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## City warms up to new type of coal

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ESCANABA — A test burn of cheaper coal at Escanaba's power plant is going "so far, so good," according to Electric Superintendent Mike Furmanski. He updated council during a work session Thursday.

A cheaper western coal is being tried in the power plant's two boilers because of a price hike in eastern coal, which is normally burned at the plant. The city had a contract to purchase eastern coal but the mine where it came from has gone bankrupt.

The trial run began in the No. 1 boiler two weeks ago after the arrival of 16,000 tons of the western coal, said Furmanski. The test burn went so good the first week, the western coal was fed into the No. 2 boiler April 20, he said.

Besides a couple "klinkers" found in the boilers, which is typical, test results to date are going good, Furmanski said. The ash bed is being maintained, the precipitator (air filter system) is handling it well, and the opacity (air emissions) are slowing down, Furmanski told council.

The heat value of the western coal appears to be a little lower than eastern coal, he said. Employees will have a better handle on the amount of energy being produced by mid-May to compare with past monthly tabulations. There also is a little more ash from the western coal, as expected, he added.

The western coal will be tested for a couple more weeks at which time the city will make a decision whether or not to purchase more of the same or seek coal from a different supplier.

The western coal being tested would be available to the plant for \$95 a ton. The city was planning to purchase 93,000 tons of eastern coal at \$72.45 a ton for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

Because of the recent price hike in the available western coal, the city is proposing in its 2008-09 budget to use \$1.7 million from the electric fund to pay for the coal price increase rather than raise electric rates.

Western coal was previously tested at the plant in 2002 because of its favorable market price at that time, Furmanski said. It burned and generated energy but it wasn't cost effective because of the extra load on the precipitator. Since then, minor changes have been made in the air path in the boiler, he said, explaining it may be enough for the western coal to burn well this time around.

Furmanski told council he's hopeful the current western coal works at the power plant because eastern coal prices are at record high prices.

Escanaba's plant operator, Wisconsin Public Service, will give a report on the test and make a recommendation on the western coal during a special meeting prior to council's May 15 meeting, said City Manager Jim O'Toole.

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