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Occupational Radiation Protection in Coal Mines: Operational and Regulatory Challengesy

Malawi has had coal mines since the 1980s. There are both open and underground coal mines in the Northern Part of Malawi. Most mines are operated by small and medium entrepreneurs who have limited capital to invest in comprehensive operational and safety systems. This poses a challenge to the safety of mine workers especially in underground mines.
The Atomic Energy Act No. 16 of 2011 requires that all facilities and activities involved with radiation sources including radon should put in place adequate measures for workers protection. The Act was passed much later after many coal mines had been in operation for decades and their is need to bring all existing facilities and activities including these coal mines into regulatory control.

The paper explores the various operational and regulatory challenges that exist in the coal industry in Malawi and how these challenges may continue to affect occupational radiation protection. The paper is also meant to open a discussion on how regulatory frameworks can be set to address radiation protection and safety of workers in existing facilities.
A survey of three underground coal mines identified the following operational challenges:
1. limited capital to invest in safety measures e.g. ventilation systems,
2. lack of commitment by management to adopt occupational safety systems;
3. lack of capacity by competent authorities to regulate coal mines e.g. lack of equipment;
4. lack of knowledge among operators and policy makers on the radiation hazards associated with coal mines

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