

China Carbon Emissions Decline as 2014 Global CO2 Stays Flat

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Steam rises from chimneys at the Junliangcheng power station in Tianjin, China. In the battle to rein in pollution, China has cut its dependence on coal. Photographer: Tomohiro Ohsumi/Bloomberg

(Bloomberg) -- China's emissions of carbon dioxide fell last year for the first time in more than a decade, helping stall global production of climate-warming gases. The finding, along with new data from the International Energy Agency, is a sign that efforts to control pollution are gaining traction.

Total carbon emissions in the world's second-biggest economy dropped 2 percent in 2014 compared with the previous year, the first drop since 2001, according to a Bloomberg New Energy Finance estimate based on preliminary energy demand data from China's National Bureau of Statistics.

Global carbon emissions from the energy sector were unchanged last year, the first time in 40 years that a halt or dip wasn't associated with an economic downturn, the IEA said Friday in a statement. China and developed nations have encouraged investment in renewable energy and efficiency measures, decoupling economic growth from emissions, the IEA said.

“Coal demand is slowing” in China while all other fuels, including oil, gas and renewables, are being consumed more, said Sophie Lu, a Beijing-based analyst at BNEF.

The IEA has identified shifting energy consumption in China, the most populous nation with 1.4 billion people, as among the reasons global carbon dioxide emissions was flat last year.

Fatih Birol, the IEA's chief economist who was named in February as the agency's next executive director, said the results are an encouraging sign.

“This gives me even more hope that humankind will be able to work together to combat climate change, the most important threat facing us today,” Birol said in the IEA statement.

Renewables Investments

The China results show that the country's battle to rein in pollution is having a tangible effect. The world's biggest carbon emitter, has poured money into clean energy sources such as solar, wind and hydro developments, while cutting its dependence on coal.

China led in renewables last year with investments of \$89.5 billion, accounting for almost one out of every three dollars spent on clean energy in the world, according to BNEF figures released in January.

Domestic coal production is falling along with consumption.

China's coal consumption fell 2.9 percent in 2014 from the previous year, the first drop in at least a decade, said Tian Miao, a Beijing-based analyst at North Square Blue Oak Ltd., a research company in London with a focus on China.

China's energy consumption growth weakened to 3.8 percent in 2014, the lowest since 1998, as the economy expanded at its slowest pace since 1990.

The world's biggest energy consumer got 11 percent of its primary energy from non-fossil fuels including renewables and nuclear in 2014, up from 9.8 percent a year earlier, the National Energy Administration said on Dec. 31. China is targeting 15 percent of its energy from such fuels by 2020.

Pollution Mitigation

The proportion of coal fell to 64.2 percent last year from 66 percent in 2013, according to the NEA.

Hebei, China's most polluted province, cut coal consumption by 15 million tons, closed 141 mines and stopped work to improve 478 mines last year, Chen Guoying, head of the provincial environmental protection department, said this week.

China plans to cap carbon emissions by 2030 under an agreement reached between U.S. President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November.

A wider climate change accord may be finalized in Paris climate talks in December after negotiations in Lima last year ended with a plan for nations to commit to cut emissions.

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