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Imerys announces reorganisation of its UK kaolin operations



Kaolin operation in southwest England
Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

Imerys, the French-owned speciality mineral producer, has announced a reorganisation of its UK kaolin business to ensure the future of its operations in southwest England. The UK is the world's second largest producer and exporter of kaolin or china clay used in the manufacture of paper and, to a lesser extent, ceramics. However, in recent years there has been a significant decline in sales. This is attributed to increasing competition in Western European paper markets from imports of kaolin from the USA and, more recently Brazil, which now accounts for a third of the total market.

Recent increases in energy costs in the UK have severely affected the competitiveness of Imerys' business. This is the main reason cited by Imerys for stopping the energy-intensive process of producing clay for paper coating. Future UK production will largely focus on filler clays used in lower grade applications, which have a much lower value than paper coating

clays. Imerys will continue to produce ceramic clays and clays for speciality markets such as paint, rubber and plastics. The reorganisation may result in up to 800 job losses from the Cornwall and Devon area.

Source: <http://www.imerys.co.uk/scopi/group/imeryscom/imeryscorp.nsf/HomeWo>

Findings of Government energy review published



Power generation in the UK
Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

The findings of the Government energy review have been published in a report “The Energy Challenge Energy Review Report 2006”. The review includes a number of far-reaching proposals designed to reinforce the UK's long-term energy policy. The review focused on a number of key areas, including:

- Cutting the UK's CO₂ emissions by 60% by 2050
- Ensuring that affordable energy is available to everyone
- Securing future energy supply

The report's proposals aim to meet these objectives by:

- Improving energy efficiency to help reduce emissions
- Utilising cleaner methods of energy production in conjunction with existing technologies
- Making substantial new investment in electricity generation capacity
- Developing alternative fuels for transportation
- Managing our increased dependence on oil and gas imports
- Developing a market framework in the UK that is positive for investment and for the growth of “home-grown energy”
- Making coal-fired power generation cleaner
- Securing gas supply by maximising economic recovery from the North Sea, reducing dependence on gas and managing the risks associated with higher gas import dependence
- Protecting vulnerable customers and ensuring that everyone can afford adequate energy supply .

Trade and Industry Secretary Alistair Darling described the proposals as “a framework within which the energy market will operate for the coming 30 to 40 years.”

Source: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file31890.pdf>

Proposed changes to the planning regime for energy projects

New laws may be introduced to help fast track planning applications for contentious energy projects, including nuclear power stations. In the preface to the “The Energy Challenge Energy Review Report 2006”, Alistair Darling MP mentions the importance of tackling “problems with getting planning consent” for energy-related projects. He adds “ We have a responsibility to ensure that our planning system deals with investment proposals in an efficient and timely way.” The report highlights that obtaining “the necessary consents can be a major cause of delays for all types of energy projects.” The report indicates that the Government will establish a framework for considering the issues relevant to the construction of new nuclear power stations and the context in which public inquiries, as part of the planning process, should be held.

Source: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file31890.pdf>

Government energy review suggests continued role for coal



Headgear at a disused UK coal mine
Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

According to the recent energy review coal has a role to play in future energy supply to the UK. It is highlighted that during the previous winter more than 50% of the UK's electricity generation was derived from coal-fired stations. However, for coal to have a long-term future, the problems of carbon emissions from coal-burning stations will have to be tackled. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) has the potential to reduce emissions of coal power stations by 80 to 90%. The future of this technology will largely be dependent on its economic and technical feasibility at a commercial scale. CCS technology is particularly appropriate to the UK as it is well placed to take advantage of old oil and gas fields where carbon dioxide could be stored.

Source: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file31890.pdf>

Alcan announces planned closure of two UK sites



Workington produces aerospace products
Photo credit: NASA

Aluminium company, Alcan, plans to close two of its UK sites, where more than 300 people work. The proposed reorganisation would result in the closure of the Workington site which manufactures products for aerospace and engineering markets and the Midsomer Norton site which produces flexible food packaging. Alcan commented “this proposed reorganisation represents the most viable solution to ensure the long-term competitiveness of Alcan's European assets.”

Source:

<http://www.alcan.com/web/publishing.nsf/Content/Alcan+Announces+Intent+to+Close+Two+U.K.+Sites>

Date set for electronic waste law



Future electronic waste
Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive (WEEE) became law in February 2003. The Directive sets collection, recovery and recycling targets for all types of electrical goods, making manufacturers responsible for collecting and recycling end-of-life products. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has suggested the scheme should be fully implemented by July 2007. Rob Brightwell, director of the WEEE implementation project, has since warned the government that it “will need to accelerate practical preparations for implementation if the UK is to deliver the latest timetable.”

Sources: <http://www.letsrecycle.com/legislation/news.jsp?story=5713>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5213544.stm>

Welsh gas pipeline update

The National Grid has said that a controversial new gas pipeline that will run across Wales will help industry and create business opportunities for users of gas. The pipeline will connect two liquefied natural gas terminals at Milford Haven with the national network. People living close to the proposed route of the pipeline are concerned over the impact construction will have on the environment, particularly in the Brecon Beacons. Once completed the pipeline will supply around 20% of the UK's gas requirements.

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_west/5181336.stm

North Sea costs are increasing



Offshore platform

Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

Continued interest exists in the North Sea oil, however, rapid cost rises in recent years and a slowdown in exploration are of concern according to the UK Offshore Operators Association (UKOOA). UK production of oil and gas reached a peak in 2000 and has begun to decline. UKOOA indicate that "as production declines it becomes increasingly challenging to sustain the competitiveness of a basin." UKOOA reports that operating costs per barrel have increased during the last two years by as much as 20 percent, totaling £4.7 billion in 2005. This, in conjunction with recent tax rises for the UK oil and gas sector, "threatens to undermine the UK's competitiveness and therefore the ability of the industry to find and extract new oil and gas reserves in the increasingly mature basin".

Sources: <http://www.oilandgas.org.uk/issues/economic/econ06/pdf/report-2006.pdf>

<http://www.ukooa.co.uk/media/view-press.cfm/395>

Parys mountain drilling programme

London-listed Anglesey Mining plc, who are exploring at their Parys Mountain property in Anglesey, reports that recent drilling has intersected both the Carreg-y-doll and North

Central zones, including a wide high grade intersection in the North Central zone. The high-grade intersection assayed 11% combined base metals over 5.7 metres. Bill Hooley, Anglesey's Executive Director commented "Together these intersections indicate that lenses of massive sulphide mineralisation with mineable widths and grades can be expected at the North Central zone horizon in the Garth Daniel area." This area is located approximately 100 metres west of the current drilling.

Source: <http://www.angleseymining.co.uk/>

Drilling re-starts at Curraghinalt gold project



Exploration drilling in the UK
Photo Copyright: BGS©NERC

Tournigan Gold Corporation have announced the start of an infill diamond drilling programme at their Curraghinalt gold project in Northern Ireland. The drilling will focus on the east Curraghinalt vein extension, which Tournigan believes has the potential to significantly increase the inferred gold resource at Curraghinalt. This phase of drilling is likely to consist of 36 drill holes, totalling 6 300 metres in length, and is expected to be completed by late 2006. Curraghinalt is a "high-grade meothermal quartz-sulfide gold vein system" with an inferred resource estimate of 262 000 ounces.

Source: <http://www.tournigan.com/>

The British Geological Survey releases the UK Minerals Yearbook 2005

The British Geological Survey (BGS) has released the latest in the UK Minerals Yearbook series. The publication is available for free download from www.mineralsuk.com. The Yearbook contains the latest statistics on the UK's production, imports, exports and consumption of fuel and non-fuel minerals and is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Source: www.mineralsuk.com