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 form 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.