

Anti-mining activists neglect facts in rhetoric

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Julian Martin's Nov. 19 column, "Coal industry can't be trusted to be responsible," typifies the rhetoric and misinformation that anti-mining activists use to advance their cause. Instead, let's stick to the facts.

Fact: Surface mining is highly regulated by both the state and federal governments. Before receiving mining permits, coal producers must provide regulatory agencies with extensive and highly detailed mining plans that explain every facet of the mine's operation, its environmental impact and plans for reclaiming the land after mining is completed. Sizeable bonds are posted to assure reclamation. Regulators inspect mining sites to ensure coal operators are adhering to environmental and reclamation standards. If those standards are violated, regulators will issue notices of violation that result in fines to the operator or (for serious infractions) even closure of the mine.

Fact: No one denies that the surface is disturbed during the mining process. However, the pictures that the anti-mining forces show to bolster their case reflect active excavation of the mine area -- not reclaimed mine lands.

This practice is as deceptive as showing pictures of an airport, shopping center or highway construction job during active excavation and decrying the project as ugly and environmentally destructive. These extremists know very well that mining companies must meet rigorous regulatory standards for land restoration, drainage control and tree growth as mining of each area is completed, but they choose to tell only half the story.

Fact: Many reclaimed surface mining sites are productively used for farming, industrial parks, prisons, schools, housing subdivisions, airports and recreational activities -- beneficial uses that are not otherwise practical due to the scarcity of flat land in Appalachia. Other reclaimed mining sites support thriving populations of deer, elk, bear, turkey and other wildlife that feed on vegetation growing on the land. Mining companies, including my own employer, are instrumental in the efforts to reintroduce the near-extinct American chestnut tree and honey bee colonies at reclaimed surface mining sites in Appalachia.

Fact: Mining companies do not dump "toxic waste" to create valley fills. Rather, valley fills are merely storage for the natural dirt and rock that cover the coal seam. Moreover, the streams that are impacted by valley fills are typically gulleys or small head-of-hollow indentions that are dry except during rain events or snow melts.

Fact: These fills are necessary and essential for both surface and deep mines. The extremists say they are only against surface mining, but if their goals are met, they will succeed in stopping all mining, including deep mining.

Anti-mining activists such as Mr. Martin would like to see the total elimination of coal mining in Appalachia, which would result in the elimination of thousands of good-paying mining and related jobs. The devastating economic impact on the counties, state and even our nation if these anti-mining efforts are successful is unimaginable. And that's a fact.

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