The U.S. coal industry is one of the worst contributors to global climate disruption, pouring millions of metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere every year. The Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal Campaign is leading the charge to stop the U.S. coal rush and start a clean-energy revolution. Through grassroots activism, partnerships, and litigation, the campaign has helped retire more than 75 coal-burning plants in the United States. In 2011 alone:

- Washington State agreed to become coal-free by 2025.
- The retirement of three different coal plants in Virginia was announced, including the old and outdated GenOn plant right outside of Washington, D.C., which had been polluting the air in our nation’s capital.
- Coal-plant expansions and proposals for new coal plants were defeated in Georgia, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Texas.

Students have been enthusiastic participants in the Beyond Coal movement. In 2011, student-led Campuses Beyond Coal Campaign helped defeat a proposed coal plant at Purdue University, while schools such as Penn State University, Miami University of Ohio, and Western Illinois University announced decisions to phase out coal power. In all, the campaign has already achieved 17 victories on campuses around the country.

While our first priority is to move the U.S. beyond coal, we are also helping communities in other countries who want to stop the destructive practices of the coal industry and move toward a clean energy future. Globally, the coal industry disproportionately harms the poorest and most vulnerable people, while doing little to reduce energy poverty. In country after country, coal companies resort to the same tactics: misleading public-relations campaigns, political maneuvering, and intimidation of local citizens. This past year the Sierra Club’s International Program organized delegations from Appalachia and India to share stories and discuss strategies for mobilizing against the coal industry and its destructive practices.
Stopping coal is not enough. Developing clean-energy solutions is equally important. Solar, wind, and energy efficiency are solutions that keep our water and air clean, lower our dependence on fossil fuels, and generate better, safer jobs for workers. The clean-energy revolution has already taken off, with the wind and solar energy sectors proving that renewable energy can deliver economic growth and good jobs. While the clean-energy sector has grown for a decade, 2011 in particular was a milestone year:

- The solar industry grew by 69 percent, employing more than 100,000 Americans.
- The U.S. wind industry was responsible for more than 35 percent of all new generating capacity during the past four years, more than nuclear and coal combined. The U.S. wind industry also employs more people than the coal mining industry.
- Wind energy in Iowa provides 20 percent of the state’s electricity. Texas now has built enough wind turbines to power 2 million homes.
- California passed a renewable-energy standard of 33 percent by 2020 and a cap-and-trade program, the first of its kind in the United States.

The United States is entering an era in which job creation and environmental and health protections are one and the same. Although the United States federal government has not yet set a renewable-energy standard or signed an international climate agreement, progress toward clean energy is gaining momentum daily, largely due to grassroots pressure. Across the U.S., cities, counties, and states are moving forward with clean-energy programs that save lives, create jobs, and keep our air and water clean.

More information: beyondcoal.org