

Rotting coal stock claims denied

By David Young, Energy Correspondent

Britain's biggest coal user and the National Coal Board have both dismissed claims by miners' union leaders that coal stocks are wasting on the ground.

Suggestions by Mr Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, that as much as 20 per cent of the coal in stock at the power stations has "degraded" to a point where it is unusable because of the time it has been in stockpiles have been denied by the Central Electricity Generating Board.

The Coal Board has also said that little damage has been done to its stocks; more than 21 million tonnes at the pitheads.

The electricity board said: "These claims were first made by Mr Scargill some time ago and if they were true then we would not have any coal left. We still have 20 million tonnes at the power station, enough to last for 22 weeks."

Coal loses 0.5 per cent of its calorific value - the amount of energy it produces - in the first six months of storage through

exposure to air. After that it stabilizes and no further loss occurs.

Spontaneous combustion is the main threat to stocks left on the ground for some time, but the generating board diminishes this threat by stacking coal in comparatively low mounds. The coal is stacked layer by layer to prevent air pockets and is also removed to the furnaces by bulldozers which "shave" the stockpiles in shallow layers.

The board is also confident of stretching its stocks beyond the quoted 22-week period by increasing its oil burn from the normal 8 per cent of output.

Demand for power is also falling off as the weather improves and the days get longer. Almost 1 per cent of power output is saved for every hour later lighting-up time becomes.

The coal board said the only damage to its stocks was that coal at the bottom of the stockpiles was being crushed by the weight from above. "The coal has to be crushed in any case for industrial boilers."

Rotting coal stock claims denied.

By David Young, Energy Correspondent.

The Times (London, England), Tuesday, Apr 17, 1984; pg. 2; Issue 61808. (341 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS34442897