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The Honorable Sally M. Jewell  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Gina McCarthy  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Secretary Jewell & Administrator McCarthy,

As you are aware, on August 5, 2015 federal Environmental Protection Agency contractors at the Gold King Mine in Colorado breached a sealed adit, causing the release of more than three million gallons of contaminated mine water into nearby waterways. The release of highly concentrated lead, arsenic, beryllium, cadmium and mercury into these waterways disrupted water access for both urban and agricultural use, and these substances are likely to remain present in river sediment for years to come. This incident underscores that the potential for similar situations exists in other parts of the country, including some with consequences that could be exponentially more damaging.

Located in my district near Redding, California, the inactive Iron Mountain Mine, which produced iron, silver, gold, copper, zinc, and pyrite from the 1860s through 1963, contains extremely acidic drainage. In fact, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, the drainage is 6,300 times as acidic as automobile batteries, and Iron Mountain is considered one of the most toxic sites in America. Iron Mountain Mine drains to a small reservoir which then feeds into the Sacramento River – California's primary source of water for urban and agricultural use, upon which millions rely.

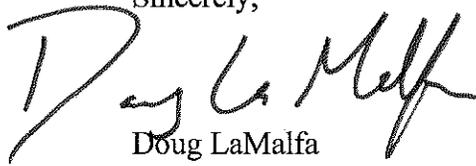
In the past, uncontrolled spills have resulted in acidic waste releases from Iron Mountain to nearby waterways. Though these releases have not yet been of disastrous proportions, the mine's proximity and connection to California's primary water supply merits serious concern. While federal agencies previously attempted to plug a leak at Iron Mountain, that effort failed due waste so extraordinarily acidic that it ate through the steel and concrete plug.

Given the fact that the EPA and several Department of Interior agencies share responsibility for containing and addressing the hazardous substances within Iron Mountain Mine, I request your written responses to the following inquiries by January 8, 2016:

1. Most work at Iron Mountain was suspended following the Gold King Mine incident. Have procedures at Iron Mountain been reassessed following the Gold King incident? If so, please provide a detailed explanation as to how the procedures have been updated.
2. The Gold King Mine incident appears to have been due to a failure to monitor high-pressure accumulations of waste behind a sealed adit. Have the EPA and Interior determined whether similar high-pressure situations exist at Iron Mountain, and if so, how are those situations being addressed?
3. How often are safety and progress reviews of work at Iron Mountain conducted? When were the most recent reviews conducted?
4. Did the review determine whether there were any potentially dangerous issues, and if so, have those issues been addressed? How so?
5. How confident are you that efforts being undertaken by the EPA and Interior agencies can ensure that toxic drainage from Iron Mountain Mine will not cause contamination of California's primary water supply?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress