



# NEWS

## U.S. Department of the Interior

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Contact: Joe Pally, (202) 208-2565  
jpally@osmre.gov

### **Interior Secretary Norton Applauds Leadership of Sen. Specter, Rep. Peterson on Cleanup of Dangerous Coal Mines Across America**

*Proposal would reclaim abandoned mines decades faster than current law;  
3.5 million Americans living near dangerous abandoned coal mines would be safer sooner*

**(WASHINGTON)** – Interior Secretary Gale Norton today praised the leadership of Pennsylvania lawmakers who have introduced an Administration measure that will accelerate the cleanup of dangerous abandoned coal mines and direct funds to the highest-priority areas.

U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (PA) on Tuesday introduced the Administration's proposal as S. 2049. U.S. Rep. John Peterson (PA) introduced the legislation in the House on Wednesday.

"Sen. Specter and Rep. Peterson have moved decisively to introduce legislation that will get serious about saving lives, improving health and safety and restoring landscapes in Pennsylvania and all across our nation," said Norton. "With their leadership, we can get this job finished, reclaim these areas and turn these death traps and ruined landscapes into community assets."

The 1977 Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act established the Office of Surface Mining and authorized the office to collect fees to finance reclamation of abandoned mine lands. Through the AML program, problems at many high-priority sites have been addressed. However, when AML coal fee collection authority expires in September 2004, approximately \$3 billion in significant health and safety problems will still remain. A recent study conducted by OSM found that 3.5 million Americans live less than one mile from health and safety hazards created by abandoned coal mines.

Secretary Norton on Monday outlined the Administration's proposal to reauthorize the fee with reforms that would eliminate all significant health and safety problems within 25 years, remove 142,000 Americans from risk annually and save \$3.2 billion. Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell hosted Secretary Norton at the Pennsylvania State Capitol on Wednesday, Feb. 4, to announce the proposed AML reauthorization plan in Harrisburg, Pa.

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