

China is stopping 103 coal power projects as part of its move toward more renewable energy

Peter Dockrill, [ScienceAlert](#), Jan. 19, 2017, 11:44 AM



Smoke billows from smokestacks and a coal fired generator at a steel factory on November 19, 2015 in the industrial province of Hebei, China. Getty Images/Kevin Frayer

China has announced plans to cancel more than 100 coal plants currently in development, scrapping what would amount to a massive 120 gigawatts (GW) of coal-fired electricity capacity if the plants were completed.

For a bit of context, the entire US has approximately [305 GW gigawatts](#) of coal capacity in total, and this massive adjustment leaves room [for China to advance its development of clean, renewable energy](#).

Despite [China's much-publicised pollution problems](#), the reason for the cancellations is because the country was actually vastly exceeding its planned coal capacity for the future.

Per China's [five-year-plan](#) for its power sector, it's targeting a coal-fired capacity of 1,100 GW in 2020 – a sizeable increase from its existing 920 GW.

But if all 103 plants in development were to be completed, China's capacity [would reach 1,250 GW](#), creating a huge, unnecessary surplus of coal power – which is why the Chinese government is putting on the breaks.

In a [directive issued this week](#), the country's National Energy Administration cancelled planning and construction on 85 new coal plants, in addition to [18 facilities canned last year](#).

The 103 cancelled plants span 13 Chinese provinces, and were [worth about 430 billion yuan \(US\\$62 billion\)](#). Of the 120 GW of cancelled capacity, some 54 GW would have come from [projects already under construction](#).

While suspending so much infrastructure will hurt China economically, creating an energy surplus in the future wouldn't be a smart play either.

In any case, environmental groups are welcoming the decision to shut down so much planned capacity for [one of Earth's most polluting fossil fuels](#).

"Stopping under-construction projects seems wasteful and costly, but spending money and resources to finish these completely unneeded plants would be even more wasteful," Greenpeace told [Reuters](#).

While China has come under fire for being [evasive about its carbon emissions](#) and has attracted a lot of unwanted attention for a series of [local pollution crises](#), the country is the world's [biggest investor in renewable energy](#).

While China is clearly not abandoning coal, its uptake of clean energy saw it account for about [40 percent of global renewable capacity increases in 2015](#) – building almost 20,000 new wind turbines in that year alone.

"The key thing is that yes, China has a long way to go, but in the past few years China has come a very long way," Greenpeace researcher Lauri Myllyvirta told Michael Forsythe at [The New York Times](#).

But despite the national directive to pull back on coal infrastructure, some think that actually enforcing the suspension in the provinces affected might be a harder thing to accomplish.

According to energy policy researcher Lin Boqiang from China's Xiamen University, overcoming local resistance to halting construction on projects worth billions and employing huge numbers of workers will be a battle in itself.

"Some projects might have been ongoing for 10 years, and now there's an order to stop them," he told [The New York Times](#).

"It's difficult to persuade the local governments to give up on them."

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