

# The state of coal mining in south africa

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



South Africa's racialized past has characterised the South African coal mining sector according to white ownership and black labour. This essay will explain how the country's past has shaped coal mining today and what the racialised division of labour means for environmental justice. In addition, the ramifications of environmental racism and environmental justice will be elucidated by looking into mining policies that control the black labour market and the effect they have on the lives of black people. Furthermore, stricter control of mines and possible solutions to the negative consequences of coal mining will be provided.

On state control over the labour market in South Africa, Anthony Lemon (1984) makes the suggestion that, as a capitalist country that is deeply racialized, no other country has as extensive and as explicit capitalist control of its labour market as South Africa. State restrictions on freedom of movement continue to hinder black Africans from selling their labour freely. Control of the country's labour force negatively affects South Africa's potential for economic growth, as a consequence of strike action and employer-employee dispute. However, Marxist analysts argue that the primary purpose of government control of the labour market is to create a cheap and easily controlled labour force for capitalists. The overarching sentiment here is that all attempts at advancing the economy or uplifting previously marginalised peoples through integration into the economy is for the sole purpose of advancing capital interests. Therefore, there exists a history of systemic exclusion and marginalisation that impacts heavily on South Africa's economic and political landscape. By extension and in addition

to that, the coal mining industry is similarly affected. This can be assessed through application of stricter control on mining.

The Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) governs mining activities in South Africa. The DMR is a political entity in itself and is under the rule of the ruling party. The ruling party seeks to implement policies that advance its own agenda. The economy will be directly affected as a result, followed by the country's citizens. Therefore, politics, economics, and environmental issues are forced to intersect with one another. However, this cycle can be remedied through the implementation of a governing body that is independent from the South African government.

A paper on the correlation of coal mining and mortality that was published in the British Medical Journal provides an overview of the recorded illnesses and diseases that have come to fruition in recent years. Due to the correlation between coal mining and mortality, it was established that there certain laws and rights mining companies need to adhere and obtain to before conducting activities that may harm the environment as stated in the Mining and Petroleum Resources Development Act. More often than not, these rights, as well as the mining activities that follow, often overlook and affect local communities in and around the area of activity. A possible solution to this is to make the criteria stricter in order for the coal mining activities and mortality ratio to be reduced. This proves necessary because, and as the recurring narrative suggests, there is a direct relationship between the capitalist system, coal mining and local communities.

All new and ongoing mining operations, as well as exploration activities, are required to have government-approved permits. According to Walde (2002), the permitting process ensures that “ environmental standards are maintained from the beginning to the end of mining and metal production operations”. As a result, new mine developments are now required to have operation and closure plans that define how a specific site will be reclaimed upon termination of mining. Attention to the full life cycle of a mining site will prevent negative environmental impacts. Moreover, it will hold mining companies accountable for unlawful activities through a comprehensive, transparent compliance and enforcement programme.

In addition, mining companies must be encouraged to adopt a transparent and effective approach to disclose information related to mining, including the mandatory and automatic disclosure of all documents related to the approval and regulation of mines. By adopting and enforcing such laws local communities and other affected parties can meaningfully participate in all aspects of the mining authorization process. As an alternative to government regulatory agencies, political ecology supports the idea of holding polluters legally responsible for the effects of their actions. “ Prohibit mining in places or using practices that may violate human rights or cause substantial harm to the environment on which communities depend, prioritizing strategic water source areas and protected areas”. Under this system, the government will register pollutants, monitor levels of environmental pollution, and hold the polluters liable for damages committed. According to National Environment Management Act, the costs of remedying pollution, environmental degradation, consequent health effects and prevention or

minimization of environmental damage must be paid for by those responsible for harming the environment. Governmental activity will, therefore, follow the minimal state model of using policing powers and the court system to protect life and property rights from invasion. Consequently, the law should immediately require coal-fired power plants to meet air emissions standards and require Eskom to commence decommissioning those plants that cannot comply. Implementing a significant decline of existing coal-production and investing strongly in clean energy to provide for South Africa's energy needs would address the dire impacts of climate change.

However, despite the environmental and societal harms of mining and coal burning, the South African government has failed to enforce the relevant environmental standards. The government should be rigorous about the environmental situation in South Africa by making sure that the laws and regulations are respected. Nonetheless, Feris and Kotze (2014) argue that the South African government seems to be overwhelmed by the current situation because mining companies fail to take responsibility for their actions and they face few or no consequences. As a result, Feris and Kotze recommend, " independent monitoring organizations which compose of non-governmental people take the responsibility of monitoring the mining companies". Independent monitoring organizations' roles will be to ensure respect for the laws and legislations made by the government and the participation of all parties involved in the issuance of mining permits. Furthermore, their responsibility will be to check compliance with laws on environmental pollution during mining operations and ensure the observance

of procedures for the closure of a mine. To this extent, the monitoring system will use all necessary actions against non-compliance of mining companies to enforce environmental and general health laws.

If stricter control of mining companies is not applied, the number of people who die due to mining operations will drastically increase. Mining operations will continue to worsen the environmental situation in South Africa.

Therefore, stricter control of mining companies is important in order to ensure that the impact of mining operations is correctly managed. For this reason, it will be beneficial for the government to adopt new, stricter laws and legislations towards the environmental impact of mining in South Africa.