

ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATIONS AND MINING ORGANISATIONS

Johannes Albertus Wessels

Centre for Environmental Management, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, P.O. Box 231, Potchefstroom, 2520, North West Province, Tel: (018) 299 4267; Fax: (018) 299 4266; cell: 083 639 9571, E-mail: eobjaw@puk.ac.za

Abstract

Mining is essential to the human well-being in many aspects. Mining activities, however, contribute significantly to pollution and other environmental impacts in South Africa. Recently much more stringent environmental legislation has been developed in South Africa in order to facilitate sustainability in the mining community. Authorisations constitute one of the main “command and control” instruments that can be used to influence and direct the behaviour of individuals and organisations to achieve sound environmental protection and sustainability ultimately. The problem is that in the ever-changing maze of South African environmental legislation, it is often difficult for individuals and organisations to identify, obtain and maintain environmental authorisations. This may result in mining organisations facing the risk of losing their licence to operate and/or their ability to expand their resource utilisation functions. This article provides a legislative framework for the mining sector, explores the purpose and importance of environmental authorisations, gives an overview of the underlying relationship between environmental authorisations, risk assessment and environmental management systems before proposing a generic procedure for identifying, obtaining and maintaining environmental authorisations. This article ultimately aims to ease the challenge of mineral resource utilisation in an ever-changing legislative environment.

Key Words

Mining, environment, environmental performance, legal compliance, liability, authorisations, legislation, Environmental Management Systems, ISO 14001.