



November 4, 2024

Honourable Steven Guilbeault,
Minister of Environment and Climate Change

Cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister ; Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

RE: Importance of a thorough impact assessment for the proposed Vista coal mine Expansion

Dear Minister Guilbeault,

We represent a group of Alberta physicians and other health care workers who understand and care deeply about preventing the health impacts of mining and burning of thermal coal. We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the proposed expansion of Coalspur's Vista coal mine and request that you designate it for an impact assessment as soon as possible.

As you know, the Coalspur Vista coal mine has never been subject to a federal review and its expansion plans have twice been determined by your predecessors to warrant an impact assessment. The project is projected to produce several potentially disastrous impacts on areas of federal jurisdiction and should be subject to federal review before it can be allowed to advance any further. The Vista coal mine expansion is expected to have severe adverse effects on the local environment, wildlife, and on human health both locally and globally. Here we focus on known and potential human health effects.

It is ironic to be writing this letter at a time when we are celebrating the end of coal-fired power generation in Alberta. We are among a number of groups who fought for this transition to a lower carbon and less polluting power grid for Alberta, and are pleased that Alberta has achieved this milestone well ahead of the announced 2030 deadline. We know that air pollution from thermal coal causes premature death, emergency room visits for asthma and other lung diseases, and cardiovascular events like heart attacks and stroke, and are relieved that this avoidable threat has been removed from our local population. However, with the proposed mine expansion, we are saying to the world that we are okay with exporting these known harms 'over there'. This to us is unconscionable. Diseases caused by air pollution are the second leading risk for death globally (8 million deaths in 2021) and is primarily driven by particulate matter, the cause of close to 7.8 million deaths in 2021. Coal is the worst energy source for causing particulate air pollution.

There are also several well-known adverse human health consequences for workers and those living in the vicinity of open pit coal mining operations. These include [selenium toxicity](#) from



release in the watershed, [increased morbidity and mortality](#) from a variety of causes in coal mining communities, [chronic disease from dust and dirt in the local environment](#), and the psychological and economic impacts on Albertans and other users of the coal mining region where habitat and access will be adversely impacted for many generations. These impacts often disproportionately impact indigenous and rural communities.

Finally, to state the obvious, thermal coal is the most carbon intensive fuel source for generating electricity. Carbon pollution goes into the atmosphere and increases the effects of climate change wherever it is burned. In Alberta, we are becoming increasingly familiar with the devastating impacts of climate change-fueled extreme weather events, from the wildfires that have impacted Slave Lake, Fort McMurray, and most recently Jasper, as well as many other smaller communities and First Nations, to the costly and disruptive hail storms and flooding in Calgary and High River, and increasing drought in southern Alberta.

It is incredibly short-sighted, when we know that renewable power sources are now equivalent or superior to coal on a lifecycle cost-per-watt basis in most jurisdictions, to now even consider expanding our production of the dirtiest, most carbon intensive, and habitat-destroying energy source..

Minister Guilbeault, no part of the Vista coal mine has ever been federally assessed, and once expanded, it will be the largest thermal coal mine in Canada. We cannot allow a coal project of this unprecedented scale to move forward without a clear and comprehensive understanding of its impacts on endangered species, Indigenous rights, the surrounding water and land, and the health of frontline communities.

Given these expected impacts fall within federal jurisdiction, we urge you to designate the proposed Vista coal mine expansion for impact assessment immediately.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I trust that you will do what is right. Please do not hesitate to contact any of us should you wish more context on the important health implications of this decision.

Sincerely,

<original signed by>

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