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August 18

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A team of four engineering and two business students from the University of New Hampshire, above in lab coats, consults with the judges at the Waste-Management Education and Research Consortium in New Mexico last April. Their work won first place and as invitation to visit the U.S. Department of Energy.

UNH targets greenhouse gases

08/16/2004 08:19 AM

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A group of students from the University of New Hampshire has developed a method of removing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere that could reduce American CO₂ emissions by 23 percent per year

The technology, which doesn't have a name yet, removes CO₂ by combining it with recycled industrial waste such as coal fly ash or cement kiln dust, according to Patrick Smith, a recently graduated environmental engineering major who worked on the team.

Current systems require CO₂ to be purified once it's captured before it can be disposed. Technology developed by the UNH team leads to permanent disposal of CO₂ without going through the very expensive purification process, according to UNH environmental engineering professor and team adviser Kevin Gardner.

Depending on the location and materials, the technology can remove carbon dioxide at a cost between \$1 and \$6 per ton, according to business student Briahna Itchkavich-Levasseur, who helped write the project's business plan.

"The way the technology is now, there are a number of different ways it could be implemented," Gardner said. "It's hard to believe that it can be done this cheaply."

The idea for the project came from a contest held in April by the Waste-Management Education and Research Consortium in New Mexico, which was looking for the best way to permanently remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The team of four engineering and two business students, now calling themselves Co2alescence, got to work in September. Their work not only won them first place at the April contest but also earned them an invitation to visit Washington and present the technology to the U.S. Department of Energy.

"That was really exciting. It was great to receive feedback from experts in the field," Smart said.

Commercializing this technology is the next step for Co2alescence. The team already has a provisional patent and anticipates applying for a full patent next March. The technology's appearance is flexible enough to blend with any scenery, according to Smart. Although the United States is no longer a member of the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement to combat global warming, a number of states still abide by it, according to Itchkavich-Levasseur. She says the U.S. absence from the Kyoto Protocol won't affect the project's business plan, and she anticipates commercialization in three to five years.

"We really had to step up because we had an interdisciplinary team," she said. "We complemented each other nicely."

Neelang Parghi is a graduate student in business journalism at Boston University currently serving an internship at Mass High Tech.

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