



Mine 'nightmare'

Bauxite dig dubbed neighbour from hell

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Environment Reporter

IT is the "neighbour from hell" that spits dust over a WA town while digging up bauxite in a shire where mining is supposed to be illegal.

Residents for Responsible Mining, a 70-strong group in the Shire of Chittering, complain that large-scale mining activity has turned their quiet Darling Range community into a dusty, noisy minesite, destroying their way of life and allegedly affecting their health.

A little-known regulation, usually used by councils or farmers to build roads, has allowed Bauxite Resources Limited to dig up and treat 130,000 tonnes a year of bauxite-rich dirt in Bindoon for export to China, even though mining is not permitted under the shire's town planning scheme.

Companies usually have to seek mining leases, undergo strict environmental assessments and consult with communities, but BRL has

been able to bypass these by getting a quarry licence — or extractive industry approval — from the Shire of Chittering. Residents say a main road used by the school bus is now a haul path with trucks roaring past every three to eight minutes and that wildflowers are coated in orange dirt.

"Our house is 400m from the site where they load the ore onto trains and in the afternoons it is very noisy and sometimes it is unbearable," Mooliabeenee resident Cheryl Porter said.

"When they first started I had a couple of asthma attacks and that was directly from the dust because I was standing near the road talking to a friend at the bus stop and as a truck went past. The dust came off and within minutes I could hardly breathe."

The Department of Environment and Conservation revealed on Friday it is investigating BRL for a possible breach of the Environ-

mental Protection Act.

It has demanded the company retrospectively apply for licences that should have been issued before works began.

Mines Minister Norman Moore yesterday said he was awaiting the outcome of the DEC investigation with interest.

Shire president Alex Douglas said the company had "stretched the envelope" and that the initial application by BRL was for a much smaller project.

In November, the first 43,000 tonne commercial shipment of Bindoon bauxite left Fremantle for China. Because the land was bought before the WA Mining Act came into effect in 1899 no royalties are paid to the state.

BRL did not answer questions put to them on Friday. A spokesman said the "questions are sensational and inaccurate".