

INEEL/CON-99-00655
PREPRINT



Geothermal Electrical Production CO2 Emissions Study

K. K. Bloomfield (INEEL)
J. N. Moore (Energy of Geoscience Institute)

October 17, 1999 – October 20, 1999

Geothermal Resource Council 1999 Annual Meeting

This is a preprint of a paper intended for publication in a journal or proceedings. Since changes may be made before publication, this preprint should not be cited or reproduced without permission of the author.

This document was prepared as a account of work sponsored by an agency of the United States Government. Neither the United States Government nor any agency thereof, or any of their employees, makes any warranty, expressed or implied, or assumes any legal liability or responsibility for any third party's use, or the results of such use, of any information, apparatus, product or process disclosed in this report, or represents that its use by such third party would not infringe privately owned rights. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the U.S. Government or the sponsoring agency.



Production of Greenhouse Gases from Geothermal Power Plants

K. K. Bloomfield¹ and J. N. Moore²

1. Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, Idaho Falls, ID 83415

2. Energy & Geoscience Institute, Salt Lake City, UT 84109

Key Words

Carbon dioxide, greenhouse gases, power plant emissions

ABSTRACT

Emission of “greenhouse gases” into the environment has become an increasing concern. Deregulation of the electrical market will allow consumers to select power suppliers that utilize “green power.” Geothermal power is classed as “green power” and has lower emissions of carbon dioxide per kilowatt-hour of electricity than even the cleanest of fossil fuels, natural gas. However, previously published estimates of carbon dioxide emissions are relatively old and need revision. This study estimates that the average carbon dioxide emissions from geothermal and fossil fuel power plants are: geothermal 0.18 , coal 2.13, petroleum 1.56 , and natural gas 1.03 pounds of carbon dioxide per kilowatt-hour respectively.

Introduction

California was the first state in the nation to enter into deregulation of electrical production and supply. The purpose of deregulation was to move electrical production provided by the utilities into a competitive market place. As a result, consumers can now choose the generator of their electricity. Individual consumers can now reduce the impact their electrical consumption has on the environment by choosing to use renewable energy or “green power”, which includes electricity generated by geothermal plants. This study was designed to update a previous estimate (Goddard and Goddard, 1990) of the quantity of carbon dioxide (CO₂), hydrogen sulfide (H₂S), methane (CH₄), and ammonia (NH₃) emitted during geothermal power generation.

The amount of carbon stored in the atmosphere has been increasing. The accumulation of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) is attributed in part to electrical generation mainly from the burning of fossil fuels, cement manufacturing, and deforestation. Elevated levels of atmospheric CO₂ are hypothesized to be causing changes in global climate.

To counteract these climatic effects, delegations from more than 150 countries met in Kyoto, Japan in December of 1997 to complete negotiations on a treaty to reduce their emissions of certain “greenhouse gases”. The agreement they reached is called the Kyoto Protocol. It calls on developed nations to reduce their use of carbon emitting fossil fuels. In the U.S., CO₂ emissions account for roughly 85 percent of the emissions of the six gases named in the Kyoto Protocol. If ratified by the U.S. Senate, the U.S. will have to limit emissions of CO₂ and five other gases by 2008-2012 to 7 percent less than 1990 emissions.

This target appears to be fairly modest until the U.S. Department of Energy projections of energy use and emissions for 2010, based on normal business-as-usual energy and economic growth

expectations, are considered. Under this scenario, the United States will have to reduce emissions by nearly one-third of projected emissions to reach the target values. This is a very ambitious target and will require unprecedented action for the U.S. to get the job done in such a short period of time. It means Americans will have to slash their energy use or select “green energy” sources quickly and drastically. The use of geothermal energy can be a significant contributor to reducing energy related CO₂ emissions.

Approach

The most commonly cited reference on gaseous emissions from geothermal power plants was written by Goddard and Goddard (1990). Since that earlier work the mix of dry steam, flashed steam and binary plants has changed somewhat. More importantly, injection has diminished the carbon dioxide released from geothermal power plants. Benoit and Hirtz (1994) reported that CO₂ carbon dioxide emissions from the Dixie Valley geothermal plant had decreased from 0.152 pounds of CO₂ per kilowatt-hour of electricity produced in 1988 to 0.093 in 1992.

The steam that feeds all dry-steam and flash-steam plants can contain several weight percent of non-condensable gases. The quantity of gases emitted depends on several factors, including the characteristics of the resource (dry steam or liquid, reservoir fluid composition, temperature), the method of electrical generation (flash, binary, or combined cycle), and plant characteristics (efficiency, H₂S abatement equipment). Resources that generate electricity from dry steam or through the flashing of reservoir liquids to steam contribute non-condensable gases to the atmosphere. In these plants the gases contained in the reservoir fluids pass through the turbine with the steam, but unlike the steam, they do not condense at the turbine exhaust outlet. These gases are then exhausted to the atmosphere or a primary abatement system where H₂S is removed. Binary power plants, in contrast, release no non-condensable gases because the geothermal fluids are not exposed to the atmosphere (Blaydes, 1994).

Under the Clean Air Act of 1990, there are no federal emission limits for CO₂. Consequently, formal reporting of CO₂ emissions is not required by regulatory agencies and therefore, this data is not readily available in the public domain. Regulatory agencies commonly require an emission source compliance test for other gases such as H₂S and CH₄.

Data were obtained on CO₂, CH₄ (methane), NH₃ (ammonia), and H₂S (hydrogen sulfide) from geothermal operators, utilities, and state air-quality boards. The primary sources of electrical production and CO₂ emissions data were the operators of dry steam and flash plants. The measurement of non-condensable gas in geothermal fluids is critical during initial well testing for power plant design and regulatory concerns. The non-condensable gas content is a major factor in designing condensers, non-condensable gas ejector systems and H₂S abatement systems. Non-condensable gases can be a major regulatory and permitting concern that may result in large capital and operational cost. Although there is no legal requirement for the collection of CO₂ emissions, CO₂ data is collected during required compliance tests. CO₂ data is also collected since the production of non-condensable gases is often used as a reservoir monitoring tool and an indicator of power plant energy conversion efficiency.

The data that was supplied by the operators included total steam flow to the plant in mass per hour, the mass ratio of steam to total non-condensable gas, net capacity of the plant in megawatts

and concentrations of the gaseous components. The concentrations of the non-condensable gas mixtures were expressed in terms of the volume fraction of each gas in the total non-condensable gas volume, y_i . An example of the data received and the calculation of emissions per kilowatt-hour follows:

Example data:

Steam flow to plant	200,000 lbs/hr
Plant output net	10 Mwe
Sample gas/Steam ratio	10000 ppmw or 1.0%

Noncondensable gas component	Dry gas percent by volume
CO ₂	97.8
H ₂ S	1.2
CH ₄	0.5
NH ₃	<u>.05</u>
Total	100.0

Example Calculations:

Percent by volume to percent by weight conversion:

Component	y_i volume fraction	M_i molecular weight	$y_i M_i$	$y_i M_i / \sum y_i M_i$ weight fraction
CO ₂	0.978	44.01	43.042	0.987
H ₂ S	0.012	34.08	0.409	0.009
CH ₄	0.005	16.04	0.08	0.0018
NH ₃	0.005	17.03	<u>0.085</u>	<u>0.0019</u>
			$\sum y_i M_i$ 43.616	$\sum y_i M_i / \sum y_i M_i$ 1.00

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Noncondensable flow rate} &= \text{Steam flow to plant} * \text{Sample gas/Steam ratio} \\ &= 200,000 \text{ lbs/hr} * 1.0\% \\ &= 2,000 \text{ lbs/hr} \end{aligned}$$

Gas component flow rate = Non-condensable flow rate * component weight fraction

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CO}_2 \text{ flow rate} &= 2,000 \text{ lbs/hr} * 0.987 \\ &= 1,974 \text{ lbs/hr} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{H}_2\text{S flow rate} &= 2,000 \text{ lbs/hr} * 0.009 \\ &= 18 \text{ lbs/hr} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CH}_4 \text{ flow rate} &= 2,000 \text{ lbs/hr} * 0.0018 \\ &= 3.6 \text{ lbs/hr} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{NH}_3 \text{ flow rate} &= 2,000 \text{ lbs/hr} * 0.0019 \\ &= 3.8 \text{ lbs/hr} \end{aligned}$$

Plant steam rate = Steam flow to plant / Plant output net

$$= 200,000 \text{ lbs/hr} / 10 \text{ Mwe}$$

$$= 20,000 \text{ lbs steam} / \text{Mwe or } 20 \text{ lbs steam} / \text{kw-hr}$$

CO₂ emission rate = 1,974 lbs/hr / 10 Mwe
= 197.4 lbs/hr / Mw or 0.197 lbs / kw-hr
H₂S emission rate = 18 lbs/hr / 10 Mwe
= 0.18 lbs/hr / Mw or 0.00018 lbs / kw-hr
CH₄ emission rate = 3.6 lbs/hr / 10 Mwe
= 0.36 lbs/hr / Mw or 0.000036 lbs / kw-hr
NH₃ emission rate = 3.8 lbs/hr / 10 Mwe
= 0.38 lbs/hr / Mw or 0.000038 lbs / kw-hr

Several assumptions were made in performing the calculations. First, it was assumed that there is no partitioning of CH₄, H₂S, and NH₃ between the non-condensables ejected to the atmosphere and the condensate. Because some dissolution of these gases will occur in the cooling tower, our calculations slightly overestimate the quantities of these gases that are emitted from plants where condensate is injected. In contrast data on the CO₂ contents of the injected fluids at The Geysers was provided, and the effect of this injection has been considered when calculating CO₂ emissions from The Geysers. This correction was not made for emissions from flashed-steam plants. Secondly, our average rate includes power produced by binary plants that do not have any CO₂ emissions.

We report emissions in Tables 1 and 2 as the average value for all geothermal capacity including binary power plants. The data cannot be reported by power plant type due to the proprietary nature of some of our data. Table 1, compares the CO₂ emissions from geothermal power plants to those from fossil fuels. CO₂ values for coal, petroleum and natural gas are calculated using data taken from Electric Power Annual 1997, Volumes I and II (Energy Information Administration, 1998). Table 2 shows the emissions of “geenhouse” gases from geothermal plants per unit of geothermal electricity produced

Table 1. Comparison of Geothermal and Fossil Fuel CO₂ Emissions

	Geothermal	Coal	Petroleum	Natural Gas
Emissions (lbs. CO ₂ /kw-hr)	0.18	2.13	1.56	1.03

Table 2. Geothermal “Greenhouse” Gas Emissions

	CO ₂	H ₂ S	CH ₄	NH ₃
Emissions (lbs./kw-hr)	0.18	1.87E-04	1.66E-03	1.39E-04

Summary and Conclusion

This investigation quantifies the concentrations of greenhouse gases emitted by geothermal power plants. The results indicate that electrical production from geothermal fluids produces an order of magnitude less CO₂ per kilowatt-hour of electricity produced than coal, petroleum and natural gas. Thus, the data clearly demonstrate how increased geothermal utilization can assist the United States in reaching the emission reductions established by the Kyoto Protocol.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Energy, Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy under DOE Idaho Operations Office Contracts DE-AC07-94ID13223 (KKB) and DE-AC07-95ID13274 (JNM). Such support does not constitute any endorsement by the U.S. Department of Energy of the views expressed in this publication. The geothermal community has been very supportive of this investigation. Many companies have generously provided data. In particular, we would like to thank the staff of Caithness, Cal Energy, Calpine, Unocal and Utah Municipal Power Agency (UMPA) for their cooperation. The authors also wish to thank J.L.Renner for reviewing the manuscript.

References

Benoit, D. and Hirtz, P., 1994, Noncondensable gas trends and emissions at Valley, Geothermal Resources Council Transactions, v. 18, p. 113-117.

Blaydes, P.E., 1994 Environmental advantages of binary power plants can enhance development opportunities, Geothermal Resources Council Transactions, v. 18, p. 121-125.

Energy Information Administration, 1998, Electric power annual 1997, Volume I, DOE/EIA-0348(97)/1, 62 p.

Energy Information Administration, 1998, Electric power annual 1997, Volume II, DOE/EIA-0348(97)/2, 136 p.

Goddard, W.B and Goddard, C.B., 1990, Energy fuel sources and their contributions to recent global air pollution trends, Geothermal Resources Council Transactions, v. 14, p. 643-649.