



MESA TÉCNICA DE TRABAJO PARA
EL CIERRE DE MINAS EN PANAMÁ



Press Release

Experts say First Quantum's Cobre Panama tailings dam is at very serious and imminent risk of failure due to internal erosion and a lack of proper monitoring

Panama, December 12, 2024 - Experts from the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW) revealed critical new findings regarding the Cobre Panama mine in a preliminary report dated December 9, 2024. The report concludes that the **physical stability of the tailings management facility (TMF) dam is seriously compromised**. In December 2024, the Technical Committee for Mine Closure of the Panamanian IUCN Committee and the Panama is Worth More Without Mining Coalition, held a press conference in Panama City to **demand that the Executive Branch uphold Panamanian law and prioritize the safety of nearby communities and the preservation of the environment**.

ELAW's report analyzes the *Ninth Monitoring Report*, presented by Minera Panama, a subsidiary of First Quantum Minerals that operates the Cobre Panama mine, in September 2024, together with other documents that were provided by the Ministry of Environment to ELAW experts who visited Panama in November 2024.

ELAW experts also reviewed a report from May 2024 that was prepared by an external contractor hired by Minera Panama, which warned that the **risk of internal erosion of the TMF's northern dam** should be "addressed with the utmost care and urgency," especially given the high-rainfall climate in Donoso, the region where the mine is located. The finding is even more serious when one considers that **the mining company's Eighth Monitoring Report, submitted in February 2024, reported that none of the TMF dam's inclinometers were operational**; and the *Ninth Report* indicates that only two out of five inclinometers were operating as of May of this year. **ELAW experts warn that "one of the most fundamental methods for monitoring the stability of a TMF is the use of inclinometers for detecting any changes in the embankment of a TMF."** They add that this is a clear violation of the *Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management*, which the mine site is obligated to comply with according to the resolution that approved its 2011 Environmental Impact Study.

A tailings facility failure is not unheard of in recent history. On the contrary, its occurrence and impacts are widely documented. A comprehensive inventory, published in 2022, documents 432 tailings facility failures between 1915 and 2021, 57% of them in the Americas. **In 2019, the collapse of a tailings dam owned by the mining company Vale in Brumadinho, Brazil, killed more than 270 people and affected more than 23,000 people. The disaster was caused by internal erosion.**

Article 6 of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, better known as the [Escazú Agreement](#), requires that, in the event of an imminent threat to public health or the environment, "the relevant competent authority shall immediately disclose and disseminate through the most effective means all pertinent information in its possession that could help the public take measures to prevent or limit potential damage." In August of this year, **the Ministry of Environment reported that the relevant authorities had not shared information on potential risks related to the mining project with nearby communities.**

The organizations that endorse this statement make **an urgent appeal to the Panamanian government to ensure the proper management of the mine site and to take steps to guarantee its definitive and safe closure as soon as possible.** As ELAW experts warned during their stay in Panama, only a specialized external entity can guarantee a safe closure; however, Panamanian authorities continue to delay the adoption of measures that the mining company must implement temporarily to guarantee the physical and chemical stability of the site.

For more information:

Email: info@uicnpanama.org

Phone: +507 6576-1962

You can view ELAW's report on Cobre Panama's tailings management [here](#).

