

Institutional control of mine wastes in Saskatchewan, Canada

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Many jurisdictions around the world require mining operations to prepare closure plans and to post a bond or other financial assurances of sufficient value to cover the cost of closure. However, not all jurisdictions address the conditions under which they would accept the return of such properties, once the operator has fulfilled their obligations and is requesting release from further financial bonding. The issue is further complicated when it includes former uranium mill and tailings sites where international conventions and the national nuclear regulatory frameworks play an overriding and often defining role.

In Saskatchewan, a consultant led a team of provincial government departments in a process to develop an effective institutional control program (ICP). This required extensive consultations with industry, Aboriginal traditional users and other stakeholders to gain their support and inclusion. The entire policy development process culminated in 2007 with the implementation of the Reclaimed Industrial Sites Act and Regulations.

The program addresses all aspects of conventional closed mines, as well as uranium specific issues of radioactive waste management, including all applicable articles of the IAEA's Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management, the requirements of the federal Nuclear Safety and Control Act, the expectations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and all applicable provincial Acts and regulations.

Cameco Corporation was the first company to successfully register a decommissioned gold site, as well as five former uranium sites into the program. Following acceptance of a site into the program and a financial deposit from the operator, each site is monitored and maintained under provincial responsibility.

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