

Tesla buys [battery materials](#) from the mining giant with the most allegations of human rights abuses against it in a database of abuses tied to clean energy. Mining company **Glencore** has racked up at least 70 allegations since 2010, including accusations of corruption and poor working conditions, according to the nonprofit Business & Human Rights Resource Centre.

Both Tesla and Glencore say they take measures to address harms caused by mining operations. **But this is the second year in a row that Glencore has topped the Resource Centre's list.** More than half of the allegations its researchers documented in 2022 are linked to just five companies, including Glencore.

The global push for more [clean energy](#) depends on materials used to make solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles, and batteries. And unless companies take steps to stamp out abuse, haphazardly racing to deploy more renewable energy risks repeating harms committed by other extractive industries.

"We see the risk of abuses increasing as pressure to mine for new minerals is also intensifying," says **Caroline Avan**, the Centre's natural resources researcher. "Obviously, we expect large companies like Tesla to use their leverage to influence the sector as a whole and not only ask but require that their suppliers are not committing human rights abuses." There are more than 500 allegations of abuse dating back to 2010 in the Resource Centre's "transition minerals tracker." They cover a broad range of potential harms, from mistreating workers to polluting the environment, stoking conflict, or paying off government officials. But all of the allegations stem from the mining of six key minerals used in renewable energy, electric vehicles, and batteries: cobalt, copper, lithium, manganese, nickel, and zinc. The Resource Centre just published its annual report on the data last week. That analysis found 65 new allegations in 2022 — of which five were made against Glencore as a company and another four implicate joint ventures in which Glencore is involved.

Corruption was a growing problem for Glencore and the rest of the industry last year, according to the report. There were four times as many corruption allegations against mining companies in 2022 compared to the year before. In one case, Glencore pleaded guilty to foreign bribery and market manipulation charges and agreed to pay \$1.1 billion in fines. Glencore and its subsidiaries "bribed corrupt intermediaries and foreign officials in seven countries for over a decade" and "undermined public confidence by creating the false appearance of supply and demand to manipulate oil prices," according to the US Department of Justice. In **Zambia**, Glencore faces another investigation by the country's Anti-Corruption Commission into alleged payments the company made to a political party.

Two more allegations against Glencore involve workers' rights at mines in the **Democratic Republic of Congo, Peru, and Columbia**. In 2022, The Verge reported on the precarious working conditions at a cobalt mine Glencore operates in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Workers there reported having little water or food while working long hours in sweltering heat. At the time, a Glencore spokesperson told The Verge that workers had access to "as much water as they need" from water stations in communal areas and emphasized the company's commitment to worker health and safety.

Tesla made a deal to purchase a quarter of the cobalt the mine produced, Reuters reported in 2020. The company has also purchased nickel from a Glencore mine in Australia, according to Tesla's 2021 and 2022 impact reports. Tesla didn't respond to a request for comment from The Verge.

The automaker's 2022 impact report says that the company visited cobalt mine sites in the Democratic Republic of Congo last November and "reviewed grievances from NGOs and academic studies related to working conditions." The company also says it removed 12 cobalt suppliers and 29 nickel suppliers "due to supply chain due diligence concerns after attempted risk mitigation," but Glencore doesn't appear to be one of them.

"Our assets are located in diverse contexts, some in highly developed countries with strong legal and political frameworks, and others in more challenging socio-political circumstances with a history of conflict, limited basic services, and weak rule of law," Glencore spokesperson Charles Watenphul said in an email to The Verge. He added that the company is committed to upholding international agreements on labor and human rights.

Cobalt has become notorious as "the blood diamond of batteries." But it's important to recognize that the problems don't stop there, Avan says. Her research shows that around the world, supply chains for clean energy are riddled with accusations of wrongdoing. That makes it even more important to cut down on how many raw minerals these technologies need. That can happen by designing devices that are easier to recycle or repair and building out better public transportation options rather than simply switching from gas-guzzlers to [electric vehicles](#).

Of course, for any new materials that have to be mined, accountability matters. "[Mining companies](#) need to have due diligence and respect for human rights in place in their operations. And what we see at the moment is that this is clearly not the case," she says.

Source: the verge