

Minnesota rules require mine sites to be maintenance free when they close. Too often, the task of maintaining old mine sites falls to taxpayers.



Question #3:

Will the company leave the site clean and maintenance free?

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

In 2000, the Gilt Edge Mine, a gold mine in South Dakota, was added to the Superfund list after the Brohm Mining Company became insolvent and the state spent \$1.3 million to prevent the overflow of acidic waste water. Brohm Mining left behind 150 million gallons of acidic waters contaminated with heavy metals and millions of cubic yards of acid-generating waste rock. The site now requires long-term treatment that includes a water treatment plant, drainage collection systems, water diversion structures, the installment of synthetic liners and soil covers, and ongoing monitoring. Emerging problems continue to demand new actions. In 2004, leaks in the diversion ditches were discovered, and new efforts to repair the system had to be undertaken.

If Minnesota's government ignores its own rules that call for mines to be maintenance free at closure, the PolyMet mine project will leave Minnesota with...

- two waste water treatment plants that will need to run and be maintained for hundreds of years.
- 526 acres and over 167 million tons of reactive waste rock left on the surface. Surrounding this is a system to collect contaminated water seepage that must be monitored and maintained. A synthetic and soil cover will be placed over the waste rock requiring annual maintenance, repairing of erosion, and removal of deep-rooted woody plants that might perforate the synthetic material.
- a pit "lake" whose water levels will need to be maintained through pumping to prevent contaminated overflows into the nearby Partridge River.
- a tailings basin pond whose water levels will need to be maintained through pumping to prevent contamination over-topping the dams and entering the nearby Embarrass River. Surrounding the tailings basin is a seepage water collection system that will need to be monitored and maintained.
- a lengthy network of pipelines at the mine and tailings basin sites, conveying untreated and treated water that will need to be monitored and maintained.

Learn more at miningtruth.org

SOURCES:

Minnesota Administrative Rules 6132.3200. Closure and Postclosure Maintenance. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/rules/?id=6132.3200>

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The Pew Campaign for Responsible Mining. January, 2009. Hardrock Mining in the West: The pollution persists. <http://www.pewenvironment.org/news-room/other-resources/hardrock-mining-in-the-west-the-pollution-persists-85899366301>

U.S. EPA. Updated July 2012. Gilt Edge Mine. <http://www2.epa.gov/region8/gilt-edge-mine>