

Congress considers solutions as mining track record demands stronger oversight & more cleanup funding

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Earthworks * Great Basin Resource Watch

PRESS RELEASE: 20 July 2017

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New Study: 74% of U.S. gold mines pollute water

As Congress considers 'innovative' mining reform, industry's track record demands stronger environmental oversight & cleanup funding

Washington, D.C., July 20 -- A [new study](#) of U.S. gold mines' operating records reveals that major gold mines surveyed by the United States Geological Survey have spilled contaminants, and 74% polluted water with cyanide, arsenic, nitrates or other hazardous materials. Earthworks and Great Basin Resource Watch released [U.S. Gold Mines: Spills & Failures Report](#) the same day the House Natural Resources Committee [holds an oversight hearing on mining reform](#).

“Our report shows that even when conditions are more favorable to mining, as in Nevada with very little precipitation and generally a low water table, water pollution is still a problem at the vast majority of major gold mines operating today,” said John Hadder of Nevada-based Great Basin Resource Watch. He continued, “The public needs real mining reform to prevent degradation of clean water by

mining operations past, present, and future.”

[U.S. Gold Mines: Spills & Failures Report](#) surveys federal and state data and news reports to compile operating records of 27 operating U.S. gold mines accounting for 93% of national gold production [according to the United States Geological Survey](#). The study shows:

- Gold mines always spill -- Gold mines responsible for 93% of U.S. gold production have accidentally spilled cyanide, mine waste, diesel, or other hazardous materials.
- Gold mines almost always pollute water -- 74% of operating gold mines polluted surface and/or groundwater, including drinking water
- When gold mines don't pollute water, it's almost always because there's no water nearby -- of the mines that didn't pollute water, only one had a perennial stream in the project area.

As the Energy & Minerals Resources subcommittee holds a hearing on [“Seeking Innovative Solutions for the Future of Hardrock Mining”](#), the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that more than 40% of the headwaters of western watershed are polluted by hardrock mining, and abandoned hardrock mining reclamation will cost taxpayers more than \$50 billion. And a 2012 study shows that [92% of U.S. copper mines pollute water](#).

“The ‘innovative’ solution we need for hardrock mining is simple,” said Earthworks Policy Director Lauren Pagel. She continued, “We need mining reform that prevents pollution, forces companies to pay to clean up when pollution occurs

anyway, and gives communities a say as to whether and how mining occurs. Right now, hardrock mining is treated like a sacred cow relative to other industries.”

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For more information:

- U.S. Gold Mines Spills & Failures: <https://www.earthworksaction.org/USgoldMiningFailuresReport>
- House Natural Resources subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources oversight hearing on “[Seeking Innovative Solutions for the Future of Hardrock Mining](https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=402489)” <https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=402489>
- Earthworks’ testimony: https://www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/earthworks_testimony_at_seeking_innovative_solutions_for_the_future_of_hard
- U.S. Copper Porphyry Mines: https://www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/us_copper_porphyry_mines

**** Earthworks is dedicated to protecting communities and the environment from the adverse impacts of mineral and energy development while seeking sustainable solutions.*

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