

Press Release

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Tailings risks: maintaining momentum

Two years after the tailings dam burst in Brumadinho, Brazil, the mining industry has shown its willingness to take the issue of global tailings risks seriously. But the challenges remain great, if one considers the vast numbers of abandoned sites, the profit motive driving corporate decision-making, and the way that regulators have allowed companies to walk away from their responsibilities and externalise costs to society and future generations. The proposed establishment of an independent Global Tailings Institute is an opportunity to promote a more ambitious Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management, re-build trust in the industry, and use its independent status to foster inclusive international collaboration.

Despite growing disclosure on tailings storage facilities (TSF), the [RMI Report 2020](#) reveals that the vast majority of large-scale mining companies are still unable to demonstrate that they review and report on how effectively they manage TSF-related risks, and take responsive actions as necessary. The publication last year of the new Global Standard was most welcome, though RMF would support more ambitious aims for the standard as it evolves. These include:

- Raise accountability and responsibility to the CEO or the Board level;
- Make Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) a fundamental right, not a formality to be ineluctably obtained;
- Include protection of World Heritage Sites and other recognised protected areas;
- Include protection of riverine, lake, and marine environments;
- Specify that TSF should be located away from community and worker facilities;
- Specify that TSF should not be located in areas with moderate or higher seismic risk;
- Require more public disclosure of the effectiveness of measures taken to limit risk; and
- Revise the consequence classification matrix to classify as 'Extreme' any failure that would result in any loss of life, instead of the current threshold of 100+ human fatalities.

Moreover, the Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management applies mostly to new TSF, with less attention being paid to existing and abandoned ones. Yet it is estimated that up to one-third of the current global portfolio of TSF are impaired and in need of urgent intervention; and that 25% to 30% of all TSF are abandoned, raising the question of responsibility over time.

The government of China acted incisively last year, after a tailings dam spill at a molybdenum mine that was the biggest tailings leak the country experienced in twenty years. But we need more coordinated and inclusive efforts worldwide to ensure leading practices on tailings management are implemented and enforced across the industry. Whatever the mechanism, clearly urgent action is needed to address the thousands of highest risk TSF that currently threaten the lives of many peoples around the world.

[Download the full statement \(.pdf\)](#)

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About the Responsible Mining Foundation

The Responsible Mining Foundation (RMF) is an independent research organisation that encourages continuous improvement in responsible extractives across the industry by developing tools and frameworks, sharing public-interest data and enabling informed and constructive engagement between extractive companies and other stakeholders. The Foundation does not accept funding or other contributions from the mining industry.

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