Oil Shale in Belarus: History and Future by Judy

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In Belarus, oil shale is a large energy source that has been highly underdeveloped. It is estimated that there is approximately 8.8 billion tons of oil shale located in Belarus. This includes almost 3.6 billion tons of oil shale reserves that are recoverable. All of the reserves of Belarus are located in the Pripyat Shale Basin. This area is located in the western part of Hormiel, the eastern part of Brest Voblasts, and the southern part of Minsk.

Most of the reserves of oil shale in Belarus were discovered decades ago. However, the oil shale remains unexplored because it has a high sulfur and ash content. The oil shale has low heat combustion and the cost of extracting and processing the oil shale is quite high.

The reserves of both natural gas and petroleum are being depleted, which is resulting in a high need of imported hydrocarbons, coming mainly from Russia. For this reason, the country has recently renewed their interest in exploring the oil shale industry.

Exploration History

Oil shale was first discovered in Soviet Belarus in 1963. The 10,000 kilometer area of the Pripyat Basin was studied during the 1970s through the 1980s and it was discovered there is oil shale from the Upper Devonian ages through the Lower Carboniferous age. There were smaller deposits of oil shale found in other parts of Belarus. However, these smaller deposits were found to have a negligible value economically.

There are two potential deposits in the Pripyat Basin that were found to be exploitable. These were the Turov and the Lyuban. The Turov deposit is estimated to have 2.7 billion tons of shale. The Lyuban deposit is estimated to have 0.9 billion tons of shale.

The shale available in Belarus was deemed as unworthy to develop when compared to the larger deposits of nearby Estonia. The deposits that are in Belarus are of a much lower quality than those of Estonia. The oil shale only has 10 to 28% organic matter and heat combustion of 4.2 to 9.5 MJ/kg. The ash content of the oil shale is between 58 to 87%. The properties of the oil shale mean that it cannot directly be burned at a power station operated by fossil fuel. Instead, the rocks must first be put through a pyrolysis process. This process turns the rock into shale oil and then the oil shale gas can be used as conventional hydrocarbons.

Belarus Future in Oil Shale

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in Belarus requiring high amounts of imported hydrocarbons, mainly coming from Russia. The peak of the gas and oil production in the country saw its peak during the 1970s and has been in a steady decline since. The numerous energy disputes with Russia have led the country to renew their interest in developing the oil shale industry.

The biggest problem that Belarus faces in the production of oil shale is the mass amounts of waste products caused by the production and how to effectively use them.

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