

Miners find climate change adversely affects their operations: study

Urged to design operations with climate in mind

Peter Koven, Financial Post, with files from Canwest News Service

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Climate change is already having an impact on Canadian mining operations, according to a study released yesterday by the David Suzuki Foundation, which also points to ways the industry can adapt to changing conditions.

"We spoke with mining stakeholders from across Canada and found a significant number believe that climate change is already having a negative impact on their operations," said Jason Prno, a mining researcher who coauthored the report.

The study looked at mining industry trends in relation to the impact climate change is having on operations, the industry's efforts to reduce its own greenhouse-gas emissions and ways the industry can adapt.

Climate change-related conditions include droughts, which decrease water availability and force gravel quarries to curtail production; warm temperatures, which melt ice roads; and heavy rains, which can shut down access roads.

They can all affect mining operations.

Mr. Prno said that while companies have started reducing emissions, "most companies are not yet proactively planning for climate change."

In a presentation at the Toronto Stock Exchange, Mr. Prno said mining companies need to look closely at the climate-change predictions in the regions in which they plan to operate, and design the mine infrastructure that reflects it.

For example, technologies can be used in the Arctic to keep the ground permanently cool and prevent mine infrastructure from getting damaged.

"There's a vast number of technologies that are out there and strategies to adapt to climate change," he said.

The study also offered recommendations to the government, saying that regulations are needed to ensure that mine plans take climate change into account, both during their operations and through closure. It also called for more regulatory certainty around greenhouse-gas emissions, which it said is needed before major efforts to mitigate emissions can truly take hold in the mining sector.

"The Canadian mining sector can do its part by implementing measures to adapt to climate change and

reducing its carbon footprint," said Dale Marshall, climate-policy analyst with the David Suzuki Foundation.

"Every sector needs to be part of the solution by reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, the root cause of climate change. But preparing for the ongoing reality of climate change is in the best interests both of mining companies and communities whose wellbeing is tied to the success of the industry."

According to the study, Canadian miners now have an opportunity to become leaders in climate-change mitigation and adaptation.

"Collaboration between mining companies, mining associations, regulators, scientists, and other industrial sectors will greatly enhance the chance of success," the study said.

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