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Legislative challenges hindering mine waste being reused and repurposed in South Africa

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Abstract

While the waste hierarchy promotes the reuse of waste there currently remains limited reuse of mine waste in South Africa. Overburden, waste rock, tailings and slag are stockpiled or disposed leading to environmental liabilities including acid mine drainage and leaching. Globally there are numerous documented uses of mine waste. However, South African waste legislation currently fails to create an enabling environment for mine waste reuse, and consequently hinder the generation of economic value from this waste stream. Mine waste in South Africa is defined as a residue, which is considered a resource of minerals for future re-mining. Being classified as hazardous, the reuse of mining residue is legally challenging in South Africa. Furthermore legislated environmental management process promotes cradle-to-grave approaches, which is not supportive of any waste reuse initiative. Legislative authorisation falls between two government departments' often with conflicting mandates leaving mine residue becoming trapped between being a waste and being a by-product with economic value.