

Interstate Mining Compact Commission

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Interstate Mining Compact Background

The mining industry is one of the most basic and important in the Nation. Our manufacturing activities, transportation systems, and the comfort of our homes depend on the products of mining. Yet it is also true that generations of mining operations have had their effect on the surface of our land and on the condition of other resources. There is an urgent need to find improved means of turning mined lands to their most useful functions and to find ways of reducing the undesirable effects of mining operations on other property and resources. The necessary programs should be undertaken with due regard for the interests of all land and other resource users, including homeowners, mining and other industries, recreationists, conservationists, and the general public.

Governmental action to assist mining industries in their efforts to become more efficient in their methods, thereby increasing yields at lower costs, also is in the public interest. Such activities can and should go hand in hand with programs aimed at improving the usefulness of the surface of mined land.

Individual states have the power to establish and maintain programs of land and other resource development, restoration and regulation appropriate to cope with the surface effects of mining. The Interstate Mining Compact would not shift responsibility for such programs. On the other hand, states acting singly without reference to actions in other jurisdictions labor under serious handicaps in mounting desirable programs. While physiographic, climatic and regional differences in density of population and varying availability of recreational facilities make the application of rigid, single standards inappropriate, fundamental equity would be served by making it possible for individual states to construct their programs in such a way that those mining operations which actually are similarly situated be afforded similar types of assistance and be subjected to comparable regulatory patterns. There is much that an interstate agency like the Interstate Mining Commission established by this compact could do to develop and pool experience in dealing with mining problems.

The Interstate Mining Compact could do much to overcome the limitations just outlined. The Interstate Compact to Conserve Oil and Gas (in successful operation for about thirty-five years and now participated in by virtually every oil and gas producing jurisdiction of the United States), suggests some of the accomplishments that might result from interstate efforts in the field of the mining of solid substances. "The form statute for the conservation of oil and gas," and the many other suggestions of the Interstate Oil Compact Commission, have brought an increasing degree of comparability into state programs affecting the production of oil and natural gas. Also, that Commission serves as a forum for the exchange of useful information in its field of interest. While the focus of an Interstate Mining Compact as here envisaged would be somewhat different from that of the Oil and Gas Compact, and while its format bears only slight resemblance to the Oil and Gas Compact, its basic approach is the same. By adopting the compact, states would obligate themselves to undertake and maintain certain types of programs. In addition, an interstate body with roots in each of the party states and an ability to facilitate the sharing of knowledge would be placed in operation.

The Interstate Mining Compact had its beginnings in 1964. In April of that year in Roanoke, Virginia, the Council of State Governments held a conference on surface mining, attended by state and federal legislative and administrative officials, by mining industry representatives, and by conservationists. In the aftermath of this meeting, the Southern Governors' Conference, that Fall, called on the Council of State Governments to assist the states in developing one or more compacts to deal with surface mining problems. These initiatives led to the subsequent adoption in many states of strengthened laws and programs for regulating surface mining; and to supplement these intra-state activities, the Interstate Mining Compact was drafted and became available for their consideration in the legislative sessions of 1966.