

# Wash or Perish

Dear Friends,

The washing of coal is becoming akin to the washing of dirty linen in public. Indian coal high in impurity and ash content should ideally be “washed” before it is sent to the thermal power plants or to the blast furnaces.

We all know that when burned, coal is the dirtiest of all fossil fuels – however, a range of technologies are being used and developed to reduce the environmental impact of coal-fired power stations. Collectively, they are known as clean coal technology (CCT). One important constituent of CCT is Coal washing, which involves grinding the coal into smaller pieces and passing it through a process called gravity separation. One technique involves feeding the coal into barrels containing a fluid that has a density which causes the coal to float, while unwanted material sinks and is removed from the fuel mix. The coal is then pulverised and prepared for burning.

Coal India Limited, the world’s largest coal company, operates 17 coal washeries, out of which 11 are Coking coal and the remaining are non-Coking coal washeries, with a total capacity of 39.40 million tons per annum. The company has plans to set up 20 new washeries with a combined capacity of 111 million tons to help realise a better price for its produce. Not only so, coal washing should be promoted in the country as a number of studies have shown that washed coal has higher calorific value than unwashed coal, translating into better power generation efficiency. The lower ash content of washed coal results in lower emissions as well which augurs well for the already battered ecosystem.

But alas, things are not as simple as they sound. For, the washeries are mired in the red tape-ism of vested interests and are way beyond schedule. Some experts in the know opine that the body of local washery makers, are effectively stalling the entry of state of the art technologies which is the crux of the matter. Others also point out that washing is perceived as a threat to pilferage which is certain to block many of the so-called “black holes” which have been corroding the system for ages. And at the very heart is a whooping 3 thousand crore direct outlay.

Paradoxically, the juju that is being bandied as the stumbling block is the environmental clearance.

Read on, that’s the least we can do.

With Best Regards,



**Suvabrata Ganguly**

Editor