

Timeline of Coal in the United States



- 1000 A.D. ● Hopi Indians, living in what is now Arizona, use coal to bake pottery made from clay.
- 1673-74 ● Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette discover “charbon de terra” (coal) at a point on the Illinois River during their expedition on the Mississippi River.
- 1701 ● Coal is found by Huguenot settlers at Manakin on the James River, near what is now Richmond, Virginia.
- 1748 ● The first recorded commercial U.S. coal production from mines in the Manakin area.
- 1762 ● Coal is used to manufacture, shot, shell, and other war material during Revolutionary War.
- 1816 ● Baltimore, Maryland becomes the first city to light streets with gas made from coal.
- 1830 ● The first commercially practical American-built locomotive, the Tom Thumb, is manufactured. Early locomotives that burned wood were quickly modified to use coal almost entirely.
- 1839 ● The steam shovel is invented and eventually becomes instrumental in mechanizing surface coal mining.
- 1848 ● The first coal miners' union is formed in Schuylkill County, PA.
- 1866 ● Surface mining, then called “strip” mining, begins near Danville, Illinois. Horse-drawn plows and scrapers are used to remove overburden so the coal can be dug and hauled away in wheelbarrows and carts.
- 1875 ● Coke replaces charcoal as the chief fuel for iron blast furnaces.
- 1890 ● The United Mine Workers of America is formed.

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- 1896 ● Steel timbering is used for the first time at the shaft mine of the Spring Valley Coal Co., where 400 feet of openings are timbered with 15-inch beams.
- 1901 ● General Electric Co. builds the first alternating current power plant at Ehrenfeld, Pennsylvania, for Webster Coal and Coke Co., to eliminate inherent difficulties in long-distance direct-connect transmission.
- 1912 ● The first self-contained breathing apparatus for mine rescue operations is used.
- 1930 ● Molded, protective helmets for miners are introduced.
- 1937 ● The shuttle car is invented.
- 1961 ● Coal becomes the major fuel used by electric utilities to generate electricity.
- 1973-74 ● Oil embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Companies (OPEC) focuses attention on the energy crisis and results in increased demand for U.S. coal.
- 1977 ● Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) passed.
- 1986 ● Clean Coal Technology Act passed.
- 1990 ● U.S. coal production tops 1 billion tons in a single year for the first time.
- 1995 ● The National Coal Association and the American Mining Congress merge into the National Mining Association, representing coal- and minerals-producing companies.
- 1996 ● Energy Policy Act goes into effect, opening electric utility markets for competition between fuel providers.
- 2002 ● Coal mining companies reclaimed 2 millionth acre of mined land.
- 2005 ● Congress passes and President signs into law the Energy Policy Act of 2005 that promotes increased use of coal through clean coal technologies.