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Global 'collapse' in number of new coal-fired power plants

Not long before coal use is over, say analysts, while warning of possible resurgence in China

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The number of coal-fired power plants being developed around the world has collapsed in the last three years, according to a report.

The number of plants on which construction has begun each year has fallen by 84% since 2015, and 39% in 2018 alone, while the number of completed plants has dropped by more than half since 2015.

The [report, from the NGO-backed Global Energy Monitor](#), says the falling costs of renewable energy are pricing coal out of the electricity market, more than 100 financial institutions have blacklisted coal producers, and political action to cut carbon emissions is growing.

"It's only a matter of time before coal is a thing of the past worldwide," said one of the report's authors, Neha Mathew-Shah, of the Sierra Club.

However, Christine Shearer, of Global Energy Monitor, said even emissions from the existing coal plants were incompatible with keeping global warming below 2C. "We need to radically phase down coal plant use over the next decade to keep on track for Paris climate goals," she said.

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The report warns of a possible coal plant resurgence in China, where satellite photos show developers have restarted work on dozens of suspended projects.

Coal plant retirements have continued at a record pace, the report finds, with the US accounting for more than half of the total despite efforts by the Trump administration to prevent the closure of ageing plants. A separate report this week found that three quarters of existing US coal-fired electricity production was now [more expensive than new solar and wind energy](#).

However, [data from the International Energy Agency](#) published on Tuesday found that global carbon emissions rose in 2018, with a young fleet of coal plants in Asia accounting for a third of the increase.

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The World Coal Association said in a statement: "As the largest source of electricity generation, coal will continue to be a critical enabler of development. For many countries, particularly in south and south-east Asia, it underpins economic development. We must respect and support them in their choice and fund low emissions technologies."

However, the best modern coal plants are [still significantly more polluting than even gas plants](#).

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China and India have accounted for 85% of new coal power capacity since 2005, according to the Global Energy Monitor report. China permitted construction for the generation of less than 5GW of coal power in 2018, compared with 184GW in 2015. India permitted less than 3GW in 2018, compared

with 39GW in 2010. India has added more solar and wind power capacity than coal over the last two years.

However, a report by the China Electricity Council, which represents the power utilities, proposes allowing 290GW of new capacity, more than the entire US coal fleet.

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Lauri Myllyvirta, of Greenpeace, said: "Another coal power construction spree [in China] would be near impossible to reconcile with the emission reductions needed to avoid the worst impacts of global warming."

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