



5 Foremost Pros And Cons of Mountaintop Removal

Aug 25, 2015 by Crystal Ayres

If you live in the United States and/or are familiar with modern mining methods, you've probably heard about mountaintop removal mining. MTR, as it's commonly called, is the process of removing the land on the summit of a mountain to get to the coal seams underneath. When using this technique, coal companies first clear trees and vegetation from the mountain. Once this is done, they use millions of pounds of explosives to remove 400 to 600 vertical feet of mountain soil. When the coal seams are exposed, they remove the coal using giant earth-moving machines and bring it to a coal processing plant.

Mountaintop removal is praised by proponents because it's more effective and less expensive compared to other methods. However, it's also heavily criticized by detractors because it's believed to be harmful to the environment. To gain a deeper understanding about this topic, you need to learn more about the pros and cons of MTR.

TEDxYouth@IsaacDickson | Helen | Mou...



List of Pros of Mountaintop Removal

1. It's cheaper than other mining methods.

At first glance, mountaintop removal might seem expensive. Explosives, for one thing, aren't exactly cheap, especially since millions of pounds are needed for a single mountain. The earth-moving machines used in digging up coal are also pricey, with some costing approximately \$100 million.

Despite these costs, MTR is still greatly favored by coal companies because it reduces the need for hiring additional workers. This means they won't have to pay salaries every month and provide benefits like health insurance (which can be costly considering the dangerous nature of their work) and paid vacation time. They can also minimize the chances of dealing with the sky-high expenses, legal complications and PR challenges, which will inevitably arise if their workers would suffer injuries or even die because of mining accidents.

2. It's more efficient compared other strategies.

According to its proponents, mountaintop removal is one of the most superior forms of mining. This comes from the fact that, in certain geologic situations, it allows people to access thin seams of coal that wouldn't have

been accessible if traditional underground mining methods were used. It also helps the coal industry save more time; obviously, blasting away hundreds of feet of soil and digging up coal using powerful machines require less man-hours than drilling a tunnel through a mountain, lowering people from the surface down to the tunnel and bringing mined coal from the tunnel up to the surface.

Coal companies also argue that MTR is safer for miners since they no longer have to go underground, where they can be injured because of landslides, tunnel cave-ins and other accidents.

3. It helps keep energy crises at bay.

Because of the petroleum crises in the 1970s as well as the increasing number of home appliances and personal gadgets in American households, there has been a rising demand for coal in the U.S. This is evident in the fact that almost 50 percent of the electricity that's generated in the country is produced by coal power plants.

Because of this, coal companies are pressured to find a cost-effective and less time-consuming way of obtaining coal. One of the solutions they explore is mountaintop removal. MTR cannot be yet considered a major contributor to energy generation in the U.S. (as of 2001, it accounted for only less than five percent of coal production in the country). However, it's a huge contributor in certain regions; in West Virginia, for example, 30 percent of the coal mined in the state in 2006 was provided by mountaintop removal.

The Human and Environmental Costs of our Hunger for Coal: Antrim ...



List of Cons of Mountaintop Removal

1. It can harm the environment.

Detractors of mountaintop removal argue that it has a huge negative effect on the environment. For one thing, it introduces large transport trucks into the area, which can bring about air pollution and destroy the natural terrain. It also introduces explosives, which can cause noise pollution and frighten (and even physically harm) birds and other animals.

One of the biggest effects of MTR is the damage it does on natural waterways. After blasting soil on the mountain, coal companies have to remove the debris to gain access to the coal seams underneath. They usually dump the soil — usually along with toxic mining byproducts — into nearby valleys, burying any streams that might be present in the area. This became legal in 2001, when the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Army Corps of Engineers made changes in the U.S. Clean Air Act and included mining debris in the materials that can be deposited into valley streams. The Bush administration took things further by allowing mining companies to dump their waste materials (including dirt and rock) into headwater waterways, i.e. the source of rivers and streams.

Despite being legal, depositing soil and other mining byproducts into waterways can be incredibly harmful to the environment. The EPA studied streams near valleys filled with mountaintop removal mining waste, and they found that these streams had higher levels of minerals in water. One example of such minerals is selenium which, in high concentrations, has toxic effects to both humans and animals. The streams also had less aquatic biodiversity compared to waterways that were not exposed to mining byproducts.

Another negative impact of mountaintop removal is its alteration of the site's natural geologic structure. For starters, it leads to the removal of trees and other plants that aren't only homes to animals but also help in controlling floods and reducing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Even if coal companies reclaim the mountain and try to replicate its original structure, they cannot completely revert the area to its natural state. Reclaimed soil usually have low organic content, nutrient content and water infiltration rate, which means they're not really good at supporting plant life compared to natural soil. This is one of the reasons why it takes hundreds of years before forests in MTR sites can reestablish themselves

2. It exposes people to health and safety hazards.

Coal companies argue that mountaintop removal is safer for miners because, as mentioned above, they don't spend all their time underground and get exposed to tunnel cave-ins and other accidents. However, MTR is still dangerous because explosives are used; when faulty or misused, they can cause serious injuries to workers and even lead to deaths.

The techniques used in mountaintop removal are harmful not just to miners but also to the people who live near the area. Blasting soil can expel rocks into the air, which can land on private properties nearby and injure the people who live in them. Airborne dust from MTR sites, as well as the waterways that are filled with mining waste, can contain sulfur compounds as well as other dangerous chemicals that can affect human health.

This is most likely why many people who live near mountaintop removal mining areas have more health problems than those who don't. Studies have found that residents near MTR sites experience hypertension, lung cancer and chronic lung, heart and kidney disease (among other types of illnesses) at a higher rate.

Conclusion

Mountaintop removal has both advantages and disadvantages. The key here is to continue the discussion in hopes that, one day, the government, coal companies and residents in mining areas can enjoy the pros without experiencing a lot of the cons.



About the Author of this Blog Post

Crystal Ayres has served as our editor-in-chief for the last five years. She is a proud veteran, wife and mother. The goal of ConnectUs is to publish compelling content that addresses some of the biggest issues the world faces. If you would like to reach out to contact Crystal, then go here to [send her a message](#).

📁 Environment

📁 Negatives and Positives, Opposing Viewpoints

< 9 Fundamental Pros and Cons of Horse Slaughter

> 10 Far-Reaching Pros and Cons of Food Irradiation

RECENT POSTS

[9 Powerful Catholic Prayers Asking for Forgiveness](#)

[15 Advantages and Disadvantages of Federalism](#)

[11 Powerful Prayers for the Incarcerated](#)

[14 Biggest Advantages and Disadvantages of Fast Food](#)

[11 Opening and Closing Prayers for Annual Church Meetings](#)

[9 Uplifting Catholic Prayers for Grief and Loss](#)

[20 Factory Farming Advantages and Disadvantages](#)

[9 Strong Catholic Prayers for Bullying](#)

[11 Powerful Catholic Prayers for Baseball Players](#)

[17 Advantages and Disadvantages of Experimental Research Method in Psychology](#)

RECENT POSTS

[9 Powerful Catholic Prayers Asking for Forgiveness](#)

[15 Advantages and Disadvantages of Federalism](#)

[11 Powerful Prayers for the Incarcerated](#)

[14 Biggest Advantages and Disadvantages of Fast Food](#)

[11 Opening and Closing Prayers for Annual Church Meetings](#)

CATEGORIES

[Bible Verses](#)

[Climate Change](#)

[Development](#)

[Economy](#)

[Education](#)

[Environment](#)

[Human Rights](#)

[National Security](#)

[Policy](#)

[Prayers](#)

[Pros and Cons](#)

[U.S. Foreign Policy](#)

ARCHIVES

SELECT MONTH



[HOME](#) [PRIVACY POLICY](#) [CONTACT US](#)

© 2019 CONNECTUSFUND

EXCLUSIVE MEMBER OF MEDIAVINE HOME