

TASK TYPE 13 Identifying the Writer's Views and Claims (Yes/No/Not Given)

IELTS PRACTICE TASK

The future of coal

Can this source of energy ever be made cleaner?

Coal currently provides an estimated 40% of the world's electricity, and with that, millions of jobs for people working in the sector. It also produces 39% of global carbon dioxide, and causes serious health problems for many urban populations. As a source of energy, it provides us with heat and power, but it is often a disaster for local environments and the global climate.

The big question is not how we can make coal *clean*, which is impossible, but how to make it *cleaner*. In the USA, the Clean Air Act was a law that was introduced to reduce the emission of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from factories and power plants. The consequent reductions have been dramatic, showing that laws like this can and do make a difference. Unfortunately, less progress has been made with carbon dioxide regulations. Last year 34.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide were emitted from fossil fuels, the highest amount on record, with coal contributing the most. Cheap natural gas has recently reduced the demand for coal in the USA, but elsewhere demand is rising. Over the next twenty years several hundred million people worldwide will gain access to electricity for the first time, and it is likely that most of them will use power produced by coal.

American Electric Power's Mountaineer Plant in West Virginia supplies electricity to 1.3 million customers across seven states. Those customers pay relatively little to power the contents of their households: refrigerators, washers, dryers, flat screens and lights, but neither they nor any American power company have to pay anything for the right to pollute the atmosphere. However, to their credit, Mountaineer did carry out an experiment in containing the carbon they produced. Through a complex chemical process, they were able to compress over 37,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide and inject it into a large area of sandstone a mile below ground level. It was a successful system and they had planned to develop the project further to increase the amount of carbon dioxide that they could capture. However, they were unable to obtain the financial investment they needed from the United States Department of Energy, due to a change in climate change legislation, and they were forced to abandon it.

Trapping carbon dioxide underground is nothing new, however. Other companies in North America and Norway have also been experimenting with this for the last few decades. Although some voices in the media have expressed concerns about the possibility of a sudden and catastrophic leak of carbon dioxide – which would be lethal to people and animals – the risk of this happening is extremely low. More worrying would be smaller leaks occurring over long periods of time that would defeat the purpose of storage. The task ahead, then, is to make carbon capture more efficient, and countries such as China are keen to make this happen. In Tianjin, about 85 miles from Beijing, a power plant called GreenGen is China's first power plant designed to capture 80% of its emissions,

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and likewise, in the U.S. a new power plant in eastern Mississippi has also come up with the technology to capture a high proportion of carbon dioxide. Technological innovation is only half a solution, though. It won't be adopted by other power companies until governments require it, for instance, by imposing a tax on the carbon that plants emit. This may be a small price to pay for the sake of our future.

Questions 1–6

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in the Reading Passage?

You should write

YES	<i>if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer</i>
NO	<i>if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer</i>
NOT GIVEN	<i>if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this</i>

- 1 The Clean Air Act has been disappointing in what it has achieved so far.
- 2 The use of natural gas in the USA is likely to soon overtake the use of coal.
- 3 People need to be more responsible in the way they use power in their homes.
- 4 It was Mountaineer's own choice to give up its carbon dioxide storage project.
- 5 There is only a small chance that stored carbon dioxide might escape from below ground.
- 6 Carbon-storage technology will only spread if the government makes it compulsory.