

POWERING THE PLANET

# Fading Black: The Economic Burden of the Coal Industry

**MiRÁ**  
*Bertsch*





Coal has become increasingly recognized as a financial burden for various reasons, impacting both the economy and public health. A 2021 report from the Institute for Energy Economics highlighted that compliance with stricter emissions regulations for coal plants can lead to an increase in operational costs by 30% to 50%, with capital expenditures for pollution control reaching nearly \$1 billion per plant. Price volatility has also plagued the coal market; the U.S. Energy Information Administration noted significant fluctuations from 2019 to 2021 due to supply chain disruptions and shifting demand. Employment in coal mining has dramatically decreased, with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting a drop from over 86,000 jobs in 2011 to around 43,000 in 2021,.

Furthermore, global investments in fossil fuel subsidies have declined, with U.S. support for coal shrinking from \$7.5 billion in 2014 to \$1.6 billion in 2020, according to the International Energy Agency. Maintaining old coal-fired power plants incurs hefty infrastructure costs averaging \$1,000 per kilowatt, compared to \$300 to \$400 for new renewable installations as noted by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. Sadly, the health implications of coal pollution, estimated by the American Lung Association to cost about \$74 billion annually in the U.S. due to ailments such as asthma and heart disease. As these factors converge, the case for transitioning away from coal to cleaner energy sources becomes increasingly compelling.

