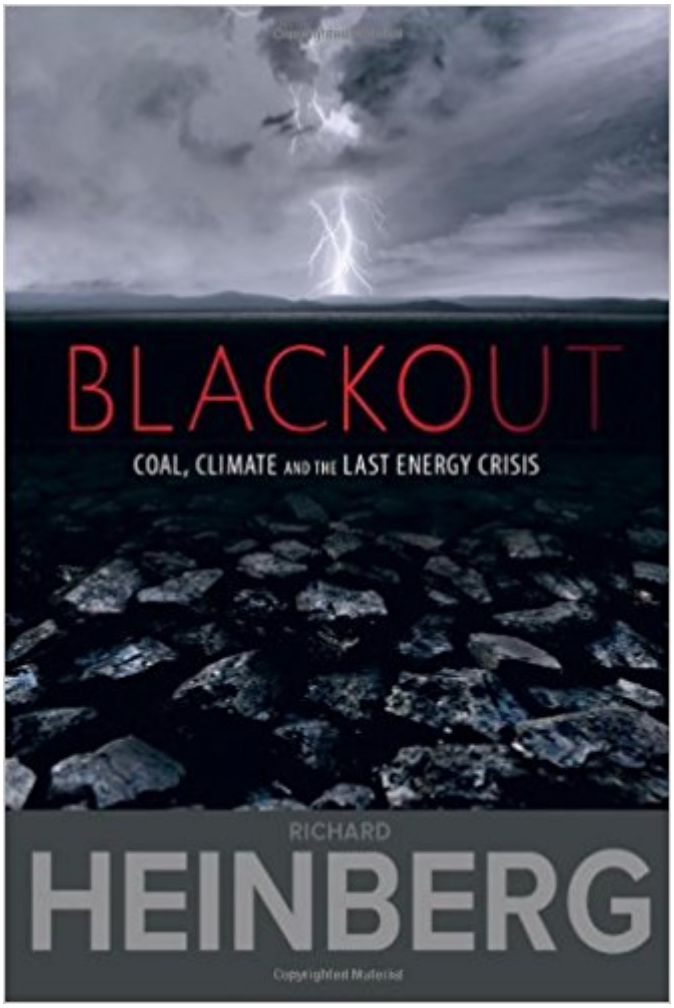
Blackout: Coal, Climate And The Last Energy Crisis



Synopsis

"Blackout is an important and timely book. In the form of this compact volume, one of the best and most productive peak oil authors working today has turned his customary scholarhsip, wisdom, wit and writing prowess to some of the most ciritical issues now unfolding on our planet. "- Frank Kaminski, Energy Bulletin Coal fuels about 50% of US electricity production and provides a quarter of the countryâ ™s total energy. China and Indiaâ ™s ferocious economic growth is based on coal-generated electricity. Coal currently looks like a solution to many of our fast-growing energy problems. However, while coal advocates are urging full steam ahead, increasing reliance on the dirtiest of all fossil fuels has crucial implications for climate science, energy policy, the world economy, and geopolitics. Drawbacks to a coal-based energy strategy include: Scarcityâ ”new studies prove that the peak of usable coal production may actually be less than two decades away. Costâ ”the quality of produced coal is declining, while the expense of transport is rising, leading to spiralling costs and potential shortages. Climate impactsâ ”our ability to deal with the historic challenge of climate change may hinge on reducing our coal consumption in future years. Blackout goes to the heart of the tough energy questions that will dominate every sphere of public policy throughout the first half of this century, and it is a must-read for planners, educators, and anyone concerned about energy consumption, peak oil, and climate change. Richard Heinberg is a journalist, editor, lecturer, and senior fellow of the Post Carbon Institute. He is one of the worldâ ™s foremost peak oil educators and the award-winning author of seven previous books, including Peak Everything and The Partyâ ™s Over.

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Customer Reviews

Coal fuels about 50 percent of US electricity production and provides a quarter of the country’s total energy. China and India’s ferocious economic growth is based almost entirely on coal-generated electricity.Coal currently looks like a solution to many of our fast-growing energy problems. However, while coal advocates are urging full steam ahead, increasing reliance on the dirtiest of all fossil fuels has crucial implications for the global climate, energy policy, the world economy, and geopolitics.Drawbacks to a coal-based energy strategy include:Scarcity â “ new studies suggest that the peak of world coal production may actually be less than two decades away. Cost â “ the quality of produced coal is declining, while the expense of transport is rising, leading to spiraling costs and increasing shortages. Climate impacts-our ability to deal with the historic challenge of climate change will hinge on reducing our coal consumption in future years.Blackout goes to the heart of the tough energy questions that will dominate every sphere of public policy throughout the first half of this century, and is a must-read for planners, educators, and anyone concerned about energy consumption, peak oil and climate change. (2008-11-25)

Richard Heinberg is widely acknowledged as one of the world’s foremost Peak Oil educators. A journalist, editor, lecturer, and Senior Fellow of the Post Carbon Institute, he is the award-winning author of seven previous books including Peak Everything, The Party’s Over, and Powerdown. Richard has appeared in many documentaries (including The 11th Hour) and national radio and television programs.

This book is a look at the amount of coal reserves that exist in numerous countries around the world, how much is being used every year and a prediciton of how long coal will last as a fuel. It also has a prediction for the future of the climate if the use preditiond are true and for what will happen to civilization if coal is used to the point that it can no longer be mined economically.The book had some fascinating information, but it was written in 2008 with information going back a number of years prior. The book came out right after the financial meltdown and subsequent deep recession, which created a lot of change in energy use. In addition, fracking had just gotten going and the author had no way to predict the amounts, or prices, of natural gas and how that would change power plant usage of coal fired fuels.For instance, coal is used in such small quantities now, that

many railroads that used coal as the backbone of their profits are selling off coal cars and are having financial difficulties. CSX has even closed several branch lines that are no longer needed with the reduction of coal output.The book was an interesting read and should be kept on the shelf for future reference if coal ever makes a comeback, but I think much of the information is simply outdated. If you are really interested, I would recommend the library first. (I gave it 3 stars because of the outdated material, but would give it 4 in the material were current)

The book begins by exposing the flaws of using R/P ratios to forecast future supplies of coal, which ironically is the most common method used to estimate how much coal we have. The author instead lays out a thorough argumnet that coal supplies must be estimated using a Hubbart-curve type of analysis, similar to that used to forcast future oil supplies. Different types of coal, and a history of their uses are also discussed in the early pages.The bulk of the book (more than half of it) is structured as a review/summary of several recent studies of coal supplies in different regions all around the globe. The author presents a balanced set of studies, summarizes their findings and forecasts, and then critiques them. The author does not simply state which study is correct, but rather points out the robustness and validity of each study, slowly building a body of evidence and a conclusion about the future of coal in a given region. These pages were surprisingly technical and were a bit of a chore to read at times, but the presentation of hard facts builds a more credible position on future coal supplies and is valuable to the book.The book continues by briefly discussing coal and how its use relates to climate change. New coal technologies are discussed, such as carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) and integrated gasification combined cycle (IGCC). The current status of these technologies is presented along with some discussion of their future role in coal usage. Although IGCC can improve the efficiency of coal-fired electricity, it also greatly increases the cost, as does CCS. It is a good summary of new coal technology, and disects facts from hype.The book concludes with three potential scenarios in which our usage of coal is very different. They range from the collapse of industrial society to the transition of a low-energy, sustainable future. They are interesting and thought provoking.Overall this book is well-researched, logically-presented, and well-explained. If you are interested in a realistic analysis of coal, a resource on which our dependency will only grow, read this book. You will also learn how much our future depends on how we choose to use (or not use) coal.

This is about a "Hubbert’s Peak" of coal. It is full of study results of interest. If you think coal has no future in light of the natural gas boom, this book might sway you a smidgeon.

good book

This is a good book full of alarming numbers. If the author is right, we’re in deep trouble as a society.

This book was only ok, I am glad it was a library rental and not a purchase. For the most part it is a review of DOE publications with little commentary. Downloading the free energy outlook reports would get you the same information. No mention of new technologies for mining coal only ways of burning it for energy production. If you want information on this field I suggest "The Quest" and "Limits to Growth". These books will provide better information and lead to other material to read that is more informative.

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