

Two year programme of Environmental Improvements

The Authority has embarked on a two-year environmental improvement programme targeted at sites where disused tips in its ownership have an adverse environmental impact on local communities or ecology. This work is over and above the obligations arising from planning consent or contractual commitments. For these reasons the programme is largely concentrated in South Wales.

In this year's programme the two main projects are at Western Tip and Castle Tip. Western Tip is on the Authority's Aber Farmlands estate and is sited on Mynydd Aber above Ogmere Vale. The tip has been affected by extensive burning in the past and is devoid of vegetation. Surface water drainage problems caused by the tip are threatening the ecologically sensitive valley of Cwm-y Fwch below the southern flank of the mountain. Reclamation works have started and the tip is being reprofiled and restored to mountain pasture for sheep grazing. The contractor is Wallers UK Limited and the consultant is W. S. Atkins Consultants Limited.

Design work is complete for landscaping of Castle Tip and work started in September 2003. The contractor is Tihill Forestry. This tip is sited alongside the A470 trunk road in the Taff valley and towers over the village of Troedyrhiw. The Authority appointed Halcrow Group Limited as consultant and briefed its landscape architect "to make the tip disappear without moving it". A sensitive design has been prepared incorporating features of the surrounding landscape which includes woodland, pasture and the typical "fridd" of the Welsh valleys.

Landscape improvements involving tree planting have already been completed on Aberfan and Cwmtillery tips. These projects have been designed to improve the appearance of the sites when viewed from the local communities.

Also at Aberfan and with the co-operation of the tenant farmer, an area of the site has been fenced to prevent grazing and thus allow natural regeneration by native plant species. The fenced area will be monitored in conjunction with the local authority under the "Coed Merthyr" initiative to encourage biodiversity. Further landscaping works planned for this year include Tymawr Tip in the Rhondda, the Marine Tips in Ebbw Vale and the former surface mine site at Pwll Du near Blaenavon.

Following successful completion of trials on Tymawr Tip, the Authority is working with Envar Limited, a waste recycling company, to ameliorate adverse conditions and promote growth on sites that have previously been restored. Envar's incorporate recycled wastes into the surface in a controlled manner and in full compliance with all statutory and environmental controls. Typical of waste materials used include cement kiln dust to control acidity and "bio-solids" or sewage cake to provide nutrients.

Works are in progress on Abertillery South Griffin Tip in Ebbw Vale and at the former Brown Lees opencast mine site in Stoke-on-Trent. It is hoped to extend this work to include Snowdown Tip in Kent, Frances Tip in Fife, Pwll Du and further sites in South Wales.

Works planned for next year include reclamation of Avon Tip, which dominates the communities of Blaengwynfi and Abergwynfi in the Afan valley and woodland planting on Tydraw Tip in the Rhondda.

Authority Civil Engineer Daryl Smith said: "Although the Authority's budget for environmental improvement works is small in the national context, with careful management and local consultation it is possible to make a huge impact for the benefits of landscape and ecology. Costs can be reduced by innovative and careful re-use of waste materials".

Mike Holt, General Manager at Envar added "That the beneficial re-use of waste materials is the ultimate in environmental sustainability: we are delighted to participate in the Coal Authority's environmental improvement programme UK wide."

Making an Impact

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- Daryl Smith,
Civil Engineer, the Coal Authority.

