

Transport ministry orders ban on coal export loading

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China's Transport Ministry yesterday ordered ports to temporarily stop loading coal for exports as the country struggles to meet domestic needs amid mounting power shortages.

The coldest winter with the most snow in decades has left millions of Chinese without heating and running water, causing mounting losses from power shortages and other damage.

The Transport Ministry's emergency notice, posted on its Website, ordered railways and other transport networks to make hauling coal and food a priority over coming weeks. Ocean shippers should stop loading coal for export and divert shipments, if needed, "for domestic thermal coal requirements," it said.

It warned of "severe" consequences for failing to comply with the order, to stay in effect through the Lunar New Year holiday in February.

It was unclear the amount of coal shipments that would be affected by the order.

On Wednesday, the economic planning agency ordered the country's utility companies and coal suppliers to cooperate in combatting power shortages that have forced more than a dozen provinces to ration electricity.

Chronic winter time shortfalls of coal, used to fuel three quarters of China's electricity supply, have been aggravated by disruptions to transport networks due to unusually heavy snow.

In some areas, snow has also damaged power grids: storms felled three power transmission towers on Wednesday along a major line of the Three Gorges Dam, disrupting a link in central China's transmission system, Xinhua news agency reported.

Coal shortages have worsened due to friction over prices for coal and electricity. Coal suppliers are pushing for higher prices, while utilities have chafed at caps on electricity rates that prevent them from passing higher costs for coal on to customers.

Source:Shanghai Daily



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