

Coal and Missouri

Coal underlies the northwest third of Missouri, and Missouri was the first state west of the Mississippi in which coal was mined. The coal beds in Missouri tend to be thin (28 inches thick), however, and most do not commercially support coal mining.ⁱ Consequently, in the 12 months ended 10/6/2007, Missouri produced 270,000 short tons of coal.ⁱⁱ Illinois alone produced 143 times as much. Missouri coal is all bituminous in grade (second most desirable), but high in sulfur (undesirable).ⁱⁱⁱ

Generating electricity accounts for more than 94% of the coal burned in Missouri, and coal accounts for about 83% of the total electricity generated. Most of the coal burned in Missouri comes from Illinois and Wyoming, with a smaller percentage being our own domestic coal.ⁱⁱⁱ

From these facts, it is easy to see that Missouri is unlikely to become self-sufficient in coal. It simply is too widely dispersed in too thin a layer — it would involve digging up 1/3 of the state. We will depend on obtaining coal from other states. Like all natural resources, coal eventually can be used up. Many years remain before that happens, however. Further, as Missouri is not home to large coal mining activities, we don't face the safety and pollution problems those activities cause.

The problem with coal for Missouri is not supply, but the effect of using it. Coal is the primary source of air pollutants that contribute to many types of illness, including lung and heart disease. Coal is a primary source of atmospheric acids that are causing acid rain that causes problems in the Northeast and raises the pH of the oceans, killing coral that is an essential fish habitat. It is also a primary source of CO₂, the primary human contribution to global warming. The Labadie plant is a huge coal-fired power plant, 2.5 times the size of the next largest in Missouri. It is the 14th largest power plant emitter of CO₂ in the nation. It is far from the most intensive CO₂ emitter, however: that distinction belongs to the Anheuser Busch, Butler Municipal, Kahoka Light & Water, and Independence Power generating stations, which tie, emitting about 3.2 times as much CO₂ per watt generated as does Labadie.^{iv}

We have basically three choices with respect to coal. First, we could continue to use it as we have, and even more intensively, as oil becomes more scarce. If we do, we will poison ourselves and cook the planet. Second, we could work to control and mitigate the ill effects of using coal. The easy work here has already been done. To do more will be expensive. It will require technological innovations that are by no means guaranteed, and which belong to future decades even if they come to fruition. But they are possible and should be pursued energetically. Or third, we could find ways to reduce our use of coal. This third option is the safest and least expensive. To reduce our use of coal, we need to find alternative ways to generate electricity. Fortunately, they exist. They will be discussed in separate white papers. Plus, we need to reduce our electricity use. We can do that by being more efficient, and by simply making lifestyle choices to use less. Reducing one's use of electricity is as simple as turning off the lights when you aren't in a room and raising the thermostat a couple of degrees in summer. As a people we are surely capable of doing these things, once we know how and become convinced that we really must.

ⁱ *Missouri*. U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. [Http://www.osmre.gov](http://www.osmre.gov).

ⁱⁱ A short ton is the standard ton we use in the U.S., 2,000 lbs. *Weekly coal production overview*. U.S. Energy Information Administration, http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/coal/weekly/weekly_html/wcpoct62007.html, viewed online 10/31/2007/.

ⁱⁱⁱ *State coal profile: Missouri*. U.S. Energy Information Administration. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/coal/statepro/imagemap/usaimagemap.htm>.

^{iv} The Carbon Monitoring for Action Database, <http://carma.org>.