



MINE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION

Recent decades have shown that modern mines can be operated successfully in Ireland without long-term damage to the environment or public health. With co-operation between the authorities and stakeholders the regulation, operation and, when it happens, the closure of mines has been a largely positive process in Ireland.

Mines have significantly benefitted local communities both socially and economically while making use of our natural resources. All mining and exploration activity must comply with relevant national and European legislation. Mining companies operating in Ireland in recent decades have worked responsibly to meet and maintain the high standards of compliance required, and to leave environmentally low risk, safe sites for future re-use. Companies have, in a planned way, closed mines carefully, restoring these sites to agricultural uses and/or facilitated other potential industrial uses.

Regulation is tailored to the life stages of a mine



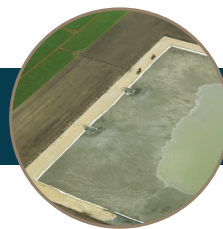
EXPLORATION
5-25 years



**AUTHORISATION
& DEVELOPMENT**
10 years



OPERATION
10-50 years



CLOSURE
5-10 years



AFTERCARE
30 years plus

Exploration

In addition to zinc, Ireland has good potential for the discovery of many minerals, including those required for the energy transition process. Since the 1960s, thousands of Prospecting Licences have been issued across Ireland, north and south. The exploration conducted has resulted in the discovery of several major mineral deposits, including Europe's largest zinc mine, and the third largest in the world, at Navan, Co. Meath. A Prospecting Licence permit issued in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland allows the holder to explore for minerals in a defined geographic area for 6 years, with the option to renew if the holder has met

the agreed requirements. Most steps in mineral exploration are low-key, leading up to drilling of a small hole or series of holes by a compact drilling rig to establish the presence of minerals. Licence holders must respect the wishes of landowners regarding access and be environmentally responsible. A Prospecting Licence does not give permission to mine. All exploration activities, north and south, are assessed as to whether the activity has the potential to have a significant effect on protected sites, including Natura 2000 protected areas.

For more information on the licensing process and on environmental safeguards see the following links:



www.gov.ie/en/publication/b45fe-prospecting-licences-common-questions-and-concerns/

www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/minerals-prospecting-licence-faqs.pdf

Authorisation and Development

After successful exploration, to legally operate a mine, certain permits must be obtained, generally in the following order:

- 1. Planning Permission** incorporating Environmental Impact Assessment (from the Local Authority or An Bord Pleanála in the Republic of Ireland or the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland). The licence holder is typically a mineral exploration or mining company, rather than an individual.
- 2. An EPA licence in the Republic of Ireland** (environmental regulations and legislation are part of the planning permission in Northern Ireland).
- 3. A Mining Lease or Licence** (depending on who owns the minerals) from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, or from the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland (Minerals and Petroleum Branch).

Authorisation for a proposed mine and associated processing, waste storage facilities and infrastructure is subject to rigorous examination, public participation and, where granted, conditions for construction and operation. Safeguarding the environment is a core consideration. Applications are very detailed with many technical reports from expert and international consultants. Typically, application and authorisation documents are available to be viewed online. The proposal is subject to the local, national and EU legislation in the Republic of Ireland and UK legislation in Northern Ireland.



Republic of Ireland links:



www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/28d9da-mineral-exploration-and-mining/

Northern Ireland links:



www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/SPPS.pdf

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/ippc-guidance-and-application-forms

Operation

Mining companies must operate in compliance with the conditions and limits specified in their authorisations. A licence from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), or planning permission in Northern Ireland, regulates the environmental performance, emissions to water & air, noise, vibration and generation of waste from the operation. The Health and Safety authorities regulate the safe working practices of the operation. Central government departments oversee that the company is mining in a safe and sustainable way and recoups royalties on behalf of the State or the mineral rights holder. Site inspections and monitoring of emissions are regular and can be unannounced in Ireland. Under the terms of a licence the

company must also carry out self-monitoring on many aspects and has a strict duty to notify the authorities immediately if there is an incident or non-compliance. All ongoing monitoring and reports are examined by the authorities and, if necessary, investigations and enforcement action can be taken, up to and including court prosecutions. In the Republic of Ireland, companies with an EPA licence are required to publish Annual Environmental Reports on their environmental performance. Enforcement data are published by the EPA in the Republic of Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland.



www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/enforcement/EPA_ComplianceandEnforcementPolicy.pdf

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/dard-enforcement-policy.pdf

Health and safety legislation applies to all operating mines and sets out duties on the owner, operator, manager and employees at a mine with respect to persons at or in the area immediately surrounding a mine.



www.hsa.ie/eng/Your_Industry/Mining/

www.hseni.gov.uk/topics/mining-and-quarrying

Closure and Aftercare

Regulation has an important role to play in mining, as it is designed to reduce and mitigate against environmental risk. Exhaustion of the ore is inevitable and therefore planning for, and design of, closure is an integral part of the licensing process. The costs associated with closure and clean-up can be significant for mines running to tens of millions and can take many years. Mining companies are therefore required to assess and plan for the costs associated with closure from the outset to ensure that there is adequate money and resources set aside to cater for this (known as financial provision). It is not only important to protect the environment but also to protect the public purse in the case of default by a company where the state would then have to step in and remediate and close the site. Therefore, funds are required to be secure, sufficient and accessible by the state if necessary. Closure and aftercare planning is very detailed and all tasks, large and small, are costed. Plans are developed in line with national and

international guidelines, approved by the authorities and reviewed at least annually during the operation of the mine. Cessation of operations, whether anticipated or not, must be followed by implementation of the approved closure plan by the mining company. When satisfactory closure has been demonstrated to the authorities, aftercare of the mine is then implemented. Aftercare generally entails lower-level monitoring and maintenance to ensure the risk to the environment continues to be minimised. Both closure and aftercare are overseen closely by the authorities particularly the spending of funds set aside for this purpose.

LEARN MORE

See Factsheet on Lifetime Value of a Mine for a recent, successful mine closure at Lisheen, Co. Tipperary.

See the following links for more information about mine closures in Ireland:



www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/licensee/fp/

www.gov.ie/en/publication/29332-a-social-environmental-and-economic-assessment-of-galmoy-and-lisheen-mines/

