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World wind power leader EU passes 100GW

By Pilita Clark, Environment Correspondent

The EU has cemented its title as the world champion of wind power by passing the milestone of 100 gigawatts of generating capacity installed.

The turbines bestriding the continent's plains and seas can now pump out as much electricity as 39 nuclear power plants – or enough for 57m households.

The new record, announced by the European Wind Energy Association trade body, underlines how quickly wind power has grown in the EU, despite the eurozone crisis and concern about the cost of wind subsidies and turbine-blighted views.

It took almost 20 years to get the first 10GW of wind power connected to the grid in Europe, the EWEA said, but only 13 years to add 90GW. Half the 100GW was installed over the past six years, in line with EU targets to tackle climate change by getting a fifth of the bloc's energy from renewable sources, such as wind and solar farms, by 2020.

“It would require burning 72m tonnes of coal annually in coal-fired power plants to match Europe's annual wind energy production,” said Christian Kjaer, EWEA chief executive. To load that much coal on trains would require 750,000 wagons.

Germany has the most wind power installed, with 29GW, followed by Spain (21GW) and France (6.8GW). Most of this is onshore, but in the fast-growing offshore wind sector, the UK is currently the world leader.