

USCMA 2004 Resolution

A Mission Response to the Devastation Caused by Mountain Top Removal Coal Mining

“The sanctity and sacredness of all life and the natural environment created by God should not be destroyed in the name of corporate profit.”

- Catholic Committee of Appalachia

Let it be resolved that:

We as Catholic missionaries realize that we have a moral responsibility to call for comprehensive action to prevent more harm to communities and the environment and to provide assistance to those already adversely affected by this destructive practice.

Rationale:

Mountaintop removal mining (henceforth MTRM), takes place in many states in the Appalachian region. This area is among the most biologically diverse temperate forests on the planet. In the process of MTRM, entire peaks, hillsides, and mountaintops are blasted off in order to reach coal that lies underneath. The resulting tons of waste rock, dirt, and vegetation are then dumped into nearby valleys and streams. These valley-fills bury streams and aquatic habitat under piles of rubble hundreds of feet high, disrupting nearby communities, and destroying the entire surrounding ecosystem.

Many communities have experienced overwhelming floods, destruction of their homes, ruined water wells and severe health problems due to spills from sludge impoundments, air pollution and falling debris. Entire communities have been displaced as homes get in the way of 20-story-high draglines. Coal companies claim they are acting within the law and providing jobs, but with dynamite technology the number of jobs are many fewer than 20 years ago and are temporary, non-union positions. Also, the destruction to people, especially the poor, and the environment is indisputable. There are socially and ecologically responsible extraction techniques available. MTRM is not the only method, but it does provide a bigger profit.

An Environmental Impact Statement released in May 2003 found that mountaintop removal permanently damages the environment - over 1200 miles of streams have been damaged or destroyed, and pre-mining forest conditions, including impacts to the wildlife they support, may not return for generations, if not thousands of years.

However, the current administration's recommendations accompanying these findings suggest ways to expedite the permitting process to allow MTRM to continue at an accelerated rate. For the past three years, the administration has repealed or proposed repealing a number of longstanding environmental laws designed to protect communities and the environment. First, in May 2002, the administration repealed a 25-year-old Clean Water Act regulation that prohibited industries from burying streams, wetlands, and other waters with their wastes. Then, in January 2004, the administration proposed repealing the “Stream Buffer Zone” rule to allow federal and state agencies to issue permits for coal companies to dump their wastes directly on top of streams. (The rule had stated that no permits would be issued that would disturb areas within 100 feet of streams, unless the permitting agency affirmatively confirms that the activities will not adversely affect water quality).

Call for Specific Actions:

We commit ourselves to working within our own personal missionary activities and those of our congregations, societies and organizations to support the following efforts:

1. **Ask our Members of Congress to ensure all of the nation's waters and peoples remain protected by the Clean Water Authority Restoration Act.** Thank those who have joined the effort to preserve the original Clean Water Act. Ask those who have not done so to start today by cosponsoring the restoration act.
2. Representatives Chris Shays (R-CT) and Frank Pallone (D-NJ) have introduced the **Clean Water Protection Act** (HR 738) to restore important clean water safeguards against destroying streams and other waters with industrial wastes. **We will contact our representative and ask him or her to co-sponsor this important and urgently needed legislation.**
3. **Educate ourselves** regarding the legislation and effects of this destructive mining technique. Read testimonies of residents of the area, environmental specialists and the EIS report on the short-term and long-term effects of MTRM. Visit the region to witness the devastation or contact the following groups for more information, several of them have Web sites: Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition: www.ohvec.org, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth www.kftc.org, Catholic Committee of Appalachia: ccappal@foothills.net - Sr. Robbie Pentecost, OSF, and Earthjustice: www.earthjustice.org.