



Regulation of dust from minerals operations in England

B. Marker

Independent consultant, London, United Kingdom (brian@amarker.freereserve.co.uk)

Unacceptable levels of dust emissions may arise at all stages of quarrying and mineral processing or from old mine tips. Operators are responsible for keeping emissions to a minimum but, at closed sites the operator may no longer exist in which case the land owner has certain responsibilities. Emissions are regulated through European and National legislation. Provisions include environmental permits administered by the Environment Agency; planning consents, responsibilities for local air quality and provisions to prevent public nuisances administered by local authorities; and health and safety at work regulations administered by a Health and Safety Executive. Therefore it is important that these regulatory bodies should co-operate.

Environmental permits set out operating conditions to protect air quality and surface water. Planning determines when, where and how development should take place. Local planning policy documents identify land allocations for extraction, criteria for determining planning applications, and measures for enforcing conditions. Policies are subjected to sustainability appraisal (including strategic environmental assessment). Planning applications should conform to local planning policies. If proposed development might cause significant environmental harm environmental impact assessment is required to assess likely impacts and propose mitigation and monitoring measures as a basis for planning conditions. Air quality legislation sets limit values for Pb, Cd, As, Ni, and Hg. If air quality objectives are unlikely to be met an action plan is prepared. The local authority is responsible for investigating nuisances that cause unacceptable annoyance to the public. A notice can be issued requiring operations to stop. Health and Safety legislation and regulations protect the workforce at, and visitors to, sites setting out exposure limits. In addition, local authorities must identify contaminated land, establish what remediation is required, who is responsible for it and ensure that remediation takes place.

Minimisation of dust emissions depends on good design and management of sites and equipment. Principles of good site management include thinking ahead, reacting quickly to problems and training. Effective monitoring is required both for site management and for effective enforcement of regulations.