



## Utah Approves Expansion of Important Copper Mine

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After two public hearings and an extended comment period, the Utah Air Quality Board has approved emissions increases for long-term mining at Kennecott Utah Copper's Bingham Canyon mine. During the process, Kennecott was able to overcome objections from environmental activists who claimed mining causes too much air pollution.

### **Bolstering Utah's Economy**

The Kennecott mine, located about 35 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, is one of the world's largest open pit copper mines. In June, Utah regulators signed off on a permit that allows increased emissions from dust.

The expansion is an important milestone for Kennecott, which can now actively pursue about two dozen other permits related to the mine's expansion. One of the major hurdles involves permitting for conversion of a coal-fired power plant to natural gas.

Expansion includes widening the mine by about 1,000 feet and deepening it by another 300 feet. The amount of rock mined would jump from 197 million tons to 260 million tons, resulting in about a 15 percent increase in pollutants from dust. Because of the permit for increased emissions of dust, Kennecott will be able to extend the life of the mine until 2028.

The mine has been in existence for 108 years and produces more than 25 percent of the country's copper and about 7 percent of the nation's gold and silver. Kennecott officials say the project would pump \$1 billion into the local economy and add more than 14,000 jobs.

### **Surpassing Federal Air Standards**

As a condition of the mine expansion, Utah's Division of Air Quality is imposing strict air quality monitoring and setting pollution levels stricter than federal standards.

Even with the expansion, the dust levels will be below federal safety levels. Dust retention requirements and increased onsite monitoring should ensure that overall dust levels, even if they increase at the mine itself, won't have a downwind effect. Also, because of other changes at the mine, overall pollution levels will fall, explained H. Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow at the National Center for Policy Analysis.

"This is a win-win for the mine and for the environment," Burnett said. "The only people who are unhappy are rabid environmental activists who want to shut down virtually all economic activity in the West so they can have it for their own personal playground. West Coast environmental activists want to shut down jobs and a way of life for the mining communities in the West because they want to be able to go skiing in Utah or hiking in Montana" without encountering any signs of economic development.

"Utah's environmental regulators have gone above and beyond what the law requires to make sure there's no environmental impact or harm to humans," said Burnett.

### **Corporate Responsibility**

Derek Monson, manager of public policy at the Utah-based Sutherland Institute, said Kennecott has tried very hard to comply with environmental regulations.

"A lot of the pollution is beyond Kennecott's control. The mine is up on a mountain that sits on top of a valley. There are lots of inversions where the weather patterns are right and a cloud of smog hangs over the entire Salt Lake Valley," he explained. "Kennecott is doing what it can to lessen pollution, but sometimes it kicks over and hangs over the valley. Most people here realize that this is just a function of the way the valley is situated. They know it's not going to go away, that it's just a fact of life."

Monson said the Salt Lake Valley community generally considers Kennecott an environmentally conscious company.

"Kennecott wants to be involved in the community and not be perceived as some corporation that despoils the environment and doesn't do anything about it," Monson said.

Kennecott spokesperson Jana Kettering explained that Kennecott is reducing its air emissions in many ways.

"Kennecott is proposing to convert the majority of the onsite, coal-fired power plant to a combined-cycle natural gas operation while dramatically reducing emissions, generating additional power and nearly doubling the efficiency rating," said Kettering.

"KUC regularly engages with stakeholders, including elected officials, community and business leaders, and environmental organizations. ... In the end, the proposed solution for Kennecott will benefit the environment, the community and the economy," Kettering explained.

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