

PART 716—SPECIAL PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

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SOURCE: 42 FR 62691, Dec. 13, 1977, unless otherwise noted.

§ 716.1 General obligations.

(a) This part establishes special initial performance standards that apply in the following special circumstances—

- (1) § 716.2 applies to surface coal mining operations on steep slopes.
- (2) § 716.3 applies to surface coal mining operations involving mountaintop removal.
- (3) § 716.4 applies to special bituminous coal mines.
- (4) § 716.5 applies to anthracite surface coal mining operations.
- (5) § 716.6 applies to surface coal mining operations in Alaska.
- (6) § 716.7 applies to surface coal mining operations on prime farmlands.

(b) All surface coal mining and reclamation operations subject to this part shall comply with the applicable special performance standards in this part. Such operations shall also comply with all general performance standards in part 715 of this chapter unless specifically exempted *in this part* from the requirements of part 715.

§ 716.2 Steep-slope mining.

The permittee conducting surface coal mining and reclamation operations on natural slopes that exceed 20 degrees, or on lesser slopes that require measures to protect the area from disturbance, as determined by the regulatory authority after consideration of soils, climate, the method of operation, geology, and other regional characteristics, shall meet the following performance standards. The standards of this section do not apply where mining is done on a flat or gently rolling ter-

rain with an occasional steep slope through which the mining proceeds and leaves a plain or predominantly flat area; or where the mining is governed by § 716.3.

(a) Spoil, waste materials or debris, including that from clearing and grubbing, and abandoned or disabled equipment, shall not be placed or allowed to remain on the downslope.

(b) The highwall shall be completely covered with spoil and the disturbed are a graded to comply with the provisions of § 715.14 of this chapter. Land above the highwall shall not be disturbed unless the regulatory authority finds that the disturbance will facilitate compliance with the requirements of this section.

(c) Material in excess of that required to meet the provisions of § 715.14 of this chapter shall be disposed of in accordance with the requirements of § 715.15 of this chapter.

(d) Woody materials may be buried in the backfilled area only when burial does not cause, or add to, instability of the backfill. Woody materials may be chipped and distributed through the backfill when approved by the regulatory authority.

(e) *Variances from approximate original contour restoration requirements.* (1) This section applies to surface coal mining operations on steep slopes where the operation is not to be reclaimed to achieve the approximate original contour and is not a mountaintop removal operation.

(2) The objective of this subsection is to allow for a variance from the approximate original contour restoration requirements on steep slopes to—

(i) Improve watershed control of the area; and

(ii) Allow the land to be used for an industrial, commercial, residential, or public use, including recreational facilities.

(3) The regulatory authority may grant a variance from the requirement for restoration of the affected lands to their approximate original contour only if it first finds, in writing, on the basis of a showing made by the permittee, that all of the following requirements are met:

(i) The permittee has demonstrated that the purpose of the variance is to

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make the lands to be affected within the permit area suitable for an industrial, commercial, residential, or public use postmining land use and that the proposed industrial, commercial, residential, or public use is likely to occur.

(ii) The proposed use, after consultation with the appropriate land-use planning agencies, if any, constitutes an equal or better economic or public use.

(iii) The permittee has demonstrated that compliance with the requirements for acceptable alternative postmining industrial, commercial, residential or public land uses of 30 CFR 715.13 has been achieved except for the requirement at §715.13(d)(3) and (4) to provide letters of commitment. The permittee must demonstrate to the regulatory authority that necessary public facilities are likely to be provided and that the plan is financially feasible.

(iv) The permittee has demonstrated that the watershed of the area will be improved as compared to the condition of the watershed before mining. The watershed will be deemed improved only if—

(A) There will be a reduction in the amount of total suspended solids or other pollutants discharged to ground or surface waters from the area as compared to such discharges; or, there will be reduced flood hazards or more even flow within the watershed containing the area due to reduction of the peak flow discharges from precipitation events or thaws; or any other criterion authority in the granting of the variance. While improving one or more variables, the permittee must also at least maintain the variables not improved at their premining levels;

(B) The total volume of flows from the proposed affected lands, during every season of the year, will not vary in a way that adversely affects the ecology of any surface water or any existing or planned use of surface or ground water; and

(C) The appropriate State environmental agency approves the plan.

(v) The permittee has demonstrated that the owner of the surface of the lands within the permit area has knowingly requested, in writing, as a part of the application, that a variance be

granted. The request shall be made separately from any surface owner consent given for the operation and shall show an understanding that the variance could not be granted without the surface owner's request.

(vi) The proposal is designed and certified by a qualified registered professional engineer in conformance with professional standards established to assure the stability, drainage, and configuration necessary for the intended use of the site.

(vii) All other requirements of the Act and these regulations will be met by the proposed operations.

(4) Every permittee who obtains a variance under this subsection shall:

(i) Backfill completely the highwall with spoil material, in a manner which results in a static factor of safety of at least 1.3 using general geotechnical analysis.

(ii) Improve the watershed control of the area by reducing the peak flow from precipitation or thaw or reducing the total suspended solids or other pollutants in the surface water discharge during precipitation or thaw or by attaining the criteria approved by the regulatory authority in the granting of the variance. While improving one or more variables, the permittee must also at least maintain the variables not improved at their premining levels. The total volume of flow during every season of the year shall not vary in a way that adversely affects the ecology of any surface or ground water.

(iii) Disturb land above the highwall only to the extent that the regulatory authority deems appropriate and approves as necessary to facilitate compliance with the provisions of this section. The regulatory authority may authorize such a disturbance above the highwall if it finds the disturbance is necessary to—

(A) Blend the solid highwall and the backfilled material; or

(B) Control surface runoff; or

(C) Provide access to the area above the highwall.

(iv) Place off the mine bench no more than the amount of spoil necessary to achieve the postmining land use, ensure the stability of spoil retained on the bench, and meet all other requirements of the Act and parts 710 through

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725 of this chapter. All spoil not retained on the bench shall be placed in accordance with the Act and these regulations.

(5) The regulatory authority shall review every variance granted pursuant to this subsection not more than three years from the date of issuance of the permit to ensure that the proposed alternative postmining use is proceeding in accordance with the terms of the approved plan, unless the permittee affirmatively so demonstrates.

[42 FR 62691, Dec. 13, 1977, as amended at 45 FR 83168, Dec. 17, 1980]

§ 716.3 Mountaintop removal.

(a) Surface coal mining and reclamation operations that remove entire coal seams running through the upper fraction of a mountain, ridge, or hill by removing all of the overburden and creating a level plateau or gently rolling contour with no highwalls remaining are exempt from the requirements of § 715.14 of this chapter for achieving approximate original contour, if the following requirements are met:

(1) An industrial, commercial, agricultural, residential, or public facility (including recreational facilities) use is proposed for the affected land.

(2) The alternative land use criteria in § 715.13(d) of this chapter are met and the proposal is approved by the regulatory authority.

(3) All other applicable requirements of part 715 of this chapter can be met.

(b) Surface coal mining and reclamation operations conducted under this section shall comply with the following standards:

(1) An outcrop barrier of sufficient width consisting of the toe of the lowest coal seam, and its associated overburden shall be retained to prevent slides and erosion.

(2) The final graded top plateau slopes on the mined area shall be less than 1v:5h so as to create a level plateau or gently rolling configuration and the outcrops of the plateau shall not exceed 1v:2h, except where engineering data substantiates and the regulatory authority finds that a minimum static safety factor of 1.5 will be attained.

(3) The resulting level or gently rolling contour shall be graded to drain in-

ward from the outslope except at specific points where it drains over the outslope in protected stable channels.

(4) Damage to natural watercourses below the area to be mined shall be prevented.

(5) Spoil shall be placed on the mountaintop bench as is necessary to achieve the postmining land use approved under § 715.13 of this chapter. All excess spoil material not retained on the mountaintop shall be placed in accordance with the standards of § 715.15 of this chapter.

(c)(1) All permits giving approval for mountaintop removal shall be reviewed not more than 3 years from the date of issuance of the permit, unless the permittee affirmatively demonstrates and the regulatory authority finds that all operations are proceeding in accordance with the terms of the permit and applicable requirements of the Act and the regulations of this part. The terms of the permit shall be in accordance with the requirements of the Act and the regulations of this part.

(2) The terms of a permit for mountaintop removal may be modified by the regulatory authority if it determines that more stringent measures are necessary to prevent or control slides and erosion, prevent damage to natural water courses, avoid water pollution, or to assure successful revegetation.

§ 716.4 Special bituminous coal mines.

(a) *Definition.* Special bituminous coal surface mines as used in this section means those bituminous coal surface mines that are located in the State of Wyoming and that are being mined or will be mined according to the following criteria:

(1) Excavation of the mine pit takes place on a relatively limited site for an extended period of time. For the purposes of this section, mine pit means an open-pit mine in which the surface opening is at least the full size of the excavation and has a contiguous border. The pit generally is quite deep and is formed by the removal of relatively large amounts of overburden to obtain lesser amounts of coal. The term as used in this section applies only to mining operations that extract coal