

Appalachia: A National Energy Sacrifice Zone for Cheap Short-Term Power???

What is Mountaintop Removal?

Mountaintop Removal (MTR) is the strip mining practice of blasting off the tops of mountains so that huge machines can mine thin seams of coal. First the mountainsides are razed of plant material. Holes are drilled, explosive charges are set, and a layer of mountain is blown apart. Coal is separated out from the debris that is shoved into nearby valleys and streams burying the waterways forever (Valley Fill). The practice is prevalent in southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and adjacent areas of Virginia and Tennessee.

What are Dangers?

Coal destined for power plant generation is washed with a chemically-enhanced water process. The liquid waste is typically pumped up into huge Slurry Impoundments built into mountain hollows with earthen dams. Many of these impoundments hold multiple billions of gallons of sludge laden with lead, arsenic, mercury, copper, chromium and other toxins. Another practice of slurry disposal is injection into the ground, typically in abandoned underground mines. Severe well-water contamination is present in certain areas close to injected slurry, resulting in widespread health problems within the populace.



Photo by Vivian Stockman, Oct. 19, 2003

Quick Facts

More than **1000 square miles of mountains** have been destroyed in Appalachia.

Over **1200 miles of streams** have been permitted to be buried under valley fills in West Virginia alone. Hundreds of miles of streams have been polluted with heavy metals and acid mine damage.

Flooding due to runoff from MTR sites is causing widespread property damage and loss of life.

At present there are 45 **Slurry Impoundments** in West Virginia that are considered at high risk for failure; 32 are at moderate risk. (www.appvoices.org)

3 million pounds of explosives are used against West Virginia mountains every working day...more than any place in the United States.

Property values have decreased as much as 90% due to damage from blasting and coal dust.

Miners have been replaced with heavy machinery. In 1950 there were 125,000 miners in West Virginia. Today there are 15,000.

The majority of efforts to stop MTR and make communities safer are initiatives of **local residents** who have lived there for generations.



Marsh Fork Elementary School; photo: Vivian Stockman

The National Religious Coalition on Creation Care

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Religious Declarations on Mountaintop Removal Coal Extraction

West Virginia Council of Churches is 14 member denominations of Catholic, African-American, Orthodox, and Protestant bodies. Excerpts from their 2007 statement follows:

As people of faith, called upon by our covenant with God and each other to safeguard and care deeply for what God has created, we cannot stand by while our mountains are being devastated. The destruction caused by mountain top removal mining, as presently practiced, is unprecedented and permanent.

We have, in the past, called for the strictest possible enforcement of SMCRA and the Clean Water Act. We strongly renew that call for enforcement, believing that if the law is fully enforced, the terrible damage of large-scale mountaintop removal will end.

We still observe that the areas of our state in which coal mining has been the primary occupation remain among the poorest and have the least-diversified economies in the state. Mining families deserve our support and help in making a secure, just economic transition. We urgently request that state leaders and our Congressional delegation work diligently toward economic diversification for our state.

We are also called upon to support others in the coalfield communities whose health is being harmed, and whose ancestral homes are being destroyed, disrupted and devalued.

Psalms 24:1 reminds us that “The Earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; and the world, and they that dwell therein.” According to Genesis 2:15, humans have been made stewards of all that God has made. We are called to be responsible and faithful in caring for all that God has faithfully given.

<http://www.wvcc.org/docs/MountainTopRemovalResolution2007.pdf>

Members of The West Virginia Council of Churches are regional bodies of the following denominations:

The African Methodist Episcopal Church; The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; American Baptist Churches USA; Antiochian Orthodox Christian; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Church of the Brethren; The Episcopal Church, USA; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; Presbyterian Church (USA); Roman Catholic Church; The Salvation Army; United Church of Christ; United Methodist Church.

Churches and Synagogues that have passed resolutions against Mountaintop Removal

The United Methodist Church

The Presbyterian Church (USA)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Religious Society of Friends

Unitarian Universalist Association

The Episcopal Church

Episcopal Dioceses in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Southern Ohio, North Carolina and Southwestern Virginia

Commission on Religion in Appalachia (19 different Christian denominations)

The West Virginia Council of Churches (14 different Christian denominations)

Catholic Committee of Appalachia (headquarters in Charleston, WV)

Congregation B’Nai Isreal (Charleston, WV)

Episcopal Appalachian Ministries (headquarters in Knoxville, TN)

The Mennonite Church (Statement)

West Virginia United Methodists

West Virginia Presbyterians

Baha’is of West Virginia

www.ilovemountains.org/resolutions

www.ohvec.org/temp/ch_syn_against_mtr.pdf

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