



DEPARTEMENT DE L'ARIEGE
ARRONDISSEMENT DE SAINT GIRONS
CANTON D'OUST

MAIRIE DE COUFLENS

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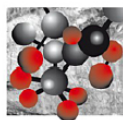
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Secrétariat ouvert
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ASSOCIATION
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Travail • Santé • Environnement



France : a tungstene mine contaminated by asbestos will not re-open *Press Release*

In Couflens (Ariège, French Pyrenees), a tungsten mine - whose ore contains asbestos, both actinolite and tremolite - was operated from 1972 to 1986. At that time, Henri Pézerat and Annie Thébaud-Mony had then been struggling with the miners for the recognition of occupational diseases for some of them suffering from asbestosis and cancers. Thirty years later, since 2015, a project to re-open this mine was supported by the public authorities, in particular by Emmanuel Macron, then Minister of the Economy and Industry. In October 2016, the exploration permit was granted to the company Variscan-Mines. For nearly four years, the city of Couflens and a collective of associations mobilized against this project, bringing several cases before the Toulouse administrative court. The court finally ruled on June 28, 2019.

According to its press release, *"the court considers that, following the provisions of Article L. 122-1 of the Mining Code that it is the responsibility of the competent authority, under the supervision of the judge of the excess of power, to ensure, before issuing an exclusive research permit, that the candidates for such an authorization possess, directly or indirectly, the technical and financial capacities which will enable them to carry out the exploration work and assume the obligations mentioned in the decrees adopted to protect the interests mentioned in Articles L. 161-1 and L. 163-1 to L. 163-9 of the Mining Code".* »

Thus, the Toulouse Administrative Court pointed out the glaring inadequacy of Variscan-Mines' financial situation, making it illusory to conduct mining exploration work in a way that respects the health of workers, residents and the environment, because, according to Article L. 161-1 of the mining code cited in the judgment, *"Research or mining operations must comply, in accordance with the rules set out in the Labour Code, on health and safety at work, with the requirements and obligations necessary to preserve public safety and health, the strength of public and private buildings, the conservation of roads, the mine and other mines, the essential characteristics of the surrounding environment, whether land or water, and more generally the protection of natural areas and landscapes, fauna and flora, biological balances and natural resources"*.

This decision is very welcomed by the municipality of Couflans and the associations, with a great relief. Beyond the financial aspect, we know that the Salau mine presented risks of fatal injuries, particularly because of asbestos, but also arsenic and radon. Knowing that it takes decades for the health consequences of exposure to carcinogens to appear, if exploration work had to continue, paving the way for possible future mining activity, workers would have been exposed to these dangers. How many of them would have lost their health and then their lives?

We hope that, by abandoning jobs that kill and a project that is detrimental to public health and the environment, to the river Salat from its source, to the Haut Salat valley community and beyond, the Couserans region develops activities that are a source of life for all.