



Common Dreams
Breaking News & Views for the Progressive Community

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2014/12/22/global-consumption-worlds-dirtiest-energy-continues-rise>

Published on Monday, December 22, 2014 By [Common Dreams](#)

Global Consumption of 'World's Dirtiest Energy' Continues to Rise

'Attempts to combat global climate change will likely fail' in face of ever-increasing coal use, warn researchers

by [Lauren McCauley](#), staff writer



The mountaintop Kayford coal mine outside of Charleston, West Virginia. (Photo: [Dennis Dimick/cc/flickr](#))

As worldwide coal consumption continues to rise, efforts to keep global warming below the 2 degrees Celsius warming threshold will very likely fail, warns environmental research group Worldwatch Institute in a new [analysis](#) of coal data.

Global coal consumption rose 3 percent from 2012 to 2013, reaching over 3,800 million tons of oil equivalent (mtoe) in 2013, according to numbers provided to Worldwatch by BP.

Further troubling, according to the analysis, is that the world's coal supply is getting "dirtier" as continued demand and lower prices create markets for coal with lower energy content. For example, in 2012, "the average heat content of coal produced in the United States was about 23.4 megajoules per kilogram (MJ/kg), down from 29.17 MJ/kg in 2005," the group notes.

"This means that more and more coal needs to be burned to generate the same amount of heat for a desired electricity output."

And according to the Worldwatch analysis, emerging economies, such as China and India, are the primary drivers of increasing coal consumption. Coal demand in China has almost tripled since 2000, notes the group, rising from 683.5 mtoe at the turn of the century to 1,933.1 mtoe in 2013—more than half of the global figure.

In contrast, the United States has decreased its coal use while becoming increasingly reliant on domestic oil and natural gas production. In 2013, the U.S. consumed 455.7 mtoe of coal. However, despite efforts to reduce its own carbon emissions, recent studies have shown that the U.S. continues to export coal and its related pollution to other countries. [According](#) to an *Associated Press* analysis published this summer, in 2012, about 9 percent of worldwide coal exports originated in the U.S.

Coal consumption in the European Union has also followed a downward trend in recent years, which the analysis attributes to "the EU's flat overall energy consumption since 1990" and an increasing shift towards renewables driven largely by policy and financial incentives.

Although the report acknowledges that the pace of growth for coal use is slowing, researchers warn that the trend will likely come too late in the face of international climate inaction.

"If coal consumption continues to increase and no meaningful binding multilateral agreements on climate change are made, attempts to combat global climate change will likely fail," [writes](#) Christoph von Friedeburg, a research fellow at the Worldwatch Institute. "One source of hope is that the combination of decreasing energy intensity and declining costs of renewables will cause coal's share to keep shrinking and stop the global rise in the use of the dirtiest energy source."

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License