

# US energy use hit 30-year low during pandemic shutdowns

July 29 2020, by Matthew Brown

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In this July 27, 2018, file photo, the Dave Johnson coal-fired power plant is silhouetted against the morning sun in Glenrock, Wyo. A record drop in U.S. energy consumption this spring was driven by less demand for coal that's burned for electricity and oil that's refined into gasoline and jet fuel. (AP Photo/J. David Ake, File)

U.S. energy consumption plummeted to its lowest level in more than 30 years this spring as the nation's economy largely shut down because of the coronavirus, federal officials reported Wednesday.

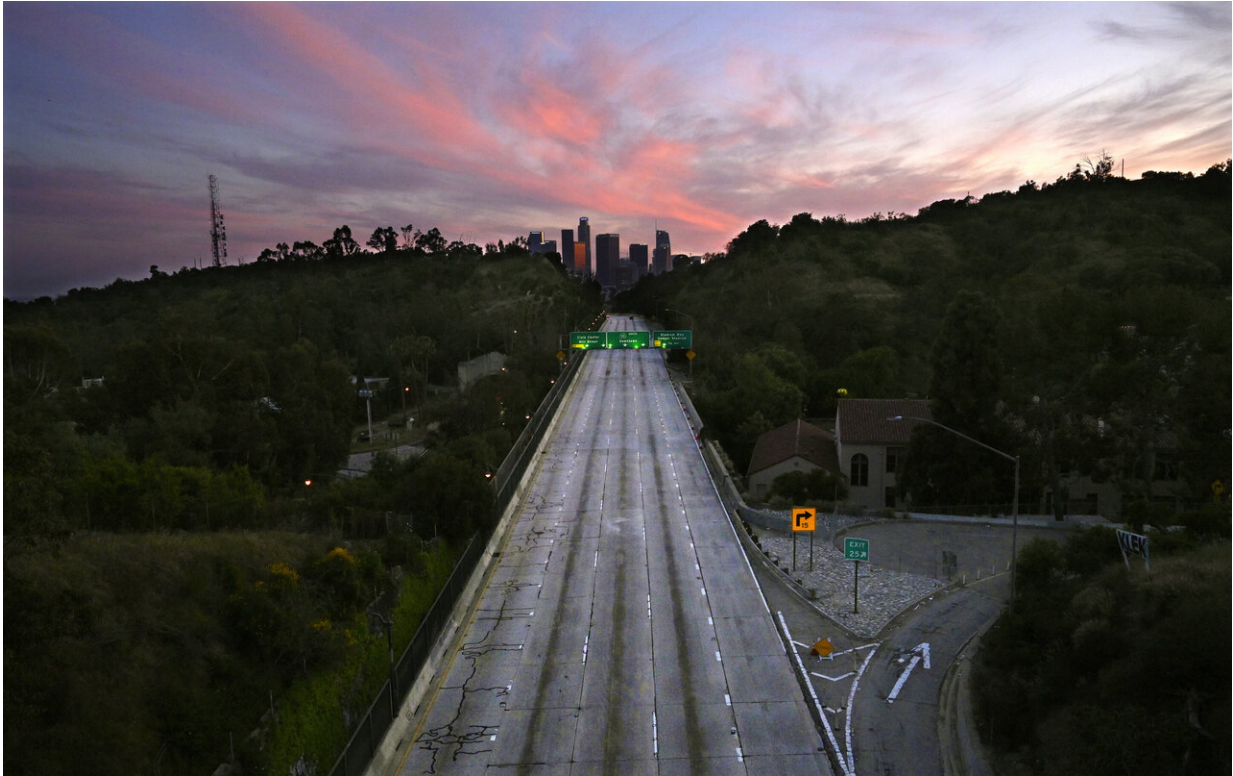
The drop was driven by less demand for [coal](#) that is burned for electricity and oil that's refined into gasoline and jet fuel, the U.S. Energy Information Administration said.

The declines were in line with lower energy usage around the globe as the pandemic seized up economies. Those trends are expected to turn around as commercial activity resumes, but an annual decline in U.S. and [global greenhouse gas emissions](#) is expected and some [energy companies](#) already have fallen into bankruptcy.

Overall U.S. energy consumption dropped 14 percent during April compared to a year earlier, the energy administration said. That's the lowest monthly level since 1989 and the largest decrease ever recorded in data that's been collected since 1973.

The largest drop previously seen was in December 2001, after the Sept. 11 attacks shocked the economy and a mild winter further depressed electricity demand.

During this spring's energy consumption downturn, natural gas usage bucked the trend among fossil fuels and increased 15 percent during the April lockdown as residential consumption increased with most of the nation under stay-at-home orders.



This April 26, 2020, file photo shows empty lanes of the 110 Arroyo Seco Parkway that leads to downtown Los Angeles during the coronavirus outbreak in Los Angeles, Calif. A record drop in U.S. energy consumption this spring was driven by less demand for coal that's burned for electricity and oil that's refined into gasoline and jet fuel. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill, File)

Petroleum consumption fell to 14.7 million barrels a day in April, down almost a third compared to the same period in 2019. Demand already has rebounded some after stay-at-home orders expired and large sectors of the economy started moving again.

Led by people returning to their old driving habits, petroleum consumption in June was back up to 17.6 million barrels a day, according to the American Petroleum Institute. But new drilling activity continued to be weak, declining in June for the seventh month in a row

to 11 million barrels daily as stockpiles of oil and petroleum products remained near record levels.

"While we are not out of the woods yet, we do appear to be headed in the right direction," said Dean Foreman, the industry group's chief economist.

Coal companies are expected to have a tougher time than [petroleum](#) producers recovering from the pandemic, which hit as the coal sector remained on a fairly steady downward spiral since 2007 despite President Donald Trump's attempts to prop it up.



In this March 25, 2020, file photo, passenger and cargo aircraft are seen stored at Southern California Logistics Airport, in Victorville, Calif., to the pandemic. A record drop in U.S. energy consumption this spring was driven by less demand for coal that's burned for electricity and oil that's refined into gasoline and jet

fuel. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill, File)

Coal consumption fell 27 percent in April compared to the same period in 2019, to 27 million tons. Most coal produced in the U.S. is used to generate electricity but many utilities have switched to cheaper natural gas and renewable sources like wind and solar.

The [energy](#) administration projects overall [consumption](#) will increase for the rest of 2020 but remain below 2019 levels.

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Citation: US energy use hit 30-year low during pandemic shutdowns (2020, July 29) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-07-energy-year-pandemic-shutdowns.html>

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