

NEWS RELEASE

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Workforce Trends in the U.S. Mining Industry: briefing paper updated
SME technical paper addresses shortage of skilled mine labor

The Government and Public Affairs Committee of the Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration Inc. (SME) has released an update of its technical briefing paper, "Workforce Trends in the U.S. Mining Industry." The United States' population is projected to increase to more than 400 million by the year 2050, a growth of more than 25 percent. As the population grows, so does the demand for maintaining and upgrading the infrastructure that supports the increased need for power, transportation, housing, clean water and sanitation. However, it is unlikely that there will be sufficient skilled labor to provide the basic raw materials needed to build this infrastructure.

"The workforce shortage is the single greatest challenge that faces the mining industry today," said SME Executive Director David L. Kanagy. "By 2029, more than half the current workforce will be retired, and the number of qualified science and engineering professionals graduating from U.S. schools will not meet the capacity required to fill these vacancies."

As reported in the briefing paper, there has been a steady decline in the number of mining and mineral engineering programs at U.S. colleges in the past two decades; down from 25 in 1982 to 14 in 2014. There has also been a corresponding decline in faculty available to teach the remaining programs. As the demand for qualified professionals outstrips the supply, finding and retaining skilled labor is likely to be a lasting problem for the mining and minerals community. In order to fill these jobs, the mining industry is often forced to turn to international schools or workers to fill the vacancies.

Federal support for U.S. mining schools is necessary to maintain qualified faculty and an educational pipeline to supply workers to meet a growing global minerals demand. SME fully supports the need for legislation, similar to the Energy and Minerals Schools Reinvestment Act of 2006, to provide the federal support needed for consistent, long-term reinvestment in our university mining engineering programs. In addition, legislation such as the Critical Minerals Policy Act of 2013 would mandate the Secretary of Labor and the National Science Foundation to conduct a four-year grant program for institutions of higher learning to implement integrated critical mineral education, training and workforce development programs. The U.S. has an obligation to preserve and foster the workforce necessary to maintain the nation's economic, energy and minerals security.

To download a copy of the briefing paper, please visit [SME Government Affairs & Public Policy](#).

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SME is a professional society (nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation) whose more than 15,000 members represent all professions serving the minerals industry in more than 100 countries. SME members include engineers, geologists, metallurgists, educators, students and researchers. SME advances the worldwide minerals community through information exchange and professional development.

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SME exists to be THE resource and advocate for the mining community.
For further details, see www.smenet.org