

Justina Cotter

There are many issues with regard to air quality for the proposed Copper World Project.

According to "Economic Impact of the Copper World Economic Impact of the Copper World/Rosemont Mine Complex," June 2024, by Power Consulting, the mounds of tailings dust -- hundreds of feet high near schools and residences -- likely will contain toxics like lead and arsenic. This type of toxic dust typically blows 20-30 miles in the dry and windy conditions that we have in the Tucson area. Although prevailing winds are from the west, daily wind changes would blow toxics from east to west, toward Green Valley, Sahuarita, Corona de Tucson, and all the housing developments southeast of Sahuarita. As an example, dust in the air can be seen almost every morning from Green Valley, when vehicles on Santa Rita Road raise dust clouds that drift across the Santa Rita Experimental Range. Additionally, toxins can also be flushed out of tailings and start to work their way down washes during storms.

Copper World Mine would produce minuscule particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, indisputably resulting in dust, inhalable particles, and haze between the mountains and Sahuarita. In its plans, Copper World says it will monitor and suppress toxic particulates that might drift into Green Valley, and Corona de Tucson homes and schools. But recent scientific studies show that is no safe "threshold" at which humans who encounter this dust will be safe. Adverse health effects will include toxic effects from absorption of lead particulates, zinc, and other heavy metals into blood and increasing respiratory symptoms, including the aggravation of asthma. Risks are highest for the elderly and young children.

Smaller, more difficult to control particles may actually be more dangerous because they can be inhaled more deeply into the lungs. The lifespan of the Copper World mine may be 44 years or longer. For people who live in the mine area, this will increase the likelihood of serious physical problems.

Students at Copper Ridge Elementary (400 students and 50 staff), would particularly be at risk from particulates that will drift into their area from the Copper World tailings piles -- situated a mere 1 ¼ miles from the school grounds. The mine's presence would require Copper Ridge School (and other schools in Corona de Tucson and Vail) to maintain contingency plans for days with poor air quality; requiring ongoing monitoring of air quality and plans to protect students during emergency alerts, such as canceling outdoor activities, training school nurses to deal with respiratory ailments, and even canceling classes when risks are high.

Heavy haul trucks loaded with harmful copper concentrates and possibly purified copper cathodes will almost certainly run constantly on the shortest route between the mine and the town of Sahuarita. Despite claims by Copper World that suppressed vehicle speeds and constant watering will keep down dust clouds on the dirt roads, it is not realistic to think that particulates will be fully contained in the boxes of the trucks, that spillages will be fully prevented, and that adequate watering of dirt roads can eliminate airborne dust during an Arizona summer. Heavy meals can contaminate land for hundreds of years.

Pima County residents need to beware of the huge piles of leftover material in the proposed Copper World Mine's tailings. This waste material - perched on the mountains above Corona de Tucson and

Vail - should not be considered "gravel" or even "crushed rock." Much of it will be sand and dust particles that could escape the tailings piles or pipes and then spread toxins into the landscape between the Santa Rita Mountains and communities to the west, northwest, and north.

In any open pit mine operation, tailings must have safeguards to hold them in check, such as dams and liners. The Copper World Mine owners have already demonstrated a willingness to cut corners with regard to necessary protections. Downstream residents, however, deserve current, even state-of-the-art safeguards for tailings piles that will be hundreds of feet deep.

Lastly, the proposed mine will drive away unique large animals in the northern Santa Rita Mountains – jaguar, mountain lion, bobcat, black bear, coati, ringtail, and more – because of toxic dust, emissions, noise, blasting, and nighttime light. These animals' sense of smell is documented at hundreds or even thousands of times more powerful than a human's. This part of the Sky Island mountain range has been their home for thousands of years, and in a relatively few years their habitat will be gone because of the haze of toxic particulates that will drift across their home range.

Thank you for your attention. Please do the right thing for Arizona communities and deny the air permit for the proposed Copper World Mine.