
Mine lays off ceramic workers

Idaho-Maryland to put first planned tile plant outside area

BY DAVE MOLLER,

Almost half of the Idaho-Maryland Mine's workers have been laid off in a restructuring that will put the company's first proposed ceramic tile plant outside of Grass Valley.

Six of the 14 employees at the mine who were part of its Golden Bear Ceramics operation were laid off, confirmed David Watkinson, president of the Idaho-Maryland Mining Corp.

The ceramics operation will split from the mine in an effort to placate shareholders who wanted to invest in one business or the other, not both, Watkinson said.

Golden Bear is looking for independent funding, and the six people may get their jobs back in one or two months if the funding is landed, Watkinson said.

The restructuring also means the first commercial ceramics plant, generated from rock waste from the mine, will open in another area where environmental reviews are not on the table, Watkinson said.

"The plan is to build a production plant here, but Golden Bear can start elsewhere right away," Watkinson said.

Some business parks outside the area have expressed an interest in the ceramics operations, but Watkinson declined to identify them.

The mine's parent, Emgold Mining Corp., is still seeking a permit from the City of Grass Valley to open the Idaho-Maryland Mine. The mine is historically the second-largest underground gold mine in California, according to Emgold.

The environmental impact report review already is underway, according to Joe Heckel, Grass Valley's community development director.

"We're probably still at least a full year out for the (final report) to be complete," Heckel said. The process will include public input.

Some residents previously have expressed concerns about what the mine might do to surrounding wells, how dewatering the mine would impact Deer Creek and how much energy would be expended at the ceramic tile plant.

"A lot of people are very concerned," said Grass Valley resident Barbara Michelman.

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To contact Senior Staff Writer Dave Moller, e-mail davem@theunion.com

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For more on the story, see Thursday's edition of The Union.

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