

Energy & Agricultural Carbon Utilization

SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES TO SEQUESTRATION

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Ammonia Carbonation and Biomass Pyrolysis for Carbon Management

James W. Lee^{1*}, Danny Day^{2,b}, Robert J. Evans,^c and Rongfu Li^d

¹Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Chemical Sciences Division, Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6194

²Eprida, Inc, 6300 Powers Ferry, Suite 307, Atlanta, GA 30339

³National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Golden, CO 80401

⁴Former Jinhuaishi Chemical Fertilizer Factory, Zhejiang Province, China

*Corresponding email: Leejw@ORNL.gov, Tel: 865-574-1208, Fax: 865-574-1275

The increasing anthropogenic CO₂ emission and global warming have challenged the United States and other countries to find new and better ways to meet the world's increasing needs for energy while reducing greenhouse gases. Here, we present an integrated technology concept for global CO₂ sequestration and environmental protection through ammonia carbonation and biomass pyrolysis. The systematic ammonia-carbonation-based approach invented at ORNL integrates fossil energy systems (such as a coal-fired power plant) with CO₂-sequestration by solidifying flue-gas CO₂ into solid NH₄HCO₃ products.^{1, 2} Our recent experimental studies demonstrated that removal of flue-gas CO₂ can be achieved via formation of solid NH₄HCO₃ through ammonia carbonation in the gas phase.³ In addition to solidification of CO₂, this process also has the potential capability to remove NO_x and SO_x emissions. Therefore, the invention could simultaneously or selectively convert CO₂, NO_x, and SO_x emissions into valuable fertilizers [mainly, NH₄HCO₃] that can enhance sequestration of CO₂ into soil and subsoil earth layers, reduce NO₃-contamination of groundwater, and stimulate photosynthetic fixation of CO₂ from the atmosphere.^{4, 5} When this technology is in worldwide use because of its high efficiency and carbon credit, in addition to the benefit of clean air protection and stimulation of photosynthetic fixation of CO₂ from the atmosphere, maximally 300 million tons of CO₂ per year [equivalent to about 5% of the CO₂ emissions from coal-fired power plants in the world] from smokestacks can be placed into soil by the use of this technology.⁶ An equally exciting and significant approach has been developed at Eprida and NREL. This approach applies a pyrolysis process to produce char and synthetic gas (containing mainly H₂, CO, and CO₂) from biomass which could come from farm and forestry sources. The hydrogen from this process could be used to create ammonia that can be used by the above ammonia-carbonation process to remove CO₂ in both the flue gas and the synthetic gas. The char materials produced from biomass pyrolysis contains a significant amount of non-digestible carbons such as the elementary carbons that can be stored in soils also as sequestered carbons. Furthermore, the carbon in the char is in a partially activated state and is highly absorbent. Combination of char, nitrogen compounds (such as NH₄HCO₃ or urea) and other plant nutrients could thus result in a slow-release fertilizer that is ideal for green plant growth. Since both HCO₃⁻ and char are non-digestible to soil bacteria, an NH₄HCO₃-char fertilizer can be an effective product that could maximally enhance storage (sequestration) of carbons into soils while providing ideal "organic slow-release" nutrients for plant growth. Therefore, the combination of these two novel approaches⁷ will provide an opportunity for fossil energy systems, farmers, and the fertilizer industry infrastructure to become the largest contributor to meeting Kyoto greenhouse-gas reduction targets.