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For more information, please contact:  
Pam Miller, ACAT, 907-222-7714  
Steve D'Esposito, Earthworks,  
202-887-1872 x203

## **EPA CITES ALASKA, RED DOG MINE AS NATION'S BIGGEST POLLUTER**

### ***Mining Industry Tops List of Polluters, Red Dog is Biggest Source of Toxic Waste***

*Anchorage* – Today the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its 2002 Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), an annual compendium of toxic chemicals released by all industries in the United States. Multinational companies that mine metals and minerals—such as gold, silver and zinc—produce more toxic waste than any other industry in the country, according to the TRI data. **The Red Dog mine in the northwest Arctic is the U.S.' largest toxic polluter** (481.6 million pounds). The Greens Creek mine outside of Juneau (37.1 million pounds) ranked second in Alaska, and the Fort Knox gold mine, located 25 miles northeast of Fairbanks, ranked third (4.5 million pounds).

**According to the EPA, Alaska ranked first in the nation for the largest total releases of chemicals in 2002, with 545.5 million pounds of toxics coming from the mining industry.** The hardrock mining industry is the nation's largest toxic polluter: it released 1.3 billion pounds or 27% of all toxics released by U.S. industry.

This report discloses that the mining industry is Alaska's largest toxic threat. The hardrock mining industry releases toxins (lead, mercury, zinc, copper, heavy metals etc.) that poison Alaska's land, air, and water. Mine waste often leaches acidic solutions of toxic heavy metals such as arsenic, lead and cadmium into surface and ground waters. According to the EPA, 40% of the headwaters of western watersheds are polluted by mining.

Despite the large amounts of toxic releases reported, these numbers do not represent the full amount of pollution released into the environment by the mining industry. Since the mining industry was required to report its toxic releases in 1997, mining companies have successfully attempted to get out of their reporting requirements through various court cases.

“The full extent of pollution caused by the mining industry in Alaska is important for us to know, so that we can protect the people living nearby and the natural resources surrounding our mine sites,” said Pam Miller, executive director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics, noting that the lead dust emissions from Red Dog had increased over the past year. “Mining corporations need to be held accountable and protect our communities and land from mining's ill effects.”

“These companies are running renegade over the public's right to know what toxic waste is dumped in their communities,” said Steve D'Esposito, President of Earthworks, “Mining companies are exposing communities and water supplies to contaminants like lead, mercury and arsenic, and some of them don't want anyone to know.”

In 1999, Barrick Gold (the 3rd largest gold producer in the world) sued to limit the public's right to know about toxic mining pollution. In April 2003, the Court agreed with Barrick on one of its legal arguments, ruling that mining companies do not have to report toxics contained within waste rock if the toxics fall below a certain "de minimis" concentration. **Because of this court decision, this years reporting is significantly lower than last year.**

As part of the regulations that guide TRI reporting, the EPA established a reporting exemption, known as "de minimis," for minute concentrations of toxics that are deemed to constitute no threat to the environment or to public health. Including toxics within waste rock under the "de minimis" exemption violates the spirit of the exemption. Even small concentrations of toxics add up quickly when dumped in prodigious quantities. Last year's TRI data showed the mining industry released nearly 3 billion pounds of toxic chemicals into the environment - Earthworks believes that a significant percentage represents toxic chemicals discharged in waste rock.

"The waste rock at Red Dog is not benign," said Miller. "The native community living near Red Dog gets its food from the surrounding area and needs to know what pollutants are coming from the mine."

The EPA has said that it plans to write a new rule clarifying reporting obligations as a result of these lawsuits. However, until then, the mining industry is doing communities affected by its toxic releases a great disservice by not reporting all the necessary information.

The TRI program was created in 1986 under the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA) in response to the toxic gas leaks in Bhopal, India and West Virginia. The purpose of the program is to provide citizens with vital information about the existence and the characteristics of pollutants produced or released into the environment in their communities.

The billions of pounds of toxics released by today's hardrock mines highlight the flaws inherent in the General Mining Law, which has remained virtually unchanged since it was first passed in 1872 and which contains no environmental safeguards.

TRI data can be obtained by visiting the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory Web site at [www.epa.gov/tri/](http://www.epa.gov/tri/). Data contained in this year's TRI report pertain to toxic releases that occurred in 2002. For more information on the two industry lawsuits, please visit: [http://www.earthworksaction.org/ewa/TRI\\_industry.cfm](http://www.earthworksaction.org/ewa/TRI_industry.cfm)

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