

SMCRA Fee Collection Reauthorization: Ensuring the Future of Abandoned Coal Mine Reclamation¹

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The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) is federal legislation that regulates coal mining in the United States. Prior to its original passage in 1977, the coal mining industry was largely unregulated, particularly with regard to environmental impacts. Mining that occurred before the enactment of SMCRA took a large toll on the surrounding land and water. More than 10,000 miles of streams and rivers are polluted with abandoned mine drainage between Pennsylvania and West Virginia alone, and hundreds of thousands of acres of scarred mine lands still remain throughout the nation's coal regions. Thousands of abandoned mines still exist that pose health and safety hazards to communities, and new mine fires and subsidences routinely develop that create an ever-evolving inventory of sites to address. Title IV is the section of SMCRA that contains the funding mechanism – which is derived from a fee on every ton of coal mined in the nation – to address dangerous abandoned mine sites and reclaim land and water degraded by mining conducted prior to the passage of SMCRA. Those fees are placed into an account known as the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund. At this time, the collection of reclamation fees is set to expire in 2021. Much progress has been made over the years to restore our nation's waterways and land by a multitude of entities including non-government organizations and government agencies alike. Nevertheless, a lot of work remains to be done. Public health and welfare, as well as restoration of our nation's land and water resources, requires congressional action to reauthorize the fee collection until the year 2036. Failure to act continues a cycle of depressed economies and unemployment while exposing our communities and families to health and safety hazards and environmental degradation. With only two years left until the expiration of the current reclamation fee collection, time is of the essence to begin working on reauthorization of the fee. This presentation will provide an overview of SMCRA's Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund and what is needed from the reclamation community to ensure the continued reclamation of dangerous mine-scarred lands and polluted waters.

Additional Key Words: Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund, SMCRA policy, abandoned coal mine reclamation funding

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