

## Mining controversy grows

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**Miners active in region singled out for environmental, social practices.**

Transnational mining giants with large projects in Latin America were named some of the 10 Most Controversial Mining Companies of 2011 by Swiss consultancy RepRisk, an advising group for investment banks, companies and other financial institutions on social and environmental risks.

Mining has expanded dramatically in Latin America over the past 10 years as the price of precious and base metals climbed.

Seven of the 10 on the list — the US-based Newmont Mining Corp. and Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold; Switzerland's Glencore International; Australia's BHP Billiton; Peru's Compañía de Minas Buenaventura; Canada's Barrick Gold; and Britain's Anglo American — operate and are developing large projects in the region.

"These mining giants and their global operations have come under fire for allegedly polluting potable water supplies, scarring landscapes and damaging sensitive ecosystems," said RepRisk in its report. "There were also numerous allegations detected by RepRisk related to impacts on local communities and effects on the traditional way of life of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, these companies were accused of having poor occupational health and safety standards, which resulted in toxic emissions and accidents that have caused injuries, fatalities or serious illness."

RepRisk pointed environmental abuses at Barrick Gold's controversial projects in the Dominican Republic and Argentina, including the bi-national Pascua Lama gold project, which straddles the border with Chile.

"The project allegedly violates OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] and Equator Principles [International Finance Corporation's commitments] due to impacts on indigenous peoples and their livelihoods, breaches national and international laws, and has reportedly damaged and depleted glaciers," said RepRisk on Pascua Lama. "It has also been accused of a lack of transparency, falsely obtained land titles, corruption in supplier contracts, and non-compliance with environmental legislation. In addition, there have been 16 worker deaths at the mine, and the operations have been accused of failing to benefit the local community."

Glencore was criticized for alleged union busting. Its "Empresa Minera Los Quenuales in Peru has allegedly harassed union members, and two people were reportedly killed during a blockade," said RepRisk. "At its La Jagua coal mine in northern Colombia, the company was also accused of trying to prevent unions from being formed."

Also in Peru, Newmont and Buenaventura currently face a serious conflict with Conga mining project, in the northern department of Cajamarca, which is rejected both by local authorities and population. The gold and copper project is located on a watershed and would destroy four lagoons that supply water to communities. —*Latinamerica Press*.