

Toxic metals pouring out of former mines

Water carries arsenic, lead and other metals into lakes and streams

By **MATTHEW BROWN**
Associated Press

RIMINI, Mont. — Every day many millions of gallons of water loaded with arsenic, lead and other toxic metals flow from some of the most contaminated mining sites in the U.S. and into surrounding streams and ponds without being treated, The Associated Press has found.

That torrent is poisoning aquatic life and tainting drinking water sources in Montana, California, Colorado, Oklahoma, Oregon and at least four other states.

The pollution is a legacy of how the mining industry was allowed to operate in the U.S. for more than a century. Companies that built mines for silver, lead, gold and other “hardrock” minerals could move on once they were no longer profitable, leaving behind tainted water that still leaks out of the mines or is cleaned up at taxpayer expense.

Using data from public records requests and independent researchers, the AP examined 43 mining sites under federal oversight, some containing dozens or even hundreds of individual mines.

The records show that at average flows, more than 50 million gallons of contaminated wastewater streams daily from the sites. In many cases, it runs untreated into



In this Aug. 6, 2015, file photo, Dan Bender, with the La Plata County Sheriff's Office, takes a water sample from the Animas River near Durango, Colo., after the accidental release of an estimated 3 million gallons of waste from the Gold King Mine.

nearby groundwater, rivers and ponds — a roughly 20-million-gallon daily dose of pollution that could fill more than 2,000 tanker trucks.

The remainder of the waste is captured or treated in a costly effort that will need to carry on indefinitely, for perhaps thousands of years, often with little hope for reimbursement.

The volumes vastly exceed the release from Colorado's Gold King Mine disaster in 2015, when a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency cleanup crew inadvertently triggered the release of 3 million gallons of mustard-colored mine sludge, fouling rivers in three states.

At many mines, the pollution has continued decades after their enlistment in the federal Superfund cleanup program for the nation's most hazardous sites, which faces sharp cuts under President Donald Trump.

Federal officials have raised fears that at least six of the sites examined by AP could have blowouts like the one at Gold King.

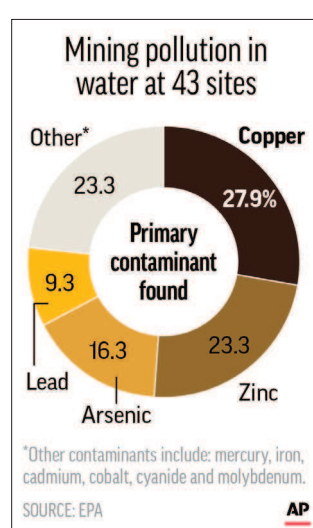
In mountains outside the Montana capital of Helena, about 30 households can't drink their tap water because groundwater was polluted by about 150 abandoned gold, lead and copper mines that operated from the 1870s until 1953.

The community of Rimini was added to the

Superfund list in 1999. Contaminated soil in residents' yards was replaced, and the EPA has provided bottled water for a decade. But polluted water still pours from the mines and into Upper Tenmile Creek.

“The fact that bottled water is provided is great,” said 30-year Rimini resident Catherine Maynard, a natural resources analyst for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. “Where it falls short is it's not piped into our home. Water that's piped into our home is still contaminated water. Washing dishes and bathing — that metal-laden water is still running through our pipes.”

Estimates of the number of such abandoned mine



sites range from 161,000 in 12 western states to as many as 500,000 nationwide. At least 33,000 have degraded the environment, according to the Government Accountability Office, and thousands more are discovered every year.

Officials have yet to complete work including basic risk analyses on about 80 percent of abandoned mining sites on federal lands. Most are controlled by the Bureau of Land Management, which under Trump is seeking to consolidate mine cleanups with another program and cut their combined 2019 spending from \$35 million to \$13 million.

Problems at some sites are intractable.

At northern California's Iron Mountain Mine, cleanup teams battle to contain highly acidic water that percolates through a former copper and zinc mine and drains into a Sacramento River tributary. The mine discharged six tons of toxic sludge daily before an EPA cleanup. Authorities now

spend \$5 million a year to remove poisonous sludge that had caused massive fish kills, and they expect to keep it at it forever.

In Colorado's San Juan Mountains, site of the Gold King blowout, some 400 abandoned or inactive mine sites contribute an estimated 15 million gallons of acid mine drainage per day.

AP also found mining sites where untreated water harms the environment or threatens drinking water supplies in North and South Carolina, Vermont, Missouri and Oregon.

This landscape of polluted sites occurred under mining industry rules largely unchanged since the 1872 Mining Act.

State and federal laws in recent decades have held companies more accountable than in the past, but critics say huge loopholes all but ensure that some of today's mines will foul waterways or require perpetual cleanups.

To avoid a catastrophe like Gold King, EPA officials now require advance approval for work on many mining sites. But they acknowledge they're only dealing with a small portion of the problem.

“We have been trying to play a very careful game of prioritization,” said Dana Stalcup, deputy director of the Superfund program. “We know the Superfund program is not the answer to the hundreds of thousands of mines out there, but the mines we are working on we want to do them the best we can.”



AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

President Donald Trump gestures as visiting Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz leaves the White House in Washington following their meeting on Wednesday.

Dems' measure blocking Trump will come Friday

By **ALAN FRAM**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Democrats will file a resolution on Friday aimed at blocking the national emergency declaration that President Donald Trump has issued to help finance his wall along the Southwest border, teeing up a clash over billions of dollars, immigration policy and the Constitution's separation of powers.

Though the effort seems almost certain to ultimately fall short — perhaps to a Trump veto — the votes will let Democrats take a defiant stance against Trump that is sure to please liberal voters. They will also put some Republicans from swing districts and states in a difficult spot.

Formally introducing the measure sets up a vote by the full House likely by mid-March, perhaps as soon as next week, because of a timeline spelled out by law. Initial passage by the Democratic-run House seems assured.

The measure would then move to the Republican-con-

trolled Senate, where there may be enough GOP defections for approval. The law that spells out the rules for emergency declarations seems to require the Senate to address the issue too, but there's never been a congressional effort to block one and some procedural uncertainties remain.

Should the House and Senate initially approve the measure, Congress seems unlikely to muster the two-thirds majorities in each chamber that would be needed later to override a certain Trump veto.

Even so, Republican senators facing tough re-election fights next year in competitive states like Arizona, Colorado and North Carolina would have to take stances that could risk dividing the GOP's pro-Trump and more moderate voters.

Moderate Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said Wednesday she would back a resolution blocking the emergency declaration, making her the first Republican to publicly state her support for the effort to thwart the emergency.

Fed officials noted number of rising threats

By **MARTIN CRUTSINGER**
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve policymakers last month noted greater threats to the U.S. economy, ranging from adverse effects of the government shutdown to rising trade tensions, and decided to emphasize that they would be “patient” in raising interest rates.

Minutes of the Fed's January discussions, released Wednesday, showed that Fed officials also felt that further rate hikes might only be needed if inflation were to accelerate.

Fed officials also

appeared close to agreeing on a plan to stop reducing their enormous bond portfolio before year's end — a step intended to help ease upward pressure on borrowing rates.

The minutes showed that Fed officials believe a “patient approach” to rate hikes would give them more time to assess the economic impact of President Donald Trump's trade battles with China and other countries, as well as the severity of a developing slowdown in global growth.

In response to the global slowdown, several Fed officials trimmed their economic outlooks while acknowledging that down-

side risks had increased.

Analysts said the minutes indicated that the bar for restarting rate increases seemed to be quite high.

“The upshot is we now expect the Fed to leave rates unchanged throughout this year,” said Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics.

Ashworth said he thinks the Fed's next rate move would be cuts next year as U.S. growth slows further.

The minutes covered the Fed's Jan. 29-30 meeting where the central bank left its key policy rate unchanged and signaled a major pivot away from steadily raising rates.

Instead, the Fed's state-

ment said it would be “patient” in determining when to hike rates again. The statement cited the global economy, which has been slowing, and financial developments including a plunge in stock prices, as reasons for the change.

The minutes said that participants believed “a patient posture would allow time for a clearer picture of the international trade policy situation and the state of the global economy to emerge and, in particular, could allow policymakers to reach a firmer judgment about the extent and persistence of the economic slowdown in Europe and China.”

Winter storm snarls travel in much of the U.S.

NEW YORK (AP) — A sprawling storm dumped several inches of snow from the Midwest to the East Coast and deluged the South with rain Wednesday as it closed schools, snarled air travel and littered highways with crashes.

Only a few inches of snow fell along the Interstate 95 corridor from New York to Washington, but it was enough to put a scare into an area that has seen little of it this winter. Schools and government offices around the region closed early.

New Jersey's governor declared a state of emergency, even though only 4 inches of snow was expected before turning to rain Wednesday night. State and local government offices in Delaware closed early, and so did local offices in Philadelphia.

But the evening commute started out on a good



AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar

A pedestrian strolls past a statue of Pittsburgh Pirates Hall of Famer Willie Stargell outside PNC Park as snow falls Wednesday morning in Pittsburgh.

note. A spokesperson for AAA Mid-Atlantic had said earlier in the afternoon it appeared motorists heeded warnings to stay off roads.

Nationwide, more than 2,200 flights were canceled and more than 5,500 were delayed, according to the flight-tracking website

FlightAware. The mid-Atlantic region was especially hard hit as airlines pulled flights ahead of the storm. Washington's Reagan National Airport led the pack.

“Travel anymore is not easy, so you expect the unexpected,” said Stacy Flye, trying to get home to

Florida. “And you know, we knew the weather was going to be bad, but sometimes you just have to take your chances.”

Amtrak made changes to its Keystone service between New York and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Multiple crashes, including a jackknifed tractor-trailer, shut down westbound lanes of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Lancaster County.

Farther west, snow forced Minneapolis and St. Paul schools and scores of other districts in Minnesota and Wisconsin to cancel classes as up to 10 inches of snow fell on the region.

Schools, businesses and government offices in Kansas closed or announced plans to start late. Several school districts closed in Missouri, where officials said many roads across the northern half of the state were partially or completely snow covered.

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