

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR MINOR REVISION
COAL AND URANIUM PROGRAM
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

COMPANY NAME: Decker Coal Company

DATE: March 4, 2013

PERMIT#: C1987001C

REVISION NO: MR167

LOCATION: West Decker Mine

Type and Purpose of Action:

The purpose of the revision is to alter DCC's hydrologic monitoring plan. The changes to the plan are in part to incorporate water quality sampling requested by DEQ. The revised hydrologic monitoring plan also updates the monitoring sites and monitoring frequencies to reflect changes on the ground (i.e. advancement of mining) and changes in the groundwater aquifers. Updates to the monitoring plan are one step in implementing the Monitoring and Quality Assurance Plan guidelines written by the DEQ.

Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures:

The change in DCC's water sampling program will ensure that DCC's water monitoring program can detect harmful analytes at the newly revised human health and aquatic life limits. Additionally, the suite of analytes (as proposed by DEQ) will allow for standardization of sampling programs at all coal mines allowing DEQ to better compare and analyze water quality at all regulated mines.

Some wells are proposed to have reduced monitoring and/or sampling frequencies. These reductions formalize will not reduce the ability of DEQ to monitoring and detect changes in groundwater quality and quantity; many of the wells with reduced monitoring frequency are gassy, and the currently approved level of monitoring does not yield groundwater levels or samples. Other wells have a long history of monitoring and demonstrate no change or only slow changes in water levels and quality.

Some wells are proposed to have increased monitoring and/or sampling frequencies. These increases were requested by the DEQ to better monitor areas and aquifers of concern. These areas include permit boundaries and regions where trace metals listed in the DEQ-7 have shown concentrations above background levels.

Alternative Actions:

The alternative action would be to not approve the change to the hydrologic monitoring plan. For changes to the water quality, this may result in samples with reporting limits about the limits recommended in the 2012 DEQ-7 and may not provide the DEQ with data at a fine enough resolution to detect changes in harmful metals or nutrients. The proposed change in the analyte suite will not make DCC's monitoring program less stringent with regards to metals and ions of environmental concern. The frequency of monitoring in the groundwater wells would still allow for DEQ to evaluate impacts to the groundwater, but some wells of concern would not be monitored at a higher frequency to determine seasonality of water quality changes.

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