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LSWP shows laudable desire for independence

April 15, 2013
The Mining Journal

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Two recent issues addressed by the Lake Superior Watershed Partnership have demonstrated greatly desired independence in the group's Community Environmental Monitoring of Rio Tinto's mining activities in Marquette County.

Despite the program's indirect funding by the mining company -which many people have been critical of- recent partnership commentary on an amendment to Rio Tinto's air quality permit and the group's detection and reporting of concentrations of uranium found in water samples at the bottom of a rock storage area at the Eagle Mine show the partnership is taking its role as an environmental watchdog over Rio Tinto's mining activities seriously.

This is a positive step, which should help transform at least a few critics into supporters.

At a recent public hearing on the air quality permit, the partnership offered several important and helpful comments, including suggestions on improving computer modeling of pollution dispersion by using data sets more germane to the local area, including the Yellow Dog Plains, where the mine is located.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality will issue a decision soon on the permit amendment, taking written and verbal comments from the public, including those from the partnership, into account.

Recently, small concentrations of uranium were found in water in the lining of the mine's Temporary Development Rock Storage Area at the mine. Partnership technicians were sampling water from a sump to compare with prior test samples taken by Rio Tinto.

A laboratory in Indiana processing the water samples for the partnership, found the uranium and reported its occurrence as required by law for concentrations exceeding safe standards for drinking water.

Additional monitoring and testing by the partnership confirmed Rio Tinto assertions the uranium was being safely removed from the water in the rock storage area by the mine's water treatment plant.

All of the results of the partnership's community environmental monitoring are available online to keep the public informed. The group's involvement in testing and reporting -with the independence now demonstrated- should go a long way toward proving the monitoring program is what it was intended to be-a valuable community asset gauging the success of the mining company's mining, milling and transportation operations.

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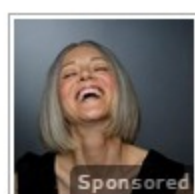
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