

Wise to WATER MANAGEMENT

Enlightened attitudes to water usage among mine operators is improving management; boosting efficiency and giving some mines a new lease of life. ITT dewatering specialist Craig Holmes speaks to Jamie Wade.



Monitoring is key to management.

JAMIE WADE: How have attitudes to water management in mining changed in the last 10 to 20 years?

CRAIG HOLMES: There's been significant change. In the past water was seen as something that you needed, used and then disposed. Twenty years ago there weren't many environmental managers on mine sites and of the few environmental managers that were around – they had other things to worry about. However, in the last 10 years companies have become very concerned about water usage; how they use it and more importantly: how they dispose of it afterwards.

JW: What are the latest trends and developments?

CH: Well that's the thing, water is now being managed and it's being managed holistically rather than discretely. By this I mean there's a cycle to water usage. Whether you're dewatering or recycling water it needs to be effectively managed from start to finish.

Increasingly, the attitude and approach to water management is tantamount to the approach to reagents and electricity; let's face it: there aren't too many dry processes in mineral processing so without water, minerals processing becomes very difficult. Water management isn't as simple as building another dam. Environmental licences don't usually allow mine operators to dig and operate another dam.

JW: Where's water management technology headed?

CH: Water management technology is increasingly about measurability – knowing what the water is doing; how much is coming in; how much is going out; the quality; and how to treat it. Monitoring is the key to effective water management. If you know how water's being used you can use it and reuse it. All mining operations will face increasing pressure from compliance and regulation and will be compelled to effectively manage usage.

JW: What are mine operators demanding today in water management?

CH: Mine operators are turning more towards specialists to help manage their water usage. In the past mine operators would, for instance, contact us for a pump. Now they turn to us for dewatering services on a project management basis that would include dewatering and correct water disposal. This typically involves water management specialists working with key stakeholders in the mines' operations, in particular the environmental management personnel onsite.

JW: What advice would you have for mine operators when it comes to procuring water management technology and solutions?

CH: Find a provider whose core business is water management!

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