

Call for tailing dams with a safety risk to register

In a bid to ensure tailing dam safety regulations are adhered to, mining houses are being called to register their dams on the database of The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS).



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The department is currently updating the database of all tailings or mine residue deposit dams in the country that meet the requirements to be classified as “Dams with a Safety Risk”, and called on mines to submit their information.

As the custodian of water resources in the country, DWS is empowered by the National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998) to regulate dams so as to improve the safety of new- and existing dams with a safety risk, and to reduce the potential for harm to the public, damage to property or to resource quality.

The department’s dam safety regulation director, Wally Ramokopa, said tailing dams are dams that are used to store water and waste that come as by-products from the mining processes.

“Dams with a safety risk are those with a minimum height of five metres and able to store more than 50,000 cubic metres of water or water containing substance. The information will be used to update the register and also to monitor these dams as required by the National Water Act and the dam safety regulations published in *Government Notice R. 139* of 24 February 2012.

Disaster management initiative

“The department, through the directorate responsible for dam safety regulations, is intensifying regulations on the safety of tailings (mine residue deposit dams) across the country to ensure that these storage facilities are regulated, with a view of averting another undesirable occurrence, such as the Jagersfontein disaster which occurred in the Free State on 11 September 2022, resulting in loss of lives and properties,” Ramokopa said.

“DWS has engaged the DMRE in order to get the data of mining houses and as a result correspondence has been sent to at least 337 tailing dams so that they can be classified as dams with a safety risk should they meet the requirements as stated. DWS encourages those mining houses that have not disclosed to DMRE, ownership of tailing dams, to register with the department,” he said.

Site inspections on the cards

Ramokopa said it was important to provide the correct information in order to ensure the dams are registered and compliant, and further advised that the information be compiled by a registered engineering professional with knowledge of dams and/or tailings storage facilities.

Ramokopa said the department will soon execute random inspections to verify the correctness of the information and the existence of the dam(s), and collaborate with the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE).

Section 120 in the National Water Act requires an owner of a dam with a safety risk to register the dam within 120 days after the date on which the dam meets the requirements to be classified as a dam with a safety risk as defined in Section 117 of NWA.

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