

Mining in Nevada

Environmental and Community Impacts

May 2009

Nevada's gold mining industry is a leading producer of gold worldwide. But that industry has had dramatic and long-lasting impacts on the air and land, as well as on subterranean aquifers increasingly critical to one of the nation's driest states.

Mercury emissions, acid mine drainage, processing chemicals, and other assorted pollutants plague the industry. Mercury regulations established a few years ago have succeeded in reducing some airborne mercury, but critics say that program lacks teeth. Abandoned mine sites, meanwhile, present expensive clean-up challenges.

Environmental problems attend all mining operations. Their exact natures are often dictated by the unique compositions of the ores being extracted, the size of the operation, and the type of environment in which they are located. Alaska faces its own set of environmental difficulties where gold and other metals are or will be mined.

Here are some of the concerns confronting Nevada:

- Nevada produces eight of every 10 ounces of gold mined in the U.S., making it the third leading gold producing region in the world. [Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology](#)
- Aggressive pumping to drain deep-pit Nevada mines is lowering the water table in northern Nevada, in an area extending well over 100 square miles. [New York Times](#)
- Government scientists estimate replenishing the groundwater could take 200 years or more. [New York Times](#)
- The Jerritt Canyon Mine, owned by an Anglo American subsidiary until 2003, has polluted neighboring streams and groundwater. <http://www.adn.com/opinion/story/600727.html>
- Northern Nevada gold mines are a significant source of mercury air emissions. [EPA](#)
- Mercury is a toxic, persistent and bio-accumulative pollutant that affects the nervous system of humans and wildlife. [EPA](#)
- The Yerington open pit copper mine, abandoned in 2000, has contaminated drinking water supplies for the Yerington Paiute Tribe and other residents. More than 175 homes rely on bottled water. [Yerington](#)

- Many of the pit lakes created by large open pit metal mines in Nevada are contaminated at levels that are potentially harmful to aquatic life, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. [Pit Mine Hazards](#)