

## An Ounce of Prevention...

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The Queensland Government has recently announced that it's confident that Bowen Basin coalmines can withstand a forecast heavy wet season. In recent years a number of mines in the region, together with a number of mines in the Mt Isa region, have contributed to downstream contamination of waterways. Contamination occurred when the mines' storm and process water dams were unable to cope with seasonal rains, and pits needed to be pumped-out to allow continued operation.

**The cost of prevention has been significant, but that cost is nowhere near the cost of investigation and remediation.**

The 2008 wet season lesson should be obvious. Some of the recent incidences may be traced to the project design phase (like permitting the construction of a process water dam within an existing flow path), which should have been identified and rectified at the project's EIS phase, however most are related to ongoing environmental management. Whilst a robust Environmental Management Plan is at the core of every mine's operations, recent events have demonstrated that there may be a gap between compliance and effectiveness under extreme conditions.

The role of Devil's Advocate has never been more important. The occasional reminder of the consequences of water infrastructure failure should be sufficient to ensure managers enthusiastically pursue the 'what ifs' and companies invest accordingly.

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