

POL 5407

WATER RESOURCES PROGRAM POLICY

Resource Contact: Dam Safety Office

Effective Date: 07-01-1999

References: RCW 78.56.070
RCW 90.03.350

Revised:

PERIODIC INSPECTIONS OF METALS MINING TAILINGS IMPOUNDMENTS

POLICY STATEMENT:

Periodic inspections of tailings dams at metal mining and milling operations regulated under Chapter 232, Laws of 1994 shall be performed annually by DSO engineers during project operation, during temporary project shutdowns, and during the post-closure monitoring period.

DISCUSSION:

RCW 90.03.350 and RCW 78.56.070 collectively require a total of 4 (quarterly) dam safety inspections by Ecology per year of tailings impoundments associated with operating metals mining and milling operations, and annual dam safety inspections at closed facilities. Also, RCW 78.56.070(2) encourages state agencies with inspection responsibilities to cross-train inspectors to perform multi-media inspections at these facilities. Ecology Air-Quality and Water Quality staffs have received cross training on dam safety, to allow them to perform dam inspections as part of their quarterly inspections at operating mining facilities. Considering the heavy inspection workload in the Dam Safety Office, and the slow rate at which typical tailings impoundments are filled, it was evident that quarterly inspections by dam safety engineers would be excessive. Thus, it was concluded that inspections by DSO engineers only need to be performed once annually on both operating and non-operating metals mining tailings impoundments, with the remaining three quarterly inspections performed by Ecology staff in other programs.

PROCEDURES:

DSO staff will schedule an annual inspection trip to all operating and closed metals mine tailings dams. The DSO supervisor will document these inspections with a memorandum to file. The DSO supervisor will also coordinate with the other Ecology programs involved in inspecting metals mining facilities to obtain copies of their quarterly inspection reports.

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Special Note: These policies and procedures are used to guide and ensure consistency among water resources program staff in the administration of laws and regulations. These policies and procedures are not formal administrative regulations that have been adopted through a rule-making process. In some cases, the policies may not reflect subsequent changes in statutory law or judicial findings, but they are indicative of the department's practices and interpretations of laws and regulations at the time they are adopted. If you have any questions regarding a policy or procedure, please contact the department.

