

Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

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Series: Environmental Quality Programs

Part 516: National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Chapter 13: Managing the NEPA Process--Office of Surface Mining

Originating Office: Office of Surface Mining

516 DM 13

13.1 **Purpose.** This Chapter provides supplementary requirements for implementing provisions of 516 DM 1 through 6 within the Department's Office of Surface Mining. This Chapter is referenced in 516 DM 6.5.

13.2 NEPA Responsibility.

A. Director. Is responsible for NEPA compliance for the Office of Surface Mining (OSM).

B. Assistant Directors.

(1) Are responsible to the Director for supervision and coordination of NEPA activities in their program areas of responsibility.

(2) Are responsible, within their program areas, for OSM Headquarters review of EISs for compliance with program area policy guidance.

(3) Are responsible for assuring that environmental concerns are identified early in the planning stages and appropriate policy and program guidance is disseminated.

C. Regional Directors.

(1) Are responsible to the Director for integrating the NEPA process into all Regional activities and for NEPA compliance activities in their Regions.

(2) Will designate a staff position to be responsible to the Regional Director for the consistency, adequacy, and quality of all NEPA documents prepared by the Region's staff. The position will also be responsible to the Regional Director for providing information, guidance, training, advice, and coordination on NEPA matters, and for oversight of the Region's NEPA process.

D. Chief, Branch of Environmental Analysis (Washington). Is designated by the Director to be responsible for overall policy guidance for NEPA compliance for OSM.

Information about OSM NEPA documents or the NEPA process can be obtained by contacting this Branch.

13.3 Guidance to Applicants. OSM personnel are available to meet with all applicants for permits on Federal lands or under a Federal program for a State to provide guidance on the permitting procedures. Permit applications under approved State programs are excluded from NEPA compliance. In addition, OSM's regulations implementing the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA) provide requirements for applicants to submit environmental information. The following parts of the regulations (30 CFR) describe the information requirements.

A. Parts 770 and 771 outline the content requirements of permit applications on Federal lands or under a Federal program for a State, including: the procedures for coal exploration operations required by 30 CFR 776; the permit application contents for surface coal mining activities required by 30 CFR 778, 779, and 780; the permit application contents for underground coal mining required by 30 CFR 782, 783, and 784; the requirements for special categories of surface coal mining required by 30 CFR 785; and the procedures for review, revision, and renewal of permits and for the transfer, sale, or assignment of rights granted under permits, as required by 30 CFR 788.

B. Part 776 identifies the minimum requirements for coal exploration activities outside the permit area. Part 776 is complemented by Part 815 of Subchapter K which provides environmental protection performance standards applicable to these operations.

C. Part 778 provides the minimum requirements for legal, financial, compliance, and general nontechnical information for surface mining activities applications. Information submitted in permit applications under Part 778 will be used primarily to enable the regulatory authority and interested members of the public to ascertain the particular nature of the entity which will mine the coal and those entities which have other financial interests and public record ownership interests in both the mining entity and the property which is to be mined.

D. Part 779 establishes the minimum standards for permit applications regarding information on existing environmental resources that may be impacted by the conduct and location of the proposed surface mining activities. With the information required under Part 779, the regulatory authority is to utilize information provided in mining and reclamation plans under Part 780, in order to determine what specific impacts the proposed surface mining activities will have on the environment.

E. Part 780 establishes the heart of the permit application: the mining operations and reclamation plan for surface mining activities. The regulatory authority will utilize this information, together with the description of the existing environmental resources obtained under Part 779, to predict whether the lands to be mined can be reclaimed as required by the Act.

F. Part 782 contains permit application requirements for underground mining activities. This corresponds to Part 778 for surface mining. As such, Part 782 sets forth the minimum requirements for general, legal, financial, and compliance information required to be contained

in applications for permits.

G. Part 783 describes the minimum requirements for information on existing environmental resources required in the permit application for underground mining and corresponds to Part 779 for surface mining activities.

H. Part 784 contains a discussion of the minimum requirements for reclamation and operation plans related to underground mining permit applications and corresponds to Part 780 for surface mining activities.

I. Part 785 contains requirements for permits for special categories of mining, including anthracite, special bituminous, experimental practices, mountaintop removal, steep slope, variances from approximate original contour restoration requirements, prime farmlands, alluvial valley floors, augering operation, and insitu activities. The provisions of Part 785 are interrelated to the performance standards applicable to the special categories covered in Subchapter K and must be reviewed together with the preamble and text for Parts 818 through 828 of Subchapter K.

J. Part 788 specifies the responsibilities of persons conducting surface coal mining and reclamation operations with respect to changes, modifications, renewals, and revisions of permits after they are originally granted, and of persons who attempt to succeed to rights granted under permits by transfer, sale, or assignment of rights.

13.4 Major Actions Normally Requiring an EIS.

A. The following OSM actions will normally require the preparation of an EIS:

(1) Approval of the Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Program, (SMCRA, Title IV). Completed in March 1980.

(2) Promulgation of the permanent regulatory program for surface coal mining and reclamation operations (SMCRA, Title V). Completed in February 1979.

(3) Approval of a proposed mining and reclamation plan that includes any of the following:

(a) Mountaintop removal operations.

(b) Mining within high use recreation areas.

(c) Mining that will cause population increases that exceed the community's ability to absorb the growth.

(d) Mining that would require a major change in existing coal transportation facilities.

(4) Approval of a proposed mining and reclamation plan for a surface mining

operation that meets the following:

(a) The environmental impacts of the proposed mining operation are not adequately analyzed in an earlier environmental document covering the specific leases or mining activity; and

(b) The area to be mined is 1280 acres or more, or the annual full production level is 5 million tons or more; and

(c) Mining and reclamation operations will occur for 15 years or more.

B. If for any of these actions it is proposed not to prepare an EIS, an EA will be prepared and handled in accordance with Section 1501.4(e)(2).

13.5 Categorical Exclusions.

A. The following OSM actions are deemed not to be major Federal actions within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA under Sections 501(a) or 702(d) of the SMCRA. They are hereby designated as categorical exclusions from the NEPA process and are exempt from the exceptions under 516 DM 2.3A(3):

(1) Promulgation of interim regulations.

(2) Approval of State programs.

(3) Promulgation of Federal programs where a State fails to submit, implement, enforce, or maintain an acceptable State program.

(4) Promulgation and implementation of the Federal lands program.

B. In addition to the actions listed in the Departmental categorical exclusions outlined in Appendix 1 of 516 DM 2, many of which OSM also performs, the following OSM actions (SMCRA sections are in parentheses) are designated categorical exclusions unless the actions qualify as an exception under 516 DM 2.3A(3):

(1) Monetary allotments to States for mining and mineral resources institutes (301).

(2) Allocation of research funds to institutes (302).

(3) Any research effort associated with ongoing abandoned mine land reclamation projects where the research is coincidental to the reclamation (401(c)(6)).

(4) Collection of reclamation fees from operators (402(a)).

(5) Findings of fact and entries on land adversely affected by past coal mining

(407(a)).

(6) Acquisition of particular parcels of abandoned mine lands for reclamation
(407(c)).

(7) Filing liens against property adversely affected by past coal mining (408).

(8) Interim regulatory grants (502(e)(4)).

(9) Disapproval of a proposed State program (503(c)).

(10) Review of permits issued under a previously approved State program (504(d)).

(11) Five-year permit renewal on life-of-mine plans under the Federal lands program or the Federal program for a State where the environmental impacts of continued mining are adequately analyzed in a previous environmental document for the mining operation (506(d)).

(12) Small operator assistance program (507(c)).

(13) Issuance of public notices and holding public hearings on permit applications involving Federal lands or under a Federal program for a State (513).

(14) Routine inspection and enforcement activities (517).

(15) Conflict of interest regulations (517(g)).

(16) Assessment of civil penalties (518).

(17) Releases of performance bonds or deposits for mining on Federal lands or under a Federal program for a State (519).

(18) Issuance of cessation orders for coal mining and reclamation operations (521(a)(2) and (3)).

(19) Suspension or revocation of permits (521(a)(4)).

(20) Federal oversight and enforcement of ineffective State programs (521(b)).

(21) Cooperative agreements between a state and the Secretary to provide for State regulation of surface coal mining and reclamation operations on Federal lands (523(c)).

(22) Development of a program to assure that, with respect to the granting of permits, leases, or contracts for Federally-owned coal, no one shall be unreasonably denied purchase of the mined coal (523(d)).

(23) Annual grants programs to States for program development, administration, and enforcement (705(a)).

(24) Assistance to States in the development, administration, and enforcement of State programs (705(b)).

(25) Increasing the amount of annual grants to States (705(c)).

(26) Submission of the Secretary's annual report to the Congress (706).

(27) The proposal of legislation to allow Indian tribes to regulate surface coal mining on Indian lands (710(a)).

(28) The certification and training of blasters (719).

(29) Approval of State Reclamation Plans for abandoned mine lands (405).

(30) Development of project proposals for AML grants, including field work only to the extent necessary for the preparation and design of the proposal.

(31) Use of AML funds to allow States or tribes to set aside State share funds in a special trust for future AML projects.

(32) Use of AML funds in an insurance pool for the purposes of compensation for damage caused by mining prior to the date of the Act.

(33) AML reclamation projects involving: No more than 100 acres; no hazardous wastes; no explosives; no hazardous or explosive gases; no dangerous impoundments; no mine fires and refuse fires; no undisturbed, noncommercial borrow or disposal sites, no dangerous slides where abatement has the potential for damaging inhabited property; no subsidences involving the placement of material into underground mine voids through drilled holes to address more than one structure, and no unresolved issues with agencies, persons, or groups or adverse effects requiring specialized mitigation. Departmental exceptions in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply to this exclusion. All sites considered in this categorical exclusion would have to first meet the eligibility test in sections 404, 409 and 411 of SMCRA. Also projects that have been declared an emergency pursuant to section 410 of SMCRA, may be candidates for this exclusion.

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