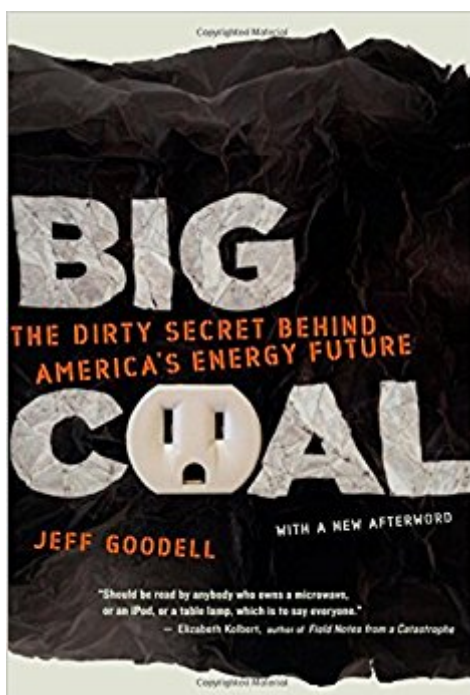


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# Big Coal: The Dirty Secret Behind America's Energy Future



## Synopsis

Long dismissed as a relic of a bygone era, coal is back -- with a vengeance. Coal is one of the nation's biggest and most influential industries -- Big Coal provides more than half the electricity consumed by Americans today -- and its dominance is growing, driven by rising oil prices and calls for energy independence. Is coal the solution to America's energy problems? On close examination, the glowing promise of coal quickly turns to ash. Coal mining remains a deadly and environmentally destructive industry. Nearly forty percent of the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere each year comes from coal-fired power plants. In the last two decades, air pollution from coal plants has killed more than half a million Americans. In this eye-opening call to action, Goodell explains the costs and consequences of America's addiction to coal and discusses how we can kick the habit.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; Reprint edition (April 3, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0618872248

ISBN-13: 978-0618872244

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 59 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #305,841 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Energy Production & Extraction > Fossil Fuels > Coal #55 in Books > Business & Money > Industries > Energy & Mining > Natural Resource Extraction #59 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Energy Production & Extraction > Mining

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. After a generation out of the spotlight, coal has reasserted its centrality: the United States "burn[s] more than a billion tons" per year, and since 9/11 and the Iraq war, independence from foreign oil has become positively patriotic. Rolling Stone contributing editor Goodell's last book, the bestselling *Our Story*, was about a mine accident, which clearly made a deep impression on him. Our reliance on coal "the unspoken foundation of our "information" economy" has, Goodell says, led to an "empire of denial" that blocks us from the investments necessary to find alternative energy sources that could eventually save us from fossil fuel. Goodell's description of the mining-related deaths, the widespread health consequences of burning coal and the impact on our

planet's increasingly fragile ecosystem make for compelling reading, but such commonplace facts are not what lift this book out of the ordinary. That distinction belongs to Goodell's fieldwork, which takes him to Atlanta, West Virginia, Wyoming, China and beyondâ "though he also has a fine grasp of the less tangible niceties of the industry. Goodell understands how mines, corporate boardrooms, commodity markets and legislative chambers interrelate to induce a national inertia. Goodell has a talent for pithy argumentâ "and the book fairly crackles with informed conviction. (June 8) Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Viewing the political and economic heft of the American coal industry, journalist Goodell presents an admiring view of the workers who mine, transport, and burn coal and an adversarial posture toward the CEOs, lobbyists, and politicians who monitor industry interests. In the background of the author's narratives, which are pegged to his visits to coalfields, coal-hauling trains, and power plants, lurks environmental pollution. Goodell injects relevant statistics (e.g., on average, an American uses 20 pounds of coal in a lifetime) that effectively personalize the reader's connection to an industry most ignore until a power outage. He astutely recognizes and heavily criticizes how mining companies and utilities capitalize on this disconnection in their public relations. Disputing their assertions that standards of living will suffer from the host of regulations and treaties he favors, Goodell particularizes his objections in detail useful to those who closely follow environmental issues. The circulation numbers of a comparable critique of the fossil fuels complex, *Boiling Point*, by Ross Gelbspan (2004), may predict Goodell's appeal to library patrons. Gilbert Taylor Copyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Is the earth about ready to ecologically bite the big one via coal-caused global warming, or is this whole thing blown out of proportion? I don't know; but I think we should play it safe and listen to Jeff Goodell. I might not agree with his liberal politics, but I do respect the study he has done on 'Big Coal', which is full of fascinating and scary stats and observations. According to Goodell, each American indirectly causes 20 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> to spew out into the air each year! Also, the U.S. is known as the 'Saudi Arabia of Coal', containing fully a quarter of the earth's coal supply, and consuming over a billion tons a year! Some coal trains are a mile-long! The last nuclear plant went on-line over 30 years ago because of the problem of what to do with nuclear waste. He says the earth's ecology is at the tipping point of some serious global warming because of 'Big Coal'. He

says that we've already raised the average temperature one degree farenheit and are well on the way to a 3.5 degrees increase which will start a catastrophic series of events in nature that we don't even want to think about. He says that it would overall, society-wide, be cheaper to clean-up the coal emissions rather than pay for the health problems the dirty air causes. The strange thing is that the coal issue is not even talked about very much, probably because most of us are so far removed from coal excavation or plants. Goodell said he had not even seen a piece of coal until he was 41 (presumably while writing this book.). By the way, I used to see coal as a kid because we had a coal furnace, but haven't seen any since. You could see lumps in the street also. All of this reminds me a little of Y2K. Nobody got excited about it until it was almost too late. Then there was a all-out (and successful) effort to avert massive computer problems. Now I think it's time to do something about the coal situation before it is too late. Is Goodell an alarmist or a realist? I hope he's only the former, but fear he is also the latter.

Although this was in my library for some time, I decided to read it now due to the mining accidents in Utah and China. I was hoping it might shed some light on why the number of mining accidents seems to be increasing, which it did. It also provided a host of other information about coal and the companies that mine and burn coal that was fascinating. From mountain top removal mining, to reverse mining to open pit mining, the author covers how coal is mined in detail. He also looks at the economics of coal in tunneled mines versus strip mines and why West Virginia and surrounding areas are so poorly compensated for the work they do. It was amazing to see the mine operator's comments in Utah on the news, while reading his previous statements that were detailed in the book. It became quite obvious that his interests in the miners trapped in Utah were more economic than true sympathy for the miners or their families. The second section deals with the burning of coal, and why it is so well loved by utilities. Basically, coal burned in older generation plants is a license to print money and the coal and utility companies are fully aware of the damage done, but put profits ahead of anything and everything. Further, the author details the obstructionist techniques used by these companies to keep coal going as a fuel. In the final section, the author details the damage being done by coal to the environment, as well as to humans who live downwind from the plants. He also looks at various solutions that could be employed today to make coal a much cleaner burning fuel and how this would affect the costs of electricity. He also ventures to China to see what they are doing about carbon releases and how we are helping to cause the massive build up of coal fired plants in China with our purchasing habits. This is a wonderful book that will answer almost any question you would have about the mining and burning of coal and why

we are still using a 19th century fuel in the 21st century. It is very readable and should be read by every individual with a connection to the electric grid. My only complaint is in how the book was foot noted. No foot notes were present in the text, making it hard to line up the text with the notes at the end of the book.

Jeff Goodell has written a book that should be read by one and all. I participated in a group meeting that interviewed Mr. Goodell and his graciousness and willingness to answer our varied questions was greatly appreciated. His ability to show the human side of this story is amazing. From the train conductors to the coal miners you learn about the path coal takes to make it into your home to run your electrical devices. Jeff Goodell doesn't stop there--he shows the 'dirty' side of coal as well. While the Big Coal industry big wigs get rich and the Appalachian Mountains are destroyed, and the workers advance farther into poverty, the appetite of the American electrical consumer becomes even more ravenous. After reading this book you will look at your home, your behaviour, and the Big Coal industry in a whole different light.

There are currently many books out there on peak oil, or energy concerns in general. However, probably not many people have read up on coal which is an old technology that's having a resurgence of sorts. This book does a nice job of filling in the gaps and talking not only about the pollution issues with coal, but also about supply and demand and what the coal industry is like in the US. I was surprised to find out how much power the railroads have, and how poorly-paid and unprotected the coal miners are. The impression I came away with is that the coal industry is a massively powerful voice in our society and is able to use that power to benefit itself, often against the good of the country. We will probably continue to hear more and more talk about clean coal technology in the near future. Anyone who wants to have some decent beginning knowledge of what's behind coal might enjoy reading this book.

I did a book report on this and it made me cautious on leaving my lights on at the house. It is super easy to turn on and off a light, but when you discover how much our planet is effected by coal companies in order to light up our world, it make you think twice.

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