

Title:

A New Beginning for Coal

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375

Summary:

Because after years of mine shutdowns and declining prices, the coal industry is making a prosperous return.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

This is the 21st century. Why are we burning little black rocks to charge our laptops and cell phones?

Because after years of mine shutdowns and declining prices, the coal industry is making a prosperous return.

In the early 1900s, coal was the nation's major fuel source, supplying almost 90 percent of its energy needs, according to the Department of Energy.

When the cleaner, more efficient petroleum and natural gas came into play, the demand for coal declined. Today, nearly 55 percent of the nation's electricity is generated using coal, and the numbers are growing, according to the World Coal Institute.

Even though perceptions of the coal industry have changed dramatically over the years, coal maintains its vital role in the world's energy mix for many reasons. It is easy and safe to transport, it remains far cheaper than natural gas, and it is abundantly available.

But it wasn't until natural gas prices shot up and California was held back by blackouts that the coal industry took center stage. For decades, it seemed to be dying. But with easing of pollution controls, the Bush Administration began to establish the groundwork for a resurgence of coal-fired power across the nation.

In 1999, natural gas was the most expensive fossil fuel, petroleum was second and coal was the least expensive, according to the Department of Energy. Although the cost of generating electricity from coal has increased through the

years, it is still lower than the cost of generating electricity from either natural gas or petroleum.

As for cleaner air, coal has long been unpopular with environmentalists who argue the fossil fuel produces the greatest amount of mercury and carbon dioxide emission, associated with global warming. Current energy bills, however, propose clean coal power initiatives, which would implement high-tech ways to reduce pollution when electricity is generated from coal.

Today, mines that were closed in the 1990s after a downturn in coal prices are being reopened in Southeastern United States. Quest Minerals and Mining (OTC BB: QMMG.OB) is acquiring and reopening properties that produce coal in compliance with Clean Air Act requirements. According to Quest, coal emitting less than 1.2 pounds of sulfur dioxide per million BTU, commonly referred to as "low-sulfur coal" is currently trading at more than \$50 per ton.