



*Best Practices
in Community
Involvement:
Planning For and Rehabilitating
Abandoned and Orphaned
Mines in Canada*

Preamble

Orphaned or abandoned mines are those mines for which the owner cannot be found or is financially unable or unwilling to carry out site rehabilitation. Some of these mines pose environmental, health, safety and economic risks to communities, the mining industry and governments in the regions in which they are located.

Abandoned and orphaned mines exist within all mining jurisdictions in Canada. These sites, however, are not well documented with respect to their numbers or their associated physical, social, health and environmental risks, impacts and liabilities. Further research and compilation of information on abandoned and orphaned mines is necessary to enable sound decision-making, cost-efficient planning and sustainable rehabilitation. Such information is also necessary to ensure transparency of decision-making and access to information by governments, civil society, industry and other communities of interest.

In 2000, various governments, the mining industry and non-government organizations recommended to Mines Ministers that a multi-stakeholder workshop on abandoned and orphaned mines be held to review the issue of abandoned and orphaned mines in Canada and to identify key issues and priorities for action. This workshop was held in June 2001 in Winnipeg, where five themes were discussed, including: Building a National Inventory, Setting Standards and Rational Expectations, Ownership and Liability Issues, Identification of Funding Models, and Community Perspectives.

The latter issue of community involvement was one of four key subjects identified for follow-up by the National Orphaned/Abandoned Mines Advisory Committee. This multi-stakeholder committee was established pursuant to the Winnipeg workshop and is now responsible for implementing the National Orphaned/Abandoned Mines Initiative (NOAMI) in Canada. At the Mines Ministers' annual conference in 2002, the Advisory Committee tabled and brought forward to Ministers a number of recommendations and lessons learned derived from case studies of abandoned/orphaned mines in Canada where community involvement has occurred.

The guiding principles presented here build on these lessons learned, along with experiences with community involvement in abandoned mines in the United States. The principles should be used by governments, industry, local communities and other parties as a template for the development of policy and citizen engagement plans and strategies prior to, during and after the rehabilitation of problematic sites.

Introduction

Adverse impacts associated with abandoned and orphaned mine sites can be the result of chemical pollution, contamination or physical hazards. Some of these sites may pose environmental, social, economic, health, safety, cultural and aesthetic challenges/risks to communities, the mining industry and governments.

In planning for the remediation of abandoned and orphaned mines, members of local communities should have equal opportunity to contribute to decisions and processes that will affect them. These processes should be as open and transparent as possible, and the definition of "affected community" should be a product of citizen self-analysis where opportunity exists to contribute to decision-making processes.

Experience with abandoned and orphaned mines in the United States has shown that public participation and community involvement can provide the essential knowledge, information and insight to enhance the efficiency of administrative decision-making, contribute to conflict resolution and support the implementation of actions and decisions. Such capacity inevitably leads to more sound risk management and trust between parties, as communities can be a vehicle for identifying health concerns/indicators and key issues of priority to which decision-makers should give attention.

Before
Reclamation



After Mine Rec-
lamation



Guiding Principles

for Community Involvement Policy Development, Site Management and Process Administration

- **Communication:**

Initial discussions should be held with community members before decisions are made to clarify the type of process to be used, determine what the goals should be, and what the process is capable of accomplishing.

- **Inclusiveness:**

Community members easily recognize, and may be critical of, public participation mechanisms that leave out the diversity of perspectives brought forward by community members.

- **Representation:**

Abandoned and orphaned mines are often subject to uncertain jurisdiction or administrative shortcomings. Where overlap exists, it is important that all jurisdictions be represented. This representation should be seized as an opportunity to create interagency coordination, cooperation and synergy.

- **Fostering Confidence in Decision-Making:**

A successful community engagement process hinges on the need for communities of interest to have confidence in both the usefulness of the process and the willingness and ability of decision-makers to act accordingly in a way that addresses community needs and interests.

- **Information Dissemination and Communication:**

Where remediation efforts are being undertaken, it is important that meetings and information sessions be held in the actual communities that may be affected by the site(s) in question.

- **Participation and Representation:**

Effort should be made to limit or ensure smooth participant turnover. In particular, governments should have consistent and accountable representation; they should acknowledge and promptly/appropriately respond to the interests and needs of community members. A prerequisite to this is logistical planning in such areas as financial provisions to support community involvement. Examples might be provisions for participant transportation, child care, and meeting at mutually convenient times.



- **Resources and Assistance:**

Due to the complex nature of issues associated with abandoned mines, community members should, where feasible, be provided with resources for assistance to help decipher technical terminology and data in order to make more meaningful contributions during the planning and decision-making process.

- **Facilitation:**

The impartial and competent facilitation of meetings is highly advisable, and the establishment of codes of conduct and terms of reference for engagement is crucial to ensure that meetings are respectful and fair.

- **Integration:**

Decisions and actions should be designed to address the many varied environmental, health, aesthetic, social and economic issues that can be associated with abandoned and orphaned mines.

- **Consistency of Involvement:**

Community involvement should be an integral component of the entire site management process from problem identification to discussion of alternatives and management options, to assessment, implementation, follow-up and monitoring.

- **Respecting Local Cultures:**

Meetings should be conducted in a manner that respects local cultures and traditions.

For further information on NOAMI, please contact the Secretariat at abandoned_mines@nrcan.gc.ca or visit www.abandoned-mines.org