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Illinois adds to its appeal for FutureGen

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So far, so good, on Illinois' bid to become home to the highest-tech coal-fueled power plant on the horizon: the FutureGen project .

Pennsylvania has joined with Kentucky and Indiana in getting behind Illinois' bid for FutureGen. And state economic development officials will be in Washington, D.C., this week to meet with officials from other states. They want to build more support for Illinois' plan to become home to this first-of-its-kind facility in the United States.

FutureGen would make use of new technologies that while using coal would create little or no pollution, nor add to greenhouse gas emissions. If successful – and a host of scientists and other experts in Illinois believe it will be – the technology would provide enormous economic benefits for coal-producing states like Illinois and Pennsylvania. It also would benefit the environment worldwide because carbon dioxide emissions could be captured and sent far underground where they could be stored within giant rock formations. The geology far beneath central Illinois offers ideal conditions for this so-called carbon sequestration.

Two sites in Illinois – one near Tuscola and the other about 20 miles south near Mattoon – are finalists for the FutureGen plant. The other two prospective sites are in Texas.

Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, in a letter to FutureGen's developers, said Illinois has the geology, the transportation infrastructure and the expertise (including scientists at the University of Illinois and the Illinois State Geological Survey) "necessary for a project of this magnitude." No other state so far is endorsing the Texas bid.

Meanwhile, in Tuscola, officials are working with longtime businesses in the area, including Cabot Corp., Equistar and CSX Transportation, to pledge vital support to the local bid. CSX, for example, has promised to help pay the cost of building a rail line to the FutureGen plant. And Equistar has offered the use of water from its reservoir.

State and local officials have done a good job of coordinating Illinois' proposal and offering the FutureGen Alliance needed incentives, including loans, tax breaks and freedom from liability in the event of a catastrophic occurrence. The FutureGen Alliance is expected to announce by late December where the \$1.5 billion plant will be. We're increasingly confident they'll choose Illinois.