



Idaho National Lab offers help with Wyoming energy

At a glance:

The director and officials from the Idaho National Laboratory met Wednesday with Wyoming's governor to discuss ways that the federal research institution can help keep state energy viable in a market troubled by global warming.

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CHEYENNE – Idaho National Laboratory is not just for the Gem State.

"It's a national resource," said Vice Adm. John Grossenbacher (ret.), lab director and president. "We look for science and math solutions to really hard problems."

Grossenbacher and other representatives of the lab met with Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal on Wednesday.

The governor and the admiral are engaged in ongoing talks about ways the lab can help keep Wyoming at the center of energy production in a market that is worried about global warming.

Though well known for its research in nuclear reactor technology, the lab also studies other areas expected to impact Wyoming's future, such as clean fossil fuels and renewable energy.

"(This state) is blessed with vast energy resources," Grossenbacher said.

But he added, "There is no free lunch."

Wyoming's vast resources include gas and oil, coal, uranium, wind and sunshine. Producing electricity from any of those comes with a price and environmental and economic trade-offs, Grossenbacher said.

Added Richard Boardman, who heads the energy security initiative at the lab, "People are too quick to put boundaries on technology and come up with a fixed solution."

He said people should be thinking: "That may not be the only answer."

The problems of energy need to be tackled from many directions at once. Industry, universities and national labs have different roles, but they can address specific problems in a coordinated fashion, Grossenbacher said.

"Then you've got a very powerful team," he added.

If those groups are working together with policymakers, such as the governor, the most complex problems can be solved, he said.

The national lab's role is to do the research and experimentation that are too risky or too dangerous for industry and academia or require big, expensive tools.

"Scale matters," Grossenbacher said.

For Wyoming coal to continue to produce electricity in a world worried about global warming, for example, the carbon dioxide created when the coal is burned may have to be captured and stored.

Accomplishing that on a scale that keeps the lights on throughout the West may require some help from the federal lab, Grossenbacher said.

The facility also provides another group of scientific eyes on such issues as whether there are better uses of carbon dioxide than storage.



With rising energy prices, worries about greenhouse gases and the impact of oil dependence on national security, Grossenbacher foresees the nation moving toward using a combination of all the resources that Wyoming is rich in.

But he adds that the choices will be difficult.

"There are no simple solutions with any of these technologies," he said.