

CAMPUSES

# BEYOND

# COAL

GUIDE BOOK



**SIERRA**  
STUDENT COALITION

## INTRODUCTION

**The United States burns over a billion tons of coal a year in coal-fired power plants. From the mining to the burning, the entire life-cycle process of coal is destructive to human health, the health of our economies and the health of our ecosystems.**

**As students and as youth, we have the power starting first on our campuses and then in our communities to alter our campus energy mix, reduce energy consumption and help move our country toward a more environmentally sustainable and socially just economy. We can lead the nation in the fight for climate justice and move our campuses beyond coal to 100 percent clean energy solutions.**



# GETTING STARTED: WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

**Most campuses are like their own little (or big) town and are often one of the largest energy consumers in the region. The key to getting started, and kicking your coal dependence, is to both build the groundswell of student support and demand and collect information and build relationships with key allies and targets in the administration.**

## WHO TO MEET WITH

Start with your likely supporters who can help you a) navigate the administration and help identify who else to meet with, b) give you valuable information, and c) give their personal support to the campaign in various ways. These allies may include:

- Sustainability Coordinator
- Chair of the Sustainability Committee
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Chairs or professors in various academic departments, such as engineering or public health
- Student Government officers
- Energy Manager, or other operations staff

For gathering energy specific information, there is actually an entire team of people who manage campus operations – often called the Office of the Physical Plant, Operations or Facilities Management Department. This department should have an Energy Manager, a typically mid-level position without budgetary power, but who has a wealth of knowledge and probably some helpful ideas. If you have a coal plant there's probably also a plant manager who will know about all the operations and fuel sources for that plant.

Make a list of at least 5 people who you want to meet with in the first month, and then call them to set up an appointment. Tell them about what you want to do and ask for their help, but also listen for important information you'll need to learn from each person. Then, be sure to follow up to demonstrate your commitment and build their trust.

## INITIAL INFORMATION TO COLLECT

- How much energy does your university consume? What are the various sectors (e.g. lighting, cooling, heating) they measure and how much does each use?
- Where does the energy come from? (i.e. local utility, on-campus generation, etc.)
- What is the electricity mix you're purchasing from your local utility? Do they offer renewable energy?
- How much does the university currently spend on energy both for purchased and on-campus energy sources?
- Have they conducted an energy audit or carbon calculator? If so, can you get the data?
- Do they have any current plans for efficiency upgrades or other emissions reducing measures?
- What's the history of student organizing on energy issues on your campus?
- Do they have a sustainability plan or report?
- Does the school have a 10 or 25-year plan? Does it include energy use and/or purchasing?
- What are the major regional or local renewable energy sources available?
- Can your student government pass binding referendums and when does voting occur?

# GOING COAL-FREE: CAMPUS STRATEGIES

**3 ways to move your campus beyond coal:**

- I. Retire or transition campus-based coal plants**
- II. End your dependence on coal-generated electricity**
- III. Stop institutional support of coal**

## **I. RETIRE OR TRANSITION CAMPUS-BASED COAL PLANTS**

**The first step if you're one of the over 60 schools burning coal and creating pollution right on campus.**

### **GET THE INFO**

Find out the basics from your university through online searches and meetings with administrators. Good info to know includes:

- ➔ What type of plant is it? Does it just produce steam, does it just produce electricity? Or is it a co-generation plant that produces both steam and electricity?
- ➔ How efficient is the plant?
- ➔ If the plant produces steam what is it used for? Heating, cooling or both?
- ➔ How much energy does your coal plant actually supply and what percentage is it of the campus' total energy use? Energy produced is measured in British Thermal Units (BTUs) for steam production and MWh for electricity production.
- ➔ What type of fuel does it use? Does it burn only coal? If so what type (e.g., bituminous, anthracite). If it burns something other than coal, what is it and how much is used?
- ➔ Are the boilers capable and/or permitted to burn something other than coal?
- ➔ What's the infrastructure in place around the plant to deliver the energy produced (i.e. is steam or chilled water piped directly into buildings, is electricity put on the grid, etc.)?
- ➔ How much does it cost to run it, including the cost of the coal and other fuels, labor, maintenance, etc.?
- ➔ How many tons or BTUs of coal does it burn daily? How many boilers does it have? What is its capacity?
- ➔ Are there any major scheduled upgrades or renovations planned (this is a great opportunity to use those millions of dollars to convert to clean fuel!)?
- ➔ Have they ever explored alternatives to coal? What happened?
- ➔ Are they familiar with good alternatives such as locally produced biomass?
- ➔ Where does the coal come from? What company, state, region, type of mining?

Additionally, get as much information as you can about the state permits for the plant, including any past or current violations, re-application and expiration dates and details on the emissions limits for the plant. You can get this information from state environmental agencies (the air office will have permit and emission information), Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and, in some cases, EPA permit databases. For additional legal or technical support, you can contact the SSC and the Sierra Club at [beyondcoal@ssc.org](mailto:beyondcoal@ssc.org).

Finally, go check it out! Take a walk around, look for where coal dust is falling on cars and buildings, piles of coal waiting to be burned and where it's dropped off, or even piles of waste. Use your instincts... if it looks wrong, there's a good chance it is. If you have an opportunity to tour the plant, let us know and we can help brief you on what to look for and ask about.

## IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS

Kicking out coal creates a huge opportunity for clean, renewable energy sources. While your group shouldn't have to completely solve the problem, having creative ideas on hand, along with other schools' success stories, will help build your credibility with the administration and the public. Successful approaches include switching from coal to a sustainable, regional source of biomass, such as at the University of Wisconsin-Madison or on-site geothermal energy, such as Ball State in Indiana. See our Report at [sierraclub.org/coal](http://sierraclub.org/coal) for their stories.

## II. END YOUR DEPENDENCE ON COAL-GENERATED ELECTRICITY

**Reduce your energy use as much as possible and then ensure the rest is powered with clean, renewable energy.**

### CREATE A CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

If your school has signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, they are required to complete a climate action plan within two years. In some cases, however, it may take a significant student push to get the President to make it happen, and ensure that students are involved in the process as primary stakeholders. If your school hasn't signed, you can still make the commitment or even pursue a Climate Action Plan independently. It's critical these plans are ambitious and seek to actually reduce emissions and pollution by cutting the campuses' dependence on all coal-generated electricity. The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education has created an excellent How-to Guide for College and University Climate Action Planning and has other university's climate action plans on their website at [aashe.org](http://aashe.org).

### MAKE SUSTAINABILITY A PRIORITY FOR LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT

Universities are almost perpetually growing and developing, so many have a 10 or 25 year "master plan" that maps out construction projects, marketing or even departmental changes. They may also have a similar plan for sustainability such as at Princeton where ten subcommittees drafted a plan to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 with green building standards, transportation improvements, and an on-campus experimental laboratory. Their sustainability plan was then integrated into the school's master plan.

### GREEN FEES

A "Green Fee" is a small fee placed on every student that attends the school to create a fund for sustainability projects. Since the fee is derived from students, it's critical that students are in charge of how the fee is administered and spent. For other methods of generating funds for these projects, check out Campus In Power's Action Toolkit at [campusinpower.org](http://campusinpower.org).

Some different options for using a "green fee" fund include:

- ➔ Purchasing renewable energy from your local utility company. At Western Washington University students passed a green energy initiative by an 85% majority to purchase 100% renewable power for their campus by increasing their student fees to \$19 per quarter. The board of trustees approved the measure, making Western the first college in the country to achieve 100% renewable energy.
- ➔ Building renewable energy sources on-campus to not only lower your carbon foot print, but also serve as a visible and educational commitment to sustainability. In the spring of 2008 at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs the student body voted for a \$5 per semester fee to fund the installation of solar panels on campus buildings.
- ➔ The first, easiest and most cost effective way to start is to simply reduce the energy use on campus through energy efficiency upgrades and conservation. In fall 2005 students at Tennessee Technological University passed an \$8 per semester green fee split with \$5 for purchasing renewable energy and \$3 for campus efficiency projects.

## REVOLVING LOAN FUND

A revolving loan fund invests in efficiency and conservation projects that typically have a 3-10 year payback in savings and then re-invests those savings into more projects. Oregon State University successfully passed their revolving loan fund in the spring of 2009 using their green fee for the initial capital. Students lobbied the student fee committee to invest 23% of the student body's green fee of \$8.50/student to start the Sustainable Energy Revolving Loans Fund (SERLF), amounting to \$100,000. SERLF is intended to fund energy efficiency projects on campus that have a 3-5 year payback period. AASHE has a great workbook for these funds on their website at [aashe.org](http://aashe.org).

## GREEN BUILDING STANDARDS

Forty percent of the energy we use goes to heat, cool, light, and otherwise maintain the built structures we live and study in, which means there's incredible potential to reduce our global warming pollution, and our use of coal-generated electricity by making these buildings more efficient. All new buildings constructed should meet the U.S. Green Build Council's LEED Silver status or higher, and you can demand plans to begin retrofitting existing buildings to meet the same standards.

## III. STOP INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT OF COAL

**Ensure your school is not only kicking its own coal habit, but using its power to pressure other institutions to do so as well.**

## DIVESTMENT FROM CAMPUS BANKS THAT SUPPORT COAL

JP Morgan Chase, Citibank, PNC and other major banks are the primary funders of coal from the mining to the development of new plants. Bank of America was once also on this list of banks funding egregious coal development, until massive public protest and a savvy campaign convinced the company to begin phasing out its support of companies that practice mountain top removal mining. Corporate campaigns of this nature can be wildly effective and you can play a role in them by advocating for the removal of these bank's services from your campus. In their place substitute a local community credit union that supports principles of sustainability and justice. Another possibility is to run a personal divestment campaign to encourage students to switch banks from Chase and Citibank to a local community credit union. Read how Seattle University took on this project at [endowmentethics.org](http://endowmentethics.org). For information on how to run this type of campaign, check out the Rainforest Action Network's Finance Campaign Toolkit at [ran.org](http://ran.org).

## ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGNS

Colleges and universities nation-wide control over \$400 billion dollars. Working on an endowment campaign is about leveraging this money to support environmentally-responsible and socially-just causes. For more information about running an endowment campaign, check out the Responsible Endowment Coalition's excellent handbook at [endowmentethics.org](http://endowmentethics.org).

This type of campaign could take a number of different directions:

- ➔ Start a committee on investor responsibility (CIR) to ensure that your school is invested in companies that support the transition to a just and sustainable green economy. Starting a CIR opens up all sorts of options to pursue endowment campaign options, including the following suggestions as well as pushing your school to file a shareholder resolution. A growing number of schools have such committees and include Amherst College, Barnard College, Columbia College, Tufts University, and University of Pennsylvania.
- ➔ Filing shareholder resolutions to companies that support coal development. Examples of such companies are Blackstone Group, a Wall Street investment firm that owns at least one company currently proposing coal plants in Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and Nevada. Blackstone is the target of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign and there is growing momentum behind this effort. For more information check out [noblackstonecoal.com](http://noblackstonecoal.com).
- ➔ Divest from coal-supporting companies. Students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) ran a Sudan divestment campaign in 2007. They successfully convinced the MIT Corporation, which manages the school's endowment, to completely divest.

## CLEAN UP YOUR COAL ASH

If your local utility owns or purchases the coal-generated electricity your university uses, you should find out what they do with the waste, or coal ash, after its burned. Coal ash is a toxic byproduct of burning coal and must be disposed of according to state regulations. Pollution from coal ash can pollute drinking water and cause both cancer and non-cancer deaths. Unsafe and even illegal coal ash retaining ponds are not uncommon, and accidents can happen as evidenced by the Tennessee Valley Authority liquid coal ash spill in December 2008. During spring 2009, students at the University of Iowa took their school's administration to task for pushing the state Department of Natural Resources to keep the state laws on disposal of coal ash weak when the DNR considered strengthening them.

## CAMPUS GREEN JOB WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS

How awesome would it be if your school has a thriving green jobs work-study program? What if, instead of calling in outside contractors to do energy efficiency retrofits or green building, there was a trained body of students paid to do this work. Imagine... it's competitive to get into, pays work-study wage, trains students how to retrofit their own campus/community with energy efficiency measures, and reduces your campus dependence on coal and all other fossil fuel. This work-study program might work best if it is accompanied by a mandate to pursue on-campus energy efficiency, such as what might come out of a campus climate action plan.

## TARGET STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM BOARDS

If you go to school at a public university, chances are that your school is part of a state consortium of schools. If you're already working to kick coal off your campus, it could help to engage sister schools in a unified call for a coal-free university system. This is a great strategy for a state network to take on and an awesome way to build a campus coalition across the state. Students in Maryland successfully campaigned for the entire University System of Maryland to commit to carbon neutrality. Instead of winning this campaign on just two or three campuses, by targeting the statewide decision-makers, they won carbon neutrality for all 15 schools in the system.

# DEMONSTRATE DEMAND

**Ending King Coal's chokehold on our economy, our energy infrastructure and our communities is no easy work, but the majority of our generation is with us. Young people consistently rank energy and the environment as a higher priority issue than other generations and across the board, 91% percent of all voters believe it is important for the U.S. to transition to a clean energy economy.**

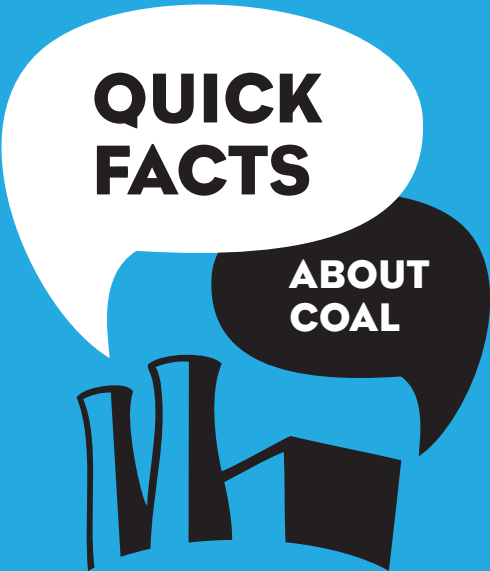
In most places (although not all!) we don't have to convince our peers that coal is a problem. The key is showing them there's a better way to meet our needs, and that they have the power and ability to do something about it.

To be successful, we must start with these discussions, but not stop there. In order to build the power necessary to shut down a coal plant, we need to not only engage thousands of people in our local efforts, but demonstrate that power by mobilizing our supporters and making our campaigns as visible as possible.

Here are some ideas:

- Run a petition drive that involves regular tabling (2-3 days a week), making classroom announcements and presenting at other student group meetings. Set your goals high, and make a plan to get there.
- Pick key time periods to do a visibility blitz on campus that involves massive flyering, poster, banners, tabling, chalking, facebook messaging, and anything else you can think of. Combining all these efforts into a 3-day visibility storm will be far more effective in breaking through the campus psyche than just doing some of these things some of the time.
- Meet with reporters and editorial boards. Don't just wait for the press to show up at your events, but get proactive in building relationships and credibility with your campus and local media. Reporter meetings can be as easy as making the call and meeting up for coffee. Editorial Board meetings are more formal, but can be hugely effective if you get them to write an editorial in your favor.
- Pass a resolution through your student government in support of your efforts. Use the opportunity to talk with and gather support from the largest and most powerful student organizations on campus. Ask them to not only vote on the big day, but stand with you to publically announce their support.
- Collect endorsements from prominent community leaders, political leaders, alumni, faculty and even celebrities. Ask them to speak at a major event, write an Opinion-Editorial, or even write a personal letter to your campus president or other targets.

You can find sample petitions, scripts, endorsement forms, media guides and other organizing tools at [ssc.org/beyondcoal](http://ssc.org/beyondcoal). Have other ideas for making your campaign the biggest thing on campus? Share them in our online forums at [ssc.org](http://ssc.org)!



## QUICK FACTS

### ABOUT COAL

- Each year 21,000 hospitalizations, 38,000 heart attacks and 24,000 deaths are caused by pollution from coal plants
- Coal plants emit more than 30% of the nation's annual carbon dioxide emissions
- Coal plants are one of the largest sources of mercury pollution in the U.S.
- Coal ash or waste sites contain harmful levels of arsenic, lead, mercury, selenium, aluminum and other toxins
- Mountaintop removal coal mining has already damaged or destroyed over 2,000 miles of streams and threatens an additional 1.4 million acres of land by 2020
- Over 600 schools have signed the Presidents Climate Commitment pledging to go carbon neutral – see if yours is one at [presidentsclimatecommitment.org](http://presidentsclimatecommitment.org)

# MAKING AN EVEN BIGGER IMPACT

**As students we have a unique opportunity to create change on our campuses, but that's just the beginning. Right now, the Sierra Club and other organizations are fighting coal in communities across the nation – working to stop new coal plants, retire existing plants, stop destructive mining practices and even demand the EPA and political leaders take action to regulate the industry.**

Leveraging our campus successes and combining efforts with community and national campaigns is how students will truly help break the coal industry's chokehold on our future. And it's easy.

1. Get to know the various campaign efforts in your region by contacting your local Sierra Club office and other community organizations. You can find state-by-state coal campaign info at [sierraclub.org/coal](http://sierraclub.org/coal).
2. Make a list of all your elected officials, from the local and state to federal level and the contact info for their offices.
3. Build a comprehensive media list for your community that includes newspapers, TV, blogs and radio.

Keep these important people informed about all your campaign successes by sending them updates, photos and samples each time you have a significant achievement, including:

- Hitting major petitioning goals
- Passing a student government resolution
- Meetings with high-level administrators
- Earning media including feature stories, letters to the editors or opinion-editorials
- Collecting endorsements from prominent alumni, celebrities or community leaders
- All campaign victories!

## OTHER RESOURCES

- For the latest campaign updates, resources and to join our online community, check out our website at: [ssc.org/beyondcoal](http://ssc.org/beyondcoal)
- For more info on the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign and what's happening in your state, visit: <http://sierraclub.org/coal/>
- For general inquiries, questions or support: [beyondcoal@ssc.org](mailto:beyondcoal@ssc.org)
- Find an SSC Regional Organizer: <http://ssc.sierraclub.org/about/meet-our-staff.html>
- Finding your local Sierra Club office: go to [sierraclub.org](http://sierraclub.org) under the tab "Local"

Other resources available on [ssc.org](http://ssc.org) include:

- Grassroots organizing skills trainings and handouts
- Guides for the Campus Climate Challenge, Power Shift and Cool Cities campaigns
- Anti-Oppression readings and resources
- Energy fact sheets and guides



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