

# Towards a **Saner** Strategy

“If humanity knew the truth about gold mining, and how much harm it generates, things would begin to change.”

—Mariano Fiestas, a citrus farmer in the San Lorenzo Valley, the site of the proposed Tambogrande gold mine in Peru.

In one way or another, metals underlie virtually every product and service in our economy—our food production, housing, transportation, medical care, you name it. And precious metals like gold can serve as symbols of our deepest commitments. But it’s one thing to enjoy the benefits of metals. It’s something else entirely to damage the lives of millions of people and ruin entire landscapes in the pursuit of minerals. The destruction and misery described in this report need not be inevitable byproducts of our need for metal.

Clearly, the time has come to reform our “metals economy,” and we already know what path reform must take. We must fundamentally reform the way we produce metals, find ways to use metals far more efficiently, and to *continue* using metals that are already in circulation. Some metals mining may always be necessary, but ultimately, our most important extraction operations should take place in scrap yards and recycling centers, rather than in nature reserves and native lands.

Those are the long-term goals. But there are also things that the mining industry can and should do immediately. Among them:

- Respect the basic human rights outlined in international declarations and conventions, such as the UN “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” the draft “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” and others.<sup>65</sup>
- Provide safe working conditions and respect workers’ rights to collective bargaining, in accordance with the eight core conventions of the International Labour Organization.
- Refrain from projects that have not secured the free, prior, and informed consent of the communities concerned.
- Fully disclose information about the social and environmental effects of its projects.
- Allow independent reviews of social and environmental management practices.

- Stay out of protected areas.
- Stop dumping mine waste into natural bodies of water.
- Refrain from projects that are expected to cause acid drainage.
- Provide guaranteed funding, before beginning a project, that will fully cover reclamation and closure costs.

Even from a conventional business perspective, the industry’s current practices no longer make sense, because investors are growing increasingly concerned about the industry’s failure to meet these rather obvious legal and moral obligations. In December 2003, the World Bank heard back from an independent commission it had appointed to review its investments in oil, gas, and mining; the commission recommended that the Bank refrain from financing any mining project that fails to meet a set of basic criteria, including those listed above. The growing field of Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) is also having a hard time supporting mining. As of January 2004, for example, the Calvert Group, an American SRI firm, had no holdings in any metals mining corporation because it could not find a single one that met its criteria for corporate responsibility. Insurance companies are growing wary of the industry as well, because of its heavy liability for workplace accidents, chemical spills, and unsecured clean-up expenses.<sup>66</sup>

You can play an important role in driving this reform. A few, simple actions on your part could make an enormous difference. First, recycle products that contain metals, such as cell phones, cans, and appliances. Second, if you have investments—mutual funds, maybe, or a retirement account—make sure that you’re not inadvertently a part of the problem you’re trying to correct! And third, lend your voice directly to the reform effort by signing the consumer petition on our website, at [www.nodirtygold.org](http://www.nodirtygold.org). Your signature will help us convince retailers, manufacturers, and mining companies that consumers want to see real changes in the mining industry—and an alternative to irresponsibly mined metals. ■