



Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine



Country: **Armenia**



No website



BHRRC company page

Summary

There are a number of noted human rights allegations related to Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine, the Shamlugh mine and the tailings dumps, including:

→ **Environmental Degradation and Impacts on Health and Livelihood:**

Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine has been accused of contributing to heavy metals pollution which can have devastating health impacts. According to Ecolur, the Akhtala River has dried up, partly due to the company's overuse of water. Sludge and waste from the tailings dumps have led to destruction of agriculture and of local rivers.

→ **Pressure on Activists:**

Employees of Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine have, allegedly, placed pressure upon activist, Oleg Dulgaryan, because of his investigations into the company's environmental impacts.

→ **Deaths and Labour Rights:**

In 2012, a worker died just six weeks after starting work at Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine. Three other deaths have been documented in recent years. Workers have also protested poor working conditions at the mine and pay cuts; some workers' salaries were allegedly reduced by nearly half. The company fired twenty-two employees who participated with the protests.

Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine does not have publicly available information of its human rights policies or environmental and social standards. The company did not respond to our questionnaire of its human rights policies and commitments.

Human Rights Commitments

- ⊖ **Does not have a website;** as such, no human rights policies are publicly available
- ⊖ The company **did not respond** to our questionnaire of its human rights policies and commitments

Human Rights Impacts

- ⚠ Health and safety
- ⚠ Environmental and water rights
- ⚠ Right to livelihood and adequate standard of living
- ⚠ Labour rights and wages
- ⚠ Deaths and/or violence
- ⚠ Attacks on human rights defenders and labour activists

Company Information

Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine operates the Shamlugh copper mine (also known as Shamlukh).

The company is entirely owned by Vahe Hakobyan via an intermediary, Masco Mine CJSC. Hakobyan is a politician and former member of Parliament. He also previously held roles as the director of Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine and the governor of Syunik, a resource-rich province with several mines. ² ³

COMPANY OWNERSHIP



Human Rights Allegations

Environmental Degradation and Impacts on Health and Livelihood

Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine has been accused of contributing to heavy metals pollution and water pollution. In 2018, Armenian authorities found a number of violations, including a leak of industrial wastewater, which polluted 200 square meters of land. (The spill was subsequently cleaned.) The company also took more water than it was allowed and emitted excessive dust and carbon dioxide. Armenian authorities also noted issues around waste management and found that the company had not paid environmental fees. ² According to Ecolur, the Akhtala River has dried up, partly due to the company's overuse of water. ²

The mayor of the Akhtala community raised concerns about environmental damages from Shamlugh, claiming waste had been thrown into nearby gorges. Waters from the local mines contaminate the Akhtala and Debet Rivers, which are used for irrigation in Armenia and Georgia. ²

Additionally, the Ministry of Environment has found a number of concerns related to the Nazik tailings dump. The dump—which is now closed—was not covered with enough soil to adequately prevent the spread of waste. Arsenic, lead, vanadium, chromium, nickel and copper were found within the soil above the dump. The Akhtala River was at risk of contamination from the dump. ² A World Bank study found high risk of contamination of the Shamlugh River from the dump, as well as a small, but concerning, risk that the wall of the dump could collapse, causing the tailings to flood out. ²

The Nahatak dump also needs reclamation. ² In 2020, Armenian authorities found violations related to Nahatak, with results of 'environmental disaster', health impacts and 'socioeconomic crisis'. ² Previously, Ecolur had documented sludge flowing from the Nahatak dump into the Debed river. ² The Tchotchkan tailings dump is also allegedly damaged and has leaked waste. ²

A 2015 study showed heavy metals pollution near Shamlugh Town caused by mining-related activity. In some sites, copper pollution was above the safe limits for agricultural production. The study also found elevated concentrations of lead, arsenic, nickel and zinc; although, these elements were within the maximum permissible concentration. Researchers raised concerns about cobalt due to its high toxicity and penetration; even though only a small amount was present, researchers emphasised it posed the highest health risks for humans, especially children. Humans can absorb these heavy metals through the soil food chain, oral ingestion, skin contact and breathing of particles. ² A different study found elevated levels of lead in children's blood. ² Concerningly, heavy-metals poisoning can lead to severe negative impacts for human health, including organ damage, cancer, neurological issues and physical degeneration. ²

Researchers also emphasised that heavy-metals pollution has negative impacts for local agriculture. ² Residents have complained that contamination from the tailings dumps has prevented crops and trees from growing properly. One resident said he planted a 600-hectare peach orchard, but nothing grew. ²

Pressure on Activists

Employees of the company have allegedly placed pressure upon activist Oleg Dulgaryan because of his investigations into environmental impacts. After Dulgaryan took soil samples to test for the presence of harmful substances, employees started to spread rumours that he was trying to shut down the combine. Company employees told community members that they shall oppose Dulgaryan or that the mine would be closed, endangering the jobs of the community.[↗]

Deaths and Labour Rights

In 2012, a worker died just six weeks after starting work at Akhtala Ore Dressing Combine. Hetq reported that the death was the third within just five years.[↗] Another death occurred during 2017 as the result of a collapse in the mine.[↗]

Workers sent a letter to the president of Armenia about poor working conditions in the mine and low wages. Miners allegedly wore clothing from home as they had not been issued with working uniforms for years. Showers and other facilities were reportedly of poor condition.[↗] The former mayor of Shamlugh region, Samvel Shakhkyan, filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights about poor safety in the mine.[↗]

Several years later, workers protested after the company reduced wages and did not address poor working conditions. Some workers' salaries were allegedly reduced by nearly half. The company fired twenty-two employees who participated at the protest.[↗]

Human Rights Commitments

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