

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
OFFICE OF FOSSIL ENERGY
NATIONAL ENERGY TECHNOLOGY LABORATORY



COMPUTED TOMOGRAPHY (CT) SCANNING FOR PETROPHYSICAL APPLICATIONS

Background

CONTACTS

Robert Kleinmann

Director, Geosciences Division
National Energy Technology
Laboratory
626 Cochran's Mill Road
P.O. Box 10940
Pittsburgh, PA 15236
412-386-6555
robert.kleinmann@netl.doe.gov

T. Robert McLendon

Geosciences Division
National Energy Technology
Laboratory
3610 Collins Ferry Road
P.O. Box 880
Morgantown, WV 26507
304-285-2008
t.mclen@netl.doe.gov

Traditional core-evaluation techniques evaluate minerals from exterior properties until all testing is concluded and the rocks can be sectioned and observed by a microscope. For real-time evaluations or in situ observation, an alternative is to use X-rays to see inside the cores. A good technique to observe the actual progression of fluids (movement) inside rocks is to use computer tomography (CT), scanning at successive time intervals to record the displacement or flooding process. Since the CT scanner procedure uses three-dimensional (3-D) coordinates that do not change unless the sample is removed from the instrument, changes in the conditions of each 3-D "voxel" can be recorded versus time. The "slices" can be reconstructed to provide 3-D images of scanned objects from many perspectives.

Sometimes minerals have interactions with fluids contained inside them. Although the mechanisms and causes are not completely known, it is well established experimentally that coal reacts with both methane and carbon dioxide (CO₂) to alter the nature of some of its minerals. It has been observed that coal swells upon adsorption of CO₂. Loss of permeability from coal swelling is a serious issue in carbon sequestration in unmineable coal seams. In situations where the desire is to use CO₂ to displace coal-bed methane, significant complications may arise due to the shrinking and swelling interactions.

Description

Regardless of which in situ processes are under consideration, it is necessary to evaluate the suitability of the selected site (site characterization) for application of the process. One of the techniques used to characterize the internal reactions



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Duane H. Smith

Geosciences Division
National Energy Technology
Laboratory
3610 Collins Ferry Road
P.O. Box 880
Morgantown, WV 26507
304-285-4069
duane.smith@netl.doe.gov

Sean I. Plasynski

Sequestration Technology Manager
National Energy Technology
Laboratory
626 Cochrans Mill Road
P.O. Box 10940
Pittsburgh, PA 15236
412-386-4867
sean.plasynski@netl.doe.gov

and/or behavior of coal with CO₂ is dual-energy CT scanning. The core is scanned at two different (high and low) X-ray tube voltages. By comparing these scans to known standards, changes in effective atomic number can be determined. Knowing that simultaneous changes in density (from CT number) and atomic number (dual energy results) occur, important and necessary information is made available for every internal voxel to simulate numerical efforts. Since it is possible to simultaneously vary experimental simulations of in situ stresses on the cores and fluid pressures, site characterization is greatly enhanced.



Figure 1. Computed Tomography Scanner

For evaluation of carbon sequestration in inert rocks (such as displacement of brine from sandstone), or oil and/or gas production by displacement (e.g. waterflood), real time in situ progress of fluid displacement can be observed. Since the voxels are all recorded in a 3-D coordinate system, quantitative, volumetric, and linear measurements are all available for retrieval by using the software.

Primary Project Goal

To evaluate target carbon sequestration or hydrocarbon production cores from in situ real time perspectives. This will allow for the possibility of more accurate numerical simulations and economic evaluations, as well as enhancing the assessments of project feasibility.

Objectives

The CT scanner test results on coal will be used in conjunction with results from the Geologic Sequestration Flow Lab (GSCFL) at NETL to help determine behavior of coal when CO₂ is injected into deep coal seams for geologic sequestration of the CO₂. More specifically, objectives are—

- To use the data to assist computer simulations of CO₂ injection and the development of coal-swelling models for realistic evaluation of technical and economic feasibility of CO₂ sequestration in coal seams.
- To obtain real-time in situ images with the CT scanner of CO₂ injection in a sandstone core with total brine saturation, until CO₂ breakthrough occurs.
- To obtain data that will assist computer simulation efforts of CO₂ sequestration in brine-saturated sandstone formations
- To observe the fingering in high-permeability strata as well as core anomalies that can be discerned in situ while testing is progressing.
- To test identical cores in both NETL's Morgantown and Pittsburgh laboratories, which will allow more complete evaluation of the cores.

Benefits

Reservoir cores can be evaluated at realistic confining pressures while simultaneously observing in situ changes in pore fluids and mineral densities and/or effective molecular weights. This information is essential to realistic numeric simulation, economic evaluations, and site characterization efforts.

PARTNERS

University of Pittsburgh

Carnegie Mellon University

Georgia Institute of Technology

West Virginia University

COST

PROJECT TOTAL

\$220,000

ADDRESS

National Energy Technology Laboratory

1450 Queen Avenue SW
Albany, OR 97321-2198
541-967-5892

2175 University Avenue South
Suite 201
Fairbanks, AK 99709
907-452-2559

3610 Collins Ferry Road
P.O. Box 880
Morgantown, WV 26507-0880
304-285-4764

626 Cochran Mill Road
P.O. Box 10940
Pittsburgh, PA 15236-0940
412-386-4687

One West Third Street,
Suite 1400
Tulsa, OK 74103-3519
918-699-2000

CUSTOMER SERVICE

1-800-553-7681

WEBSITE

www.netl.doe.gov

Numeric modeling can project the volumes of CO₂ that can be sequestered in each potential reservoir in an area adjacent to older power plants. Estimates of the number of porous and permeable lithologic units required to sequester and store CO₂ will be useful in controlling greenhouse gases.

Accomplishments

Coal is being scanned with dual energy settings to evaluate coal interactions with CO₂ at varying pore fluid and confining pressures.

Development of brine displacement models for CO₂ sequestration in brine-sandstone formations has proceeded using idealized two-dimensional flat plates that were visually transparent. While this effort has provided valuable information on fractal behavior, fingering, breakthrough, etc., advancement of simulation capability requires that actual brine-saturated sandstone cores be tested using actual sandstone in 3-D configurations. NETL's CT scanner will obtain sequential real-time, in situ images of brine displacement by injected CO₂ from a no-saturation to full-saturation condition until after breakthrough. This work will be coordinated with a cooperative research effort being initiated among Carnegie Mellon University, West Virginia University, and NETL.

Planned Activity

- Evaluate mineral cores for the Carbon Sequestration Partnerships, both for target and cap and/or seal rock properties.
- Evaluate methane hydrate formation and decomposition in a variety of geologic conditions.
- Evaluate cement degradation upon exposure to CO₂.
- Evaluate the process of electromagnetic radiation used for retorting of oil shale and heavy oil.