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COAL MINING AND CONSERVATION: A SYMPOSIUM

For those who have roamed the Appalachian hills or grown to maturity in her hollows, the devastation visited there by coal mining is an all too familiar reality. Yet in our electricity-dependent nation, we find ourself relying more and more on coal for our energy needs. Because of these needs, there is a great temptation to overlook the importance of preserving the quality of our environment. America has, after all, always been a nation of expanding horizons; when land is used up in one place, we have always been able to move on to another. Like it or not, however, those days are gone. The time has come for us to survey our resources and to decide how to maximize the benefits which they can produce, considering the future as well as current needs of our nation. One has only to travel in Pike or Harlan counties in the mountains, or Muhlenberg county in the west to understand the folly of the careless ways of the recent past and the absolute necessity of the regulation which has now begun.

The legal profession has a role to play in this process. It is not only appropriate but essential that we examine the current legal framework of coal mining to evaluate it in terms of short and long term needs and to restructure it where it is found lacking.

What follows is an attempt at such an examination. The articles range from an economic overview, to the current regulation of mining and coal transportation; from a comparison of European regulation, to the protection of water quality and the role of taxation. The list is ambitious but incomplete. Our hope is, if nothing else, that the materials here will provide a rough familiarity with the problems of coal mining and the environment and will stimulate thought that will shape future law to best serve all of our interests.

