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Top 10 sources of pollution named and shamed

Mining and material extraction have health risks that could be avoided with relatively small investments

Andrew Donoghue, [BusinessGreen](#) 22 Oct 2008

Small-scale mining operations have been ranked by a new report as one of the most polluting industries from a human health perspective.

The US-based [Blacksmith Institute](#), together with environmental group Green Cross Switzerland, released the top 10 list this week which names and shames the most serious polluting activities around the world.

The sources of pollution include some well-known activities such as the impact of untreated sewage and groundwater contamination but also the impact of small-scale mining, metals smelting and car battery recycling.

The report claims that such activities can seriously affect the environment and human health, including that of children. Deaths and related illnesses could be avoided with relatively cheap intervention by governments and aid groups.

"Our goal with the 2008 report is to increase awareness of the severe toll that pollution takes on human health and inspire the international community to act," said Richard Fuller, founder of Blacksmith Institute. "Remediation is both possible and cost-effective. Clean air, water and soil are human rights."

Mercury amalgamation, a by-product of small-scale mining, affects up to 15 million miners, including 4.5 million women and 600,000 children, the report claims.

"Estimates show that as much as 95 per cent of all mercury used in small-scale mines is released into the environment. Hundreds of pounds of mercury are used every day for gold recovery, and it only requires less than one microgram per cubic metre to cause serious health effects," the report states.

The report's authors claim that more attention has to be given to the impact of pollution on human health. "While much attention has been paid to these diseases [HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB], the relationship between human health and pollution seems to have been largely ignored."

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