

British Columbia: Beating the bad rap



Copper Mountain Mining Corporation

Primary crusher support wall construction at Copper Mountain.

[Peter Koven](#) Jul 26, 2011 **Last Updated: Jul 26, 2011 5:15 PM ET**

For all the criticism that British Columbia's mining industry receives, Jim O'Rourke will tell you that it is a good place to do business.

He should know. Mr. O'Rourke is the chief executive of Copper Mountain Mining Corp., which is holding the grand opening of its namesake mine in B.C. next month. It is the most promising new operation to open in B.C. in years. He was also involved in a number of prior B.C. projects, including the Endako mine in the 1960s and the Gibraltar mine in the 1970s.

"The whole Copper Mountain project went very well. From the time of buying the mine, completing our preliminary assessment in the first year, we went right into the feasibility study and met all of our targets over the past four years," he says.

"I think things have gotten a little more complicated [in B.C.] but overall it went well."

The smooth success of Copper Mountain stands in stark contrast to British Columbia's poor reputation among many in the industry. Fairly or not, B.C. is often viewed as a tough place to do business because of land claims issues and bureaucratic headaches.

That reputation was underscored in the latest rankings of mining jurisdictions by the Fraser Institute. British Columbia came in 36th place, behind the likes of Namibia, Bulgaria and Burkina Faso. By contrast, neighbouring Alberta ranked first.

It has not helped B.C.'s mining reputation that one negative event got so much attention last year: the federal government's decision to reject Taseko Mines Ltd.'s Prosperity project over environmental concerns. That came after the provincial government approved it.

The Taseko decision overshadowed a lot of new mining activity in the province, all of which suggests that mining companies are eager to invest money there. Along with Copper Mountain, New Gold Inc.'s New Afton mine and Thompson Creek Metals Co. Inc.'s Mount Milligan mine are under construction. Existing mines are being expanded, and a number of others are in earlier stages of development. Even Taseko continues to advance Prosperity with an adjusted mine plan.

"We haven't built a lot of new mines over the last couple of decades. Now that we're in this cycle where we see more mines being proposed and hopefully more mines being built, we have an opportunity to prove ourselves and hopefully demonstrate to the public that we're a different industry than we were 100 years ago," says Zoe Younger, acting president of the Mining Association of British Columbia.

Ms. Younger acknowledges that land claim issues with First Nations remains a "very challenging" issue in B.C., as are issues around the timeliness of the regulatory process and co-ordination between the provincial and federal governments. Regulation could become a bigger issue following potential cuts to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

But none of that changes the fact that the B.C. mining industry is worth \$7-billion to \$8-billion a year in revenue and creates 14,000 direct jobs and 35,000 secondary jobs, she says. And after the forestry industry was devastated by the pine beetle epidemic, the mining industry is viewed as more essential than ever. Mining and oil and gas now bring more money into the provincial treasury than forestry.

"The government is well aware of that. They obviously need the money so I think they're quite a bit more supportive now," Mr. O'Rourke says.