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Caribbean universities partner with American counterpart on climate change

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Caribbean universities partner with American counterpart on climate change

AUSTIN, USA – The University of Texas at Austin (UT) is partnering with two Caribbean universities on the dual-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago to create a new clean energy project that will store greenhouse gases underground and eliminate the country's contribution to climate change.

The nation has strong incentives to mitigate climate change. Surrounded by the war Sea, the small Delaware-sized country is susceptible to sea level rise and tropical storms which are expected to increase in intensity as the world warms.

Also, although the oil and gas industry accounts for 40 percent of gross domestic product and 10 percent of exports, it has been declining in recent years, prompting interest in developing a carbon storage industry to provide a source of jobs. And although the tiny country emits a relatively small amount of greenhouse gasses compared with large nations, it is in the top 10 highest in per capita emissions globally due to its industrialized economy.

"For us, we've been declining in [oil and gas] production so rapidly that something needs to be done quickly to protect our economy," said David Alexander, a petroleum researcher at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. "Someone else may perceive this as a problem but it's not — it's an opportunity to create more jobs and wealth while implementing sustainable measures that address our emissions."

UT is partnering with The University of Trinidad and Tobago and The University of the West Indies on the new effort.

"I'm enthusiastic about the start of what I hope will be a long and fruitful partnership," said Katherine Romanak, a research scientist with the UT Bureau of Economic Geology's Carbon Center. "By setting a precedent for what's possible in an international collaboration on climate change mitigation, we hope others will be inspired to follow our footsteps."

Carbon capture and geologic storage (CCS) is a method of capturing greenhouse gases from industrial facilities and storing them underground so they are not released into the atmosphere where they can contribute to human-caused climate change. In February and April, the three universities signed two memoranda of understanding that laid out plans for organizing joint meetings and workshops and sharing facilities, with the goal of deploying CCS technology in Trinidad and Tobago.

The three universities have been working on the collaboration since 2017. However, the deal was finalized by Andrew ***** of The University of the West Indies Petroleum Studies Unit and UT researchers in the agreement in December 2018 during the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change. Both researchers took part in a panel discussion at the conference. The panel was the only official conference event dedicated to CCS.

Other alternatives to CCS, such as storing carbon in forests or the soil, may seem like promising mitigation options but many experts believe that CCS has the potential to make the most significant impact on the country's emissions. That's because storing carbon in forests

renewable energy options such as solar and wind currently require large amounts of small island nation doesn't have.

"Even if the whole island were trees, no houses, it wouldn't be enough," ***** sa panel.

The nation's representatives are looking at a portfolio of mitigation options but imple CCS is likely to have the biggest effect on the nation's emissions, ***** said.

To demonstrate the role of the technology, ***** and Alexander have recommend be included in the nation's "technology needs assessment" document, which outlines strategy to mitigate emissions. With this document, the nation can access critical int funding, such as the Green Climate Fund that is aimed at their specific needs.

The researchers are also exploring the idea of holding their first CCS workshop for lc stakeholders at one of the Trinidad universities in September.

"Now that we have this formal partnership started and we're making progress at the level on our nation's plan to tackle climate change impacts, we have no doubt in our Trinidad and Tobago will be a country that sets a precedent," ***** said. "For oth nations that have yet to act, here's a way forward."

The bureau of economic geology is a unit of the UT Jackson school of geosciences.

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