

**Interview with France TV on coal tips**

<b>Date and time</b>	22 <sup>nd</sup> February 2024 16.30
<b>Interviewer and organisation</b>	<b>Redacted – Section 40</b>
<b>Length</b>	30 minutes
<b>Format</b>	Pre-record/broadcast – camera operator
<b>Location</b>	Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay
<b>Press officer</b>	<b>Redacted – Section 40</b>
<b>Brief summary</b>	<p>France TV are interested in reporting on disused coal tips in Wales, and the dangers they could represent.</p> <p>They'll be interviewing the Minister, and <b>Redacted – Section 40</b>, visiting a tip (RCT area) and meeting with the coal tip safety team on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February.</p> <p>The piece is to be positive and they're looking to show what the Welsh government is doing to prevent any disaster or accident.</p>
<b>Additional info</b>	France TV will also be interviewing <b>Redacted – Section 40</b>
<b>Tone</b>	Reassuring about the safety of coal tips in Wales

**Potential questions and lines to take****Lines to take**

- The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring our communities are safe. Since 2020, the Welsh Government has made significant investment in coal tip safety, including a programme of regular inspections, funding for maintenance works and the development of a new legislative framework.
- A key objective for the Coal Tip Safety Taskforce has been to address the gap in information about the number and location of disused coal tips across Wales and to give them an interim category rating.
- Mapping the locations and ownership of disused coal tips has been a complex and lengthy exercise. There are more than 2500 disused coal tips in Wales. Original estimates were that there were approximately 1,200 disused coal tips in Wales – the actual figure is more than double that.

- We have made £44.4 million available to local authorities between 2022-25 to carry out routine works on public and privately-owned tips.
- The category of a tip is based on several factors, including the closeness of a tip to local communities, houses or major infrastructure.
- Category C and D tips need more frequent inspections as they have more potential to impact public safety. It does not mean they are unsafe, but they may be larger and are more likely to be closer to communities or major infrastructure.
- Category A and B tips are less likely to impact public safety, and category R tips even less so as they have often been removed/levelled and have often been built over.
- Our publication of location data for category C and D disused tips in November 2023 went extremely well and received significant media coverage. We provided a substantial package of supporting information for tip owners, occupiers, local communities and their representatives.
- I have been very encouraged by the uptake of that supporting information and the response to this generally.
- Wales is a world leader in this field by creating a highly accurate and comprehensive national-scale database of disused coal spoil tips and using this information to create a pioneering approach to the inspection and monitoring of these tips in Wales.

### **Funding**

- We have made £44.4 capital investment available between 2022-25 to support local authorities to carry out necessary maintenance and remedial works, and we continue to discuss longer-term remediation with UK Government.

### **RCT**

- Rhondda Cynon Taf has 327 disused tips in its authority, and the highest amount of higher-rated tips in Wales.
- They have a robust maintenance programme of their own, and we work very closely with the team there.

### **Inspections and maintenance**

- Disused coal tips are now being monitored and maintained significantly more than before the landslide in Tylorstown in February 2020.
- We have commissioned the Coal Authority to undertake on-going inspections until our new statutory regime is in place. This includes all category D tips being inspected twice a year and category C tips being inspected once a year.
- The Coal Authority are also commencing a programme of inspection of Category B tips.
- The inspection programme identifies maintenance works needed to maintain the stability of disused coal tips. We have a funding programme in place to support local authorities with undertaking any maintenance and / or capital works.

- We have also made £44.4 million available to local authorities between 2022-25 to carry out routine works on public and privately-owned tips.
- People can report any concerns regarding coal tips to the Coal Authority's helpline.

### **Technology trials**

- We are continuing our programme of technology trials, which encompasses more than 70 category C and D disused coal tips.
- The aim of the trials is to research and pilot a wide range of technologies to determine their suitability in contributing to the safe and effective management of disused tips. The outcomes of the trials will inform the long-term technology and monitoring strategy of the future management regime.

### **Legislation**

- A disused tips safety Bill is a priority for this Government, and we remain committed to establishing a long-term, pro-active regime to ensure the ongoing safety of this important part of Wales' industrial legacy.
- The Disused Tips (Mines and Quarries) Bill will seek to reform out-dated laws around tip safety and give greater security to the people living in their shadow. It seeks to enshrine in legislation a long-term, sustainable and fit for purpose regulatory regime for disused tip safety, led by a newly created public body solely focused on this work.

### **Likely questions**

#### ***Are these the final numbers of disused coal tips in Wales?***

- This work is very much a 'live project' and we will continue to further quality assure the location information of the remaining tip categories. We can expect further adjustments as the work progresses.

#### ***When will you publish the locations of the category A, B and R disused tips?***

- We believe it is in the public interest to publish this information as soon as possible.
- As soon as the data is ready, we will make this information available on our webpages.

#### ***How many schools / hospitals are close to tips?***

- There are multiple complex factors to consider around disclosing numbers of coal tips within a certain radius near to schools / hospitals and this could be very misleading.
- Just because a tip might be near to a school / hospital does not mean that there is an impact to public safety in any way. I do not want to release any information that could raise unfounded concern.

- For example, a tip is unlikely to be a risk to a property located 100 metres upslope of it or to a property situated close by but on the opposite slope of a valley.
- There are multiple factors which must be fully addressed when assessing any sense of an impact to public safety from disused coal tips. These include, but are not limited to: topography, drainage, maintenance status and slope stability.
- I am consistent in my reassurance to our coalface communities that there is dedicated programme of work to monitor and maintain category C and D tips.

***Are the tips dangerous?***

- Winter inspections for this year began on 9 October 23. To date no significant issues have been raised despite heavy rainfall and I am aware that the Coal board have undertaken around 80% of inspections.
- Being categorised as a C or D tip does not mean there is an imminent risk of a tip slipping. It does mean that because of its size and/or proximity to communities, the tip requires to be monitored more frequently.
- These inspections help to identify any maintenance requirements, enabling actions to be taken as soon as reasonably possible.

***What would happen if a tip slipped?***

- The local authority is likely to be the lead public body in responding to any tip slip.
- We would ask the Coal Authority to support the local authority and, on some occasions, Natural Resources Wales may also provide support.
- The disused coal tips have been there for many decades and the regular inspection programme is designed to ensure any changes are identified early.

***Do coal tips have any effect on the health of communities?***

- Coal tips have been present for many decades and some for centuries.
- There is now a dedicated programme in place to monitor and maintain these coal tips.
- This programme is designed to ensure any changes in terms of the structure or make up of the land are identified early.

***If asked about tip reclamation/restoration:***

- The Welsh Government's policy is to identify potential opportunities to turn disused tips into beneficial assets for communities.
- Investment in these sites would open up significant opportunities to address regional inequalities, which coalfield communities continue to face.

- Investing in the reclamation, remediation, and repurposing of disused tips will bring economic benefits, new skills, and more employment to some of the most deprived communities in the UK.
- To assist in addressing the climate and nature emergency, some of our coal tips can be sites for tree planting, contributing to ecological networks and improving ecosystem resilience.
- Ultimately, the best option for reclamation will depend on the specific tip, including its hazard status and proximity to sensitive receptors such as communities.
- Some tips have already been reclaimed, turning them into woodlands, for example the Spirit of Llynfi Woodland in Bridgend County, where over 60,000 trees were planted.
- The remediation of the Tylorstown landslide includes the creation of a wildlife meadow from the debris removed from the tip.

### **Useful information**

#### **Background**

**Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk**