

Anglo American's Track Record: Rhetoric or Reality?

Executive Summary

The London-based mining giant Anglo American PLC, which is involved in the proposed Pebble copper and gold mine in Alaska, professes to uphold high standards of corporate social responsibility, but a review of its track record in other parts of the world finds a series of problems with regard to environmental protection, worker safety, community impacts and human rights. We limited our review to mining operations most similar to those being proposed for Alaska. Among the problems found in these operations are the following:

- Anglo American's platinum operations in South Africa are a major cause of sulfur dioxide emissions and have experienced numerous spills and accidental discharges.
- Acid runoff from a mine in Zimbabwe owned by Anglo American until 2003 contaminated groundwater, polluted the neighboring Yellow Jacket River, and is believed to have harmed the river's fish. A 2001 study of 34 mines around the world found that the Anglo operation had by far the highest level of arsenic in its surface water.
- A mining operation in Nevada was the single largest source of mercury air pollution in the United States during Anglo's ownership. Recommendations to limit fish consumption have been issued for downwind fisheries.
- A mine in Ghana operated by AngloGold Ashanti—an Anglo American subsidiary until 2006 and an associated company for a year after that—has repeatedly spilled waste water and tailings into neighboring communities in recent years. Scientists have found that streams in the vicinity of the mine are “significantly polluted” by metals.
- A scientific study has found that school children living near an Anglo American zinc, lead and copper mine in South Africa have elevated levels of lead in their blood and perform less well in school.
- Numerous leaks and spills have occurred at South Africa mines operated by AngloGold. At one mine, chronic overflows of mine tailings water have degraded surface and groundwater of the Vaal River, and the overtopping of a containment structure near a processing plant caused slurry to flow into the backyards of four houses.
- Anglo has been in bitter conflict with subsistence communities and farmers in Ghana, South Africa and Mali, where villagers have been displaced from their traditional lands to make way for mining operations.
- An Anglo American zinc mine in Ireland has polluted river sediments with lead and zinc. Sections of the river were closed to anglers and public warning notices regarding heavy metal contamination were posted.
- Copper emissions from the Palabora mining operation, owned by Rio Tinto and Anglo American, have contaminated soil, trees and wildlife in neighboring Kruger National Park.
- Over 220 mine workers have died at Anglo American mining operations in the last five years. Mine workers have repeatedly protested against unsafe working conditions.

Anglo American tries very hard to portray itself as a company dedicated to good corporate citizenship, constantly emphasizing its commitment to environmental protection, worker safety and respect for the communities in which it operates. Yet in the ten examples discussed in this report, the reality of Anglo American's record falls far short of its rhetoric.

The degradation of rivers and streams and impacts to subsistence communities, in particular, will undoubtedly be of special concern to communities in Alaska that could be impacted by the Pebble mine. In addition to the problems seen elsewhere, there is the risk inherent in the fact that Anglo American has never operated a large sulfide mine in a sensitive salmon ecosystem or in harsh Arctic conditions comparable to those of the Bristol Bay watershed.

Whether it is the poor safety record of its platinum and formerly owned gold mines, the failure to control acid mine drainage in Zimbabwe, the repeated spills of mine waste into communities in Ghana and South Africa, the mercury air pollution in the U.S., degraded rivers in Ireland, or the unfair treatment of subsistence villagers displaced from their land in places such as South Africa, Anglo American can hardly be considered a model of good corporate citizenship.

[Full Report available here](#)