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WORLD COAL

World Coal, 8th April 2016

Italy should use more coal

Italian imports stood at 16 million t of thermal coal and 3.5 million t of metallurgical coal in 2015, according to figures from Italian coal industry association, Assocarboni, similar to import levels in 2014.

Italy relies on imported natural gas and renewables for much of its electricity supply, resulting in electricity prices 50% higher than the European average. Coal accounts for just 13% of the Italian energy mix compared to a European average of 28%.

At its annual congress, Assocarboni's President, Andrea Clavarino, called for the use of more coal in Italy to bring down electricity prices and help boost the competitiveness of Italian manufacturers.

"Coal is not the enemy to fight," said Clavarino in his address to the congress. "Electricity production from coal has an environmental impact in its lifecycle similar to natural gas, taking into account the efficient curb-emissions systems developed in recent years."

Clavarino continued: "Assocarboni thus proposes to use more coal – through the implementation of the best combustion technologies – and renewables, and less gas, which is expensive and has serious supply security issues. Nowadays, coal guarantees low costs and energy security, as reserves are equally distributed across the world, and therefore is, together with renewables, the best combustible to support economic and industrial development across the world, including Italy."

Italy boasts some of the most efficient coal-fired power plants in the world with the Torrealvaldige Nord power plants achieving average efficiency rates of 40% and peak efficiency rates of 46%. As a result, Italian coal-fired power plants emit 25% - 30% less carbon dioxide than less-efficient plants.

Clavarino also pointed to a number of studies that show, when lifetime carbon dioxide emissions are taken into account, shale gas generates higher emissions than coal. "Lawmakers must keep these findings in consideration in the definition of a country's energy policies," Assocarboni concluded.

Edited by Jonathan Rowland.