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Decommissioned Wind Turbine Blades/Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality: U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Approves State's Use as Surface Coal Mining Backfill

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The United States Department of the Interior Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement ("DOI") published a January 13th Federal Register notice approving an amendment to the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality ("DEQ") regulatory program under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 ("SMCRA"). See 90 Fed. Reg. 2614.

DOI has approved the repurposing of inert decommissioned wind turbine blades and towers in Wyoming as backfill in end walls for the final pit voids in surface coal mining operations.

DEQ notes in a January 13th news release announcing the DOI approval:

...As the wind energy industry was growing in Wyoming and nationwide, the Joint Minerals, Business and Economic Development Committee and Wyoming's legislature recognized the need for answers in the handling and use of these massive turbine blades and towers when they reached their end of life.

DOI recognizes in the Federal Register notice that the Wyoming legislature made certain changes to the Wyoming Land Quality Division Coal Rules addressing specific reclamation standards governing the use of retired blades and towers as backfill and end walls in final pit voids at surface mines. The stated motivation was the concern that options to dispose of blades and towers are limited. For example, DEQ's Solid and Hazardous Waste Division Administrator stated:

...Landfilling the retired blades and towers is unsustainable due to land limitations that are needed for communities' waste. Stockpiling, which was becoming common and a growing issue, is an eyesore and problematic for the environment.

The first commercial wind turbines arrived in the 1990's. Many are now approaching the end of their operational lives and therefore the question has arisen as to what happens to these materials.

DOI notes that on September 27, 2024, it sent a letter to the United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") Office of Land and Emergency Management seeking comments on DEQ's proposal. On October 24, 2024, EPA responded that:

...it does not see a conflict between Wyoming's proposed revisions and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) as long as the facilities are permitted and subject to Wyoming's Construction and Demolition Landfill Regulations under Chapter 4 of Wyoming's Solid Waste Division Rules, and meet the Federal criteria at 40 CFR 257, Subpart A.

A copy of the Federal Register notice can be downloaded [here](#).