

Water treatment plants, pipelines, and tailings dams can all break at sulfide mines. We need to consider what's at stake if that happens in Minnesota.



Question #2:

Are there strong safeguards in place for when things go wrong?

Why is this an important question? Let's look at some real-life examples:

The Pinto Valley mine, a copper and gold mine in Arizona, has been plagued by tailings dam failures, pipeline breaks, seepage flows, conveyance blockages and storm water overflows from 1989 to the present. In 1997, a tailings dam failed, and 3.4 million gallons of heavy-metal tainted water were released into Pinto Creek, a water body that flows into Roosevelt Lake, one of the area's largest sources of drinking water. In 2010, a storm event caused 5,362 tons of contaminated tailings to spill into Pinto Creek. That same year, heavy rains resulted in another release of mine tailings. In 2001, over 1,000 pounds of sulfuric acid were released when a pipeline broke. The events have led to extensive impacts to surface water quality and fish habitat.

An Earthworks analysis of 14 modern copper mines in five states found that 100% of these mines experienced pipeline spills or other accidental releases. 92% had failures of water collection and treatment systems that resulted in releases of contaminated mine seepage that significantly impacted water quality. 64% had tailings basin spills.

The Tulsequah Chief Mine, a copper mine in British Columbia Canada, closed its water treatment plants in June 2012, citing increasing costs, safety concerns, and unanticipated technical challenges. The action put the mine in violation of its water discharge permit.

If the two PolyMet water treatment plants were to break down and cease working...

- during mining operations: over 6.2 million gallons of polluted water a day will not be treated — and risk being discharged to the surrounding environment. That is the equivalent to the amount of water used by the population of the City of Eden Prairie every day.
- after the mine closes: between 1.5 and 3.5 million gallons of polluted water a day will not be treated — and risk being discharged to the surrounding environment. That is equivalent to the amount of water used by the populations of cities like Red Wing or Roseville every day.

If pipelines carrying polluted waste rock drainage break at the PolyMet mine site...

- water containing high concentrations of metals and sulfates would be released into the environment.

If the PolyMet tailings basin dam fails, or if the water collection system for the tailings basin does not work 100% of the time...

- metals, sulfates and other contaminants would be released into surface waters and groundwater.

Learn more at miningtruth.org

SOURCES:

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