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PILOT PROJECT AIMS TO CUT GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

A Hunter Valley coal mine is working with university researchers to trial new technology to reduce the impact of greenhouse gases released during mining.

Scientists from CRC mining and energy company AGL are working with Coal & Allied's Mount Thorley Warkworth Mine, near Singleton, to tap into coal seam methane gas trapped underground.

Coal seam methane gas is usually released when the coal is mined, but the pilot project aims to capture and remove the gas prior to mining.

If successful, the \$5.5 million pilot project could help Coal & Allied reduce their carbon footprint at Mount Thorley Warkworth as well as their two other mines in the Hunter Valley.

Chris Lauritzen, manager New Developments, said methane is 21 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

"More than 60 per cent of our total greenhouse gas emissions on site are 'fugitive' emissions (gases released from seams during mining)," Mr Lauritzen said.

"So if we can reduce that by capturing some of the methane gas from the coal prior to mining, we will be able to substantially reduce our impact on the environment.

"During the trial we will be flaring off the gas, which converts the methane into less harmful carbon dioxide.

"But if the coal bed methane gas is available in sufficient quantities and flows freely, it could even open up a new source of fuel to generate electricity."

Contractors from McDermott Drilling are drilling four wells in an area which will eventually be mined.

CRCMining scientists will use one of the wells to trial new drilling techniques to drill horizontally up to 200 metres from the initial well.

The scientists hope the horizontal drilling will open up more pathways for the gas to flow, which ultimately would reduce the number of wells required to extract coal seam methane gas.

The drilling programme is expected to be completed in December, and design of the surface gas and water management facilities is well advanced.

Operation of the wells and collection and analysis of data will continue through 2009, before a decision is made about the likely effectiveness of a full-scale programme.

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