

Federal Cabinet adopts CCS act

High environmental standards for future capture, transport and storage of carbon dioxide

The Federal Cabinet today adopted the draft act on the capture, transport and permanent storage of carbon dioxide in deep underground rock formations (carbon capture and storage, CCS). Minister Gabriel: "Coal-fired power plants will only have a future if they become less harmful to the climate. CCS could hold prospects for achieving this. Now we have to test whether this technology works on an industrial scale. However, we are not giving CCS a blank cheque with our act. On the contrary: The draft provides for tough environmental standards to which there will be no exceptions. The most important criterion is that the storage sites must be permanently safe."

The act grants operators the necessary planning and investment security for pilot and demonstration plants. However, they also have to prove, among other things, that complete retention of CO₂ in the storage site is guaranteed for an unlimited period of time. Moreover, comprehensive, state-of-the-art precautionary measures must be taken to prevent risks for humans and the environment. After a period of 30 years from the decommissioning of a plant, and thus about 80 years after its start-up, operators may transfer their responsibility to the Federal Government - but only if they can furnish proof of long-term safety according to the state of the art in science and technology.

In 2015 the Federal Government will analyse the experience gathered in demonstration projects at home and abroad. It will decide to what extent compliance with the high environmental and safety standards stipulated in the act can be proven and whether CCS is an option that is technologically and economically feasible. The draft act transposes the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the geological storage of carbon dioxide into German law.

The Federal Government's climate protection strategy is still focussed on increasing energy efficiency and stepping up the use of renewable energies. Compliance with the climate protection targets is ensured through the cap on greenhouse gas emissions defined under the European emissions trading scheme, which will be reduced by an annual 1.74 percent from 2013. It is up to the operators of power plants whether they opt for more efficiency, a fuel switch or an increased share of renewable energies to meet the cap. The state has the task of establishing clear legal provisions for the environmentally sound use of CCS for companies choosing to pursue this option.