REVIEW OF PROPOSED 5 FOOT DAM RAISE UPPER TAILINGS POND EMBANKMENT SYSTEM LISBON VALLEY OPERATIONS RIO ALGOM CORPORATION

by John D. Nelson and Steven R. Abt REVIEW OF PROPOSED 5 FOOT DAM RAISE UPPER TAILINGS POND EMBANKMENT SYSTEM LISBON VALLEY OPERATIONS RIO ALGOM CORPORATION

for

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

NMSS

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Rio Algom Lisbon Valley Mine and Mill Facility is located south of La Sal, Utah. This mill was previously licensed and is currently under review for relicensing. The Rio Algom Mill has been depositing tailings in a disposal system consisting of two tailings ponds, referred to as the upper pond and the lower pond. The lower pond has reached its full capacity. All tailings are now being deposited into the upper pond and the pond is nearly full.

The Rio Algom Corporation has proposed that the embankment of the upper pond be raised five feet utilizing the downstream method of construction with slopes of 2.0 horizontal to 1.0 vertical. This five feet raise is proposed as a short term solution for the storing of mill tailings.

This report presents the results of a review of the stability of the embankment system after the proposed five foot raise has been constructed. The five foot expansion is an interim measure until final plans and specifications are presented for an alternate ongoing tailings management plan.

The proposed impoundment expansion (five foot raise only) was reviewed in accordance with USNRC Regulatory Guide 3.11. The review is based upon the documents listed as references in this report and observations made during a visit to the site.

2. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS AND RESULTS OF ANALYSES

2.1 Hydrologic Considerations

The required storage capacity of the upper tailings pond was based on considerations of the 100-year storm. The 100-year storm was selec-Led rather than the Probable Maximum Flood (PMF) design series because the proposed five foot expansion is considered an interim measure until a subsequent proposed tailings management plan is implemented.

The principal drainage area tributary to the upper tailings pond is approximately 150 acres. Dames and Moore (ref. 3) computed the 100-year, 7-day rainstorm to produce 4.0 inches of rainfall. Based on 100 percent runoff, a total volume of 50 acre-feet of runoff would need to be stored in the tailings pond area.

In determining the storm water storage capacity of one tailings pond, it was stipulated that the maximum operating pond level would be five feet below the embankment crest elevation. It was computed that after storage of the 100-year storm and allowing for wave runup a minimum freeboard of two feet would remain in the pond at all times.

2.2 Stability Considerations

The existing embankment and soil properties are described in the report by Dames and Moore dated August 22, 1980 (ref. 3). Figure 2.1 shows a plan view of the existing embankment and the proposed five-foot embankment raise. Figure 2.2 shows the critical embankment section through the existing embankment and the proposed five-foot embankment raise.

Borings were advanced at locations 1 and 2 as shown in Figure 2.1.

The logs of those borings as presented by Dames and Moore are shown in Figure 2.3. Samples were taken from depths of 22.5 feet in each boring for laboratory testing and determination of shear strength. Multiple stage triaxial tests were performed on each of those samples. Stress paths and strength envelopes as presented by Dames and Moore (ref. 3) are shown in Figures 2.4 and 2.5. The triaxial tests indicated that for the embankment soil, the angle of internal friction was 34.5° and 38.5° in terms of effective stresses, and 31.0° and 40.0° in terms of total stresses. For one test, a cohesion of 800 psf was indicated whereas for all others the cohesion was zero.

No shear strength was presented for the natural foundation soils. Standard penetration test results taken in the foundation soils indicate blow counts ranging from 12 to 23 blows per foot (ref. 3). Some direct shear test results were presented in the Dames and Moore report dated October 2, 1973 (ref. 1). That report was prepared in conjunction with the design of the upper tailings embankment. Test results presented for samples taken from boring D7 (Page I-A-7; ref. 1) indicate that angles of internal friction of less than 20° may be attained for yield shear strengths.

Stability analyses were conducted by Dames and Moore utilizing the shear strength parameters as shown in Fig. 2.2. The results indicated that the minimum factor of safety for static steady state seepage conditions would be 1.55. For seismic conditions, the minimum factor of safety would be 1.35. For static analyses, effective stress shear strength parameters were utilized whereas for seismic analyses total stress shear strength parameters were used.

3. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ANALYSES

3.1 Hydrologic Analysis

A review of the applicant's hydrologic analysis for the proposed expansion was performed. Dames and Moore (Ref. 3) presented the 100-year, 7-day rainfall as 4.0 inches. The staff checked the reported 100-year rainfall with a 24-hour, 100-year rainfall value of 3.0 inches as presented in the U.S. Weather Bureau Technical Paper No. 40. Also, the 10w hazard probable maximum precipitation (PMF) was computed for the project site in accordance with procedures presented in the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation publication "Design of Small Dams" (Ref. 6). The low hazard thunderstorm yielded a 6-hour storm depth of 2.93 inches while the 24-hour general storm was estimated to be 5.80 inches. Because the low hazard PMF is usually larger than the 100-year storm, the value of 4.0 inches for the 100-year, 7-day storm as reported by the applicant is considered to be reasonable.

The hydrologic maps submitted by the applicant were checked and reviewed by the staff. On the basis of the maps provided, it is estimated that the upper pond will have a surface area of 30 acres after the embankment is raised resulting in an average storage volume of 27.5 acre-feet per foot of freeboard. Although the applicant did not provide an elevation-volume curve for the proposed expansion, it was estimated that the expansion will have a total storage capacity of approximately 138 acre-feet of runoff.

Utilizing the 4.0 inch 100-year rainfall and 100 percent runoff, a runoff of 50 acre-feet would have to be stored within the pond

freeboard. The addition of 50 acre-feet of runoff to the impoundment would raise the water surface approximately 1.8 feet. Should extreme wind conditions prevail when the 100-year storm occurs, the maximum wave height is estimated to be 2 feet.

Assuming that the 1.8 feet and 2.0 feet of freeboard would be consumed by runoff and wave height respectively, a freeboard of 1.2 feet would remain. Although 1.2 feet of freeboard falls somewhat short of the reported minimum freeboard of 2.0 feet, it would only occur under extreme conditions and is considered to be adequate.

3.2 Stability Analyses

3.2.1 Site Conditions and Material Properties

During the later part of 1979, a site visit was made by Roy Person, NRC and John D. Nelson, CSU. These personnel were accompanied by representatives from Rio Algom and Dames and Moore and walked over both embankments to observe conditions along the crest, the face, and the toe of the embankment. In general, the embankment appeared to be maintained well. There was no evidence of erosion or cracking of the embankment. No evidence of seepage or wet spots along the face of the embankment were observed.

Appendix B of the Dames and Moore report dated August 22, 1980, includes a report of construction inspection and control during the upper tailings embankment. In all cases, the percent compaction that was finally achieved was greater than 90 percent. In a few isolated areas, the actual percent compaction was less than 90 percent. Those areas were reworked and subsequent testing indicated that adequate

compaction had been accomplished. On the basis of that report, it may be concluded that the embankment fill material will be of uniform density.

3.2.2 Shear Strength

The report on inspection control (Appendix B, ref. 3) indicates that relatively uniform densities may be expected throughout the embankment. The frequency of sampling and testing that was reported in ref. 3 is therefore considered to be adequate.

Multiple stage triaxial tests were performed on two samples taken from the embankment. The test results indicated reasonable magnitude of shear strengths in terms of effective stresses. The shear strength parameters in terms of total stress, do not differ greatly from those for effective stresses. This is due to the development of low negative pore water pressures. This is reflected in the shapes of the stress paths and indicate the overconsolidated nature of the compacted embankment material. It is believed, therefore, that the total stress shear strength parameters that are reported, adequately describe the shear strength of the embankment.

Shear strength values for the natural foundation soils as shown in Figure 2.2 were not substantiated with laboratory data. Furthermore, laboratory test data presented in the Dames and Moore report dated October 2, 1973 (ref. 1) indicate that shear strength values considerably lower than those that were assumed for the stability analyses may exist in the foundation soils. The reviewers, therefore, conclude that inadequate shear strength data for the natural foundation soil has been presented.

The boring logs that were presented in reference 3 indicated that bedrock had not been encountered in the borings. A subsequent letter from James R. Boddy of Dames and Moore dated September 11, 1980 to Rio Algom (ref. 5) indicates that bedrock was, in fact, encountered. Furthermore, in reference 3 the critical embankment section (as shown in Figure 2.2 of this report) indicates two strata of natural soils. The basis for representing the natural soil in two distinct strata with different shear strengths is not presented and the boring logs do not indicate any basis for doing so. Also, on page 7 of reference 3 it is stated that a cutoff barrier was extended to competent bedrock. This cutoff barrier is not indicated in the critical embankment for stability analyses. It is concluded, therefore, that the critical embankment section as shown in reference 3 (Figure 2.2 of this report) does not represent the actual existing conditions with regard to geometry and shear strength of the foundation soils.

3.2.3 Seepage Conditions and Location of Phreatic Surface

The phreatic surface within the embankment that was assumed for purposes of stability analyses is shown in Figure 2.2. However, the boring logs indicate that to the entire depth of soil overlying the bedrock, no groundwater was encountered. Furthermore, piezometers placed at depths of 31.5 feet in boring 1 and 28.5 feet in boring 2 indicated no water at the time reference 3 was prepared. The two piezometers, however, were located near the top of the location of the phreatic surface as shown in Figure 2.2. Consequently, they are not capable of locating a phreatic surface even slightly lower than that. It

is concluded, therefore, that the locations of the peizometers are such that they would be unable to accurately describe the location of the phreatic surface unless it were relatively high.

The fact that no water was encountered during drilling may be indicative that seepage is existing in the weathered sandstone beneath the foundation soils. However, there is no indication that observations were made in the drill holes after long periods of time after drilling. It is concluded, therefore, that the location of the phreatic suface within the embankment and foundation soils is not adequately addressed.

3.2.4 Stability Analyses

Stability analyses were conducted by Dames and Moore utilizing their in-house computer program. The critical failure surfaces that were determined are shown in Figure 2.2 of this report. The static factor of safety of 1.55 and the seismic factor of safety of 1.35 were indicated.

Stability analyses were checked at Colorado State University using the Computer Program STABL2. The program utilizes a modified Bishop's method similar to that utilized by Dames and Moore. This program computed a factor of safety of only 1.4 for the static condition shown in ref. 3. The STABL2 program generates conservative values and for that reason the actual factor of safety was checked by means of a hand calculation. This resulted in a factor of safety for the static critical section of 1.45. For the seismic analyses, the STABL2 program indicated a factor of safety of 1.14. This value is somewhat lower than that indicated by Dames and Moore. Nevertneless, it is greater than the value required by Regulatory Guide 3.11. An additional analysis was conducted

by the review team considering a potential shear surface that extended primarily through the proposed embankment raise. For that shear surface, factors of safety for static conditions of 1.57 and for seismic conditions of 1.08 were computed.

The factors of safety that were computed appear to be adequate. Although the Bishop's method of analysis indicated a factor of safety slightly lower than 1.5 the assumed phreatic surface is believed to be higher than what actually exists, and therefore, would generate factors of safety lower than what actually exists. Some question, however, exists as to the adequacy with which the conditions that were analyzed represent the actual conditions.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the foregoing review, it is recommended that the following issues be addressed in more detail.

4.1 It is recommended that a revised Appendix A to reference 3 be submitted. This Appendix should include corrected boring logs indicating any variations between the two strata of foundation soils. They should also indicate the depth to bedrock. In addition, this Appendix should include water content and dry density data for the second triaxial test sample.

4.2 The basis on which the shear strength of the natural soils was assumed was not presented. The applicant should show by means of laboratory data or field tests that the assumed values of shear strength are in fact accurate. If this can not be demonstrated, revised slope stability analyses should be conducted.

4.3 Page 7 of reference 3 indicates that a cutoff trench was excavated and recompacted beneath the embankment. However, the critical embankment section that was analyzed and is reproduced as Figure 2.2 in this report does not indicate that cutoff wall. The effect of that cutoff on the stability analyses should be discussed. Plate 4 in reference 3 (reproduced as Figure 2.2 herein) should be revised to indicate that such a cutoff does exist if it does, or else the text should be revised. Because the inspection report as presented in Appendix B of reference 3 indicates that a cutoff trench was excavated, the reviewers believe that Plate 4 (ref. 3) is incorrect and that the stability analyses should be revised.

4.4 The boring logs and the piezometers indicate that the phreatic surface shown in Plate 4 of ref. 3 (see Fig. 2.2) is incorrect. It is not uncommon for the phreatic surface within an embankment to be lowered by a highly permeable natural foundation soil or through highly permeable bedrock. It was indicated in reference 3 that the upper layers of the sandstone bedrock are weathered and it is possible that the seepage is occurring therein. However, it is also possible that seepage could be occurring through a layer in the natural foundation soils causing a zone of high water content with low strength. It is recommended that adequate sampling in the natural foundation soils should be accomplished to show that such a zone of high moisture content does not exist that

would adversely affect the stability of the embankment.

4.5 On page 18 of reference 3, it is stated that "it is estimated that a sufficient quantity of material will be available within the immediate vicinity of the impoundment area"...in order to accomplish the proposed five-foot raise. The applicant should demonstrate by means of exploratory borings or test pits that a sufficient quantity of material does in fact exist. Alternatively, it should be demonstrated that alternative sources of borrow with suitable properties can be located in the event that suitable borrow does not exist in the immediate vicinity.

REFERENCES

- Dames and Moore, "Report of Consulting Services, Tailings Pond Embankment Stability and Groundwater Geohydrology and Seepage Evaluation, Lisbon Valley Mine Tailings Disposal System", Job No. 7144-002-06, October 2, 1973.
- Dames and Moore, "Report of Preliminary Management Study, Lisbon Valley Mine Tailings Disposal System", Job No. 7144-0106-06, January 18, 1980.
- Dames and Moore, "Report of Geotechnical Evaluation to Support the Request for a Five-Foot Dam Raise, Upper Tailings Pond Embankment System, Lisbon Valley Operations, for Rio Algom Corporation", Job No. 07144-017, August 22, 1980.
- Rio Algom Corporation, letter to Mr. John Linehan, dated August 27, 1980.
- 6. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (1977), Design of Small Dams, Revised Reprint, A Water Resources Technical Publication.





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APPENDIX

HYDROLOGIC COMPUTATIONS

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