

PIB NEWS ANALYSIS

Major Reforms made in Draft Mining Plan Guidelines 2024 issued by Ministry of Coal

Coal mining in India has witnessed transformative changes in recent years, ushering in a new era marked by significant industry developments. The commencement of commercial coal mining has spurred unprecedented growth, with captive and commercial mines collectively surpassed 100 million tons in coal production during FY23 and likely to cross 200 million tonnes by FY26. The adoption of outsourcing models such as Mine Developer and Operators (MDOs) has emerged as a preferred business strategy, fostering extensive engagement from contractors and service providers. This trend also encompasses the auctioning of abandoned coal mines under a revenue-sharing framework.

The concept of a responsible mining, coal mine transformation strategies and "just transition" have gained prominence, emphasizing the imperative shift from coal-dependent economies to sustainable alternatives while ensuring the welfare of workers, communities, and the environment. This necessitates comprehensive measures encompassing support for affected workers, community development initiatives, environmental remediation, and policy reforms within existing guidelines.

In response to these developments, the Ministry of Coal (MoC) has revised the framework of preparation of Mining Plan, a pivotal step to regulate and advance India's coal mining sector and issued draft guidelines on Mining Plan for consultation. These guidelines serve as a strategic blueprint for coal mining companies, facilitating effective planning, execution, and monitoring of mining activities while upholding stringent environmental, social, and safety standards. The primary objective is to optimize coal resource extraction through sustainable practices that minimize waste and enhance operational efficiency. This strategic approach includes advanced technological integration to streamline operations, thereby achieving environmental and economic sustainability.

Safety and health measures constitute a cornerstone of the revised guidelines, ensuring the protection of mining personnel and local communities. Robust safety protocols and infrastructure are imperative to safeguard all stakeholders involved in coal mining operations.

The revised draft guidelines also focused on responsible mining practices that bolster the coal industry while prioritizing ecosystem preservation. This involves mandatory inclusion of restoration, remediation, and regeneration measures in mining plans to ensure sustainable natural resource management. By minimizing environmental impacts, addressing community concerns, and promoting continuous improvement in water quality monitoring, the guidelines aim to foster a more sustainable and ethical approach to coal mining.

Key reforms introduced in the revised draft Mining Plan & Mine Closure Guidelines include:

- Enhanced flexibility for minor modifications in Mining Plans, with major changes requiring approval from the Coal Controller Organization (CCO).
- Provision for calendar plan flexibility to accommodate increased annual coal production beyond scheduled targets.

- Mandatory reporting of other commercially valuable minerals found within leasehold areas to State Governments.
- Preference for blast-free and continuous coal-cutting technologies in mining methods.
- Implementation of comprehensive Safety Management Plans as per Coal Mines Regulations, 2017, including mandatory safety audits.
- Integration of fly ash filling protocols into mining plans to address related environmental concerns.
- Requirement for drone surveys and processed outputs for comprehensive five-year compliance reports of Mining Plans.
- Inclusion of sand for stowing in mines within revised guidelines.
- Provision for extraction of barrier coal in adjacent mines to conserve coal reserves.
- Facilitation of mine amalgamation for safer and more efficient operations, including the use of decoaled voids for overburden dumping.
- Permission for project proponents to exclude non-viable areas within allocated blocks with detailed justifications.
- Guidelines for dumping overburden in areas outside coal blocks.
- Certification of project boundaries based on DGPS surveys for coal blocks allocated through auction or allotment.
- Standardization of Heavy Earth Moving Machinery (HEMM) specifications to ensure safety, efficiency, and interoperability in coal mining operations.
- Mandatory adoption of conveyor belts or railway transport for coal evacuation, promoting environmental sustainability.
- Requirement for mechanized loading to optimize coal movement from siding to end-users, enhancing operational efficiency and environmental protection.
- Mandatory preparation of Temporary and Final Mine Closure Plans for abandoned or discontinued mines post-2009.

These guidelines are now under stakeholder consultation to facilitate an inclusive and comprehensive review process, ensuring that all relevant perspectives are considered. The stakeholders are requested to submit their comments by 1st July 2024.

The Ministry of Coal remains committed to fostering sustainable development and environmental stewardship in India's coal mining sector. These comprehensive reforms underscore ministry's dedication to responsible resource management, community welfare, and environmental conservation.