

7. PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Objective: To conduct exploration activities in ways that create minimal disturbance to the environment and people.

Introduction

In most countries, environmental law, regulations and guidelines exist to provide direction for exploration activities. In the absence of these, explorers are advised to apply good practice as described in the *e3 Plus* Excellence in Environmental Stewardship Toolkit, and, in the case of more advanced exploration projects, the Performance Standards of the International Finance Corporation (2012).²⁰

Policies and Management Processes

In developing systems for the management of environmental and socio-environmental matters, explorers are encouraged to follow established guidelines and give consideration to the following:

²⁰ www.ifc.org/performancestandards

- a.** Adopt and make public policies and procedures for the management of environmental and social issues;
- b.** Create a management and reporting structure that identifies objectives and allocates appropriate resources and responsibilities for the environmental and social aspects of exploration projects;
- c.** Apply relevant national regulations and inform themselves of international good practice guidelines for environmental management;
- d.** Establish procedures for the management of environmental issues that are relevant in the area of exploration. Explorers are encouraged to involve the local community in the identification and implementation of preferred environmental management options;
- e.** Advance understanding amongst employees, contractors, local stakeholders and affected communities

- of the potential impacts of exploration and mining on the environment and relevant procedures to prevent and mitigate adverse environmental impacts;
- f.** Take reasonable steps to ensure that contractors have the capacity to implement operational controls and comply with environmental policies and procedures; and
 - g.** Where possible, support capacity building and education of local stakeholders and affected communities in environmental management using appropriately qualified, independent experts.

Impact Assessment and Management

Explorers, their employees and contractors should be aware of the potential impacts of their activities on the environment and apply appropriate management processes to minimize or mitigate any adverse impacts. In doing so, explorers should consider the need to:

- a.** Conduct an initial, and then periodic assessments²¹ of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental and social impacts, risks and hazards of exploration activities on the environment and people (see Principle 4);
- b.** Conduct and document baseline environmental and social studies to establish any pre-existing conditions against which changes can be monitored, and share the results of such studies with local communities;
- c.** Work with government and the local community to identify the potential to augment or complement existing land use and development strategies or plans;
- d.** Where possible, incorporate local or traditional knowledge and practice into baseline studies and the management of environmental issues, but also

²¹ *Explorers are encouraged to consider independent, third party assessments, particularly in the advanced stages of exploration.*

- be respectful of the nature of such information and maintain confidentiality;
- e. Have in place and periodically test procedures and equipment to respond to potential environmental incidents;
 - f. Create and implement procedures for managing **chance finds** of archaeological sites, artifacts or cultural items;
 - g. Use processes that reduce the consumption of energy and water and provide for the safe storage and disposal of **hazardous materials and residual wastes**; and
 - h. Carry out continuous remediation and reclamation of lands affected by exploration activities.

Vulnerable Environments and Biodiversity

Explorers should respect and protect vulnerable environments and species, as well as areas of biodiversity, and:

- a.** Respect legally-designated protected areas and promote practices that support biodiversity assessment and management;
- b.** Engage with indigenous peoples and local communities to identify valued environmental sites, and any other locations of importance to local people so that the exploration project is respectful of these areas; and
- c.** Support the development and implementation of sound, inclusive and transparent approaches to land-use planning, biodiversity, conservation, and climate change, based on the best available data, including traditional knowledge.²²

²² *Explorers may find this is most easily accomplished through participation in local or national industry associations or working directly with local indigenous peoples.*

Monitoring and Reporting

Explorers are advised to implement processes of monitoring and reporting on environmental performance (see Principle 2) to inform management, government, local communities, shareholders, and other interested parties. Explorers are advised to promptly report all environmental accidents or incidents to the local community and appropriate authorities and to actively share plans to manage the accident or incident. Explorers are also encouraged to consider the option to:

- a.** Where possible, create a community-based process for the participation of local stakeholders and other affected and interested parties in the monitoring and verification of environmental management performance and, where applicable, support capacity building so that such activities are meaningful and effective; and

- b.** Prepare and publish regular reports on environmental performance that, wherever reasonably possible, are validated by local stakeholders and affected communities or other third-party observers or auditors.