

SPAIN

Asociación Española de Normalización (UNE)

Building resilience in the mining and metals industries

Overview

A changing climate will affect the mining and metals sector in various ways as extreme weather events have the potential to damage fixed assets and disrupt supply chains. To address the climate challenge, companies are well advised to integrate sustainability drivers within their existing risk management and planning procedures, and technical standards can offer substantial support in achieving these objectives.

The development of today's mining industry doesn't just depend on an organization's knowledge of geological resources or technological advances, it also depends on its operations being compatible with the principles of environmental and social protection. In Spain, the mining community has been working towards the integration of standards, supported by the Spanish Association for Standardization (UNE). One of these standards is UNE 22470, *Sustainable mining-mineral processing – Metallurgy management system. Indicators*, which was revised in 2019.

The main reason for updating the standard was to expand its scope to new metallurgical and external reporting indicators that make it applicable to the entire chain of mineral raw materials. The initiative for the standard arose from the sector itself and a working group was formed consisting of 39 experts from government, industry, civil society and academia, all coordinated by representatives from UNE. The first of its kind for the industry, UNE 22470 covers all mining activities, such as exploration, investigation, extraction, preparation and dressing of minerals and recycling of waste, as well as all activities derived from mining (rehabilitation, refurbishment, conditioning and maintenance of infrastructure, deposits or plots).

Spain's sustainability commitment is also reflected in the iron and steel industry through a series of concrete and tangible actions. Its most significant illustration has undoubtedly been the creation of the Sustainable Steel Mark (Marca Sostenibilidad Siderúrgica) for the Spanish steel sector, which guarantees the quality of steel products used in buildings and construction. To qualify for this certification, companies need to establish an integrated management policy under the principles of sustainability according to UNE 36901, *Iron and steel sustainability management systems. Requirements*.

Published in 2018, the standard aims to help organizations implement a sustainability policy and objectives that take into account legal or other requirements to which they subscribe, as well as information relative to their economic, social and environmental performance. The degree to which an organization can apply the standard depends largely on the nature of its activities, the products and services it provides, its location and the conditions in which it operates. UNE 36901:2018 covers identified aspects of sustainability that an organization can control and have influence over.

In terms of worker safety and welfare, the standard also incorporates the recommendations of ISO 26000, *Guidance on social responsibility*. Recognizing that compliance with the law is an essential part of social responsibility, the standard can help organizations in the steel sector go beyond legal compliance. To help embed these principles on a national scale, UNE 36901 is referenced in the Spanish Code on Structural Concrete (Código Estructural).

Outcomes and benefits

The two UNE standards are still in the early stages of implementation and thus provide only preliminary insights into the potential expected outcomes. UNE 22470 aims to provide a policy mechanism to promote responsible behaviour within the mining industry. It has helped companies set continual improvement goals and controls for sustainability indicators regardless of the type of mining activity carried out. By defining the indicators to be used in a sustainability management system for mining organizations, it is supporting the country's environmental, social and economic objectives. Besides, the management system developed in the standard, while designed to be used independently, is compatible with other existing management systems.

Likewise, UNE 36901 has helped companies in the steel sector to define a series of commitments in areas such as environmental protection, energy efficiency, quality of processes and products, and worker health and safety. It also upholds a number of sustainability aspects of the Global Reporting Initiative, a guide that helps organizations improve the quality and transparency of their sustainability reports.

Both standards are aligned with the most advanced sustainability initiatives, including those embodied in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Partners involved

UNE 22470:2019 was promoted by GRUPO SOIL, a group of companies specializing in water treatment, waste and environmental services, and the National Confederation of Mining and Metallurgy Enterprises (CONFEDEM).

UNE 36901 was developed based on a proposal from CALSIDER, a company dealing in quality, standards and certification for the steel sector, and UNESID, the Spanish association of steel-producing companies and first-stage processing of products. It was therefore supported by the main sector companies, public authorities, laboratories and engineering companies, among others.

Timeline

UNE 22470 was published in its present form in 2019. The mining sector had worked in 2008 and 2015 on previous versions of the standard, which were restricted to mining activities. The new and augmented standard was developed in just one year based on those previous works.

UNE 36901:2018 is a revision of an earlier standard which arose from the industry's interest in advancing the cause of sustainability in the steel sector. It was revised to incorporate the requirements of ISO 14001 with a view to facilitating the integration of sustainability in the steel industry with other management systems. The standard was published in September 2018.