

# Coal – Not Your Average Backyard Rock

By Emily Tran

Have you ever heard of children getting coal in their stockings at Christmas if they had been bad that year? Well, maybe getting that lump of coal isn't so bad! Ever since the 1800s when we started commercially mining coal, the uses for it have been endless. It is used both in the cold winters to heat up buildings and houses, and also in the hot summers to make electricity so you can cool off in air conditioning.



Did you know that **coal** is a type of rock? Coal is **mined**, or dug out from inside Earth. The Appalachian Mountains are a major area in the United States where coal is mined. Other places include the Rocky Mountains, Pennsylvania, Wyoming and Montana.

It takes millions of years for coal to form. It is an important natural resource, but it is not a renewable resource. The amount of coal we have is limited. Scientists estimate that there is enough coal in the world to supply

us with energy for the next 300 years. However, we have to remember that this number is only true if we continue to use the same amount each year as we do now. If we start to use more coal, it will run out sooner.

To make electricity, coal is burned at a power plant. When you watch TV, use a computer, dry your hair or play video games, there is a good chance you are using electricity produced by burning coal in a power plant.

Coal produces a lot of **pollution**, especially in the air. When coal is burned to produce electricity, it releases chemicals into the air. Those chemicals are harmful to our bodies and the environment. Recently, in the United States, the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act have forced companies to work on ways to make coal use less harmful to the environment.

So don't underestimate the importance of coal. If you find a lump of coal under your tree on Christmas morning, remember to thank Santa because now you can listen to the radio, refrigerate your food, and turn on those Christmas lights!