

## National Coal sued over Zeb Mountain compliance

Staff Reports

Wednesday, April 6, 2011

KNOXVILLE — Area environmental groups Tennessee Clean Water Network, Sierra Club and Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment have filed a federal lawsuit against National Coal Corp., accusing the company of refusing to comply with requirements to report discharges from its Zeb Mountain coal mine in Campbell County.

Knoxville-based National Coal was acquired in December by Ranger Energy Investments LLC, which also owns Southern Coal Corp., and in January Ranger Energy closed National Coal and laid off its 155 employees. National Coal's Knoxville office was permanently closed along with the Jacksboro, Tenn., field office.

National Coal has operated mines throughout East Tennessee and at one time owned the mineral rights on 65,000 acres, operated 10 mines.

The environmental groups claim National Coal has been violating an agreement to report selenium discharges from the Zeb mining site. Selenium is a naturally occurring compound that, in large quantities, can be toxic and is often exposed in mining of ores. Ranger Energy officials could not be reached for comment.

The groups in September took legal action against National Coal to stop the company from "unlawfully dumping toxic pollutants into the creeks and waterways of Campbell and Scott counties." In a settlement between National Coal and the group, the company reportedly agreed to begin disclosing selenium limits.

"Zeb Mountain is the largest mountain top removal site in Tennessee," Renee Hoyos, Tennessee Clean Water Network executive director, said in a statement. "The public deserves to know how much selenium is going into coal streams and creeks from their coal operations. Our settlement required this kind of transparency from National Coal."

Cathie Byrd, who is with SOCM, said the groups are holding National Coal to the terms of the agreement because "National Coal Corp.'s operation at Zeb has a track record of repeatedly violating the Clean Water Act by dumping harmful amounts of toxic selenium pollution into Eastern Tennessee waterways without permit authorization."



© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online