



WHAT IS MOUNTAINTOP-REMOVAL COAL MINING?

Mountaintop-removal coal mining is exactly what it sounds like: mining companies blow up ancient, forested mountains to extract the underlying coal. They dump the mining waste into adjacent valleys—turning wild mountains into polluted wastelands, destroying watersheds, and severely harming nearby communities. Mountaintop-removal is prevalent in the Appalachian states of Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia.

THE HUMAN COST OF MOUNTAINTOP-REMOVAL MINING

Since 2007 numerous peer-reviewed studies have documented the incredibly dangerous effects that mountaintop-removal coal mining has on communities. Here are just some of the startling facts:

- Cancer rates are 5 percent higher near mountaintop-removal sites.
- Birth defects are 42 percent more likely in children born in mountaintop-removal areas.
- Life expectancy in mountaintop-removal affected counties is up to 1.5 years shorter.
- Over the course of their lives, people in mountaintop-removal regions have an average of 1,404 more unhealthy days more than the average American (nearly four years).

“THESE COMPANIES COME IN AND BLOW APART OUR LAND FOR PROFIT, AND MEANWHILE... COMMUNITIES ARE TORN APART BY POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT. THE PEOPLE HERE ARE TREATED LIKE THEIR LAND DOESN'T MATTER, LIKE THEIR LIVES DON'T MATTER.”

Ann League,
activist in Campbell County, Tennessee,
for Save Our Cumberland Mountains

- Poverty rates, especially child poverty rates, are far higher in mountaintop-removal affected areas than in other places in the United States.
- Black lung cases among coal miners have quadrupled since the 1980s.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF MOUNTAINTOP-REMOVAL MINING

Mountaintop-removal is extremely destructive. After clear-cutting the forests, mining companies push millions of tons of waste rock and top soil into the valleys below, permanently burying streams. Many of these mined areas are also the source of drinking water for millions of people. Over 500 mountains in Appalachia have been destroyed.

This devastating practice poisons drinking water, lays waste to wildlife habitat, increases the risk of floods, and endangers local communities. In a 2005 environmental impact statement, the Environmental Protection Agency found that mountaintop-removal mining had already:

- Destroyed 7 percent of Appalachian forests.
- Buried or contaminated more than 2,000 miles of streams.
- Destroyed 8,000 square miles of mountaintops, an area the size of Delaware.
- Deeply endangered one of the most bio-diverse ecosystems in the world, threatening more than 240 species.
- Pumped millions of gallons of heavy metals and other pollutants into local rivers, lakes, and streams that



local communities, and millions of others, rely on for clean drinking water.

- Contaminated thousands of miles of streams with selenium and other pollutants that deform and cause reproductive failure in fish and that have put Appalachian waterways on the brink of collapse.

The study went on to report that mountaintop-removal coal mining could ultimately destroy more than 1.4 million acres of forested mountains. Unless we act now, a total of 2,200 square miles of Appalachia will be devastated.

PUTTING AN END TO MOUNTAINTOP-REMOVAL COAL MINING

Working together, we can end destructive mountaintop-removal coal mining and stop big energy companies from walking away with billions in profit — while leaving

“AT 40 YEARS OLD, I CAN THINK OF TEN COMMUNITIES IN BOONE COUNTY [WEST VIRGINIA] THAT HAVE LITERALLY BEEN DESTROYED. I’VE SEEN THE ELDERS WITH TEARS RUNNING DOWN THEIR FACES, KNOWING THEIR HOMES ARE GONE.”

Maria Gunnoe,
resident of southern West Virginia and organizer
for the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition

behind valleys and streams filled with mining rubble. Too many communities in Appalachia have already paid a heavy price in polluted drinking water, flooded towns, damaged homes, and lives.

ALTERNATIVES TO COAL

The U.S. Department of Energy has found that the Appalachian region has extensive wind energy resources. In fact, West Virginia has already started investing in wind power. However, as mountaintop-removal destroys peaks and ridges, it also destroys the wind potential of those areas. People in Appalachia deserve clean energy sources that provide them with safe, good paying jobs that contribute to their communities.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- **Learn more** about mountaintop-removal coal mining and take action: www.sierraclub.org/MtR
- **Join the Sierra Club Coal Campaign.** You can sign up here. If you live in a state affected by mountaintop-removal coal mining, contact your local Sierra Club Chapter: www.sierraclub.org/chapters/
- **Learn more** [about environmental justice.](#)
- **Discover your personal connection** to mountaintop-removal by entering your zip code at www.ilovemountains.org
- **Write a letter** about mountaintop-removal coal mining to your local newspaper and urge that we move beyond coal to a cleaner, safer energy future.

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