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The nature and articulation of ethical codes on tailings management in South Africa

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It is well recognised that the mining industry in South Africa is highly rated for its substantial contribution to the country's economic growth, including employment and infrastructural development. It is also known that mining and ore processing activities potentially pose a severe threat to public health and environmental well-being, in the way operations are carried out, mine wastes are disposed of (in dumps), local communities are relocated, mine management and the mining community in general, perceive established environmental standards and etiquette. This paper examines ethical practices and norms in the South African mining industry, with particular reference to the management of tailings dams. We analyse the modes of articulation of the country's regulatory instruments for tailings management, and review the corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach of leading mining companies. Despite decades of research and resulting recommendations on tailings management, it is concluded that current legislations are largely ineffective, level of adherence by mine management and the mining community, low, and mechanisms for compliance monitoring, weak. New perspectives on legislative issues for unsolved problems in tailings handling are put forward, and directions for future research indicated.

