

Abstract
Deep-Sea Tailings Placement (DSTP): Unknowns, Secrets & Differing
Perceptions: A Non-Industry Perspective

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Much of the mining industry and scientific community agree that we lack adequate technical information to understand the *long-term* impacts and risks to marine and terrestrial ecosystems that will result from disposal of metal-mine tailings in deep marine waters. Nevertheless, such tailings disposal is already occurring in several countries; i.e. Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Norway. Most of the relevant experience has been gained in only the last 15 years. Decades of experience from tailings disposal in both terrestrial and shallow marine environments show that these wastes are *not inert*.

Gaps in long-term knowledge for deep marine settings are daunting, but the *governance weaknesses are more significant*. Many governments in developing countries lack adequate technical staffs, budgets and political support to effectively oversee land-based tailings disposal operations; oversight of DSTP operations will be much more complex and costly. These countries may have reasonable, relevant regulations, but often lack the political will to enforce them. Mine corporations control the collection and dissemination of most data, and “filter” what information is made public to civil society, their consultants and regulators. Much is secret and not released to the public; i.e. detailed tailings chemical compositions; other data are inadequately-detailed, such as water (especially unfiltered samples) and sediment quality, true baseline data, water balances, etc. Thus, civil society often mistrusts the operators, their consultants, regulators, and their reports, as is evidenced by demonstrations and opposition to numerous projects in Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, Mongolia, etc.

Industry arguments for investigating and promoting DSTP include: increasing populations and limited available land have increased competition with other users (e.g. cities, agricultural) for disposal sites; and tailings stability concerns due to storms and seismic events. Additional “drivers” for industry interest in DSTP likely include: significant contamination of ground and surface waters; increased competition for scarce fresh water; financial liabilities from “perpetual” operation of water treatment facilities, collapsed dams, and remediation and maintenance of tailings facilities.

Public trust for DSTP proposals will not develop if relevant studies and reports are not conducted and prepared by experts who are financially and politically-independent of the mining industry, and who are allowed to disclose all major, long-term, impacts and public costs, many of which are presently hidden.