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Coal-to-gas switching – Part one: Tipping the balance

Global coal demand has fallen consistently since 2015, putting an end to the uninterrupted growth it has enjoyed since the late 1990s. Indeed, 2014 may prove to have been the year of 'peak coal': in North America, natural gas is out-competing coal as the preferred power generation source, and in 2015, for the first time, the US generated more electricity from gas than coal. In China, which consumes half of the world's coal, demand has been declining as the economy grows less strongly – while becoming less energy intensive – and competition from increasing gas and renewables intensifies. In Europe, consumption also remains on a down trend. With coal substitution a major engine of gas demand growth, the future of the two fuels are inextricably linked. In the first of two articles, Gas Matters takes a look at how coal-to-gas competition has developed and where it stands today.

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