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# "The Impact of the Coal Age on the German Environment: A Review of the Historical Literature"

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Without doubt the transformative moment came in the mid-nineteenth century, when the various German states began shifting from wood to coal as a fuel source to feed the new steam engines coming from Great Britain. The fossil fuel economy impacted Germany more than the rest of continental Europe, largely because Europe's most extensive coal reserves lay under Prussian controlled soil, giving rise to an extraordinarily fast-paced industrial growth in regions such as the Rhineland, Westphalia, and Silesia. Coal mining caused ground depressions, altered the natural hydrology, and pockmarked the land scape. Coal dust, phenol (carbolic acid), and other coal pollutants washed into Germany's rivers and streams. Acid rain from coal burning became a major source of forest death. It was also coal-tar derivatives that produced the first artificial dyes, giving rise to Germany's mammoth chemical plants—Bayer, BASF, Hoechst, AGFA—companies which today are still among the greatest polluters of Germany's environment. All rights reserved. © 1998 The White Horse Press

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