

Coal dust kills 23,000 per year in EU: report

4 July 2016



Coal accounts for 18 percent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions in 2014 and a quarter of its electricity mix in 2015

Lung-penetrating dust from coal-fired power plants in the European Union claims some 23,000 lives a year and racks up tens of billions of euros in health costs, an NGO report said Tuesday.

Even as the bloc shifts towards renewable sources like wind and Sun energy, coal still accounted for 18 percent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions in 2014 and a quarter of its electricity mix in 2015, said the analysis.

Emissions from 257 power plants for which data was available "were associated with 22,900 premature deaths in 2013," said the report entitled "Europe's dark cloud: How coal-burning countries make their neighbours sick".

There are a total of 280 coal-fired plants.

The study was compiled by researchers from four green energy lobby groups: the Health and Environment Alliance, the WWF, Climate Action Network Europe and Sandbag.

In addition to deaths, the report blamed coal plant

pollution for nearly 12,000 new cases of chronic bronchitis and more than half-a-million asthma attacks in children in the EU in 2013.

The medical treatment required, as well as reduced productivity caused by absence from work, amassed "substantial costs" of 32.4 billion to 62.3 billion euros (\$36 billion to \$70 billion), said the report.

About 83 percent of deaths, some 19,000 in total, were blamed on inhalation of fine particulate matter, air-borne particles so small—under 2.5 micrometres in diameter—that they can enter deep into the lungs and bloodstream.



An NGO report attributed 4,690 premature deaths to coal power stations in Poland

Heart disease, cancer

"Most common causes of death connected to particulate matter exposure are strokes, heart disease, chronic lung disease or lung cancer," said the report.

It warned the particles "are transported hundreds of kilometres and across national borders, impacting the health of people both within the country of

production and further afield."

The report listed the EU's worst offenders, attributing 4,690 premature deaths to coal power stations in Poland, 2,490 to Germany, 1,660 to Romania, 1,390 to Bulgaria and 1,350 to Britain.

The five countries most affected by pollution from their own as well as neighbouring countries were Germany with 3,630 deaths, Italy with 1,610, France with 1,380, Greece with 1,050, and Hungary with 700.

"Air pollution is responsible for millions of deaths worldwide," Roberto Bertollini, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative to the EU said in a statement.

"Higher temperatures from climate change will exacerbate the problem."

A similar study in the United States had attributed more than 13,000 premature deaths to coal pollution, while Indian research has blamed as many as 115,000 premature deaths and 20 million asthma cases per year on coal.

In Paris last December 195 nations agreed to curb climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas in a bid to limit global warming to "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial levels.

© 2016 AFP

APA citation: Coal dust kills 23,000 per year in EU: report (2016, July 4) retrieved 25 January 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-07-coal-year-eu.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.