

Environmental Concerns of Gold Mining

Producing pure gold results in a very high environmental burden due to the physical mining and extraction processes used to extract the pure metal. Whether gold is obtained from base ore which requires a mining operation (and tons of gold ore are required to produce one gram of pure gold) or by extracting gold metal from rivers and streams, the environmental impact is simply enormous.

The total output of gold from mining and extraction activities is actually not required if we consider the amount of pure gold which already exists and is available in our homes. Unused jewelry does very little in terms of producing an active investment return to the owners while at the same time, it represents a huge, untapped store of highly pure metal which does not require much to return it to a highly refined and usable state.

Green gold is recycled metal and because it does not need a great deal of handling and processing the environmental impact on producing pure, usable gold from existing sources is much less compared to gold which must be mined and extracted from ore.

Obtaining gold from ore requires large amounts of water, typically provided by rivers and dams, which in turn becomes very heavily polluted with by-products and the waste materials necessary to process the ore. Zinc for instance is necessary in order to bind the gold from the ore; zinc is highly toxic in concentrated form and it is an accumulative poison in similar ways as lead is.

To remove the zinc requires further poisonous and toxic processes, usually involving sulfuric acid to separate the zinc from the gold. Sulfuric acid itself is the active component of "acid rain" and is highly corrosive as well as damaging to plants, animals and people.

Even more deadly is the sodium cyanide which is used in conjunction with the zinc to create a "sludge" which contains the pure metal. In 2000, a dam burst in Romania and with the tens of thousands of tons of highly contaminated water, at least 100 tons of highly poisonous sodium cyanide were also released into the East European river system. The environmental carnage which resulted is still being cleaned up today and tens of thousands of fish and animals have died as a direct consequence.

Using gold which is effectively stockpiled in our homes makes commercial and environmental sense. In the current economic climate, gold is hitting all time high price levels because it is viewed by institutional investors as a safe haven for their clients. The reduced costs associated with producing refined gold ingots from existing gold in the form of jewelry and gold-bearing components such as computers also allows for high prices to be offered to those considering selling their jewelry.

Green gold is not only environmentally friendly but commercially an astute selling decision. High gold prices are fueling the prices gold recycling refiners can offer; however, once the economic climate recovers we can expect the price of pure gold to start dropping which in turn will lead to lower prices being offered to sellers.

About the Author

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