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Italian coal imports set to rise 7% in 2011: Assocarboni

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Italy is set to increase coal imports by around 7% this year, Italian coal association Assocarboni said Tuesday.

"The country will import 17 million tons of steam coal, stable compared to 2010, and 7 million tons of coking coal and PCI (pulverized coal injection), up 27% over last year," Assocarboni chairman Andrea Clavarino told Platts.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Coal Industry Advisory Board plenary meeting in Paris, Clavarino said the steam coal market was expected to grow more strongly over the coming years after Italian voters rejected new nuclear build in a referendum earlier this year.

"This is also reflected in the major investments set to take off for a total amount of Eur5.5 billion (\$7.45 billion) relating to new coal plants," he said.

Major projects seeking to finalize development and proceed to construction are SEI's 1,320 MW coal plant in Saline Joniche, Enel's 1,980 MW oil-to-coal conversion at Porto Tolle, to include a demonstration carbon capture unit, and Tirreno Power's plans for a 460 MW coal unit at Vado Ligure.

"All efforts are aimed at rebalancing the national energy mix, as Italy is the only country in the world to depend on gas for electricity production for more than 60%, with the bulk coming from Algeria and Russia," Clavarino said.

"With nuclear power out of the game and renewable energy still too expensive, Italy should boost the use of coal to overcome a situation that threatens the security of the country's power supply and undermines its competitiveness," he said.

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