

Quarries Regulation long overdue

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ABANDONED quarries can be ugly, dangerous places, with open pits, denuded hills, exposed highwalls and rusty equipment.

Although generally smaller than strip mines, quarries and other noncoal mining are every bit as environmentally damaging. Yet for some reason they don't face anything close to the same level of regulatory scrutiny.

Quarry operators must obtain permits, but they needn't post-reclamation bonds or follow any guidelines for cleaning up played-out quarries.

This leads to abuses of the sort found at the Century Limestone quarry outside of Elkins. Its operators abandoned the ugly 150-acre site - referred to as a "pig in a parlor" by former Supreme Court Justice **Richard Neely**.

The state Division of Environmental Protection has taken what limited steps it can under current regulations. It has revoked the permits.

That will block further operations on the site and prevent Century and its officers from obtaining future mining permits.

But without bond money to pay for a cleanup, Century will continue to be a huge eyesore.

The state Supreme Court ruled in 1994 that the DEP has the authority under current laws to write regulations to police quarries. Then-DEP Director Dave Callaghan wrote those regulations, but his successor, Eli McCoy, shelved them after receiving complaints from quarry lobbyists.

Lobbyists have also managed to kill bills placing stricter regulations on quarries. However, this session, a bill passed the House. Its future in the Senate is uncertain.

The bill would create a fund of between \$27,000 and \$30,000 a year to clean up abandoned quarries. It's a small fund for a huge problem. But it's better than what's available now: nothing.

If the bill dies in the Senate, DEP should simply write the regulations the Supreme Court empowered it to impose six years ago.