

‘The war on waste’ How could the mining industry respond?

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An international ‘war on waste’ is waging whereby industries and consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impacts our linear ‘take-make-dispose’ economy facilitates. The promotion, and in some cases adoption, of circular economy principles has grown in recent years but how has this impacted on the mining industry and, more specifically, mine waste management?

Fundamentally, we mine waste, not ore. The large tonnages of waste rock handled at mine sites, particularly open cuts, illustrates this. Continued mining in this manner is expected to meet the metal demands of our growing global community. It is therefore imperative that the produced waste is characterised to determine: i) if it can be further utilised following circular economy principles; or ii) if it truly waste how can it be disposed to minimise environmental risk? Barriers to winning the war are not necessarily technological. Instead, they are socio-economical with the need to better define the value proposition of waste valorisation a key challenge.