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|  |  | | | | | | | | | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  | |  | Ever since the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, the most important resource sought after by industrialized countries has been sources of energy.  Many of the most important inventions of this time required much more power than horses or waterwheels could produce.  Industries needed a cheap and efficient source of power.  In 1698, the first commercial steam engine was produced when Thomas Savery, a Cornish army officer, patented a pumping engine that used steam.  Thomas Newcomen, a Devonshire blacksmith, improved on Savery's engine in 1712; his engine came into widespread use in the 1720s.  Still, the steam engine wasted heat and used a great amount of fuel.  James Watt of Scotland began working to improve the steam engine in the 1760s, and by 1785 had eliminated many of the problems of earlier engines.  Watt's new steam engines used heat much more efficiently than previous engines and used less fuel.  Coal provided the power to drive the steam engines, thus making it an extremely valuable commodity in the Industrial Age.  Back then, the black plumes of smoke and ash were not viewed negatively; in fact, they were a sign of progress.  Also, no one understood the immense impact the pollution of the air, earth, and water had on the native flora and fauna.  Strip mining for coal was a common practice, but one that left the area devoid of life.  These practices are still common, and continue to harm the biosphere.  Today, coal and other fossil fuels are used to create about 67% of the world's electric power and about 70% of the power produced in the United States.  Such plants burn coal, oil, or natural gases.  These substances develop from fossils, the remains of prehistoric plants and animals, and are therefore called fossil fuels.  In a fossil fueled electric power plant, the fossil |  | |  |  | | | |  | |
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