

Mixed reaction to tailings standard

RESPONSE to the Global Tailings Review's Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management has been mixed.



Mixed reaction to the standard on tailings management

[Surface Mining > > Geomechanics-ground-control](#)

[Comments](#)

[Share](#)

[Noel Dyson](#)

The standard, created in response to the 2019 Brumadinho dam disaster in Brazil that killed 272, was launched on August 5.

Guidance linked to the standard is to come from the International Council on Mines and Metals, one of the co-convenors of the standard.

A key Australian mining lobby group welcomed the standard's release while a member of the advisory group to the standard said it did not go far enough.

Minerals Council of Australia CEO Tania Constable said the standard would help support the safe management of tailings facilities around the world.

"Australian companies actively contributed to the development of the standard, which reflects Australian leading practice, standards and guidance," she said.

"The safety and health of our people and communities is the minerals industry's number one priority.

"While current tailings management practices in Australia are advanced and highly regulated, the industry is committed to continuous improvement as part of its culture of safe and responsible resource development.

"The standard and forthcoming guidance will be reviewed in line with the Australian minerals industry's commitment.

"The industry is supporting the development of advanced tailings specific training courses, which include among others the Future Tails program at the University of Western Australia backed by MCA members BHP and Rio Tinto.

"These efforts will help ensure Australia has ongoing access to the high-quality expertise needed to ensure continued safe operation of tailings facilities into the future."

Earthworks mining program director Payal Sampat said the global standard did not go far enough.

"The global standard doesn't make the true 'step changes' that are so urgently needed to prevent future disasters," he said.

"The trend in increasingly severe and frequent tailings dam failures is the unfortunate result of allowing mining companies to sacrifice safety to cut costs, dodge upfront financial obligations, and pass the buck on accountability.

"The global standard does not adequately address these or other critically important issues.

"The ultimate goal of tailings management must be zero harm to people and the environment and zero tolerance for human fatalities.

"A meaningful standard for tailings dams must require financial assurance and insurance, and accountability at the highest level of corporate governance.

"Community consent must be required at all stages of a project, allowing for communities to establish 'no-go zones' where tailings facilities must never be considered.

"Public participation in decisions and reliable grievance mechanisms are necessary to ensure that communities and workers can raise the alarm without consequences.

"We were looking to the global standard for these safeguards, but at present, it falls short of what is needed."

Sampat pointed out that the launch of the standard came the day after the sixth anniversary of the Mount Polley tailings dam collapse in British Columbia, which spilled 24 million cubic metres of metals-laced water into the Hazeltine Creek and Quesnal Lake.

He said no environmental charges for the damage caused had been laid so far.