

News Release

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ERCB RELEASES MAJOR DIRECTIVE ON OIL SANDS TAILINGS MANAGEMENT AND ENFORCEMENT CRITERIA

Calgary, Alberta (February 3, 2009) The Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) has issued a Directive which develops new industry-wide criteria for managing oil sands tailings, and specific enforcement actions if tailings performance targets are not met.

Directive 074: Tailings Performance Criteria and Requirements for Oil Sands Mining Schemes requires operators to:

- Prepare tailings plans and report on tailings ponds annually,
- Reduce the accumulation of fluid tailings by capturing fines and placing them in a deposit that is trafficable and,
- Specify dates for construction, use and closure of fluid tailings ponds deposits and file these dates with the ERCB by September 30, 2009.

In past applications, mineable oils sands operators proposed the conversion of fluid tailings into deposits that would become trafficable and ready for reclamation. While operators have applied fluid tailings reduction technologies, they have not met the targets set out in their applications; as a result, the inventories of fluid tailings that require long-term containment have grown. With each successive application and approval, public concerns have also grown.

“Tailings” is a term used to describe waste from oil sands extraction processes. This waste is generally composed of water, sands, silt, clay and residual bitumen. Alberta’s inventory of fluid fine tailings that require long term containment is now 720 million cubic metres.

Directive 074: Tailings Performance Criteria and Requirements for Oil Sands Mining Schemes also contains new rules pertaining to Dedicated Disposal Areas (DDAs). DDAs are dedicated to the deposition of captured fines, which are more solid in composition than liquid tailings and must be trafficable and ready for reclamation five years after deposits have ceased. Operators must:

- Reduce the accumulation of fine fluid tailings by capturing a minimum amount of fines (mineral solids with particle sizes equal to or less than 44 micrometres) as proposed in applications or as approved by the ERCB and place the captured fines in a DDA;
- Prepare a plan for every DDA whereby tailings deposits are trafficable and ready for reclamation five years after active deposition has ceased. The plans would be reviewed for the establishment of performance measures by the ERCB, and
- Operate and abandon each DDA in accordance with applications or ERCB approvals.

The Directive was issued in draft form in June 2008. The final version reflects feedback from government, industry and the public and consultations with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Environment.

The new Directive can be found at www.ercb.ca.

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