

24 quarries on strike

Operators demand processing licences amid Govt scrutiny



President of the Trinidad and Tobago Aggregate Producers Alliance Nigel Tenia joins quarry workers during a protest at the Silica Sands Ltd Quarry, Silica Road, Valencia, yesterday. PHOTO BY ABRAHAM DIAZ

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President of the newly formed Trinidad and Tobago Aggregate Producers Alliance (TTAPA) Nigel Tenia has warned that as many as 100,000 jobs across the construction industry are at risk as quarry operators shut down operations over the Government's failure to issue long-overdue processing licences.

Tenia said the closure of its 24 members' operations nationwide, which started yesterday, could disrupt the supply of sand, gravel, and other base materials critical to the country's construction and infrastructure projects. He said they have all voluntarily closed their doors to highlight the urgent need for reform in the sector and "safeguard their livelihoods".

"Without sand and gravel, there's no cement mix, no blocks, no plaster, no roofing, no wiring, no painting," Tenia said. "We are the foundation of the construction industry, and if we stop, everything else stops."

"We are not prepared to kick the can any further down the street. We need to fix the process now. We know it won't be a quick fix because of the number of stakeholders involved: the Ministry of Energy, WASA, EMA, and others, but, in the interim, we are calling for a three-year moratorium so our members can operate in peace while the system is corrected."

Across Trinidad and Tobago, there are an estimated 90 known quarrying sites where millions of dollars in raw materials—including stone, clay, gravel, red and sea sand, asphalt, and tar sands—are extracted for use in construction, manufacturing and industrial projects.

However, authorities believe there are several other quarries operating under the radar, with no formal oversight or regulation.

The eight licensed operations are Bestcrete Limited in the Melajo Forest Reserve in Matura; ANSA McAL Limited in Depot Road, Longdenville; Mineral Mines of Trinidad Limited in Vega de Oropouche; Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited in Coco Road, Claxton Bay; Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited in Milton Village, Couva; AADS Multi-Tasking Limited in Rio Grande Trace, Matura; Firma Fabrication and Construction Limited in the Melajo Forest Reserve in Sangre Grande; and Seereeram Brothers Limited in Cangrejil Road, Santa Cruz.

Every other quarrying operation in T&T, whether it is occurring on private or state-owned land, is illegal (unless it was registered after September 2020).

The TTAPA president said the licensing process has become "archaic and frustrating", pointing to years of unexplained delays within the Ministry of Energy's Minerals Division.

He accused officials of stalling approved applications, leaving legitimate operators unable to work while unlicensed ones continue unchecked.

“There’s no communication, no updates, no feedback, and some of our members have been waiting for over five years for a response,” he added.

TTAPA has reportedly submitted applications for processing licences on behalf of several individuals and companies within the mining sector.

The applications, according to TTAPA, include Walter Gosein, Danny Persad, Vishal Gosein, Sean Maharaj, Danny Guerra, Paramount, Swan Quarry, Kevon Garraway, Carminco, Edu Agard, Woodford Trading, Kalifa Quarry, Brian Bachan, Keon Warner, Noel Hinds, Ancil Smith, Anthony Secharan, Rondel Adolphus, Howard John, Keyodie Clarke, Farie Blue Gate, Caribbean Minerals Agency, Rawl Felix, and Nigel Tenia.

These submissions indicate TTAPA’s intention to engage actively in the industry and seek formal recognition through proper licensing channels.

He also questioned what he described as selective enforcement by authorities. Referring to the recent arrest of a quarry operator and 15 workers for operating without a licence. Tenia said it was unfair that other known unlicensed operations face no similar action.

“If we are all operating outside the arm of the law, why target one and not the others? What makes one operator different from another?” he asked.

Tenia also raised concerns about licensing inconsistencies, noting that Studley Park in Tobago was recently granted an export licence but does not appear on the Ministry of Energy’s website as having a processing licence.

“It’s perplexing,” he said. “You can’t issue a licence to export material without first granting a licence to process it. That’s putting the cart before the horse.”

Despite the mounting frustration, Tenia said his group remains committed to working with the Government and law enforcement to clean up the sector and modernise its systems.

“Illegal mining is not being done by choice,” he said. “It’s being done because operators are trapped in a broken system.

This is 2025, not 1925. We need a transparent, digital process that allows real-time tracking of applications.”

WHAT THE ACT SAYS

According to Section 12(1) of the Minerals Act Chapter 61:03, “No person shall explore for mine, process or import or export minerals except under the authority of a licence issued under this act.”

According to Section 45(1) of the act, “A person who explores for, or mines, processes, imports or exports any material without a licence issued under this Act; or mines in an area that is not a mining zone commits an offence and shall, on summary conviction, be liable to a fine of \$500,000 and 5 years imprisonment, and in the case of a subsequent conviction for such offence, shall be liable to a fine of \$700,000 and 7 years imprisonment.”