



A Guide to
greenwashing
and Corporate Disinformation
in the Mining Sector

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List of Acronyms

- AGU: Office of the Attorney General of the Union
- AL: Alagoas
- AMIG: Association of Mining Municipalities of Minas Gerais and Brazil
- ANM: National Mining Agency
- ASCOM: Communications Office
- BHP: BHP Group (Anglo-Australian mining company)
- CAAD: Climate Action Against Disinformation
- CDC: Consumer Protection Code
- CO₂/CO₂e: carbon dioxide / carbon dioxide equivalent
- CONJUR: Legal Advisory Office
- COP: Conference of the Parties of the UN climate summit (e.g., COP26, COP28, COP30)
- CVM: Brazilian Securities and Exchange Commission
- ESG: Environmental, Social and Governance
- FALA: FALA – Impact Studio
- AI: Artificial Intelligence
- IBRAM: Brazilian Mining Institute
- IDEC: Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defense
- LAPAJ: Laboratory for Research on Environmental Policy and Justice
- MTE: Ministry of Labor and Employment
- MG: Minas Gerais
- MPF: Federal Public Prosecutor's Office
- NetLab: Laboratory for the Study of Internet and Social Media (UFRJ)
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
- UN: United Nations
- PA: Pará
- PNDD: National Office for the Defense of Democracy
- RPIIC: Network of Partners for the Integrity of Information on Climate Change
- SEMAD: State Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development
- SENACON: National Consumer Secretariat
- SLAPP: Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation
- UFPA: Federal University of Pará
- UFRJ: Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- WIM: Women in Mining



Composition: Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi;
Based on a photo by Rebeca Binda.



Composition: Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi;
Based on a photo by Rebeca Binda.

Executive Summary

This guide analyzes **greenwashing** and **corporate disinformation in the mining sector** — practices that project an environmentally responsible image detached from the reality of the territories. It is a **reputation-management strategy that can be classified as misleading or abusive advertising under the Consumer Protection Code** and that, in the context of the climate crisis, **operates as a tool of disinformation**.

“**Sustainability**” has become the sector’s main commodity. Mining companies and entities such as IBRAM sell mining as a “climate salvation” and a pillar of the energy transition, appropriating terms such as “green aluminum,” “green lithium,” and “sustainable mining” to justify extractive expansion while omitting socio-environmental liabilities. Cases such as Vale, Norsk Hydro, Anglo American, Sigma Lithium, and Braskem illustrate the distance between the advertising and the territory, and studies show that mining leads the greenwashing rankings among the advertisements analyzed.

The concept of made-to-measure greenwashing (**tailored greenwashing**) describes how a single company calibrates its messaging for each audience — investors, consumers, regulators, and communities — drawing on the selective disclosure of positive data and the omission of negative data. It is the underlying contradiction of a finite, non-renewable activity that presents itself as “green.”

The guide maps the sector’s warning signs: co-optation of leaders, astroturfing, intentional disinformation

and the purchase of influence, woke-washing, the war of expert reports, judicial intimidation (SLAPP), false solutions, and economic blackmail — while also recognizing the classic repertoire of climate denial and “delay” discourses.

We advocate paths for confronting it: punishing misleading advertising; demanding transparency and “following the money”; demonetizing disinformation on platforms; investing in prevention (prebunking) and moderation; guaranteeing legal protection for defenders (anti-SLAPP law); and strengthening the integrity of climate information, in line with the COP 30 Declaration and the work of institutions such as the MPF, the Public Defender’s Offices, and the AGU/PNDD.

It is necessary to understand the mining industry’s strategies in order to combat practices that harm the public interest and undermine actions that could mitigate the climate crisis.

For life on Earth to remain in reasonable conditions in the coming decades and for unacceptable global inequality to diminish, understanding the landscape in order to act effectively is the first step. **That is one of the purposes of this guide.**



Greenwashing:

Defining the Concept



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At the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in 2021, the environmentalist **Greta Thunberg** referred to the climate conference in a post on Twitter as a “greenwashing festival.”

“#COP26 has been named the most exclusionary conference in history. This is no longer a climate conference. It is a Global North ‘greenwashing’ festival. A two-week celebration of business as usual and blah, blah, blah,” Thunberg wrote at the time.^[1]

But what, after all, is this word invoked by the activist?



Credit: Wikipedia/Greta Thunberg addresses climate strikers at Civic Center Park in Denver, on 11 October 2019.

Greenwashing, or green makeup, is a communication and marketing strategy created to **promote the image of a corporation, product, or service as environmentally responsible or sustainable**, when, **in reality, its practices do not correspond to that discourse or conceal significant negative impacts**. Such initiatives are currently tied to the demands related to meeting the so-called ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) goals and to zeroing out or offsetting carbon emissions.

Far from being unique to COP 26, greenwashing has become ubiquitous at every Conference of the Parties, the world’s largest climate-governmental-corporate gathering, as at the most recent one, held in Belém, Brazil, on land built by the mining company Vale itself — with tax incentives — and which served for various mining companies to take their “green” advertising a step further.

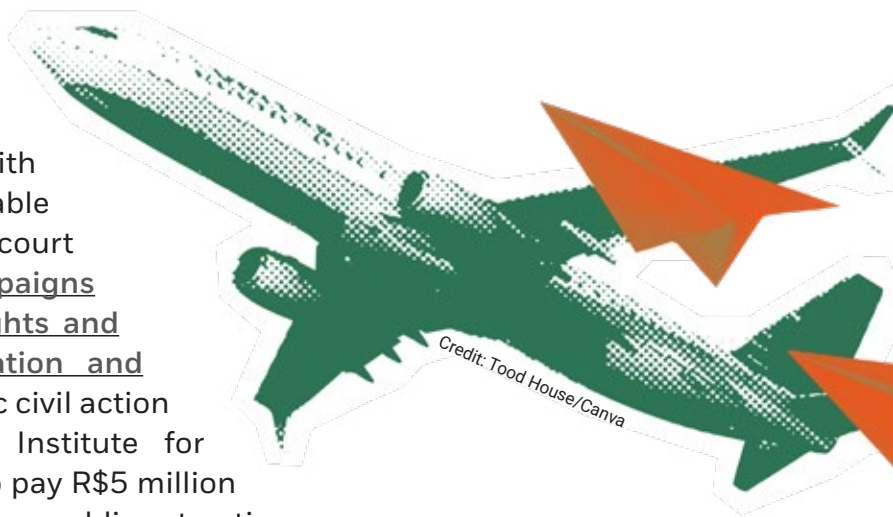
The power imbalance is striking in mining: the sector has earned more than R\$1.8 trillion since the Brumadinho dam collapse in January 2019 to date. This economic might translates into massive media presence and open doors in politics at every level.

In the current public debate, greenwashing has gone beyond advertising exaggeration and has become a **strategic reputation-management tool**. It operates by creating a **deliberate disconnect** between corporate discourse and territorial reality.

In the academic literature, practices like this are studied within the broader field of misleading corporate communication (“corporate miscommunication”). In a broad review of the subject, Montgomery, Lyon, and Barg (2024) show that, far from waning, greenwashing has become more sophisticated and more widespread.^[2]

Under the Consumer Protection Code, **the practice of greenwashing can be legally classified as misleading or abusive advertising**, since it violates society’s right to clear and truthful information and can mislead the consumer.^[3]

That is what happened recently with the airline Gol, which was found liable in the first instance by a São Paulo court for misleading advertising in campaigns that associated the company's flights and initiatives with carbon neutralization and environmental benefits^[4], in a public civil action brought by IDEC (the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defense). Gol will have to pay R\$5 million for collective moral damages, issue a public retraction, and technically substantiate future environmental claims.



In mining, Vale, BHP Billiton, and the Renova Foundation were convicted at first instance in 2024 for misleading advertising in the case of the Rio Doce waters^[5], on account of advertising campaigns that constructed a “fanciful narrative” about the process of reparation for the crime in Mariana (MG). In one month, Renova spent R\$17.4 million to attach a positive image to the Foundation and to report a nonexistent normalcy, especially regarding water quality and the recovery of springs, contradicting the reality in the contaminated territories. The judge ordered the payment of R\$56 million for material and moral damages, a decision still subject to appeal.

There is a structural dimension to this process: the conversion of citizens into consumers and the shift of the paradigm from rights — including environmental rights and the right to well-being — to artificial market demands. Greenwashing operates on two simultaneous fronts: on those who consume so-called “green products” and on the communities affected in the territories.

In the context of the climate crisis, **greenwashing in the mining sector acts as a tool of disinformation that distorts public perception of mining's real impact**, creating a false sense of progress that, in various instances, delays urgent and necessary climate action.

Made-to-measure greenwashing (tailored greenwashing)

The concept of “made-to-measure greenwashing” (tailored greenwashing) describes the ability of a single corporation to produce different versions of its environmental discourse for distinct audiences — investors, consumers, regulatory bodies, and affected communities — adjusting what it reveals and what it omits according to the interlocutor.

Academic studies show that greenwashing is an “umbrella term” that brings together various forms of misleading environmental communication, the selective disclosure of positive information, accompanied by the omission of negative impacts, being one of the most common.^[6]



This modulation is possible because the greenwashing chain involves multiple actors — companies, consultancies, advertising agencies, certifiers, and media outlets — which makes it possible to calibrate the message for each audience. In a broad review of the subject, researchers point out that, far from waning, the practice has become more sophisticated and more widespread, with no signs of exhaustion ^[2]

In the mining sector, this translates into seals and reports of “green aluminum,” “green lithium,” or “sustainable mining” aimed at the international market, while, in the territory, the same operation accumulates environmental liabilities, rights violations, and numerous conflicts — a deliberate mismatch manufactured by powerful machines of advertising and communication and by qualified professionals hired by multimillion-dollar mining companies.

As highlighted by **Maurício Angelo**, director of this **Observatory**, in his master’s dissertation defended at the University of Brasília (2024), mining is an activity that is **“essentially finite, non-renewable, and that involves the irreversible destruction of mountains, aquifers, caves, forests, and the entire directly affected ecosystem, using explosives and large heavy machinery.”** Thus, this would be exactly the antithesis, the opposite of what mining likes to sell and present itself as, including the hotly disputed and worn-out concept of “sustainable development.”

At the base of Brazilian mining, the sector’s history, also highlighted in a chapter dedicated to the subject in the same dissertation, does not even deliver the promised “development,” let alone “sustainability,” since it would be impossible for mining to offer something that goes against the very essence of its operation. As Ignacy Sachs recalls, **“sustainable development is incompatible with the unrestricted play of market forces.”**^[7]

To sustain the label, the sector relies on what environmental economics calls “weak” sustainability — which treats economic, natural, and social capital as “entirely interchangeable or intersubstitutable” — as opposed to “strong” sustainability, which requires that “at least the services of ‘natural capital’ be kept constant.” **It is this conceptual substitution that makes it possible to sell as “green” what is, at its origin, the depletion of a non-renewable good.**^[45]

What is disinformation?

Unlike incorrect information (misinformation), which can be shared without bad faith, **disinformation presupposes an organized and financed "production chain of lies."** In the socio-environmental sphere, it functions as a business model that seeks to delay, weaken, or prevent environmental protection policies and the regulation of polluting sectors such as mining, often through the spread of false narratives.



For this reason, disinformation should not be confused with a one-off error or isolated fake news. It is a **systemic and deliberate tactic of creating and disseminating** false, inaccurate, manipulated, or out-of-context information with the aim of causing harm, obtaining economic or political advantage, and confusing public opinion. One example: although fossil fuel companies had known, since the late 1950s, of the impacts of burning fossil fuels on the climate, they chose to launch a sophisticated campaign to confuse public opinion and obstruct climate action in defense of their profits.

A leaked memo from the **American Petroleum Institute** revealed its objectives: that “victory will be achieved” when the average citizen and the media “‘understand’ the uncertainties in climate science,” and “those promoting the Kyoto treaty on the basis of the prevailing science appear to be out of touch with reality.”^[8]

American Petroleum Institute. “It Costs a Lot to Live Today...” Advertisement published in The Covington News, Covington, Georgia, October 13, 1955, p. 22. Available in the Georgia Historic Newspapers archive.



Disinformation is widespread in the extractive sector, from the strategic selection of uncertainties in climate science to the selective display of emission reductions in one region while they quietly rise in another. These narratives have evolved into more **sophisticated discourses of “delay”**, which accept the existence of climate change but use economic arguments or arguments of supposed sovereignty to justify maintaining the extractive status quo.^[9]

Some call this “futurewashing”: the adoption of long-term net-zero carbon targets without any short- and medium-term objectives or action steps. Besides not being legally binding, the mechanisms of these targets often rely on methods such as carbon sequestration and offsets that lack scientific consensus and reliability as viable solutions for achieving net-zero emissions in aggregate terms.^[2]

Climate disinformation, in particular, is misleading content that “questions the existence or the impacts of climate change [...]; misrepresents scientific data, including through omission or biased selection of studies [...]; or publicizes false efforts toward climate goals.”^[10]

“Delay” discourses (climate delay) are today the predominant form of obstruction. In a typology that has become a reference, Lamb and colleagues identify twelve discourses that “accept the existence of climate change but justify inaction or inadequate efforts,” organized into four strategies: redirecting responsibility, defending non-transformative changes, emphasizing the negative effects of climate action, and surrendering to the supposed inevitability of warming.^[11]

In Latin America, this repertoire was mapped under the concept of gaslighting — “the systematic manipulation to make people doubt perceived reality.” The regional research recorded that 96% of the disinforming statements “reproduce delayist discourses,” with the narrative of fossil gas as a “transition fuel” being the most frequent. In Brazil, “27% of the news items analyzed [...] contain disinformation about the energy transition,” and “the sources that most promoted disinformation were industry representatives (46%).”^{[12][13]}

To combat this scenario, ten countries signed at COP 30 the “Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change,” committing to “protect people who report on and research climate issues” and urging the private sector to “ensure transparent and responsible advertising practices.”^[14]

All of this confirms that climate disinformation “is not a mistake: it is a business model,” sustained by a “production chain of lies, a system that turns deception into profit, manipulation into power, and confusion into influence.”^[15]



Credit: Shutterstock/Master1305

Mining Denialism

Denialism in modern mining, as defined by Angelo (2024), is subtle and perverse. It does not deny climate science but appropriates it to reaffirm the centrality of mining as a pillar of the energy transition, ignoring human suffering and broad environmental damage.

Companies and governments acknowledge impacts and disasters only as isolated technical events, **denying the unfeasibility of respecting ways of life in the affected territories and the irreversible impacts of mining.**

It is a strategy of collective gaslighting: **making the victims doubt their own reality of contamination and loss**, and attempting to impose the idea that the very life of that community, city, or region depends on mining — now presented as more than essential, inescapable, and positive.

In covering the expansion of lithium and other critical minerals, **Observatório da Mineração** identified a **pattern of silencing**: the industry systematically denies that its operations worsen local quality of life.

Photography: Isis Medeiros.
Composition:
Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi



In Jequitinhonha, the lithium “boom” is celebrated by the market, but it is denialist in concealing that, at the extraction end, what occurs is the rising cost of living, restricted access to health care, and pressure on already scarce water resources — aggravating the climate crisis of a region that has already recorded the highest temperature in Brazil’s history, in Araçuaí, in 2023, at 44.8°C.^[16]

This narrative ignores that the mining-steel sector, from end to end, is responsible for nearly 30% of global direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions, in addition to causing irreversible impacts that deprive future generations of the opportunity for full development.

Photography:
Isis Medeiros.

One of those responsible for the climate crisis and an accomplice in the planet’s critical state, mining needs to ignore its own history in order to sell itself as something different from what it really is. Although seemingly sophisticated, this is pure denialism. The dominant narrative of the mining sector in recent years.



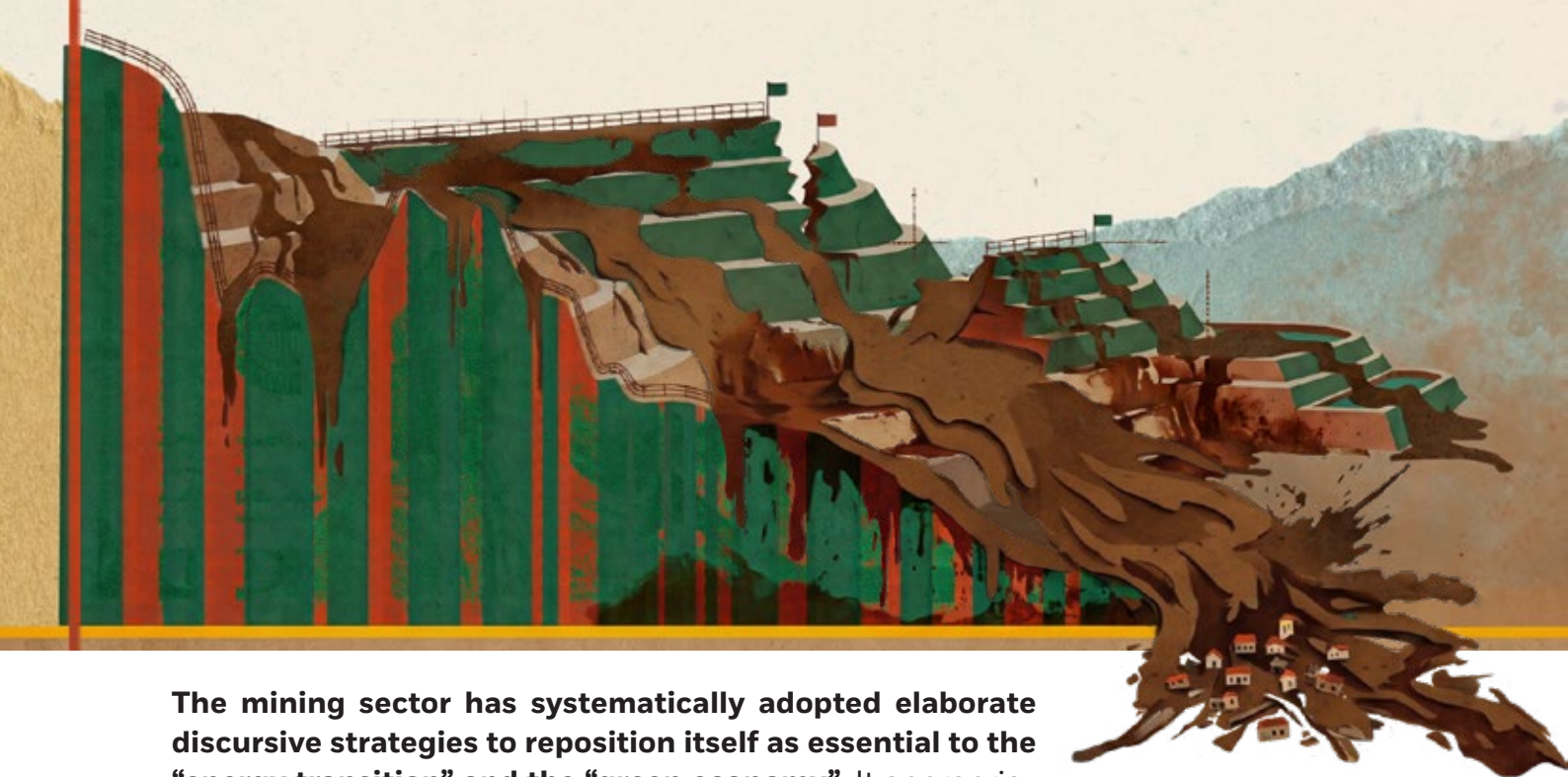
Photography: Isis Medeiros.
Composition:
Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi.

How Mining Sells the Idea of Sustainability

"Sustainability" has become the mining sector's main commodity, often sold with more effort than the product itself.

Leading the sector is IBRAM (the Brazilian Mining Institute), which promises that mining will be the "**climate salvation**" and will ensure the reduction of emissions, positioning the Amazon as the center of sustainable global mining.^[17] This rhetoric, detached from reality and from recent disasters, tries to sell the cause of the problem (intensive extractivism) as the solution, confusing public opinion and decision-makers about the real impacts of mining on the forest.

The strategy is explicit: **The package of initiatives by the Brazilian Mining Institute (Ibram) to try to convince people that mining in the country is 'sustainable' and that the expansion of critical minerals will be able to contain the climate crisis was expanded and directed toward actions related to COP 30,** as a special report by **Observatório da Mineração** noted in 2025.^[17]



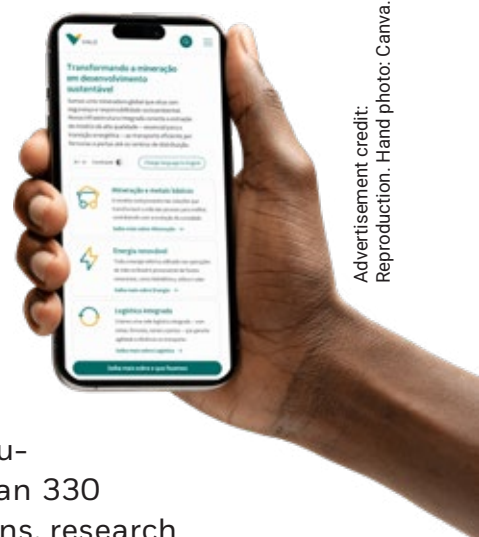
The mining sector has systematically adopted elaborate discursive strategies to reposition itself as essential to the “energy transition” and the “green economy”. It appropriates terms such as “green aluminum,” “sustainable mining,” or “green lithium” to justify the expansion of extractive frontiers, often concealing the severe local socio-environmental impacts of these activities.^[18]

As already noted, this narrative seeks to create a paradox in which the solution to the climate crisis would necessarily depend on the intensification of mining, omitting the associated human rights violations and environmental degradation. It is the use of the concept of technological and market “solutionism” to whitewash the continuation of a predatory extractive model.

This happens when mining companies, such as Vale,^[19] use advertising to highlight social responsibility initiatives that, proportionally, represent a tiny fraction of their profits, while real investments in safety and damage mitigation remain insufficient. This shows how the “standing forest” narrative, when made by the mining sector, serves to divert focus from the disproportion between the extraction of wealth and the socio-environmental return.

The disproportion is glaring: “Vale had, between 2015, the year of the Mariana disaster, and the 2nd quarter of 2025, an accumulated net profit of around R\$335 billion. That figure is more than 330 times greater than the R\$1 billion ‘in socio-environmental actions, research and development, and cultural incentives’ that the company says it invested in the Amazon region over the last decade,” **Observatório da Mineração** noted in 2025.^[19] At COP 30, where the company made itself omnipresent, “the small detail that Vale ranks among the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world — a fine contradiction — was not mentioned. The slogan could be swapped for ‘where there is a climate crisis, Vale is there.’”^[20]

Art: Julia Cristofari,
Credit: Shutterstock/Master1305



Advertisement credit:
Reproduction. Hand photo: Canva.

One of the most recent studies on the subject, covering the entire Brazilian mining sector, is by the Laboratory for the Study of Internet and Social Media (NetLab) of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), in the report titled “Greenwashing in the Energy Transition: How LinkedIn advertisements distort the climate debate and legitimize unsustainable practices.”



Of the 2,800 advertisements analyzed by UFRJ, 1,476 (52.7%) showed signs of greenwashing. The mining sector is the one with the highest percentage of advertisements involving greenwashing, at 88.6% (78 of 88). The survey highlights:

“The mining company Vale, one of the largest mining companies in the world and one of the main advertisers with signs of greenwashing in the sample, promotes the myth of ‘sustainable mining’ in its advertisements by using the pretext of supporting the energy transition through the extraction of the raw material used in wind and solar farms.”

The case of Norsk Hydro is also emblematic. **While the Norwegian giant sells the global market the image of “low-carbon aluminum” with a focus on COP 30 – the event in Brazil that was the recent apex of this shared strategy – Hydro remains silent about the historic environmental liabilities in Barcarena (PA).** The product is sold as clean, but the territory remains contaminated.^[21]

In the case of “green aluminum,” “the multinational chose the popular singer Fafá de Belém to be the face of the company’s advertising in its COP 30-focused actions. This strategy can be classified as greenwashing, according to specialists and researchers who analyze the mining company’s actions.”^[21] For Professor Rosa Acevedo Marin (UFPA), “Hydro Alunorte’s credits are on the rise and seem to erase its history as a polluter, perpetrator of disasters and environmental crimes.”^[21]



Hydro advertising campaign in 2025 / Reproduction

Another example is the British mining company Anglo American, in the Minas-Rio project, which massively expanded its sustainable advertising across media channels, while the communities neighboring the enterprise in Conceição do Mato Dentro denounce human rights violations, illness, and water insecurity. Sustainability, therefore, is sold as a seal on the final product, while the production process continues to generate sacrifice zones.^[22]

The contrast between awards and reality is emblematic: “the mining company has just been named ‘Company of the Year’ in the mining sector in the ‘ESG’ category (...) among large firms (...). Those who live with the impacts of the company’s operations, however, tell a very different story from what the awards received and the company’s advertising campaigns show.”^[22] Organizations of affected people summarize: “behind the green facade hides a long legacy of colonial dispossession and racialized violence.”^[22]

The lithium case is exemplary. Since its arrival in the Jequitinhonha Valley, Sigma Lithium has sold the project as “green,” “sustainable,” with “zero chemicals,” “zero drinking water,” “zero tailings,” and “100% prosperity” for the region — a message that gained an impactful label at COP 28, in Dubai, when “Sigma presented to the world the extraction of lithium at its plant with what it calls the ‘quintuple-zero.’”^[18] Specialists highlight the weight of the marketing: “what sets Sigma apart is that it has this robust marketing, so it takes and creates this package of actions within the mining company and sells these practices in a commercialized way.”^[18] The licensing documentation itself, however, contradicts the “zero tailings” narrative: annual production will reach 3.38 million tons of tailings per year, according to Semad.^[18]

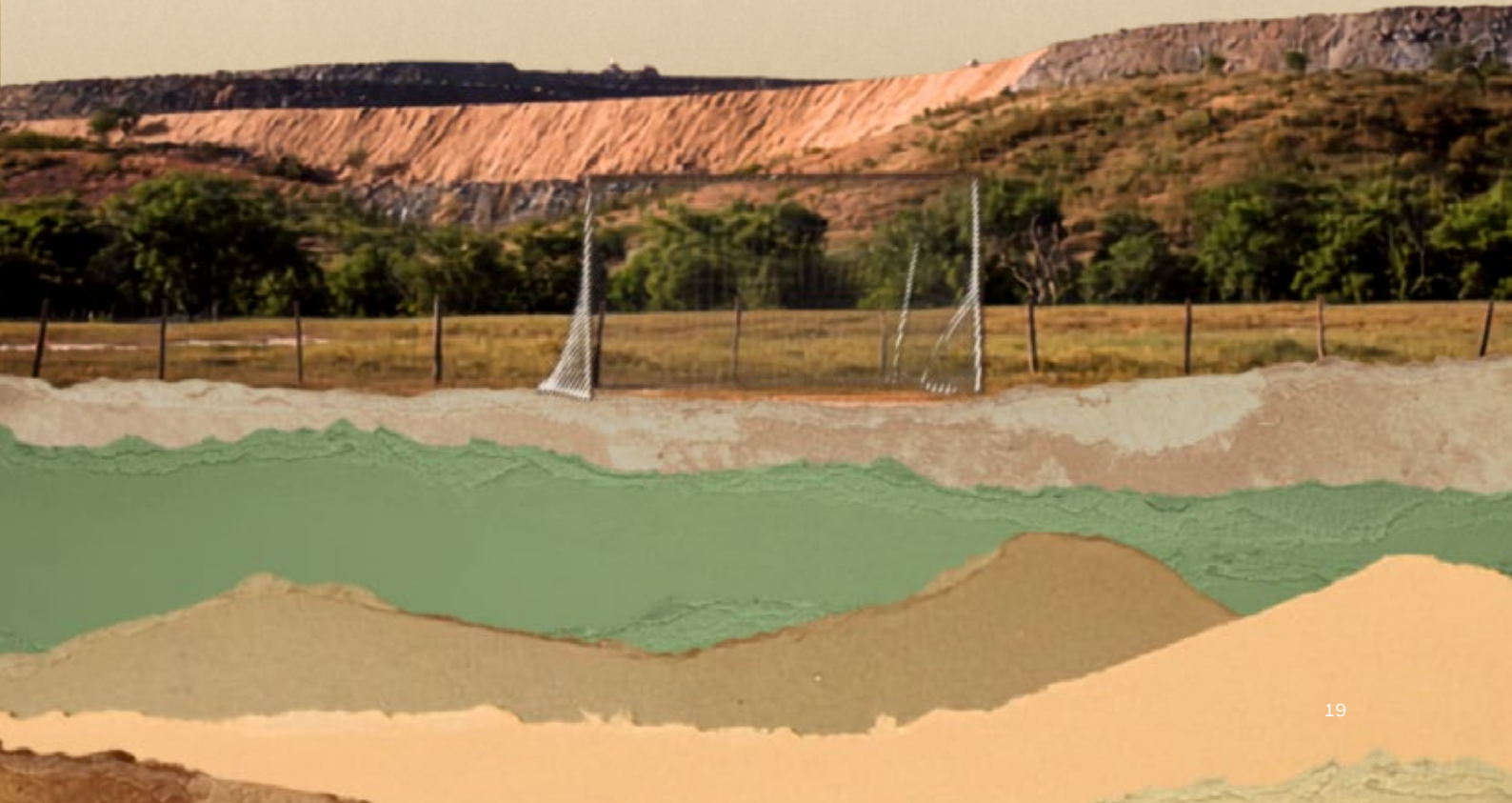
Photo by: Isis Medeiros.
Composition:
Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi.



The “operational reality” contrasts with the advertising. Federal labor inspectors “shut down part of the operations of the largest lithium mine in Brazil, operated by Sigma Lithium, after finding a series of serious irregularities,” with a risk classified as “extreme” in the tailings piles and “partial slope failure behind the municipal children’s school, in the community of Poço Dantas.”^[23] The company’s own founder, Calvyn Gardner, reported to Observatório da Mineração that “the most serious irregularity is the fact that Sigma does not follow the mining plan approved by the National Mining Agency (ANM), especially regarding the stability of the pit walls,” while the ANM claimed there were no resources to carry out inspections.^[24] Residents reported an “infernal” situation, with nighttime operations maintained despite a court decision ordering their suspension,^[25] and the company responded to the complaints by labeling them “fake news.”^[26]

This pattern connects to a larger narrative, that of “carbon-neutral cars.” As the geographer Klemens Laschefski observes, “the discourse on decarbonization allowed steel, energy, and mining companies, previously considered the main parties responsible for global environmental crises, to reduce the environmental debate to the chemical formula CO₂,” so that “they not only managed to overcome their image as villains and position themselves as protagonists in the fight against climate change, but also to discredit and silence critics.”^[27] The victims of this appropriation, the author recalls, “are not the beneficiaries of the energy transition — the owners of electric cars, among others — but rather Indigenous peoples and traditional communities.”^[27]

Photo by: Isis Medeiros.
Composition:
Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi.



Another emblematic case is that of the petrochemical company Braskem, responsible for the ground subsidence in Maceió (AL) that affected more than 60,000 people and is considered one of the worst disasters in an urban area in the world. While entire neighborhoods were being evacuated, “Braskem was one of the companies present at the United Nations Climate Conference, COP 28 (...) alongside Vale, Petrobras, and Syngenta, champions of green, conscious, and sustainable capitalism.” On its website, Braskem takes pride (...) in having reduced “by more than 17% the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions between 2008 and 2020,” whereas, in practice, “the large-scale disaster that continues to worsen in Maceió and the absolutely unsatisfactory reparation actions are a mere detail for the company’s global greenwashing propaganda machine.”^[28]

The logic that sustains these discourses is ESG turned into a showcase. For the fund manager Fabio Alperowitch, a pioneer of the subject in Brazil, “it is a lie that the market looks at the environment. It is totally a lie that the market looks at climate change.” According to him, companies “publicize what is good and hide what is bad,” and “a company creates ‘ESG goals’ and thinks it can say it is sustainable.” Without stronger regulation, he concludes, the market “will do greenwashing and stay on superficial issues.”^[29]

The numbers belie the rhetoric of “low-carbon mining.” “The mining-steel chain emitted 107.6 million tons of CO₂e in 2020,” and the “market solutions” advocated by the sector — above all the pricing and purchase of carbon credits — “have not produced the expected effects in regions where this implementation is more mature, such as Europe,” where the industry “preferred to buy carbon credits rather than carry out the necessary technological transformation.”^[30]

Photo credit: Joédson
Alves/Agência Brasil



This model is now being institutionalized in critical minerals policy. For the Observatório do Clima, instruments such as the Low-Carbon Mining Certificate create a “risk of formal certification without effective emission reduction, distorting market signals and favoring regulatory greenwashing,” repeating a model that “increases tax incentives without counterparts” and “favors advertising without emission reduction.”^[31]

On the regulatory front, the retreat of the Brazilian Securities and Exchange Commission (CVM) aggravates the situation. By making climate transparency optional, the jurist Bruno Teixeira Peixoto assesses, “the Brazilian regulator does not foster the much-debatable free market; it subsidizes informational asymmetry and institutionalizes greenwashing,” consolidating the “chronicle of a greenwashing foretold.”^[32]

In this context, another tactic observed among companies is the use of so-called “greenhushing” (or green silence). With the increase in legal regulation and in greenwashing complaints, many corporations are adopting greenhushing — the deliberate omission or concealment of their environmental goals and data to avoid public scrutiny and mitigate the risk of climate litigation. By not being required to report standardized data, mining companies opt for strategic silence about their liabilities, which may constitute a serious form of disinformation by omission, harming society’s right to transparent information.

Finally, the outcome of COP 30, in Belém, exposed the limits of this discourse. With a massive presence of the fossil and mining lobby — “complete with credentials granted by the Brazilian government itself in the case of IBRAM” — the conference ended without a clear “roadmap” for the exit from fossil fuels, confirming that, for the sector, sustainability remains, above all, a communication piece.^[33]



This sales effort appears, in no uncertain terms, in the statements of the sector's own leaders. Asked whether mining can be sustainable, the president of IBRAM, Raul Jungmann, acknowledges: "If you look strictly at the extraction of the ore, it is not sustainable [...]. Because it is finite. But if you consider the chain and the functionalities, yes. It is and may come to be more sustainable."^[7]

IBRAM's director of Institutional Relations, Rinaldo Mancin, shifts the concept onto time: "If we open our minds and think of a concept of leaving a positive legacy, a transformed territory, investment in education, investment in health, good jobs, we can bring the concept of sustainability closer to the mining sector."^[7]

Vale, responsible for the Mariana and Brumadinho dam collapses, presents itself as a "leader in sustainable mining."

For its director of Corporate Sustainability, Camilla Lott, this is "a declared ambition" inscribed in the company's "cultural narrative"; while vice-president Alexandre D'Ambrosio goes so far as to state that **"the Amazon should not be seen as a sanctuary that cannot be exploited"** and that Vale created a mining model that "is even copied by other countries."^[7]

Critical voices heard in the same research by Maurício Angelo (2024) dismantle the discourse. For MPF prosecutor Edmundo Netto, "this progress that the mining companies put forward is situated on the level of discourse [...] that responsibility is unfortunately still a fallacy in our country"; and AMIG consultant Waldir Salvador sums up: "the concept of sustainability is still just a concept. It does not apply. In reality, in practice, it does not exist."^[7]

At the root of the criticism, the Indigenous leader **Ailton Krenak** attacks "the myth of sustainability," which he says was **"invented by corporations to justify the assault they carry out on our idea of nature."**^[7]



How to Identify the **Strategies** Used by the Industry

Spreading disinformation and greenwashing is, increasingly, the modus operandi of the mining sector. Some moves, however, come before the drilling of pits and the arrival of a huge number of workers in the region.

These are some of the standard strategies most commonly used by the mining sector to advance its projects at any cost:



Co-optation of leaders and division of communities:

The classic colonial “divide and conquer” is one of the mining sector’s main approaches upon arriving in territories. An example of this is the conduct of Potássio do Brasil in Autazes, Amazonas: the company approached a Mura Indigenous Association not located in the affected region and secured these communities’ support for the mining project^[34], overriding the directly affected community – whose land is in the process of demarcation – and weakening social mobilization.



Photo: Alass Derivas – @derivajornalismo for APIB / ATL 2022 Collaborative Coverage.

Institutional self-promotion (astroturfing):

It is lobbying disguised in the creation of institutions, organizations, or false social movements to present some social license to operate, including “organized activity intended to create the false impression of a spontaneous, grassroots movement [...], but which, in reality, is initiated and controlled by a hidden group or organization.”^[10] This also occurs at the state level, as in the parliamentary fronts created to defend the sector, loosen laws, and attract investment, such as the “Parliamentary Front for Sustainable Mining,” created and maintained with the support of IBRAM.^[35]

Intentional disinformation:

It can also involve the purchase of influence. It is when a company finances supposed “experts” or influencers to speak well of its own projects. The more relevant a person is on social media, the further the disinformation they spread reaches. Recently, the Banco Master case drew attention: influencers received millions of reais from Daniel Vorcara, investigated for alleged multibillion-dollar fraud, according to Federal Police investigations – and who also has various mining businesses^[36] – to defend Vorcara and Banco Master and attack the Central Bank.^[37]

Appropriation of causes (woke-washing):

It is the appropriation of social justice terms and progressive values, in a symbolic way, to promote a company's reputation."^[10] These are marketing plays and diversity and inclusion campaigns, such as the case of Women in Mining,^[38] which seeks to highlight the role of women in mining.



Credit: Getty Images/Magnifica Productions

WIM presents itself as^[39] “an association made up of volunteers who believe in the transformative power of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the mining sector.” The mining industry needs to “attract women, welcome their strong talents, and recognize their value,” they state. With IBRAM as a founding member, **Women in Mining is sponsored by several companies involved in cases of socio-environmental impacts**, rights violations, and greenwashing, some highlighted in this guide, such as Vale, Hydro, Anglo American, and BHP.

There is also Vale's supposed “anti-racist stance” in changing the name of the former “Capitão do Mato” mine,^[40] while the majority of those affected by its dam collapses are Black people.^[41]

War of expert reports and technical distortion:

It is when mining companies pay to produce false technical reports, confusing reality before the courts and the population. This occurs in these companies' discourse with intensive use of industry jargon or technicalities to induce a sense of safety without any scientific evidence. The dispute between independent reports and reports by institutions and professionals hired by mining companies is very common in cases of environmental contamination, as with Vale in the Rio Doce cases and the Xikrin Indigenous people in Pará^[42] and the Canadian multinational Kinross, which operates the largest gold mine in Brazil, in Paracatu (MG), whose operations have for decades given rise to^[43] disputes over the impacts caused to the health of the local population, including quilombolas.

The “**war of expert reports**” is a concrete obstacle: prosecutors and defenders point to “the difficulty of building robust technical evidence, since polluting companies have vast financial capacity to contest reports and manipulate studies.”

As the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office summarizes, “availing itself of economic power, the polluter conveys disinformation that does not concern the right to freedom of expression, does not have the intent to inform, but rather to shape a behavior or induce a reality.”^{[44][45]}



Photo: Indigenous people fishing in the contaminated Xikrin River, by Souza Xikrin, Djudê-Kô, Brazil, November 10, 2021.

“Hedged” claims:

The use of mitigators such as “We believe that” before controversial statements to frame them as a matter of opinion, or to appear excessively virtuous when the actions or beliefs merely comply with the law. These statements generally lack scientific evidence, present legal requirements or general truths as part of the companies’ individual belief system, or call for government action before adopting sustainable practices.^[46]

Judicial intimidation:

Another strategy that seems to be part of a mining-sector checklist — and one that **Observatório da Mineração** itself recently faced with Sigma Lithium.^[47] It is the conversion of all economic and financial power into law firms focused on intimidating, attempting prior censorship, and threatening to take to the courts legitimate work, whether journalistic, by groups of scientists, by NGOs, or by social movements.

False solutions:

These are the compensation promises that mining companies insist on making, but which strip away rights and offer no guarantee of full reparation to the territories or to the memories of the victims. It is reducing reparation to a mere financial or procedural transaction, limited to what the law requires and using advertising on top of basic requirements and actions that the company is simply obligated to fulfill.

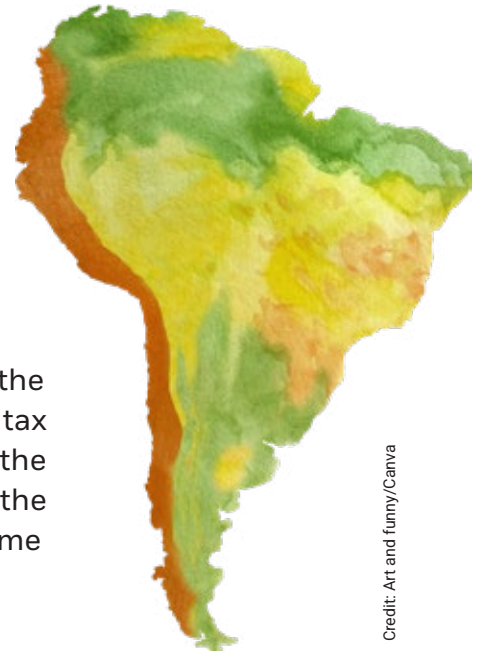


Economic blackmail:

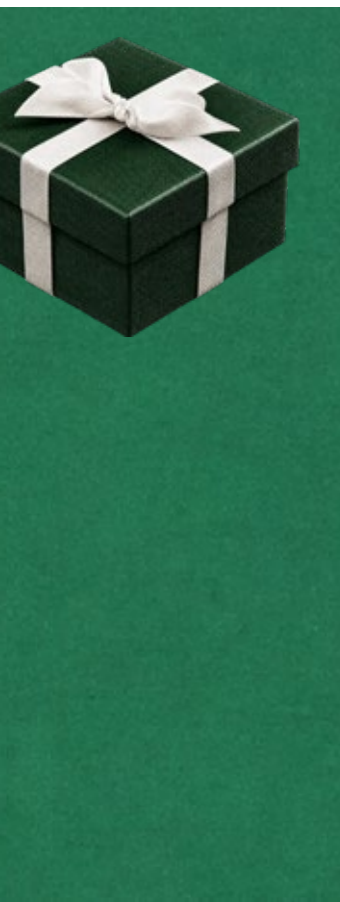
It is when the sector uses its economic power to block some advance in public policy, tax reform, or environmental regulation. This strategy is generally accompanied by a veritable discursive terrorism, with false dichotomies or fatalistic assertions such as “either we mine there, or the people will be left in misery”.

One example is when **governments decide to raise taxes** on the sector, which usually generates extreme reactions from mining companies **threatening to abandon the country**, halt operations, and generate mass unemployment. In practice, this **flight does not occur**, but it is a **bluff** already repeated in various **Latin American countries**, as in recent tax debates in Chile and Peru.

This is a way of manipulating the economic dependence of the affected areas in order to convince society that maintaining tax privileges for the mining sector is something essential for the country — a matter of sovereignty or public interest — when the reality is the opposite: profits are being privatized in the name of corporate interests.



Credit: Art and funny/Canva



Beyond the tactics described above, it is useful to recognize the classic repertoire of denial, systematized into five techniques:

- “1) using fake experts;
- 2) using logical fallacies;
- 3) setting impossible expectations;
- 4) cherry-picking; and
- 5) spreading conspiracy theories.”^[10]

Fighting *greenwashing*: What We Advocate

Greenwashing, disinformation, and denialism in the mining context must be understood as a threat to public integrity.

The creation of concrete and independent mechanisms of effective corporate accountability, combined with continuous monitoring, are the main paths that should guide us in the face of the avalanche of disinformation financed and intentionally spread by the mining sector. And the tendency is for these practices to intensify. For this reason, we advocate the following recommendations:

All advertising must be treated as such:

Advertising is not technical information. The **Consumer Protection Code** must be used to punish any misleading or abusive advertising by mining companies. Advertisements in press outlets need full transparency, with information available about how much they cost, and articles disguised as reproductions of press releases or advertorials need clear warnings beyond the standard currently adopted in the market, which is confusing for the reader.



Photo by Isis Medeiros.
Door lock credit: Shutterstock/
Master1305.



Consumer Protection:

We advocate updating regulations via SENACON (the National Consumer Secretariat) and creating a specific legal framework to regulate greenwashing in consumer relations.

In the case of the mining sector, **misleading advertising must be punished with the full force of the law**, invoking the Consumer Protection Code (CDC) when there is a **clear consumer relationship unduly and illegally affected**, and seeking civil and environmental accountability through the Public Prosecutor's Office, the CVM, and the competent bodies in the other spheres.

In the federal Executive, the National Office for the Defense of Democracy (PNDD/AGU) structures flows of “prevention, identification, analysis, and judicial and extrajudicial response” to disinformative content, always with respect for freedom of expression. ^{[48][49]}

Demonetization of platforms and content moderation:

Requiring that Big Tech adopt measures to block the monetization of and advertisements linked to climate, mining, or greenwashing denialism, with the application of warning labels and the reduction of the reach of content that violates scientific consensus and/or environmental legislation. To investigate the integrity of a given piece of information, it is important to know who is financing it.

Who funded the study, the report, the assessment? Who pays the influencer or the advertisement on LinkedIn^[15] and on any network, platform, and press outlet that speaks well of the mining sector?

These amounts need to be available clearly and accessibly to everyone, with warnings and quality information available. Moderating content and preventing the impact of the flood of disinformation will only be achieved with robust, efficient regulation and active oversight that does not bow to the interests of Big Tech, the sector's main companies, and their lobbying machine in Brasília and in various instances. ^[50]

The prevention principle (prebunking):

The theory of “inoculation” shows that exposing the public in advance to manipulation techniques — prebunking — confers psychological resistance to disinformation, with medium to large effects in protecting science-based beliefs. A study conducted in twelve countries, however, warns that exposure to disinformation has strong effects and that isolated inoculations offer limited protection, reinforcing the need to combine them with regulation and moderation.

Rigorous journalism plays a central role in this ecosystem, by “following the statements, verifying the actions, and letting the comparison reveal the inconsistencies.”^{[51][50][52]} **Debunking is not enough; it is necessary to educate the audience, one of the very objectives of this guide.** Explaining the forms of manipulation and disinformation normally used by companies in the mining sector is a strategy for the public to learn to identify these tactics before they go viral and reach more people, spreading even more disinformation.

Guarantee of legal protection:

We advocate the creation of specialized legal support networks to guide defenders (leaders, journalists, and activists) beyond the bodies that already exist today, such as the Observatory of Violence against Journalists and Social Communicators and the legal support of the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism, to cite two examples. **We support the approval of an anti-SLAPP law in Brazil, to legally shield defenders against persecution and corporate judicial harassment.** We understand that the joint action^[48] of the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office (MPF), together with the Public Defender’s Offices and organized civil society, is one of the possible strategies to begin consolidating this network. After all, protecting those who report is unavoidable: according to Global Witness, “at least 142 environmental activists were killed” worldwide in 2024, and “Brazil is the fourth country in the world that most kills environmental activists.” Hence the urgency of an anti-SLAPP law and of legal support networks, as recent cases of judicial harassment against investigative outlets make clear.^{[15][48]}

Transparency as a condition:

Demanding clearly and directly, on online platforms, how much public money, subsidies, and tax incentives a given mining project receives from the authorities, from the federal to the municipal level. It is necessary to base this on quantifiable, verifiable metrics, and for there to be a legal and formal provision to reverse any benefits and tax incentives should the company break laws and be systematically involved in cases of socio-environmental and human rights violations.





Conclusion

The energy transition and the exponential increase in demand for critical and strategic minerals have created the ideal conditions for the perpetuation of the mining industry's “green propaganda.”

The planet's geopolitical and economic scenario offers the stage for mining to place itself at the center of discussions and to largely reshape an image strongly shaken by a series of large-scale disasters in Brazil — the cases of Mariana, Brumadinho, and Braskem — and outside Brazil, of a sector that has always represented unhealthy working conditions and significant socio-environmental impacts in every region of the planet.

It is in this context that greenwashing, disinformation, and the other tactics listed in this guide gain traction. Identifying the landscape is the first step to changing it. Mining — the base of various industries, a pillar of global capitalism, and responsible for social, environmental, and climate impacts commensurate with the scale of its importance and reach — will not change its behavior spontaneously.

For this to happen, coordinated action by society and the public authorities is needed, including the press, academia, NGOs, grassroots movements, activists, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and various other actors with qualified, technical, and publicly available knowledge.

It is in this sense that this guide was produced, drawing on the accumulation of more than 10 years of journalism, research, and advocacy by **Observatório da Mineração**. The climate crisis, more severe, more extreme, and more frequent every day, as proven by science and by the facts, no longer allows the luxury of procrastination.

To accept greenwashing and mining denialism at face value, without questioning, is to accept the accelerated collapse of the chance of having a habitable planet in minimally viable conditions in the near future.

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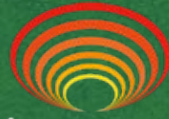
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Transparency on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

This guide observed Observatório da Mineração's Guideline on the use of artificial intelligence. AI tools were used strictly in the auxiliary functions foreseen in the guideline — support for research and the cross-checking of sources, reading and summarizing lengthy documents, formatting references, and text-revision suggestions — always under human supervision, with the writing, the critical analysis, and the editorial responsibility resting entirely with the team. All citations and data were verified against the original sources. [53]

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Observatório
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About
Observatório da Mineração
(Mining Observatory)

Observatório da Mineração (Mining Observatory) is a center for journalism, research, and advocacy focused on the extractive sector, founded in 2015.

We research and investigate mining's participation in the global climate crisis and in the energy transition, with a focus on critical and strategic minerals, and we seek to point out possible paths toward an effectively just transition.

Editorial Team

Maurício Angelo

Executive Director and Coordinator

Juliana Meato

Consultant

Lúcio Lambranh

Reporter

Marcelo Santiago

Consultant

Legal advisory:

Bruno Teixeira Peixoto, André Matheus and José Augusto Medeiros.

Contributors:

Ainay Delahanty e Gabriela Sarmet.

Graphic Project and Designer:

Moara Juliana and Júlia Brancaglione Cristofi.

Photography:

Isis Medeiros and Rebeca Binda.