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Even if it's cleaner, it's still coal

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"CLEAN COAL" is still an oxymoron (["Bush retreats on cleaner coal," Editorial, Feb. 17](#)). Each year, 4,000 miners in 27 states are diagnosed with black lung disease; mountaintops are decapitated, silting valleys and streams; and coal combustion emits mercury, soot, smog precursors, and nitrogen compounds that turn rain acidic and choke estuaries with oxygen-depleting slime.

The project the US Department of Energy pulled out of in Mattoon, Ill., was for capturing and storing carbon dioxide from a coal-fired plant. In addition to doing nothing to ameliorate the trail of ills and scars left by coal, storing large quantities of CO₂ can acidify aquifers, leaching lead and arsenic, and fracture limestone, releasing toxic concentrations of CO₂.

Reducing demand is the project to safely scale up today. Efficiency and conservation in buildings, appliances, utilities, circuitry, and vehicles can allow us to leave as much fossil fuel in the ground as possible.

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