

# 1 Dirty Gold: What is the Environmental Impact of 2 Gold Mines?

3 By [Green World](#)

4 “*Dirty*” gold is a term used to describe gold that is mined in an unsustainable,  
5 environmentally irresponsible way. Unfortunately, gold is one of the “dirtiest” metals to  
6 mine, requiring large amounts of toxic chemicals and generating tons of waste.  
7 Here are some of the effects of dirty gold mining practices.

## 8 How Gold Mines Impact Local Ecosystems

9 Gold is usually mined in enormous, open pits. Some of these gigantic craters can even be  
10 seen from outer space. Of course, much habitat destruction takes place when one of these  
11 mines is created. Local ecosystems are disrupted, affecting the connection between  
12 plants, animals, soil, water, and all those elements of a healthy ecosystem.

## 13 Types of Pollution Cause by a Gold Mine

14 To extract gold from the surrounding rocks, heat and chemicals are used. Some of these  
15 are dangerous pollutants. For example, the deadly poison cyanide is regularly used to  
16 leach gold from ore. Air, soil, and water are all affected. The waste products from gold  
17 mining are called “tailings.”

- 18 • *How Gold Mines Affect the Air*—Dust from open mines fills the air and can cause  
19 illness when it’s breathed by miners or local people. If tailings are left out in the open  
20 air, they can generate dust full of chemicals like cadmium and arsenic. And the  
21 extraction of gold involves heating it to extreme temperatures (smelting), which  
22 releases pollutants like nitrogen and sulfur dioxide into the air.
- 23 • *Environmental Impact of Mining on Water Sources*—Gold mine operators have been  
24 known to dump tailings into local water supplies. There are reports of streams and  
25 rivers, full of cyanide from gold mines, losing 80 percent or more of their aquatic life.  
26 Tailings that are stored in reservoirs can leak out. Sometimes the reservoirs burst,  
27 flooding surrounding areas with polluted water. Mercury and other heavy metals  
28 persist in water supplies near gold mines.
- 29 • *Environmental Soil Damage from Gold Mines*—Waste products from the mining and  
30 processing of gold accumulate and leach into the soil.

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32 <http://www.greenworld365.com/dirty-gold-environmental-impact-mines/>

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