

EL PAÍS

Berkeley: A sustainable mining project

Berkeley Energia's project is defined by its commitment to economic and social development and its respect for health and the environment

Berkeley Energia is now developing its ambitious project mining for uranium in Salamanca, near Ciudad Rodrigo, the same area that Enusa was extracting uranium until 2001. Berkeley, an Australian company, has invested more than 60 million euros to date in the development of this project, and mining will begin at the Retortillo-Santidad deposit, situated in the Retortillo and Villavieja de Yeltes areas.

"Berkeley's total investment in this project is around 400 million euros over the life of the mine, from initial investment to operating costs and money earmarked for the restoration of the land"
Francisco Bellón, General Manager of Operations at Berkeley

As uranium is found near the surface, the mining of the deposits will be open pit and at carried out at staggered depths. Additionally, open pit mining, rather than underground, is preferable for the safety and health of those working in the mine. Also, the type of mining proposed by Berkeley, which will be based on the principle of 'transfer mining', will allow for the rehabilitation of the affected areas throughout the early phases, therefore minimising the impact, and complying with the methodology preferred both by Spain and the rest of the world.

"The restoration plan for the Retortillo deposit has been approved and will be carried out so as to ensure the recovery of the entirety of the affected area. We will invest more than 32 million euros in this and the Junta of Castilla and Leon will ensure we follow through on these promises" added Francisco Bellón

The mining plan developed by Berkeley places significant



importance on the restoration plans. The plan aims, once the area has been mined, that the 236 hectares of affected land will fully recover. The Environmental Impact Statement relating to the project includes a plan of action which, with the supervision of the Ministry of Environment of the Junta de Castilla and Leon, will ensure compliance with all steps to guarantee proper rehabilitation of the affected areas.

The Mining Plan for the uranium deposits of Retortillo and Santidad includes a restoration plan, designed to ensure the land is returned to its original state.

This concern for the environment is mirrored in the company's concern for the security and health of its workers. They have carried out meticulous surveillance plans approved and monitored by the Nuclear Safety Council. Among these plans are ones to monitor the maximum exposure to which workers would be exposed, and the resulting levels are much lower than the legal limits. They are in fact similar to the levels of radiation one is exposed to if you have one chest x-ray a year.

All of this reinforces Berkeley's promise regarding the development of the local

community, especially in the areas surrounding the project.

The project that Berkeley is developing is extremely important, both a national and international level, as it forms part of the EU policy seeking to promote self-sufficiency of raw materials within the Union.

"The project that we are developing, once at full production, will be capable of supplying 130% of uranium consumption at Spanish nuclear power plants, which is the same as almost 30% of electricity generated by the nation" commented Francisco Bellón

One of the main promises made by Berkeley was to ensure that, when developing the project, its sustainability compared favourably with others in the sector. Not surprisingly, Berkeley is one of the few mining companies in Spain that has Sustainable Mining Management (UNE 22470/UNE 22480) and Environmental Management (UNE_EN-ISO 14001) certificates.

A RESEVOIR OF JOBS

Berkeley's industrial plan will generate huge investment and will have important economic and social benefits for the area. One of the most important of these is job creation. It is thought that the mining of the Retortillo - Santidad deposits will create around 200 direct jobs (including permanent contracts), to this figure one must add the number of indirect jobs created.

According to the University of Salamanca, who have carried out studies of similar projects, there is usually a ratio of 5.2:1 for indirect to direct jobs. This means that the number of people employed in jobs related to the project will be over a thousand. This job creation will be vital for the area, as many of the regions have been effected by rural desertification.

According to the Adecco employment offices that opened in Retortillo, Berkeley has already received more than 20,000 job applicants, many of whom come from towns in the area, including those from the neighbouring Ciudad Rodrigo, where the old uranium mines were in operation years ago. Also among the applicants are numerous graduates and technicians from the University of Salamanca.