



MCPA 44th Annual Conference Closes with Discussion on Met Coal Outlook, Railroads, Federal Oversight Challenges

The outlook for metallurgical coal, federal oversight challenges and railroad perspectives dominated the discussion during the final day of the 44th annual Metallurgical Coal Producers Association (MCPA) conference Tuesday in Roanoke, WV.

Federal oversight challenges were the focus of a panel moderated by Brooks Smith, MCPA counsel and managing partner at Troutman Pepper. Panelists included Harold Ward, West Virginia DEP cabinet secretary; Randy Moore, Virginia Energy; and Anna Wildeman, counsel, Troutman Pepper and former principal deputy assistant administrator for the Office of Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The panelists agreed the lack of predictability in regulations has cast a shadow making it difficult for operators to apply certainty to their business decisions. Also discussed was the “sue and settle approach” being undertaken by external groups and the lack of peer review and scientific review of some studies. A lack of transparency in those rules and processes further adds to the confusion, they agreed.

Navigating those challenges involves increased communication between state and federal agencies whenever possible, they said.

Jason I. Macmackin, marketing director of export coal, Norfolk Southern Corp.; and Sara Schryer, director of domestic coal sales, CSX Corp., talked about their companies and their focus on safety and leveraging innovations in technology. They both noted U.S. metallurgical coal continues at present to be strong in global markets and both indicated their companies are investing in infrastructure to support growth in the market.

Also discussed briefly was the role of AI (artificial intelligence) in the future, with both agreeing their companies are exploring how it might benefit their operations.

Ernie Thrasher, XCoal Resources, gave an outlook on the Met coal industry, noting steel remains as a critical component on the journey to net zero. He talked about year-over-year changes in seaborne coal markets and the resolution of supply side shortages which were occurring last year.

Citing statistics, he noted there was 7 percent more coking coal produced in the United States year-over-year. Geopolitics he said may impact seaborne coal markets in the future, Specifically, he pointed to global uncertainties, including war in the Middle East; the ongoing war in Ukraine; government uncertainty in Iran; China’s economic struggles; a China-Russia alliance; and reduced sanctions on Russian coal.

Conference attendees also heard from J.B. McCuskey, the Republican nominee for West Virginia attorney general, who began his remarks noting “Met coal makes steel and America runs on manufacturing.”

He talked about the importance of communities in West Virginia, noting family, common sense and maintaining a way of life steeped in traditional American values is what people coming to West Virginia will find.

McCuskey commended the industry for having an organization like the MCPA, designed to promote the importance of coal for steel making.

Glenn Davis, secretary of the Virginia Department of Energy, also spoke about the importance of coal and the fact that it impacts all of Virginia – from the coalfields in Southwest Virginia where it is produced to the Norfolk/Hampton Roads area where it is exported from the port.

He noted if the state wants to grow manufacturing in Virginia, steel plays a critical role.

He cited several statistics, noting 10,373,861 tons of coal were mined in Virginia in 2023 by some 2,260 employees. He added the state recorded zero fatalities in the mining industry in 2023. Currently, he said the department is servicing 271 permits, which include 47 for production and the rest for reclamation.

Davis also touched on the department's pursuit of federal grants related to economic development opportunities and post-mine use and the state's 2022 Energy Plan. He also spoke briefly about small nuclear reactors, noting utilities determine siting for those and not the department. He suggested Southwest Virginia is well-positioned for nuclear supply chain opportunities.

As the conference drew to a close, outgoing MCPA Chairman Bob Cline, Coronado Global, was recognized for his service and J.P. Richardson, Metinvest-United Coal, was welcomed as the new chairman by MCPA President Ben Beakes. Beakes also recognized MCPA Executive Director of Education and Outreach Barbara Altizer, for her work with MCPA and the coordination of details and events for the annual conference.

About MCPA

The Metallurgical Coal Producers Association is a non-profit trade organization comprised of metallurgical coal producers in Appalachia and those who support its producing members' operations. The six coal producers are: Alpha Metallurgical Resources, Coronado Global, United Coal Company LLC (a subsidiary of Metinvest Group), Ramaco Resources, Inc., Robindale Energy and Blackhawk Mining. Together, MCPA members make up the majority of met coal produced in the U.S. Its mission is to advance the opportunities of the metallurgical coal industry through advocacy, education and outreach. Learn more at www.metcoalproducers.com.



Panelists on the federal oversight challenges panel respond to questions at Tuesday's Metallurgical Coal Producers Association (MCPA) conference in Roanoke, WV, Tuesday. From left are MCPA President Ben Beakes (standing); Brooks Smith, MCPA counsel and managing partner at Troutman Pepper, who served as moderator; and panelists Anna Wildeman, counsel, Troutman Pepper and former principal deputy assistant administrator for the Office of Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Randy Moore, Virginia Energy; and Harold Ward, West Virginia DEP cabinet secretary.



Ben Beakes and Bob Cline



Barbara Altizer



John Holmes, JH Fletcher



Dan Vandergrift, State Electric Supply



Trent Indermuhie, Terry Sansom, Richwood



Roger Manhony, Paul's Fans



Tim Boothe, Steve Pilato, Cramer Security



Rick Altizer, Edward Farmer, Virgins Energy