

FINNISH STANDARD FOR SUSTAINABLE EXPLORATION



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1 INTRODUCTION

The Finnish Network for Sustainable Mining¹ is a cooperation forum for mining and exploration companies as well as interest groups of the sector. The network aims to share information and experiences and develop more responsible mining and exploration practices in Finland.

The companies that have committed to the Finnish Standard for Sustainable Exploration prepared in 2016 and updated between 2018 and 2021 adhere to operating principles that are sustainable in terms of environmental, social and economic performance. Sustainable exploration covers the entire lifecycle of exploration from the planning to after-care. The standard for sustainable exploration provides companies with concrete instructions for sustainable operations at each stage of exploration. The Standard is also used to assess performance and verify member companies' commitment to the common ground rules.

The Finnish Standard for Sustainable Exploration consists of common operating principles and three assessment tools which cover the entire lifecycle of exploration stage-by-stage.

2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Finnish Standard for Sustainable Exploration includes guiding principles that the companies committed to the standard for sustainable exploration follow at all stages of exploration. The guiding principles of The Finnish Standard for Sustainable Exploration are listed below.

1. The operations of the companies are transparent.
2. The companies will adhere to best practices in exploration and commit to the continuous improvement of their operations.
3. The companies will minimise any negative impacts of their operations on local communities, the environment and biodiversity.
4. The companies will respect the surrounding community and its culture and ways of life.
5. The companies will engage in active dialogue with their communities of interest and involve these in the development of the principles for sustainable exploration.
6. The companies will not jeopardise the health and safety of their employees or local communities.
7. The companies will complete any after-care measures of their exploration activities responsibly.

3 ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Exploration companies can assess, monitor and improve their performance by using three assessment tools. The assessment tools include entities related to the community relationships, environment, and safety.

3.1.1 Community relationships

Companies recognize the impact of their operations on local communities. The companies will adhere to the principles of open communications and promote the opportunities of communities of interest (COIs) to participate in the preparation, development and application of any company practices so that they take into account the needs of the communities of interests, too. *In the Sámi Homeland and the reindeer herding area, the special characteristics and rights of these communities of interest will be considered.*

The companies commit to engaging with communities of interest in accordance with the following principles:

1. The companies will identify the key COIs of their operations and encourage COI representatives to engage in dialogue and participate in issues of concern to them. The companies will assess the impacts of planned operations on various COIs and identify their expectations and needs.
2. The companies will apply the good practices described in the stakeholder engagement toolbox² to enhance interaction between the company and COIs.

¹ <https://www.kaivosvastuu.fi>

² Sidosryhmäyhteistyön työkalupakki. Kestävän kaivostoiminnan verkosto. (<http://www.kaivosvastuu.fi/handbook/>)

3. Constructive and genuine dialogue aiming at cooperation will be maintained with the local community. The companies commit to promoting the identification of impacts through engagement with COIs and to actively seeking and implementing measures to avoid and minimise any adverse impacts.
4. The principles of openness and transparency will be adhered to in operations. From the preparation stage of exploration, the companies will provide information on their operations, impacts and community relationship activities openly and in an understandable form. COIs will be provided with information on the activities and consulted actively and in a timely manner.
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6. The companies will collect feedback from their COIs in order to develop their operations and community relationship activities. Any feedback raised by COIs will be responded to, and efforts will be made to seek solutions to the causes of the concerns to satisfy the concerns of all parties in an acceptable way.
7. The companies will operate in such a way that they will not weaken the opportunities of the Sámi, as an indigenous population, to exercise their right to maintain and develop their culture and practise their traditional livelihoods. In addition, the Akwé: Kon Guidelines³ are complied with in the Sámi homeland.
8. The companies will provide COI engagement training for their employees and subcontractors.
9. At the after-care stage of exploration, the companies will notify COIs of the termination of the exploration activities and their results, and any further after-care measures.

3.1.2 Environment

The companies will comply practices and methods that ensure good management of environmental matters and the conservation of biodiversity throughout all stages of the exploration project life cycle.

The companies follow the next principles in their operation:

1. Recognising that Natura 2000 areas, legally-designated nature reserves, wilderness reserves, hiking areas and valuable landscape areas as well as other areas and sites that are valuable in terms of nature conservation can contribute to biodiversity conservation, the companies will comply with the relevant requirements set in national legislation.
2. Communities of Interest will be informed of any plans and measures affecting the environment, and they will be consulted and considered. Exploration activities will also consider the conservation of Sámi traditional knowledge and practices.
3. The companies take into account the characteristics related to the natural values of the research area.
4. Employees of the companies and their subcontractors are introduced to take environmental matters into account at each stage of exploration.
5. The companies are committed to openness and transparency and public reporting on issues related to the environmental matters.
7. No exploration operations will be carried out in World Heritage sites or natural or national parks. The company will ensure that the above-mentioned areas will not be affected by their operations.
8. After the termination of exploration activities, the companies will take care of the rehabilitation of the site, if necessary.

³ Akwé: Kon –ohjeet. Ympäristöministeriö. 2011. Ympäristöhallinnon ohjeita I. (https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/41525/OH1_2011_Akwe_Kon_-ohjeet.pdf?sequence=1)

3.1.3 Safety

The companies commit to safety principles in their operation as follows:

1. Companies shall aim to ensure a safe working environment for their employees and to promote the health and well-being of their employees.
2. The operations of the companies will cause no harm to the health or safety of other parties operating in the area or visiting the area of operations
3. The company has processes in place for risk assessment and management.
4. The goal of the companies is zero accidents
5. The companies will ensure the safety of exploration areas even after the termination of their exploration activities.

3.2 SELF-ASSESSMENT

The sustainability of exploration is assessed with the help of self-assessment of The Standard for Sustainable Exploration⁴. The companies committed to the Standard for Sustainable Exploration carry out the self-assessment annually. The purpose of self-assessment is to guide companies in the planning and implementation of entities related to sustainable exploration.

Self-assessment of The Standard for Sustainable Exploration acts as a good tool for exploration companies operating in Finland, in developing sustainability, but also as a guide in the operations of companies starting in Finland. The result of self-assessment gives a concrete evaluation of the sustainability of operations and instructs towards development of operations in the various subareas of exploration sustainability.

The self-assessment is performed by answering the questions posed in the assessment tools. In addition, the *General Questions* tab displays questions related to the company's basic information that do not affect the level rating. If the answer is *Yes* it is reflected in the final report to be published, thus giving readers / stakeholders an idea of the types of areas in which the company operates.

For each assessment tool, five levels of performance have been determined (C-B-A-AA-AAA). The sustainability of exploration, that is, the level of performance, is defined on the basis of the assessment criteria. The assessor must evaluate whether the performance of the company meets the assessment criteria for the performance indicators. All companies are expected to comply with the legal and government requirements described in the self-assessment at level C. Companies that have achieved the level of self-assessment B-AAA have developed their operations and sustainability above the requirements of legislation and the authorities.

3.3 VERIFYING THE RESULTS

The results of the self-assessment of The Standard for Sustainable Exploration are verified every three years. Only those who have been approved by the Network can act as verifiers. The verification process has been created to ensure consistent, accurate and transparent self-assessment reporting by the companies committed to The Standard for Sustainable Exploration.

The verification process ensures that the level reported by the company is consistent with the conclusion by the verifier. Verification is based on established auditing practices, such as interviews of relevant persons and checking documents. The verifier, at their discretion, may talk to local communities of interest.

Assessment tools of the Standard for Sustainable Exploration must be used in verification. The Verification report must include at least a statement that confirm the verified results. The verifier must report why a criterion is defined for the level in question, in particular if the verified level differs from the level of the customer's self-assessment.

⁴ <https://www.kaivosvastuu.fi/malminetsinta/malminetsintajarjestelma-in-english/>