

Press release

China's coal power expansion undermines clean energy progress

BEIJING, 13 February 2025 - Even as [China's renewables skyrocketed in 2024](#), with solar and wind surging month after month throughout the year, the country remains embroiled in coal, leaning on the dirty fuel to meet high energy demands.

China's continued coal power expansion is undermining the country's clean energy progress, according to a new report from the [Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air](#) and [Global Energy Monitor](#). In 2024, coal power construction activity surged to 94.5 GW, its highest level since 2015, reinforcing coal's entrenched role in the power system. Meanwhile, the country approved 66.7 GW of new coal-fired power capacity, with approvals picking up in the second half after a slower start to the year.

While China is leading the world in renewable energy deployment—adding a record 356 GW of wind and solar capacity in 2024—the simultaneous expansion of coal power raises critical concerns about its ability to transition away from fossil fuels. Instead of replacing coal, clean energy is being layered on top of an existing fossil-fuel-heavy system, making it increasingly difficult to achieve the intended shift toward a renewables-driven power sector.

Despite the slow-down in previous years and early 2024, the coal power permit rebound in the second half of 2024, was not insignificant and contradicts policy commitments to curb coal consumption. The uptick in coal power permits threatens to lock in fossil fuel reliance at a time when China's power system needs greater flexibility to integrate renewables.

In 2024, more than 75% of newly approved coal power capacity was backed by coal mining companies or energy groups with coal operations, reinforcing coal's dominance even when market fundamentals do not justify expansion. Long-term coal power contracts, as well as local government justifications for new plants – often based on economic growth rather than grid reliability – and the strong influence of coal mining companies in financing new projects are further delaying the energy transition.

Competition between coal and renewables is intensifying, with growing curtailment of wind and solar generation, particularly in the fourth quarter of 2024.

These trends challenge China's climate commitments, including the targets set out by President Xi Jinping personally to "strictly control coal-fired power generation projects, and strictly limit the increase in coal consumption over the 14th Five-Year Plan period and phase it down in the 15th Five-Year Plan period". The report warns that without urgent policy shifts, China risks reinforcing a pattern of energy addition rather than transition, limiting the full potential of its clean energy boom.

'China's rapid expansion of renewable energy has the potential to reshape its power system, but this opportunity is being undermined by the simultaneous large-scale expansion of coal power. The continued approval and construction of new coal plants—often driven by industry interests and outdated contracts rather than actual grid needs—risks locking China into fossil fuel dependence at a time when flexibility is crucial for integrating clean energy. Without decisive policy shifts, China's energy transition will remain an 'energy addition' rather than a true transformation away from coal, said Qi Qin, lead author of the report and China Analyst at CREA.

'Chinese coal power and mining companies are sponsoring and building new coal plants beyond what is needed to back up the country's impressive growth in solar and wind power. The continued pursuit of coal is crowding out the country's use of lower-cost clean energy, and is threatening to undermine President Xi's 2021 pledge to strictly limit coal consumption and phase it down over the next five years', said Christine Shearer, Research Analyst at Global Energy Monitor.

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Note to editors

The publication related to this press release is available [here](#).

About CREA

The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) is an independent research organisation focused on revealing the trends, causes, and health impacts, as well as the solutions to air pollution. We use scientific data, research and evidence to support the efforts of governments, companies and campaigning organisations worldwide in their efforts to move towards clean energy and clean air.

www.energyandcleanair.org

About GEM

The Global Energy Monitor (GEM) develops and shares information in support of the worldwide movement for clean energy. By studying the evolving international energy landscape, and creating databases, reports, and interactive tools that enhance understanding, GEM seeks to build an open guide to the world's energy system.

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