



Women's Mining Coalition Witnesses **How Permitting Delays Cost Americans Jobs**

Background

The United States already has one of the longest permitting processes in the world for energy and mineral development. "Permitting delays in the United States are the most significant risk to mining projects. The United States is ranked next to lowest due to the average 5-year to 7-year period required before mine development can commence," According to Behre Dolbear's analysis, "Where Not to Invest, 2009." Since mining is a capital-intensive process, investment dollars for mineral exploration and development tend to flow to countries where investors are likely to get the earliest return on their investment. The uncertainties regarding length of time for approval of mining activities has contributed to an all-time low amount of mineral exploration dollars being invested in the United States and to increased reliance on foreign supplies of minerals.

An Avoidable Bureaucratic Roadblock

One avoidable source of delay is the Department of the Interior's policy for processing certain administrative notices under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for mining operations. This "clearance process" for NEPA Federal Register notices, requiring notice to be sent from state offices to D.C. to undergo 14 separate levels of review within DOI, needlessly adds months to the permit process. (See attached chart.) Delays were exacerbated further by a December 2009 decision to eliminate the categories of routine notices that were previously exempt from review.

Agency Resources

Delays can also be attributed to the strained resources of the agencies responsible for permit approvals. For example, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service are facing ever-growing responsibilities and obligations to process the notices and plans of operation necessary for domestic mineral and energy development projects while simultaneously facing retirements of their most knowledgeable personnel. Additional funding is imperative to lessen this backlog of notices and plans of operation.

Delays Cost Jobs

At a time when job creation is the nation's top priority, it is imperative that we use an efficient and timely permitting process for energy and mineral development rather than creating unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. Delays in processing mining permits have impacts far beyond any particular mining project. Delays impact investment; lack of investment results in less exploration; less exploration results in less development of domestic resources; less development of domestic resources leads to greater reliance on **foreign sources, creating a greater reliance on foreign sources, thus impacting our economic and national security and eliminating jobs.** According to a 2010 U.S. Geological Survey report, America is now 100 percent reliant on foreign sources of 19 mineral commodities, many of which have no substitute in developing green energy, and more than 50 percent reliant on an additional 38 mineral commodities.