

CYANIDE MANAGEMENT IN THE AUSTRALIAN MINERALS INDUSTRY

Statement by Chief Executive, Mr Mitchell H. Hooke
Minerals Council of Australia

Australian Gold producers are keenly aware of their responsibilities for the health and safety of the community and environment in managing the use of sodium cyanide in gold production.

The industry uses this naturally occurring compound in potentially hazardous levels of concentration in gold production activities. This is why producers continually pursue and adopt world-leading practice in respecting the hazards and managing the risks associated with the use of cyanide.

The unique features of cyanide are that it does not bio-accumulate or build up in the body. It breaks down rapidly when exposed to UV light (sunshine). These factors assist in the development of new-technology systems and processes for the safe management of sodium cyanide.

The regulatory regimes throughout Australia have strict standards for transportation, storage, tailings* storage construction, operation and environmental exposure. In addition, the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) encourages the continued development of effective stringent measures governing transport, storage and use of cyanide, founded in sound science.

However, regulation is only one part of the equation. Through technology and engagement with relevant stakeholder groups, the industry is continually striving to improve its management of sodium cyanide beyond the limits established by regulation.

Both nationally and internationally, the minerals industry has developed guidance to assist companies in the safe use and effective management of sodium cyanide, through:

- > the [International Cyanide Management Code](#) for the Manufacture, Transport and Use of Cyanide in the Production of Gold. Development of the Code was an inclusive process involving a range of stakeholders including, industry, government, NGOs and academia, under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Program. The Code's purpose is to "assist the global gold mining industry in improving cyanide management, thereby minimising risks to workers, communities and the environment from the use of cyanide in gold mining and reducing community concerns about its use";
- > the [Strategic Framework for Tailings Management](#) developed through an industry and government partnership between the Minerals Council of Australia and the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources (MCMPR). The Framework provides a high level principled approach to tailings and cyanide management;
- > the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage Best Practice Environmental Management Program Booklet [Cyanide Management](#). This handbook, produced jointly by government, industry and community groups, outlines best practice approaches to the management of cyanide in the minerals industry; and
- > in partnership with State and Federal Governments, the industry supports regional workshops on Best Practice Cyanide Use and Management, conducted by the [Australian Centre for Minerals Extension and Research](#) (ACMER).

> POLICY STATEMENT

MARCH 2005

While there is currently no commercially available, environmentally superior alternative to sodium cyanide, the minerals industry continues to invest in research into alternative materials and more efficient processes (such as dedicated cyanide destruction processes to reduce cyanide concentrations and toxicity [[Fact Sheet: Cyanide Destruction Processes](#)]).

To assist this, the industry has collaborative partnerships with research institutions such as the [Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Resource Processing](#) and ACMER.

Integral to the industry's commitment to sustainable development is its engagement with neighbouring communities and other stakeholders with a direct interest in the industry's operations. The MCA welcomes constructive engagement on the safe management and use of sodium cyanide and we look forward to continuing the dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that minerals operations protect and support community and environmental health and safety.

MITCHELL H. HOOKE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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*Tailings are fine-grained solids that are the by-product of extracting the valuable minerals from the ore. Tailings may contain metals and chemicals with particular properties that can, under certain exposure conditions, cause harm to the community and the environment.

RELATED FACT SHEETS:

- > [Cyanide and its use by the Minerals Industry](#)
- > [Cyanide Destruction Processes](#)

Contact: Public Affairs Manager on (02) 62330600 / 0412173277