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is required. However, the petition shall be in writing and shall identify clearly—

(1) The performance standard involved;

(2) The alternative methods to be used to protect the environment and public health and safety;

(3) The reasons why a modification is requested with full descriptions of the impacts continued requirements for compliance with the performance standard to be modified would have on mining and reclamation and of the impacts the proposed method would have on the environment and public health and safety; and

(4) The location of the mine.

(d) If the Secretary determines that the petition presents reasonable justification for modifying the performance standard, he may grant a temporary suspension of enforcement of the performance standard, and he shall publish a notice of intention to modify the applicability of the performance standard in the FEDERAL REGISTER and in a newspaper of general circulation in the area of Alaska where the affected coal mine is located. A public hearing shall be held in Alaska and any person may testify for or against the proposed modification. The Secretary, after considering the public comments, and consulting with the Governor of Alaska, shall publish his decision in the FEDERAL REGISTER and in the same newspaper in which the original notice was published.

§716.7 Prime farmland.

(a) *Applicability.* (1) Permittees of surface coal mining and reclamation operations conducted on prime farmland shall comply with the general performance standards of part 715 of this chapter in addition to the special requirements of this section.

(2) Except as otherwise provided in this paragraph, the requirements of the section are applicable to any lands covered by a permit application filed on or after August 3, 1977. This section does not apply to:

(i) Lands on which surface coal mining and reclamation operations are conducted pursuant to any permit issued prior to August 3, 1977; or

(ii) Lands on which surface coal mining and reclamation operations are conducted pursuant to any renewal or revision of a permit issued prior to August 3, 1977; or

(iii) Lands included in any existing surface coal mining operations for which a permit was issued for all or any part thereof prior to August 3, 1977, provided that:

(A) Such lands are part of a single continuous surface coal mining operation begun under a permit issued before August 3, 1977; and

(B) The permittee had a legal right to mine the lands prior to August 3, 1977, through ownership, contract, or lease but not including an option to buy, lease, or contract; and

(C) The lands contain part of a continuous recoverable coal seam that was being mined in a single continuous mining pit (or multiple pits if the lands are proven to be part of a single continuous surface coal mining operation) begun under a permit issued prior to August 3, 1977.

(3) For purposes of this section:

(i) "Renewal" of a permit shall mean a decision by the regulatory authority to extend the time by which the permittee may complete mining within the boundaries of the original permit, and "revision" of the permit shall mean a decision by the regulatory authority to allow changes in the method of mining operations within the original permit area, or the decision of the regulatory authority to allow incidental boundary changes to the original permit;

(ii) A pit shall be deemed to be a single continuous mining pit even if portions of the pit are crossed by a road, pipeline, railroad, or powerline or similar crossing;

(iii) A single continuous surface coal mining operation is presumed to consist only of a single continuous mining pit under a permit issued prior to August 3, 1977, but may include non-contiguous parcels if the operator can prove by clear and convincing evidence that, prior to August 3, 1977, the contiguous parcels were part of a single permitted operation. For the purposes of this paragraph, clear and convincing evidence includes, but is not limited to, contracts, leases, deeds or other

properly executed legal documents (not including options) that specifically treat physically separate parcels as one surface coal mining operation.

(b) *Definitions.* For purposes of this section, the following definitions are applicable.

(1) *Prime farmland* means those lands which are defined by the Secretary of Agriculture in 7 CFR 657 and which have been historically used for cropland.

(2) *Historically used for cropland* means (i) lands that have been used for cropland for any 5 years or more out of the 10 years immediately preceding the acquisition, including purchase, lease, or option, of the land for the purpose of conducting or allowing through resale, lease, or option the conduct of surface coal mining and reclamation operations; (ii) lands that the regulatory authority determines, on the basis of additional cropland history of the surrounding lands and the lands under consideration, that the permit area is clearly cropland but falls outside the specific 5-years-in-10 criterion, or (iii) lands that would likely have been used as cropland for any 5 out of the last 10 years immediately preceding such acquisition but for some fact of ownership or control of the land unrelated to the productivity of the land, in which case the regulations for prime farmland may be applied to include more years of cropland history only to increase the prime farmland acreage to be protected.

(3) *Cropland* means land used for the production of adapted crops for harvest, alone or in a rotation with grasses and legumes, and includes row crops, small grain crops, hay crops, nursery crops, orchard crops, and other similar speciality crops.

(4) The soils either have no water table or have a water table that is maintained at a sufficient depth during the cropping season to allow food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops common to the area to be grown.

(5) The soils can be managed so that in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches or in the root zone if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep, during part of each year the conductivity of saturation extract is less than 4

mmhos/cm and the exchangeable sodium percentage (ESP) is less than 15.

(6) The soils are not flooded frequently during the growing season (less often than once in 2 years).

(7) The soils have a product of K (erodibility factor) \times percent slope of less than 2.0 and a product of I (soil erodibility) $\times C$ (climatic factor) not exceeding 60.

(8) The soils have a permeability rate of at least 0.06 inch per hour in the upper 20 inches and the mean annual soil temperature at a depth of 20 inches is less than 59 degrees F.; the permeability rate is not a limiting factor if the mean annual soil temperature is 59 degrees F. or higher.

(9) Less than 10 percent of the surface layer (upper 6 inches) in these soils consists of rock fragments coarser than 3 inches.

(c) *Identification of prime farmland.* Prime farmland shall be identified on the basis of soil surveys submitted by the applicant. The regulatory authority also may require data on irrigation, drainage, flood control, and subsurface water management. The requirement for submission of soil surveys may be waived by the regulatory authority, if the applicant can demonstrate according to the procedures in paragraph (d) of this section that no prime farmlands are involved. Soil surveys shall be conducted according to standards of the National Cooperative Soil Survey, which include the procedures set forth in U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbooks 436 (Soil Taxonomy) and 18 (Soil Survey Manual), and shall include—

(1) Data on moisture availability, temperature regime, flooding, water table, erosion characteristics, permeability, or other information that is needed to determine prime farmland in accordance with paragraph (b) of this section;

(2) A map designating the exact location and extent of the prime farmland; and

(3) A description of each soil mapping unit.

(d) *Negative determination of prime farmland.* The land shall not be considered as prime farmland where the applicant can demonstrate one or more of the following situations—

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(1) Lands within the proposed permit boundaries have not been historically used for cropland.

(2) The slope of all land within the permit area is 10 percent or greater.

(3) Land within the permit area is not irrigated or naturally subirrigated, has no developed water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality, and the average annual precipitation is 14 inches or less.

(4) Other factors exist, such as a very rocky surface, or the land is frequently flooded, which clearly place all land within the area outside the purview of prime farmland.

(5) A written notification based on scientific findings and soil surveys that land within the proposed mining area does not meet the applicability requirements in paragraph (a) of this section is submitted to the regulatory authority by a qualified person other than the applicant, and is approved by the regulatory authority.

(e) *Plan for restoration of prime farmland.* The applicant shall submit to the regulatory authority a plan for the mining and restoration of any prime farmland within the proposed permit boundaries. This plan shall be used by the regulatory authority in judging the technological capability of the applicant to restore prime farmlands. The plan shall include—

(1) A description of the original undisturbed soil profile, as determined from a soil survey, showing the depth and thickness of each of the soil horizons that collectively constitute the root zone of the locally adapted crops and are to be removed, stored, and replaced;

(2) The proposed method and type of equipment to be used for removal, storage, and replacement of the soil in accordance with paragraph (g) of this section;

(3) The location of areas to be used for the separate stockpiling of the soil and plans for soil stabilization before redistribution;

(4) If applicable, documentation such as agricultural school studies or other scientific data from comparable areas that supports the use of other suitable material, instead of the A, B or C soil horizon to obtain on the restored area equivalent or higher levels of yield as

non-mined prime farmlands in the surrounding area under equivalent levels of management; and

(5) Plans for seeding or cropping the final graded mine land and the conservation practices to control erosion and sedimentation during the first 12 months after regrading is completed. Proper adjustments for seasons must be made so that final graded land is not exposed to erosion during seasons when vegetation or conservation practices cannot be established due to weather conditions; and

(6) Available agricultural school studies, company data, or other scientific data for comparable areas that demonstrate that the applicant using his proposed method of reclamation will achieve, within a reasonable time equivalent or higher levels of yield after mining as existed before mining.

(f) *Consultation with Secretary of Agriculture and issuance of permit.* (1) The regulatory authority may grant a permit which shall incorporate the plan submitted under paragraph (e) of this section, if it finds in writing that the applicant—

(i) Has the technological capability to restore the prime farmland within the proposed permit area, within a reasonable time, to equivalent or higher levels of yield as nonmined prime farmland in the surrounding area under equivalent levels of management; and

(ii) Will achieve compliance with the standards of paragraph (g) of this section.

(2) Before any permit is issued for areas that include prime farmlands, the regulatory authority shall consult with the Secretary of Agriculture. The Secretary of Agriculture will provide a review of the proposed method of soil reconstruction and comment on possible revisions that will result in a more complete and adequate restoration. The Secretary of Agriculture has assigned his responsibilities under this paragraph to the Administrator of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service will carry out the consultation and review through their State Conservationist, located in each State.

(g) *Special requirements.* For all prime farmlands to be mined and reclaimed,

the applicant shall meet the following special requirements:

(1) All soil horizons to be used in the reconstruction of the soil shall be removed before drilling, blasting, or mining to prevent contaminating the soil horizons with undesirable materials. Where removal of soil horizons result in erosion that may cause air and water pollution, the regulatory authority shall specify methods of treatment to control erosion of exposed overburden. The permittee shall—

(i) Remove separately the entire A horizon or other suitable soil materials which will create a final soil having an equal or greater productive capacity than that which existed prior to mining in a manner that prevents mixing or contamination with other material before replacement;

(ii) Remove separately the B horizon of the natural soil or a combination of B horizon and underlying C horizon or other suitable soil material that will create a reconstructed root zone of equal or greater productivity capacity than that which existed prior to mining in a manner that prevents mixing or contamination with other material; and

(iii) Remove separately the underlying C horizons or other strata, or a combination of such horizons or other strata, to be used instead of the B horizon that are of equal or greater thickness and that can be shown to be equal or more favorable for plant growth than the B horizon, and that when replaced will create in the reconstructed soil a final root zone of comparable depth and quality to that which existed in the natural soil.

(2) If stockpiling of soil horizons is allowed by the regulatory authority in lieu of immediate replacement, the A horizon and B horizon must be stored separately from each other. The stockpiles must be placed within the permit area and where they will not be disturbed or exposed to excessive erosion by water or wind before the stockpiled horizons can be redistributed on terrain graded to final contour. Stockpiles in place for more than 30 days must meet the requirements of §715.16(c).

(3) Scarify the final graded land before the soil horizons are replaced.

(4) Replace the material from the B horizon, or other suitable material specified in paragraph (g)(1)(ii) or (g)(1)(iii) of this section in such a manner as to avoid excessive compaction of overburden and to a thickness comparable to the root zone that existed in the soil before mining.

(5) Replace the A horizon or other suitable soil materials, which will create a final soil having an equal or greater productive capacity than existed prior to mining, as the final surface soil layer to the thickness of the original soil as determined in paragraph (g)(1)(i) of this section in a manner that—

(i) Prevents excess compaction of both the surface layer and underlying material and reduction of permeability to less than 0.06 inch per hour in the upper 20 inches of the reconstructed soil profile; and

(ii) Protects the surface layer from wind and water erosion before it is seeded or planted.

(6) Apply nutrients and soil amendments as needed to establish quick vegetative growth.

[42 FR 62691, Dec. 13, 1977; 43 FR 2722, Jan. 19, 1978, as amended at 46 FR 47529, Sept. 28, 1981; 46 FR 47721, Sept. 29, 1981]

§ 716.10 Information collection.

The Office of Management and Budget has determined that the information collection requirements contained in 30 CFR part 716 do not require approval under the Paperwork Reduction Act.

[59 FR 43420, Aug. 23, 1994]

PART 717—UNDERGROUND MINING GENERAL PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Sec.

717.10 Information collection.

717.11 General obligations.

717.12 Signs and markers.

717.13 [Reserved]

717.14 Backfilling and grading of road cuts, mine entry area cuts, and other surface work areas.

717.15 Disposal of excess rock and earth materials on surface areas.

717.16 [Reserved]

717.17 Protection of the hydrologic system.

717.18 Dams constructed of or impounding waste material.

717.19 [Reserved]