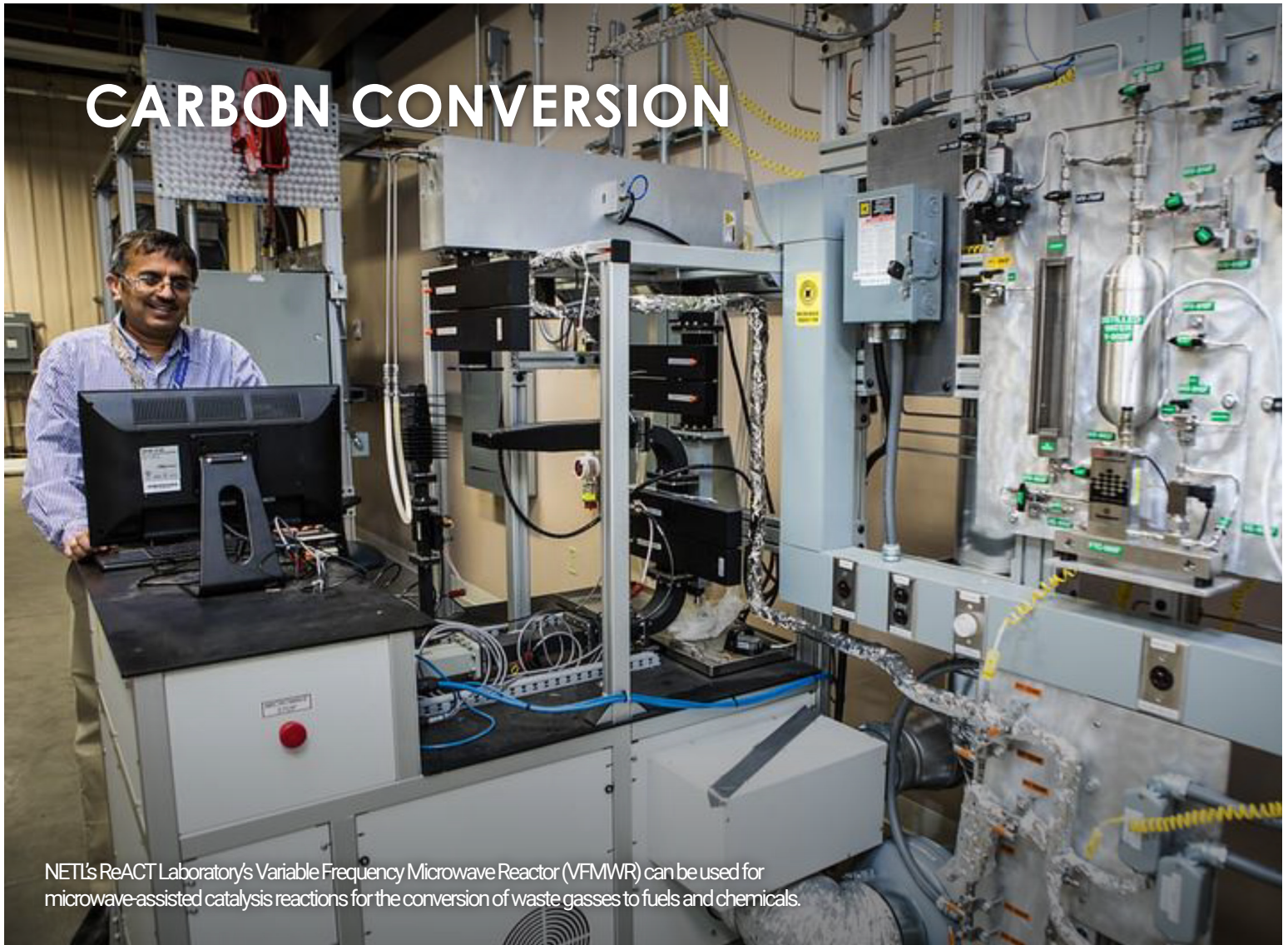


# CARBON CONVERSION



NETL's ReACT Laboratory's Variable Frequency Microwave Reactor (VFMWR) can be used for microwave-assisted catalysis reactions for the conversion of waste gasses to fuels and chemicals.

# NETL

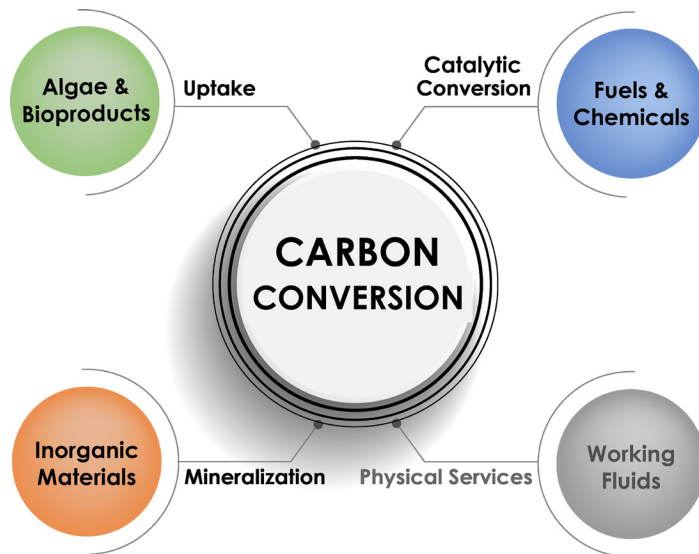
## NATIONAL ENERGY TECHNOLOGY LABORATORY

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carbon Conversion (formerly Carbon Utilization) Program's vision focuses on research, development and demonstration of a broad suite of technologies that convert CO<sub>2</sub> into environmentally responsible, equitable and economically valuable products, thus enabling low-carbon supply chains to meet the goal of a decarbonized economy by 2050. These products can provide revenue to the emitter that can offset the cost of capturing, treating, and transporting CO<sub>2</sub> – and to the user of the CO<sub>2</sub> – while also achieving a net reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted into the atmosphere. Research and development (R&D) activities address the challenges and potential opportunities associated with converting CO<sub>2</sub> into beneficial products and integrating CO<sub>2</sub> utilization systems with existing carbon-emitting sources. The Carbon Conversion Program seeks to develop technologies for both nearer-term and longer-term deployment. Learn more about DOE's Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management's role in achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in their most recent [Strategic Vision](#) publication.

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Carbon Conversion Program seeks to identify and develop new and improved materials, equipment, and processes that produce value-added goods and services using CO<sub>2</sub> or CO as a feedstock. Pathways to generate products are diverse and can include carbon uptake to grow algae, chemical and biological conversion, and mineralization. Products can include fuels, chemicals, agricultural products, animal feed, building materials, and other goods and services. Carbon utilization is generally applicable to any flue gas stream generated by the combustion of carbon-based fuels, such as coal, natural gas, and biomass, as well as several other carbon-rich waste gas streams that are currently vented to the atmosphere. The development of technologies that lead to revenue-generating products can help support broader carbon emissions reduction strategies – such as CO<sub>2</sub> capture and storage (CCS) and hydrogen production – and lead to more sustainable power generation and industrial and agricultural practices.



Carbon conversion products and pathways are represented in the above model. \*Using CO<sub>2</sub> as a working fluid, as is the case for enhanced oil recovery (EOR), is the focus of other NETL programs.

## CARBON CONVERSION PRODUCTS & PATHWAYS:

The Carbon Conversion Program is focused on carbon uptake using algae, conversion into fuels and chemicals, and mineralization into inorganic materials:

### CARBON UPTAKE INTO ALGAE AND BIOPRODUCTS

The biomass produced in algal systems can be processed and converted to fuels, chemicals, fish and animal feeds, human dietary supplements, soil amendments, and other specialty and fine products. The Carbon Utilization Program is working to develop economical adoption of biomass cultivation practices that consume CO<sub>2</sub> that would otherwise be emitted to the atmosphere. Current focus is on the cultivation of microalgae or blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) in outdoor ponds or photobioreactors. Ongoing R&D addresses CO<sub>2</sub> capture, conditioning, transport, and transfer to the algal medium in order to maximize CO<sub>2</sub> uptake and minimize the cost of CO<sub>2</sub> delivery.

### CONVERSION INTO FUELS AND CHEMICALS

Conversion pathways can include thermochemical, electrochemical, photochemical, plasma-assisted, and microbially mediated approaches. Many approaches require catalysts or integrated processes to lower the energy needed to drive these systems. Via this pathway, waste carbon can be transformed into higher-value products such as synthetic fuels, chemicals, plastics, and solid carbon products like carbon fibers. Currently, the manufacture of value-added chemicals, polymers, and other products often involves complex, multiple chemical synthesis steps; however, other novel approaches are being explored, including multifunctional nanocatalysis, biological catalysis, and process-intensified conversion systems.

### MINERALIZATION INTO INORGANIC MATERIALS

Carbon dioxide mineralizes with alkaline reactants to produce inorganic materials, such as cements, aggregates, bicarbonates, and associated inorganic chemicals. Carbonate materials may be an effective long-term storage option for CO<sub>2</sub>, especially for use in the built environment. R&D in this area seeks to react CO<sub>2</sub> with industrial alkaline sources, including wastes to manufacture valuable products and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from existing production processes. The Carbon Conversion Program is pursuing R&D that increases process performance and optimizes CO<sub>2</sub> conversion rates, capacity, and energy use efficiencies while producing a product with equivalent or superior performance properties compared to current commercial products.

## LIFE CYCLE ANALYSIS (LCA):



Life cycle analysis (LCA) assesses environmental and sustainability impacts (e.g., water, criteria pollutants, and greenhouse gases [GHGs] such as CO<sub>2</sub>) associated with all the stages of a product's life, from raw material extraction through materials processing, manufacture, distribution, use, repair and maintenance, and disposal.

The Carbon Conversion Program uses LCA to determine if a project will result in lower life cycle GHG emissions in terms of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e) than the current state-of-the-art options on the market, and combines this knowledge with economic and market performance data, technical risk evaluations, and other criteria to evaluate project merit. The most attractive CO<sub>2</sub> utilization options aim to both displace the carbon in an existing product and improve the overall carbon efficiency of the manufacturing process.

NETL has developed a Carbon Dioxide Utilization Life Cycle Analysis Guidance Toolkit document that provides guidance on what to include in an LCA, along with helpful information on completing an LCA. Also to assist researchers in evaluating the performance and economic aspects of their research, NETL develops Quality Guidelines for Energy System Studies (QGESS) documents that present the methodology employed by NETL in its assessment of various aspects of energy systems, including energy conversion facilities, CO<sub>2</sub> transport, storage performance, and cost — with a QGESS for carbon conversion under development.

## OPPORTUNITIES

NETL's Carbon Conversion Program is working with universities, national laboratories, industries, and regional partners to advance technologies that meet the objectives of the program. The Carbon Conversion Program is actively funding carbon utilization projects and continues to seek further collaborations and partnerships. Additional information about the program and funding opportunities can be found on NETL's Carbon Conversion Program website:

<https://netl.doe.gov/coal/carbon-utilization>

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NETL is a U.S. Department of Energy national laboratory that drives innovation and delivers technological solutions for an environmentally sustainable and prosperous energy future. By leveraging its world-class talent and research facilities, NETL is ensuring affordable, abundant and reliable energy that drives a robust economy and national security, while developing technologies to manage carbon across the full life cycle, enabling environmental sustainability for all Americans.



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**Contacts**

**Joseph Stoffa**  
*Technology Manager*  
Joseph.Stoffa@netl.doe.gov

**Amishi Claros**  
*DOE HQ Program Manager*  
Amishi.Claros@hq.doe.gov