

ORPHANED/ABANDONED MINES INITIATIVE IN CANADA

Background

The legacy of orphaned/abandoned mines, with the associated environmental liability, human health concerns and the financial costs of clean-up, is a serious issue facing Canada.

In 1999 and 2000, a number of stakeholders put forth requests to the Mines Ministers to establish a joint industry-government working group, assisted by other stakeholders, to review the issue of abandoned mines. The Ministers supported this initiative and requested that a multistakeholder workshop be organized to identify key issues and priorities.

The Workshop on Abandoned Mines, held June 2001 in Winnipeg, reviewed the issues for orphaned /abandoned mine sites and identified processes to move forward. Five major themes were discussed:

- Building a National Inventory;
- Community Perspectives;
- Setting Standards and Rational Expectations;
- Ownership and Liability Issues; and
- Identification of Funding Models.

Participants developed consensus, guiding principles and recommendations that were presented at the Mines Ministers' Conference, September 2001. Ministers agreed on the importance of a large-scale program for the rehabilitation of orphaned/abandoned mines sites. They asked that a Multistakeholder Orphaned/Abandoned (O/A) Mines Advisory Committee be set up to study various issues and initiatives relating to the development of partnerships in the implementation of remediation programs across Canada.

The Opportunity: With adequate resources and resolve, significant progress can be made in the assessment, characterization and remediation/reclamation of orphaned and abandoned mine sites within 5-10 years.
Source: Workshop on Abandoned Mines, 2001

Work Plan

A plan was developed, based on the principle objectives of the O/A Mines Advisory Committee. Three task groups were formed by the Advisory Committee to address the following key areas:

Information Gathering - to develop capacity for a national inventory of active, closed and orphaned/abandoned mine sites based on compatible inventories in each province and territory, including a acceptable system for categorization and priority ranking. To include agreed upon definitions and terminology as applied to O/A minesites;

Community Involvement - to develop a plan to foster community involvement in decision-making about closure and reclamation standards, and to ensure that targeted end-use and reclamation standards are acceptable to local communities; and

Barriers to Collaboration - to evaluate the efficacy of various approaches, including "Good Samaritan" legislation, permit blocking, non-compliance registries, and allocative liability versus joint and several liability.

Next Step

Documents produced from the Task Groups are to be synthesized into a series of recommendations and presented at the Mines Ministers' Conference in September of 2002.

The Orphaned/Abandoned Mines Advisory Committee is a co-operative partnership of the Canadian mining industry, federal/provincial/territorial governments, environmental non-government organizations, and First Nations.

Members include:

Christine Kaszycki (Chair) - Manitoba Industry, Trade and Mines
 Gilles Tremblay (Secretariat) - CANMET, Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)
 Joanna Ankersmit - Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)
 Louis Bienvenu - Québec, Ministère des Ressources naturelles
 Scott Clausen - NRCan
 Dick Cowan - Ontario Ministry of Northern Development & Mines
 William David - Assembly of First Nations
 Wayne Fraser - Hudson Bay Mining & Smelting
 Elizabeth Gardiner - Mining Association of Canada
 Gerald Harper - Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada
 Robert Holmes - Yukon, INAC
 Lisa Keller - Environment Canada
 Joan Kuyek - MiningWatch Canada
 Brennain Lloyd - Northwatch
 Patrick Reid - Ontario Mining Association
 Gregg Stewart - British Columbia Energy and Mines
 Darren Taylor - Trondek Hwechin First Nation, Council of Yukon First Nations