

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Ms Kezia Purick, Member for Goyder, to Minister for Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources

AUDITS OF HYDROCARBONS AND MINING SITES

1. How many mine sites as defined as holding a current mineral lease have had an audit undertaken in regard to hydrocarbon storage, usage and management over the last 12 months?
2. How many exploration sites have been visited and had an audit undertaken in regard to the storage, use and management of hydrocarbons over the last 12 months?
3. How many extractive operations (both EMP and EL) have been visited in the last 12 months and had an audit of use, storage and management of hydrocarbons over the last 12 months?
4. Provide details and list what hydrocarbons are included in the audit?
5. In undertaking the audits in the different sectors of the industry (mining, exploration and extractive), how many actual site inspections have been undertaken and how many records of inventory have been inspected?
6. How many sites have been identified as having been impacted by hydrocarbon spills and what is the volume of identified spills?
7. How much security is being held by the Department against identified hydrocarbon pollution?
8. Has the work of undertaking the audits of sites, is this work been outsourced or undertaken internally?
9. If outsourced, what company/business is doing the work and at what cost?
10. If the Department is undertaking the work, how many officials are doing the work, what skills are required, what training has been provided to identify and report hydro contamination?
11. Is this a one-off project or does the Department intend to undertake audits on an annual basis?

ANSWER

1. Eight mining operations were directed to undertake specific audits covering hydrocarbon storage, use and management in the past 12 months. In addition, there have been five departmental audits of mining operations in that period. There have been more than 100 visits to mine sites in the 12 months to 19 October 2011.
2. At least 27 visits were made to exploration operations in the 12 months to 19 October 2011. One full departmental audit was undertaken. Inspection of hydrocarbon storage, use and management is an integral part of every site inspection to active exploration operations.
3. At least 92 visits were made to extractive mineral operations in the 12 months to 19 October 2011. One full departmental audit was undertaken. Inspection of hydrocarbon storage, use and management is an integral part of every site inspection to active extractive operations. Decisions to undertake full audits are based on assessment of risk, so formal audits have focussed on mining operations.
4. The hydrocarbons included in audits are liquid fuels (petrol, avgas, aviation kerosene, fuel oil and diesel), oils and lubricants and, where appropriate, organic solvents used in processing, that are stored in bulk, i.e. quantities exceeding 1000 litres.
5. The total number of site visits carried out in the 12 months to 19 October 2011 by departmental staff is 227. There have been seven departmental audits in that period and eight operators were directed to undertake audits specific to hydrocarbons.
6. At the present time there are three sites where significant hydrocarbon impacts have been discovered. One is the historical diesel spill at GEMCO on Groote Eylandt; the second is the spill of unleaded petrol at Alcan Gove (subject of an ongoing legal action); and the third is a diesel spill at McArthur River Mine (currently under investigation). At all three sites specific monitoring and remediation activities are taking place. The Mining Environmental Compliance Group of the Department of Resources (DoR) continues to monitor all these activities.

In addition, there have been past incidents at several mine sites where spills have been reported and cleaned up with no lasting impact on the environment, such as a recent small spill of heavy fuel oil at Alcan Gove, which was cleaned up within two days and subsequently inspected and cleared by departmental officers.

7. The financial security held by DoR is against the overall cost of remediation of a site. Sites have to be remediated to the satisfaction of DoR before the security is relinquished and this includes the satisfactory remediation of any area impacted by hydrocarbon spillage and associated environmental contamination.
8. Auditing of mine sites is undertaken by the appropriate DoR staff. In the case of the specific hydrocarbon audits, it was the responsibility of the companies involved to source appropriate expertise and to submit the reports. The reports have been assessed by DoR staff. Where safety issues have been identified, the reports have been referred to NT WorkSafe.

9. Costs of audits undertaken by third parties for mining companies are not available to DoR. DoR has not engaged any third party to undertake hydrocarbon audits.
10. There are 18 DoR personnel who have completed recognised environmental auditor training. Observation and investigation of hydrocarbon storage, usage and management is an integral part of basic environmental auditor training.
11. DoR's Mining Environmental Compliance Group will continue to monitor hydrocarbon storage, usage and management during site visits as a routine activity. The current project may be repeated on an annual or biennial basis depending on the outcomes and subsequent improvements made by operators and verified by DoR staff.