

China's coal production hit record levels in 2021

In blow to climate campaigners, state encourages miners to ramp up output to avert winter gas crisis



Coal from a mine in Anhui province in China. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

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China's coal production reached record levels last year as the state encouraged miners to ramp up their fossil fuel output to safeguard the country's energy supplies through the winter gas crisis.

The world's biggest coal producer and consumer mined 384.67m tonnes of the fossil fuel last month, easily topping its previous record of 370.84m tonnes set in November, after the government called for miners to work at maximum capacity to help fuel the country's economic growth.

Official government figures show that China's **coal** binge also spurred the country to record high coal output over the year as a whole. Chinese coal production climbed to an all-time high of 4.07bn tonnes, up 4.7% on the

previous year, in a blow to climate campaigners months after the UN's Cop26 climate talks in Glasgow.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) predicted that global consumption of coal power, which is the world's single biggest source of climate emissions, would **reach record levels in 2021** driven by a surge in demand for energy to kickstart global economies following the coronavirus pandemic.

Coal power fell by 4% in 2020 as the pandemic caused a global economic slowdown, but the IEA found that the surge in demand for electricity during 2021 outpaced the growth in low-carbon sources, leading many wealthy economies to rely more heavily on fossil fuel power plants.

The IEA's most recent report, published last week, found **the steepest ever increase** in global electricity demand last year was stoked by a 9% increase in coal use compared with the year before, or more than half of the global increase in power demand, to reach an all-time peak.

China's record coal consumption comes weeks after the conclusion of the Cop26 climate talks, which ended in a fierce disagreement over a pledge to abandon coal. A last-minute intervention by India successfully watered down the language of the pact **from "phasing out" to "phasing down"**.

After the talks, held in Glasgow last month, the Cop26 president, **Alok Sharma**, said India and China would "have to explain themselves to poor nations" after watering down the Glasgow climate pact, adding that their actions had left him "deeply frustrated".

The IEA found that coal plants in the US and the EU produced 20% more electricity last year, from low levels in 2020, but their use remained below the levels recorded in 2019. The reliance on coal plants is expected to decline again next year as electricity demand slows and the expansion of renewable energy alternatives continues.