

SENATORS CARDIN, ALEXANDER INTRODUCE BILL TO END THE DUMPING OF MINING WASTE INTO STREAMS

March 25th, 2009 - WASHINGTON - U.S. Senators Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) today introduced bipartisan legislation that would prohibit the dumping of mining waste into streams, effectively ending the practice known as mountaintop mining. The Appalachia Restoration Act would amend the Clean Water Act to prevent the dumping of what is known as "excess spoil" from mountaintop mining into streams and rivers.

Mountaintop mining is a method of coal mining in which the summit of a mountain is removed to expose the coal beneath, and the resulting millions of tons of waste rock, dirt and vegetation are dumped into nearby stream and river valleys. More than 1 million acres of Appalachia have already been affected. An estimated 1,200 miles of headwater streams have been buried under tons of mining wastes. More than 500 mountains have been impacted, and homes have been ruined and drinking water supplies contaminated.

"My goal is to put a stop to one of the most destructive mining practices that has already destroyed some of America's most beautiful and ecologically significant regions," said Senator Cardin, Chairman of the Water and Wildlife Subcommittee of the Committee on Environment and Public Works. "This legislation will put a stop to the smothering of our nation's streams and water systems and will restore the Clean Water Act to its original intent."

Coal is an essential part of our energy future, but it is not necessary to destroy our mountaintops in order to have enough coal," said Senator Alexander, a member of the Water and Wildlife Subcommittee of the Committee on Environment and Public Works which has jurisdiction over this issue. "Millions of tourists spend tens of millions of dollars in Tennessee every year to enjoy the natural beauty of our mountains -- a beauty that, for me, and I believe for most Tennesseans, makes us proud to live here."

Mountaintop mining produces less than five percent of the coal mined in the United States. This bill does not ban other methods of coal mining, but instead would prevent this particular type of coal mining.