

## Vicious Circle Defined

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Yeah, I have to admit that I can be a real sucker for an interesting headline. Maybe it's some form of subliminal, professional courtesy or just the simple fact that I gravitate towards unique points of view — especially if they differ from my own. That might be the only reason I read a recent article about the environmental benefits of ... wait for it ... mining.

The article, which you can find at [www.siteselection.com/theEnergyReport/2010/jan/article3.htm](http://www.siteselection.com/theEnergyReport/2010/jan/article3.htm) [1] offers perspective on the need for mining operations in order to recover several precious metals and other elements that are vital in progressing new or alternative energy platforms. So while I doubt these thoughts will drive Greenpeace to embed a pick and shovel into their logo, I can appreciate the fresh perspective on an industry that is often more synonymous with stripping away from the earth's composition than working to restore it.

I have to admit that my knowledge of mining operations is quite limited. It's relegated primarily to pictures of big holes in the ground made by enormous machines that require monstrous amounts of oil-based fuel sources and lubricants in order to function — not exactly the backdrop for talks about new hybrid vehicles. Although it would be difficult to obtain the lithium used in the battery composition of such vehicles without these holes in the ground caused by fossil-fuel guzzling vehicles the size of an office building.

And I think we've all seen the dark and murky images of coal mines with equipment and personnel covered in dust and soot. In reinforcing the consequences of our continued use and reliance on fossil fuels, many like to present these snapshots as living arguments that reinforce the individual health problems and polluting ways these mines represent. Of course without the coal obtained from these hotbeds of

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environmental carnage I'm not sure how much juice would be available when plugging in those electric vehicles or to help supplement solar panels on cloudy days or wind turbines when the breeze fails to blow.

So we're caught in that viscous circle that is alternative energy development. In order to get to the promise of tomorrow we seemingly need to continue our reliance on the methodologies of today that so many loath. What this article showed me is that while a vocal minority wants to scream for the implementation of new, greener technologies without any delay, they fail to see the full picture in understanding the benefits of a more moderate transition.

As an example, coal is abundant and works extremely well in generating energy. It's not the sexiest option out there and certainly has its negative qualities, but until alternative options can match its performance, let's not dismiss its place in our energy grid. Similarly, mining, although vitally necessary, is definitely not the most environmentally friendly operation. However, right now it simply doesn't make sense to vilify either. And more importantly, completely turning our backs on coal or the mining operations that retrieve it would actually work to the detriment of developing a replacement.

I'm not arguing for the continued use of fossil fuels or against the implementation of new energy sources, but I think greater attention should be given to the benefits of our current approaches. In doing so, we'll have found the fuel we need for better efforts down the road.

What's your opinion? Let me hear it by e-mailing me at [jeff.reinke@advantagemedia.com](mailto:jeff.reinke@advantagemedia.com) [2].

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[1] <http://www.siteselection.com/theEnergyReport/2010/jan/article3.htm>

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