

Universal guidelines for phasing out coal

With ever-growing coal consumption in the last 40 years, it is paramount that the United Nations finalise a resolution to decrease the global dependency on the outdated fossil fuel.

Background information

Coal is primarily used to generate electricity and heat homes in less urbanized parts of the world. Reducing its consumption was one of the points agreed upon during the Paris conference in 2015. This conference set as its goal keeping the annual global warming rate down to 1.5 °C. The need to reduce coal mining and consumption comes from the fact that it is one of the biggest contributors to human induced global warming and it causes other environmental issues such as loss of biodiversity in and around mining sites and respiratory issues among workers in coal power plants or coal mines. For these specific reasons most of the countries in the Paris agreement have concluded that phasing out coal is economically viable, and the environmental benefits of the phase out vastly outweigh the economic losses. The three biggest actors in coal consumption are China, India, and the United States of America. Although it may be a bit misleading to put these three countries in the same list as China is responsible for 50% of the gross world coal usage.

One of the biggest issues with reducing coal production is the transition in developing countries. In these areas of the world many coal plants are currently under construction. And a sudden phase out would mean a loss of work for a large part of the population. European countries have agreed to financially support the developing countries during this phase out provided that they won't build any more coal power plants. The reduction in consumption of coal is seen as one of the more successful global environmental efforts; however only about twenty-three countries in the world are maintaining significant efforts to phase out coal. The good news is

that the top five coal consuming countries are on that list. Banks and financial institutions have made financial commitments to not finance coal plant and mine projects as described in the COP26 conference.

The Paris agreement has a goal of shutting down all coal powered plants in the year 2040 and shutting down 80% by the year 2030.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations have stood at the forefront of the move away from coal. With that being said the most recent effort is the “Powering Past Coal alliance”. This alliance roughly shares the goals of the Paris agreement and is used to hold summits on the topic. The UN stresses the importance of fulfilling the Paris agreement and has been very vocal about the environmental losses we will suffer if we do not take the best actions towards keeping up with the schedule set forward in 2015. Luckily, the UN is seeing progress in this area after global coal consumption started. However, the last year has seen an increase of 1.2 % in coal consumption due to the European/Global energy crisis.

The latest Statements from the United Nations Urge countries to not only move away from coal but focus on the switch to renewable energy sources. This clashes with the efforts of some countries to build more nuclear power plants. They also stress the fact that after the initial investment most of the renewable alternatives to coal energy generate cheaper energy and are therefore the obvious long-term choice for everyone. The UN stresses that phasing out coal is paramount in protecting future generations and we must put more effort into keeping our deadlines so we can turn this coal less dream into reality.

Questions to consider

Does your country have an internal plan for the coal phase out?

Which alternative energy sources does your country plan to use?

Is your country economically capable of making the move away from coal possible?

What percentage of energy generated in your country comes from coal?

How can the UN help low income countries with this change?

Which energy source provides the best alternative to coal?

Should we keep coal as an energy source for private use?

How can the UN police if countries are taking the agreed upon steps to phase out coal?

Does your country benefit from selling energy from coal to other countries?

Which countries have a similar policy on phasing out coal?