

Office of Mine Reclamation



While the Gold Rush of the 1840s was an exciting time in California's history, it was an era when little thought was given to protecting the environment, ensuring public safety, or preserving the landscape for future generations. After extracting valuable minerals from the land, miners generally abandoned the area, leaving the landscape damaged. Over time, leaking mine contaminants compromised local water supplies, unstable mine formations collapsed or caused landslides, and exposed mine features posed hazards to unsuspecting passersby.

The California Legislature enacted the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) in 1975 to protect the public and the environment during mining activities and to ensure the mined lands are restored to beneficial use when mining is complete. As a result, modern mining operations must secure a financial assurance to fully cover the cost to restore mined lands and maintain an approved reclamation plan through the life of the mining activities.

In 1991, the state created the Office of Mine Reclamation (OMR) to oversee local government administration of SMARA. In this capacity, OMR provides training and guidance to local governments, ensures that reclamation plans and financial assurances are sufficient to cover the cost of reclamation, and may initiate enforcement actions for mining operations that fail to comply with the law. In addition to overseeing existing mining operations, OMR also works to restore abandoned legacy mines (pre-SMARA mines) to a useful and safe condition.

***2016** marks OMR's 25th anniversary of managing California's mineral resources and protecting our natural landscapes. This anniversary website will showcase our ongoing work in reclamation and remediation of modern and historic mines. We will illustrate the dangers of unregulated mining and highlight the successful efforts by operators, local governments, and the state to meet California's mineral resources needs, while protecting the environment for future generations. For more information, please visit: www.conservation.ca.gov/omr*

