

How can the mining industry gain positive media traction?

Toronto, Canada – Although the extraction of minerals and metals is one of the world's most important economic sectors, mainstream media coverage of the mining industry has been essentially negative for at least the past four decades.



The mining industry is not popular today. Commodity prices continue to fluctuate, affecting all facets of the industry, while cost-cutting and downsizing are integral to the business plans of many mining companies' strategies. Moreover, mining-related stories generally only reach the general public when things go wrong: tailings ponds disasters, child labour scandals, poisonous gas leaks, flooding, underground explosions, or even investment fraud.

However, minerals and metals are the building blocks of the computers, smartphones, tablets, vehicles, buildings, heating and air conditioning units upon which we depend daily – and even some emerging green technologies. High market demands for metals, and the increasing uses of rare earth elements in everyday technologies, have made mining a thriving industry for most of the 21st century.

So, when the benefits of mining are evident in our daily lives, why does the mainstream media – and society in general – tend to be biased against the mining industry?

It is estimated that some 11-13 million people are directly dependent on some form of mining worldwide¹. Many countries perceive this sector as a mainstay of their economic development. There is compelling evidence to show that countries that adopt strict regulations governing mining – while nevertheless still offering a mining-friendly jurisdiction – will attract international investment in mineral exploration and production, creating jobs and boosting economies.

Although there have been scattered attempts by local and regional players to address the public image of the mining industry in a more relevant, 21st century-aware way, there is a common perception that the old business which once industrialised the globe no longer meets contemporary requirements for renewable, green, environmentally-aware industries, and can be dismissed as obsolete. More than a decade and a half ago, Vivian Danielson, the former editor of the Northern Miner, addressed this crucial question in a speech: "The industry must wonder at times why so much emphasis is placed on even the smallest of its sins, and why little or no attention is paid to companies doing things right or to companies with outstanding environmental records. The answer is simple: controversy sells [...]. And mining, by its very nature, is controversial."² This remains true today, although there are many success stories that the industry could hold up as representative of advancements in the industry.

¹ Henderson, M. (2006). Transformations in the Global Economy: Canada and the Global Mining Industry. (Master's Thesis). Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research: Political Science. Windsor, ON: University of Windsor Press).

² Danielson, Vivian, Speech given at the Mineral Economics Society 11th Symposium on January 25, 1999.

The [World Bank](#) has taken an active role in helping the mining industry evolve, as in its “early years, the emphasis was on reforming policies, legislation, and mining sector institutions to increase private investment and related economic performance. By the mid-1990s, the need to improve environmental performance of the sector became an essential part of the reform effort.” This coordinated effort is intended to contribute to increased tax revenues, export earnings, employment opportunities, infrastructure development, especially in rural areas, and the transfer of technology to developing countries.

It is not widely known that Canada and the U.S. are on the forefront of mining legislation, and have made great strides in ensuring that mining is conducted in a fair and sustainable manner.

According to the [Mining Association of Canada](#), the Canadian mining sector here is governed by the following laws:

- Canadian Environmental Protection Act, including the Chemicals Management Plan and Interprovincial Movement of Hazardous Waste Regulations;
- Canadian Environmental Assessment Act;
- Fisheries Act, including the Metal Mining Effluent Regulations;
- Navigable Waters Protection Act/Navigation Protection Act;
- Species at Risk Act;
- Migratory Birds Convention Act;
- Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act.

In 2012, the regulatory oversight of the mining industry was further enhanced with the introduction of a new Environmental Assessment Act, changes to the Fisheries Act and Navigable Waters Protection Act, and the announcement of a review of the Metal Mining Effluent Regulations. Unfortunately, few people outside of the mining sector have any understanding of the level of legislation that governs the mining industry in North America, while those within the industry understand that it takes years to obtain the full list of permits needed to move ahead with a mining project.

According to the new McKinsey [MineLens Productivity Index \(MPI\)](#), there have been great changes in the way that mining companies operate over the past decade. Pressed for profits and faced with low prices, mining companies are turning to technological solutions to revamp their operations and rethink their cost structures. A McKinsey [article on digital innovation in mining](#) suggests that great advances in the mining sector will come from the extensive use of data and connectivity, in-depth analyses, human-machine interactions and the introduction of fully autonomous equipment. Although many global players have made use of these advances to improve safety standards, employee work-life balance and the general advancement of the industry, this goes largely unnoticed by the mainstream media.

The mining industry needs to partner more closely with government organisations, mainstream media outlets, educational establishments and NGOs in order to promote the benefits of mining to the general public, and publicise the great improvements that have been made over the last 25 years to mitigate the impacts. Environmental assessment and remediation, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and green technology have all become part of the mining lexicon in recent years. A concerted effort by the industry as a whole, to emphasise the vast improvements to the industry would go far in elevating the general public’s awareness of these advancements.

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