aggressive efficiency efforts and investing deliberately and intentionally in renewables.

Eliminating coal-fired power plants will also result in the reduction of 55,000 premature deaths due to pollution in future decades.

We can begin moving into the future right now. There is no need to wait for new technology breakthroughs, extensive research and development work. The technologies are already here.

When it comes to energy generation and use, what kind of future are we looking for? The truth of the matter is that BAU, Business As Usual, is not sustainable. It's becoming more and more a behemoth, whose costs will burden us dearly.

There are things all of us can do right now to help usher in a sustainable future, starting in our own homes. And we need to be talking often to our leaders, locally, statewide and nationally, about the need for them to invest in a real future, a future of energy efficiency and renewables.

Reinicke is a Bismarck resident and chairman of Dakota Resource Council.