

Responsible Mining

Summary of Comments - July 17, 2024

On July 17, 2024, OurEnergyPolicy hosted a discussion on how best to expand critical mineral mining in an environmentally and socially responsible way. Find the recording [here](#).

SPEAKERS



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Summary of Key Points

- The U.S. Department of the Interior Interagency Working Group on Mining Reform released a report that provides 65 Recommendations to Improve Mining on Public Lands.
- While North America has high standards for mining, there is not a country in the world with laws sufficient to reduce all negative impacts of mining unless mines work above law requirements.
- Without intervention, markets will favor materials produced at the lowest price.
 - Both regulations and incentives are needed to ensure that modern mining is conducted using the most ethical and technologically advanced standards.
- Communities impacted by mining should be involved in the pre-mine planning process and engaged with early and continuously to build trust.
- Modern waste management methods in metals mining support both environmental remediation and recovery of valuable materials.
- Mining companies need to have thorough, proactive, land reclamation plans for when their mines are retired.



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Community Engagement

- Positive community relationships depend on engaging with communities early and including them in the pre-mine planning process.
 - Mining companies should not wait until they begin the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process to engage with community members.
- Abandoned legacy mines have negative impacts on both the environment and the outdated impression of the mining industry they illustrate.
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples describes the need for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent to conduct industrial activity on land significant to indigenous communities. This is also good practice for communities that would be impacted by mining activities.
- Additional practices that should be implemented to support mining communities:
 - Legally binding Good Neighbor agreements.
 - Mining companies providing funds for community leaders to hire independent experts that monitor mining activity and communicate complex data.
 - True profit-sharing with community members.

Environmental Concerns

- Mining produces significant waste, which is the number one concern for potential negative environmental and health impacts.
 - If not managed properly, the toxic elements in this waste can damage ecosystems and public health.
- Modern mining methods that remediate the potential adverse effects of waste tailings include:
 - Reprocessing mining waste to recover more valuable minerals and reduce mass.
 - Dewatering waste to remove excess moisture and reduce hazardousness, then stacking them in dry waste tailings.
 - Securing waste tailings underground away from surface ecosystems.
- To avoid brown sites caused by abandoned mining, all mines in the U.S. are required to have a land reclamation plan, which illustrates how a company will restore the ecosystem surrounding the mine once it is decommissioned.
 - Storing displaced topsoil correctly improves land reclamation effectiveness.
- Modern mining creates potential for Carbon Sequestration.
 - Ultramafic rocks have a natural capacity to bind carbon dioxide.
 - Miners can inject carbon into waste tailings and lock them away underground.