

Briefing on the Global Intergovernmental  
Meeting on Minerals and Metals

# UNECE's Perspectives on Tailings Safety and Sustainable Resource Management

Presentation by Ms. Claudia Kamke, Industrial Accidents Convention  
Prepared in cooperation with Mr. Harikrishnan Tulsidas, Sustainable Energy Division

**Geneva, 23 August 2023**



**UNECE**

# Key Challenges

- **Critical Raw Materials (CRM):** Increasing demand for CRMs is projected, creating potential shortages, trade dependency, geopolitical challenges, and increasing TMFs risks
- **Hazards and Risks of Tailings Management Facilities (TMFs):** Lack of knowledge of TMFs (number, location, state, condition), transboundary effects of TMFs, and effective management of TMF risks for prevention
- **Natural Hazards Triggering Technological Disasters (NATECH)**  
**Events:** Natural hazards, frequent and severe weather events of climate change increase risk of TMF failures & transb. impacts



TMF cyanide spill at Ridder (Kazakhstan, 2016)



Brumandinho dam collapse (Brazil, 2019)



Baia Mare cyanide spill (Romania, 2000)



Mount Polley tailings dam break (Canada, 2014)

Sources:

1. <https://siberiantimes.com/ecology/others/news/n0671-stinking-poisoned-water-flows-towards-siberia-from-mining-city-ridder-in-kazakhstan/>
2. UNEP, 2017
3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_Polley\\_mine\\_disaster#/media/File:Mount\\_Polley\\_Mine\\_dam\\_breach\\_2014.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Polley_mine_disaster#/media/File:Mount_Polley_Mine_dam_breach_2014.jpg)

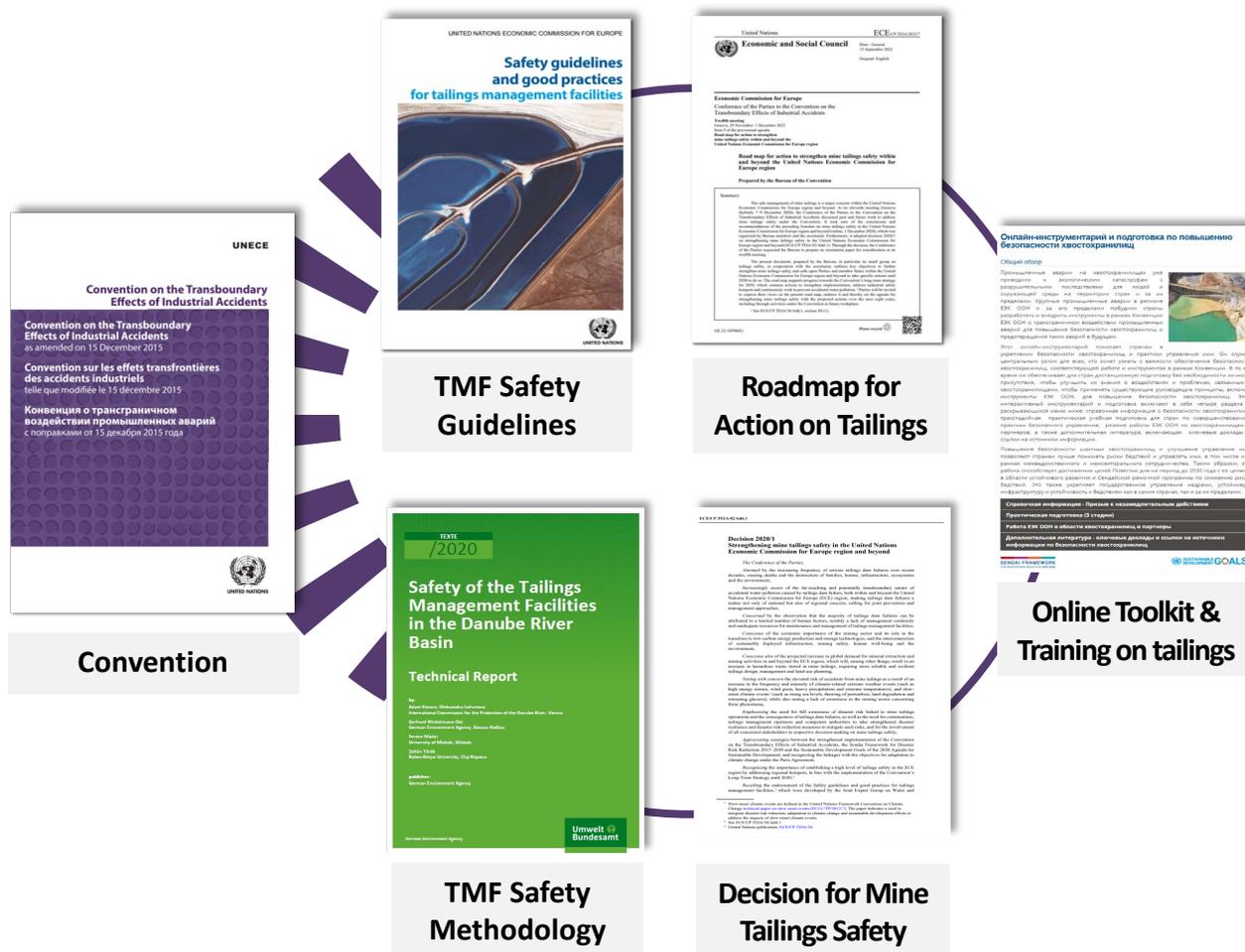
# From Waste to Wealth: How UNFC and UNRMS Can Transform the Mining and Processing Industries

- The United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC) and the United Nations Resource Management System (UNRMS) are innovative tools for sustainable resource management that can transform the mining and processing industries.
- UNFC and UNRMS can help reduce waste, use tailings and other secondary sources, and create value-added products.
- UNFC and UNRMS can support the 2030 Agenda and the circular economy by promoting resource efficiency, environmental sustainability, social responsibility and green financing.
- ECOSOC endorses UNFC and UNRMS for global application, promoted by the European Union, the African Union and many countries worldwide.
- Visit: <https://unece.org/sustainable-energy/sustainable-resource-management>



# UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention

## Guidance & tools



## Practical application

- Inventories & Maps of 580 TMFs in the Danube River Basin & Central Asia
- On-site trainings at TMFs to build capacity & understand risks
- Creation of Interinstitutional Working Groups on Tailings Safety and the Prevention of Accidental Water Pollution (IIWGs) in Central Asia
- Subregional/transboundary cooperation on tailings safety

# 2030 UNECE Road Map for Action on Tailings Safety

## 2023–2024

- Promote understanding of the risks associated with tailings
- Review and update existing measures and legislation
- Use existing and create new working groups and national coordination mechanisms
- Report tailings as a hazardous activity (10th reporting cycle)



## NEXT Steps

- **Prepare an overview:** tailings facilities in the UNECE region, possible existing threats, risks and hot spots
- **Improve shared understanding and risk management across countries**
- **Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue on existing benefits and challenges in the UNECE region**

2025–2026

# Key messages: From regional to global consultations

- Life-cycle approach & sustainable resource management are important to manage the green transition and achieve SDGs
- Need for global mapping and assessment of existing legal & policy instruments that apply to environmental aspects of minerals and metals (and related guidelines and tools, e.g. UNFC & 2030 Road Map)
- Strengthening safety & governance and preventing accidents at all TMFs, including abandoned, active, inactive, future, etc., are key for protecting people, environment & economies
- Important to take integrated risk management approach, including to address impacts of climate change & natural disasters (Natech risks), for enhancing safety measures & reducing risks
- Need for more cooperation and coordination to address TMF hazards and risks, including transboundary risks, at national, cross-border, regional & multistakeholder levels (e.g. IIWGs)
- Need to fill technical knowledge gaps through TMF mapping, risk assessment, capacity building & IO cooperation
- Reporting & regular information exchange on lessons learned and good practices across countries & regions are valuable for respective environmental processes

# Thank you for your attention

For more information:  
[www.unece.org/env/teia](http://www.unece.org/env/teia)

Claudia Kamke  
Environmental Affairs Officer  
Convention on the Transboundary Effects of  
Industrial Accidents, Environment Division  
[claudia.kamke@un.org](mailto:claudia.kamke@un.org)

For more information:  
<https://unece.org/sustainable-energy>

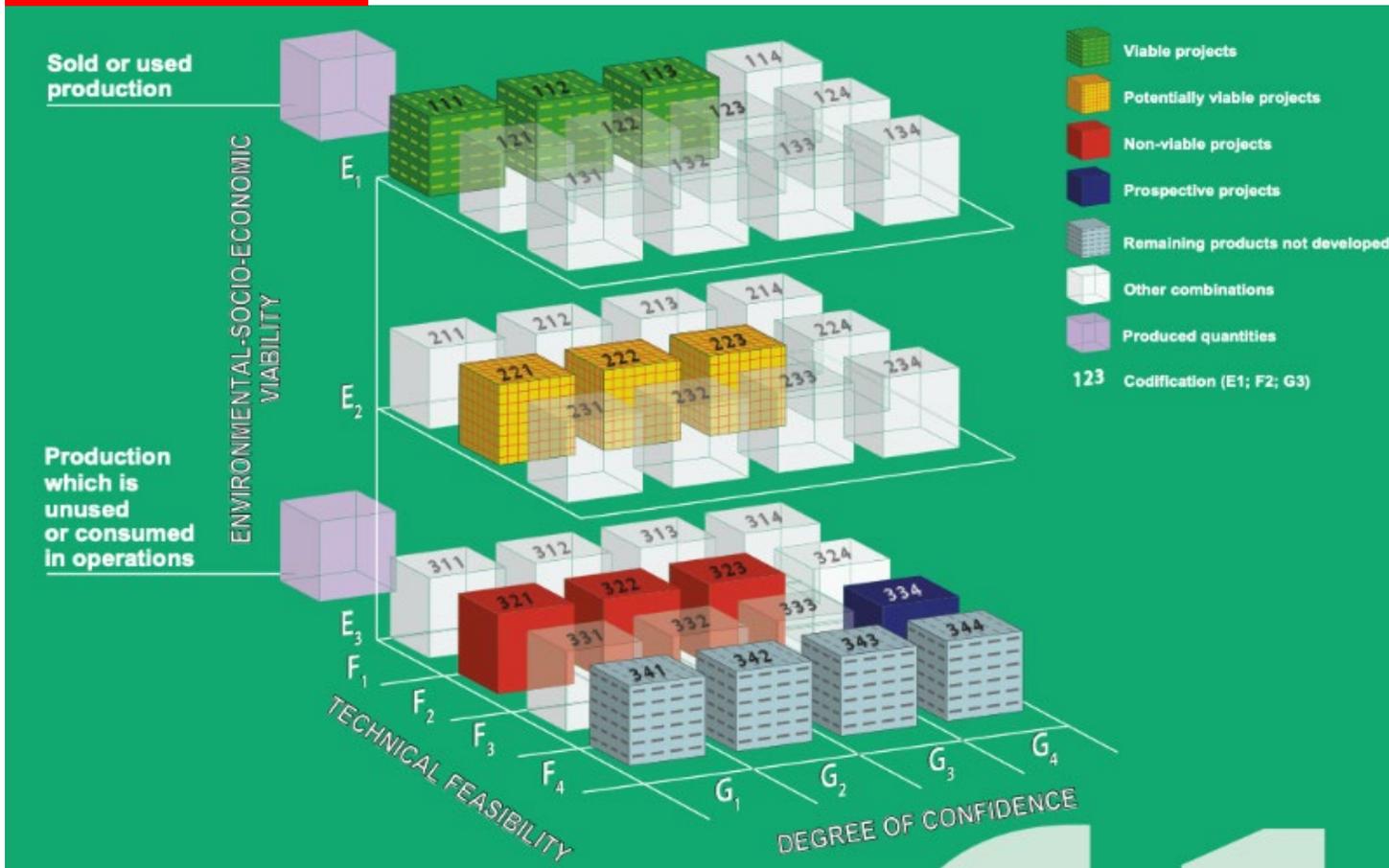
Harikrishnan Tulsidas  
Economic Affairs Officer  
Sustainable Energy Division  
[harikrishnan.tulsidas@un.org](mailto:harikrishnan.tulsidas@un.org)



## **Additional information & links**

# United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC)

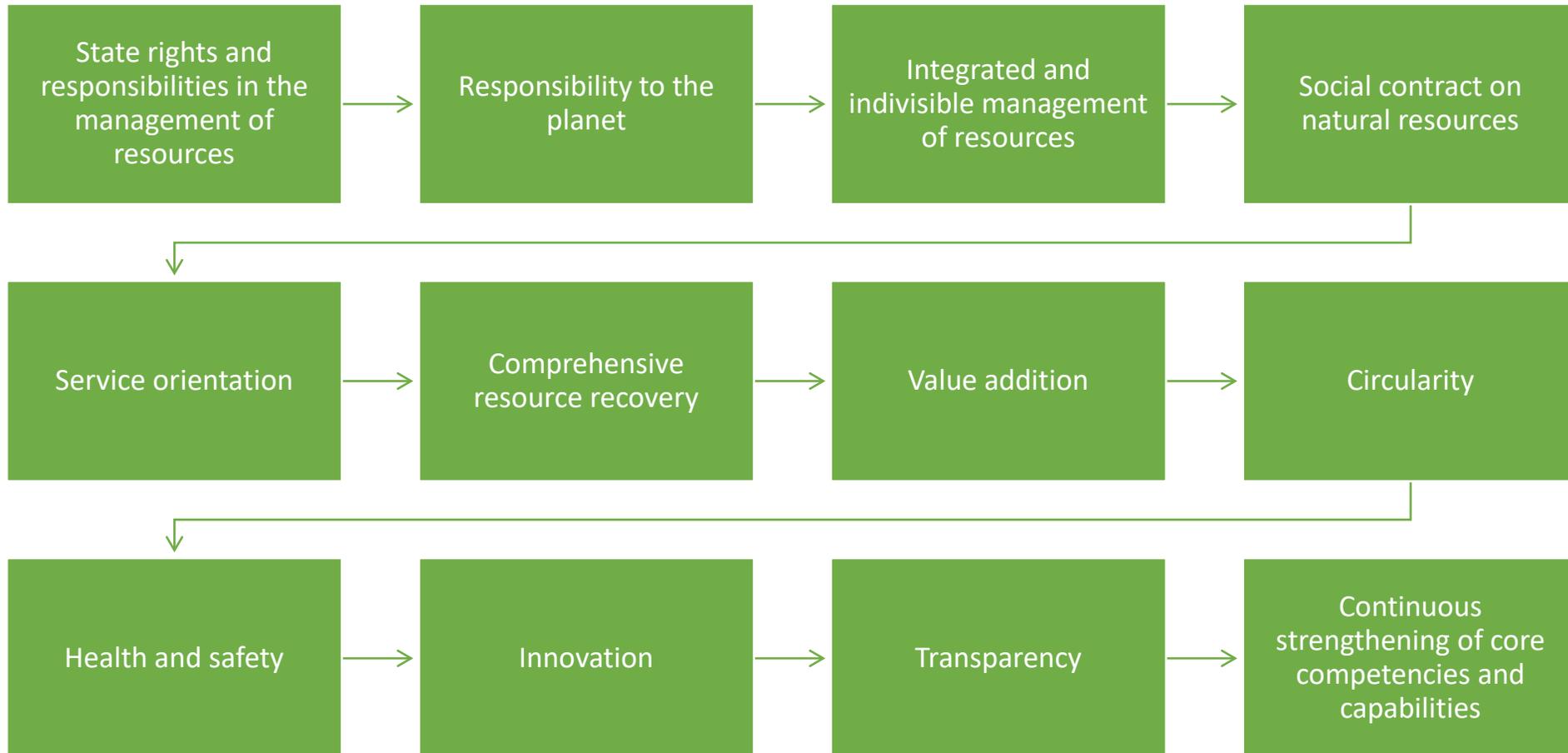
Updated 2019



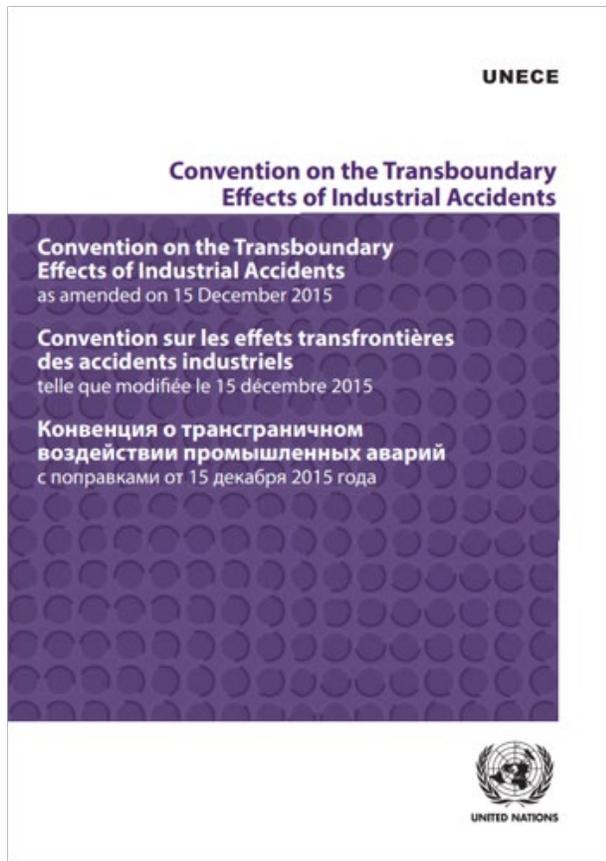
- Applicable across resources and countries
- Includes environmental, social, and economic dimensions

# United Nations Resource Management System

Based on 12 Fundamental Principles



# Industrial Accidents Convention



- Adopted 1992, entered into force 2000, 42 Parties in UNECE region
- Purpose: To protect humans and the environment against the effects of industrial accidents
- Scope: Activities (including TMFs) that involve a hazardous substance listed in Annex I and that are capable of causing transboundary effects
- Key components: Identification/Notification, Prevention, Preparedness, Public Information/Participation, Response, Transboundary cooperation

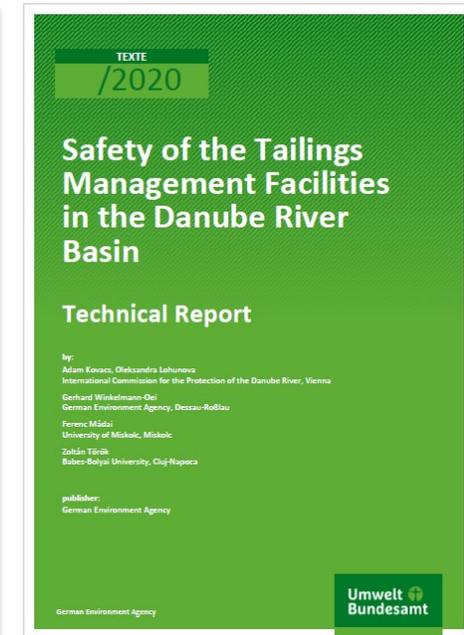
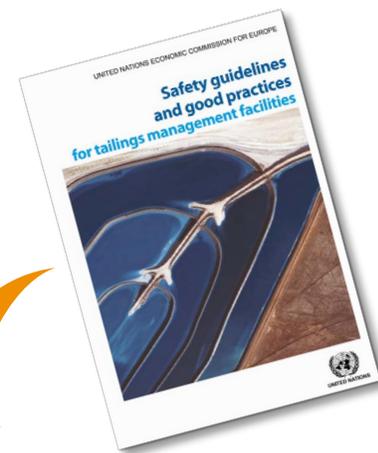
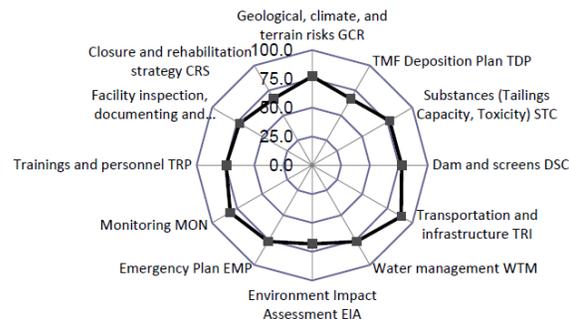
# Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Tailings Management Facilities



- Developed by the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (JEG)
- Aim to reduce frequency and severity of TMF failures
- Provides safety principles and recommendations for governments, competent authorities, TMF operators
- Includes aspects related to i) Pre-construction and construction, ii) Operation and management, iii) Facility inspections, iv) Identification, assessment, management of abandoned sites, iv) Emergency planning
- TMF Methodology was developed to support countries in the practical application of the guidelines

# Methodology for improving TMF safety

- Created by German Federal Environment Agency (UBA) in 2016 under the project on improving the safety of TMFs in Ukraine (2013-2015), to operationalize the UNECE Safety Guidelines
- Refined in 2020 under the project on Capacity development to improve safety conditions of tailings management facilities in the Danube River Basin
- Practical tool to be applied by operators and competent authorities to reduce tailings risks
- Consists of 3 components:
  1. Tailings Hazards Index (THI) & Tailings Risk Index (TRI)
  2. Checklist methodology
  3. Measure Catalogue
- Evaluation Matrix for the TMF safety level from the checklist methodology



# 2030 Road map for action to strengthen mine tailings safety within and beyond the UNECE region



- Developed by Industrial Accidents Conventions' Bureau and UNECE Secretariat, in consultation with OECD, OSCE, UNDRR, UNEP, UNDP and EU Joint Research Centre
- Purpose: i) Defines five key objectives to strengthen mine tailings safety, ii) Provides direction, actions and priorities for countries to achieve the key objectives, iii) Highlights activities that UNECE, in cooperation with partner organizations, can conduct to support countries in implementation
- Objectives: i) Understanding TMF-related risks within and across national borders, ii) Addressing TMF risks through policy and governance, iii) Prevention and preparedness for accidental water pollution from TMFs to ensure water quality, iv) Prevention of NATECH events and adaptation to climate change, v) Exchange of information and knowledge and capacity-building

# Decision 2020/1 on strengthening mine tailings safety in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region and beyond

ECE/CP.TEIA/42/Add.1

## **Decision 2020/1 Strengthening mine tailings safety in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region and beyond**

*The Conference of the Parties,*

*Alarmed by the increasing frequency of serious tailings dam failures over recent decades, causing deaths and the destruction of families, homes, infrastructure, ecosystems and the environment,*

*Increasingly aware of the far-reaching and potentially transboundary nature of accidental water pollution caused by tailings dam failure, both within and beyond the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, making tailings dam failures a matter not only of national but also of regional concern, calling for joint prevention and management approaches,*

*Concerned by the observation that the majority of tailings dam failures can be attributed to a limited number of human factors, notably a lack of management continuity and inadequate resources for maintenance and management of tailings management facilities,*

*Conscious of the economic importance of the mining sector and its role in the transition to low-carbon energy production and storage technologies, and the interconnection of sustainably deployed infrastructure, mining safety, human well-being and the environment,*

*Conscious also of the projected increase in global demand for mineral extraction and mining activities in and beyond the ECE region, which will, among other things, result in an increase in hazardous waste stored in mine tailings, requiring more reliable and resilient tailings design, management and land-use planning,*

*Noting with concern the elevated risk of accidents from mine tailings as a result of an increase in the frequency and intensity of climate-related extreme weather events (such as high energy storms, wind gusts, heavy precipitation and extreme temperatures), and slow-onset climate events<sup>1</sup> (such as rising sea levels, thawing of permafrost, land degradation and retreating glaciers), while also noting a lack of awareness in the mining sector concerning these phenomena,*

*Emphasizing the need for full awareness of disaster risk linked to mine tailings operations and the consequences of tailings dam failures, as well as the need for communities, tailings management operators and competent authorities to take strengthened disaster resilience and disaster risk reduction measures to mitigate such risks, and for the involvement of all concerned stakeholders in respective decision-making on mine tailings safety,*

*Appreciating synergies between the strengthened implementation of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and recognizing the linkages with the objectives for adaptation to climate change under the Paris Agreement,*

*Recognizing the importance of establishing a high level of tailings safety in the ECE region by addressing regional hotspots, in line with the implementation of the Convention's Long-Term Strategy until 2030;<sup>2</sup>*

*Recalling the endorsement of the Safety guidelines and good practices for tailings management facilities,<sup>3</sup> which were developed by the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents further to the evaluation of the Working Group on Development – at its*

<sup>1</sup> Slow-onset climate events are defined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change technical paper on slow onset events (FCCC/TP/2012/7). The paper indicates a need to integrate disaster risk reduction, adaptation to climate change and sustainable development efforts to address the impacts of slow-onset climate events.

<sup>2</sup> See ECE/CP.TEIA/38/Add.1.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations publication, ECE/CP.TEIA/26.

- In 2020, the Industrial Accidents Convention COP adopted [Decision 2020/1](#) on strengthening mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond
- Built on outcomes of the Seminar on mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond (online, 1 December 2020)
- Requests Parties (and invites other countries) to increase efforts to strengthen tailings safety and prevent failures, in view of elevated risk of such accidents posed by increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events due to climate change
- Reminds Parties that identification of hazardous activities and notification processes shall entail TMFs
- Urges Parties (and invites other countries) to facilitate the application of the UNECE Safety Guidelines for TMFs, TMF Methodology and good practices in the ECE region through capacity development, technology/knowledge transfer, sharing of experiences and lessons learned
- Calls on Parties to improve inter-institutional and stakeholder coordination at the national and local levels and across borders, while increasing transparency for communities and other stakeholders on how these risks are taken into account

# Online Toolkit & Training for Improving Tailings Safety

## Онлайн-инструментарий и подготовка по повышению безопасности хвостохранилищ

### Общий обзор

Промышленные аварии на хвостохранилищах уже приводили к экологическим катастрофам с разрушительными последствиями для людей и окружающей среды на территории стран и за их пределами. Крупные промышленные аварии в регионе ЕЭК ООН и за его пределами побудили страны разработать и внедрить инструменты в рамках Конвенции ЕЭК ООН о трансграничном воздействии промышленных аварий для повышения безопасности хвостохранилищ и предотвращения таких аварий в будущем.



Этот онлайн-инструментарий помогает странам в укреплении безопасности хвостохранилищ и практики управления ими. Он служит центральным узлом для всех, кто хочет узнать о важности обеспечения безопасности хвостохранилищ, соответствующей работе и инструментах в рамках Конвенции. В то же время он обеспечивает для стран дистанционную подготовку без необходимости личного присутствия, чтобы улучшить их знания о воздействиях и проблемах, связанных с хвостохранилищами, чтобы применять существующие руководящие принципы, включая инструменты ЕЭК ООН, для повышения безопасности хвостохранилищ. Этот интерактивный инструмент и подготовка включают в себя четыре раздела в раскрывающемся меню ниже: справочная информация о безопасности хвостохранилищ; трехстадийная практическая учебная подготовка для стран по совершенствованию практики безопасного управления; резюме работы ЕЭК ООН по хвостохранилищам и партнеров; а также дополнительная литература, включающая ключевые доклады и ссылки на источники информации.

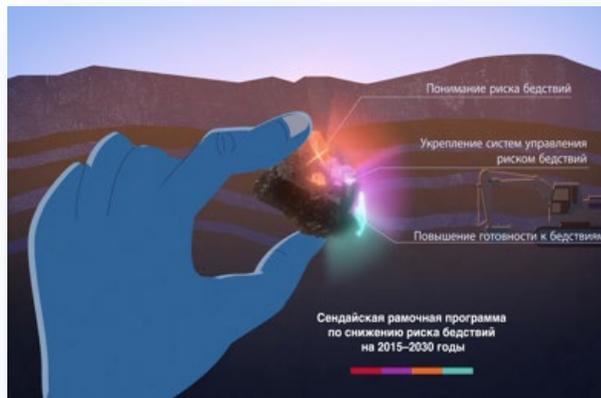
Повышение безопасности шахтных хвостохранилищ и улучшение управления ими позволяют странам лучше понимать риски бедствий и управлять ими, в том числе и в рамках межведомственного и межсекторального сотрудничества. Таким образом, эта работа способствует достижению целей Повестки дня на период до 2030 года с ее целями в области устойчивого развития и Сендайской рамочной программы по снижению риска бедствий. Это также укрепляет государственное управление недрами, устойчивую инфраструктуру и устойчивость к бедствиям как в самих странах, так и за их пределами.

Справочная информация - Призыв к незамедлительным действиям
Практическая подготовка (3 стадии)
Работа ЕЭК ООН в области хвостохранилищ и партнеры
Дополнительная литература - ключевые доклады и ссылки на источники информации по безопасности хвостохранилищ

- Promotes knowledge of tailings safety through online training on the application of relevant safety guidelines and methodology

### Consists of:

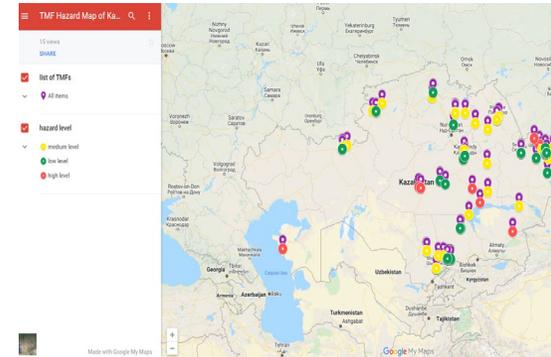
- Reference information on the safety of tailings
- Practical training → 3-step approach
- Brief information on UNECE work related to tailings and partners
- Further reading (main reports and links)
- Available in [ENG](#) and [RUS](#)



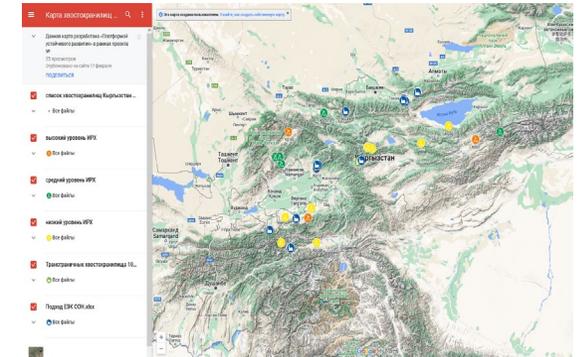
Includes tailings safety training video (ENG, RUS)

# TMF mapping: Central Asia

- TMF inventory project under the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention thanks to funding by Switzerland, Germany and the EU
- 237 TMFs identified across Central Asia with 59 or 25% capable of causing transboundary effects
- All TMFs assessed using the TMF Methodology, incl. Tailings Hazard (THI) and Tailings Risk (TRI) Indexes



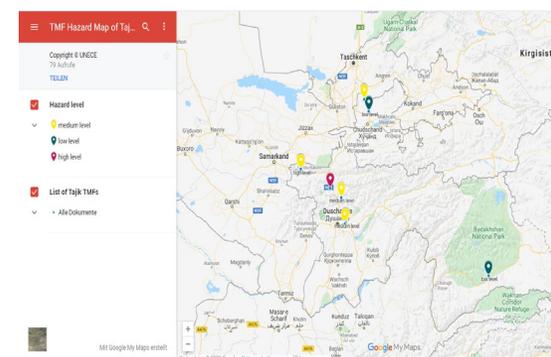
**Kazakhstan:** 121 TMFs with 7 capable of transboundary effects



**Kyrgyzstan:** 62 TMFs with 38 capable of transboundary effects



**Syr Darya River basin:** 61 TMFs with 33 capable of transboundary effects (19 KYR, 10 TAJ, 4 UZB)



**Tajikistan:** 13 TMFs with 4 capable of transboundary effects



**Uzbekistan:** 41 TMFs with 10 capable of transboundary effects