Black lung has been the underlying or contributing cause of death for more than 75,000 coal miners since 1968, according to NIOSH, the federal agency responsible for conducting research on work-related diseases and injuries. Since 1970, the Department of Labor has paid over $44 billion in benefits to miners totally disabled by respiratory diseases (or their survivors). The annual death rate from mining accidents is 20-25 per 100,000, about six times the average industry. If you do the math, that means comes out to about six deaths per thousand workers over the course of a thirty-year career as a miner. This is actually an underestimate because the government figures include office workers employed in the industry.

Miners aren't the only victims. There's also air pollution. Even with the pollution controls in place in developed countries, coal remains deadly. According to a 2011 report of the American lung association, particulate pollution from coal-fired power plants causes about thirteen thousand deaths per year. Indeed, according to the report: "Coal-fired power plants that sell electricity to the grid produce more hazardous air pollution in the U.S. than any other industrial pollution sources."

Of course, things would be much worse if it weren't for EPA. Just look at China, which has done very little to control pollution from power plants. According to a recent study:

Air pollution causes people in northern China to live an average of 5.5 years shorter than their southern counterparts. . . .

High levels of air pollution in northern China – much of it caused by an over-reliance on burning coal for heat – will cause 500 million people to lose an aggregate 2.5 billion years from their lives, the authors predict in the study, published in the journal the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

To put it in as few words as possible: coal kills.