



POWERnews

AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER FROM THE EDITORS OF POWER MAGAZINE

K-Fuel tests called a 'success' but details are lacking

FirstEnergy confirmed last week that it "successfully" tested a delivery of K-Fuel refined coal (essentially PRB coal dried from about 30% to about 10% moisture content) although KFx and First Energy aren't releasing any technical or performance data that would substantiate their claims.

First Energy declined to talk with POWER magazine saying the results are "proprietary" and will not be released because they may provide a "competitive edge in the power market." Until KFx or FirstEnergy releases verifiable test results many observers remain skeptical of the KFx claims of improved PRB combustion properties. Others have tried to economically dry lower ranked coals to improve the heat content in the past—none have been successful.

The coal feedstock KFx used to produce the test tonnage at its Fort Union, Wyo., refining facility came from Arch Coal's Coal Creek mine south of Gillette, Wyo. About 7,200 tons of K-Fuel was reported by Platts to have been shipped to FirstEnergy, although the Denver Post reported about 10,000 tons were shipped and the Rocky Mountain News reported First Energy will burn 14,000 tons of refined coal over three weekends in one of its boilers.

Early last week, KFx announced that its product "exhibited improved heat content in the plant's boiler relative to raw Powder River Basin coals burned in that facility.... (FirstEnergy) also indicated that there were no slagging or ash handling problems experienced in the test burn (singular not plural)," KFx said, noting also that "no significant problems were reported with the train shipment, barge unloading, bunkering, or pulverizing" of the K-Fuel. Both statements were confirmed by FirstEnergy.

After a barrage of requests for clarifying information from the news media, KFx responded a few days later that "Only two issues were reported by FirstEnergy: First, there was fugitive dust during transloading the coal from rail to barge; second, a few (at least six were reported by KFx in the transcript of their September 14 analyst conference call) of the delivered cars exhibited elevated heat content. The K-Fuel was sprayed with water and a dust suppressor during transloading, which reduced the dust issue and the shipment proceeded to the plant as expected."

Photographs obtained by POWER magazine clearly show considerable amounts of fugitive coal dust at the barge terminal when the K-Fuel was being loaded on a barge. Significant quantities of water were also sprayed over the coal in an effort to reduce the fugitive dust. Neither are normal events when handling PRB coal. The photographs will be published in an upcoming issue of POWER magazine.

KFx said it "expects that these issues will be remedied quickly through the use of standard dust suppressers, as well as normal packing and loading procedures to prevent localized heat elevation, as these are issues and remedies typical of Powder River Basin coals."

Perhaps, but having a hot load in so many rail cars in such a small shipment is out of

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the ordinary and deserves a better explanation beyond blaming it on a hot summer day and loading procedures.

A FirstEnergy spokesman said the utility "is still in discussion with KFx regarding any possible next steps." The spokesperson declined to discuss possible next steps, or identify the Ohio power plant in which the fuel was tested although it's generally believed that the tests were conducted at the R. E. Burger Plant.

Source: POWER magazine