

Children seek coal for resale; Santa not jolly.

by J. Matthew Griffis

In the wake of breathtaking leaps in the price of crude oil over the past year – resulting in a record ten dollars per gallon of gas that caused many to convert their cars into swimming pools, and swimsuit sales to surge – the revolutionary development at MIT of true clean-coal technology has caused a corresponding plummet at the pump. Dubbed “Sparkly Coal™,” the new product ensures that at last the dream of energy independence may become a reality.

“Well, it’s really quite simple” said Edward Stern, creator of Sparkly Coal™. “We realized that, in all the attempts to craft a truly clean coal supply, no one had tried, you know, washing it. We got some soap and rags, recruited some undergraduates and got to work!” Initial results weren’t promising, but Stern and his assistants threatened the undergrads with failed grades on their term papers and the students redoubled their efforts. “Ultimately” said Stern, “they produced a coal free of all that nasty dust. I threw it in the gas tank and haven’t had to fill up since!” Experts estimate that the development of clean coal should delay the complete annihilation of the Earth’s resources and the necessity of a global exodus for at least another decade.

One person not dancing in the streets is North Pole resident S. Claus. Claus runs a highly-successful annual package-delivery charity with a moral judgment aesthetic. Although it is nowhere near December, when Claus conducts the majority of his business, reports are already trickling in of supply shortages and sky-rocketing prices in the coal market.

“It really puts a knot in my beard,” Claus said. “Coal is a big part of what I do.” His stomach gently jiggled as he shook his head. “I don’t know if people appreciate the severity of the problem. So, bad kids get the coal, right? There are a lot of bad kids in the world. More than most people realize. I just don’t think I can afford to coal them at these prices. People think, ‘ooh, Santa is magic! He has all the resources he needs.’ Yeah, well, we thought that about the Earth, once.”

Didn’t Claus have a safety net? “Used it all up last year,” he said. “The recession hit us pretty hard. Donations are down and we did what we had to in order to reduce expenditures.” When asked if he’d had to lay off any employees, Claus got a twinkle in his eye. “No, we just cut wages and kept everyone employed. There’s no minimum wage law in the North Pole, you see. Those guys will work for a bowl full of jelly! I’m kidding, of course.” He winked. Independent reports confirm a high level of job satisfaction among the residents of Elfsburg, Claus’s base of operations.

Claus’s attention returned to coal. “There’s an economic and perceptual shift that complicates things. Coal works as punishment because it’s cheap. Now it’s worth real money. The smarter ones already are going out of their way to be naughty. They probably figure they can sell the coal and buy their own gifts.” He sighed. “Well, that’s not really the point, now is it? So even if I could afford coal, I couldn’t use it for the desired effect. Suddenly it’s good to be bad, pardon the cliché.”

The recent plummet in the price of oil due to reduced demand make it a natural candidate for the new “cheap gift,” and Claus confirmed he had decided to use that instead of coal.

“Yeah, it’s going to be difficult,” he said, grunting as he muscled a barrel into a wrapped box. Oil dripped down his beard. “These are less compact.”

Because oil is so combustible, Claus fears he will not be able to use beloved guide Rudolph – a known fire-starter – on his trips. It may be a moot point, as Claus is considering upgrading to a GPS-equipped hybrid, powered by Sparkly Coal™.

“You can’t fight economics, but I’m aware of the irony,” he said. “Three of these barrels are reserved for Mr. Edward Stern.”