

SEPTEMBER 2023

Questions & Answers

SQM's Salar de Atacama lithium mine

Does this audit report mean that SQM's mine is certified as a "responsible mine"?

IRMA audits don't yield "certification", nor do they declare at what point a site becomes a "responsible mine". The IRMA system is built to have more transparent conversation on the impacts, at a table where civil society and labor have voice equal to the private sector, and which seeks to create greater value to reduce harm.

In doing this audit, SQM volunteered to be measured against a standard more rigorous, requiring more public engagement, and more transparent sharing of results than any other global standard. It is an act of leadership and commitment to increasing dialogue across diverse stakeholder sectors and with Indigenous rights holders.

IRMA doesn't use the word "sustainable" but rather focuses on bringing attention to best practices for more responsible mining practices, and also incentives for reducing waste, supporting circular economy, addressing inequity in the use and benefits of mined materials, and supporting innovation that reduces the need for new extraction.

What does IRMA Transparency mean? What do IRMA 50 and IRMA 75 mean?

IRMA Transparency means a mine has been independently audited against all relevant requirements in IRMA's Standard and has publicly shared its audit scores and the basis for auditors' findings. By sharing such extensive information, a mine provides diverse stakeholders with the information needed to understand the mine's operations and encourage improvement as needed.

IRMA 50 and IRMA 75 mean a mine has been independently audited and met 50% or 75% of the requirements within each of the four principle areas of the IRMA Standard—business integrity, positive legacies, and social and environmental responsibility. A mine receiving IRMA 50 or IRMA 75 must meet all of IRMA's critical requirements.

What are the next steps for SQM and for IRMA?

With this independent, third-party verified information, a new opportunity is created for a conversation between the mine, area residents, workers, customers, investors and other stakeholders to explore priorities for improvement. SQM's Salar de Atacama mine will need to be audited again in three years to maintain recognition in IRMA, with an interim surveillance audit in the next 18 months. The mine can choose to be audited sooner if it would like to demonstrate verified improvements more quickly.

When will we see audit reports from other mines?

Mines being audited can wait up to a year after receiving the draft audit report -- if they choose to implement corrective actions, and have them verified by auditors, before sharing audit findings publicly. At the end of the 12-month period, IRMA releases their reports whether or not improvements have been made.

How does IRMA compare to other standards and how does achievement in IRMA differ?

IRMA's audit reports offer more independently verified information and insights into a mine's performance than any other system. The IRMA Standard requirements are detailed, specific and comprehensive, providing clear visibility into a mine's operations. This level of transparency is new for the industry and provides immense value for civil society, labor unions, investors and purchasers alike.

A lack of specificity and clear reporting creates opacity and potential risks, as it becomes difficult to objectively assess which mine's operations truly align with best practice. Transparency is the first critical step toward the IRMA's ultimate goal: to drive improved practices in mining.

If I have questions or feedback about this report, who do I contact?

If you have questions about the mining operation practices, we encourage you to contact the mining company directly: [Irina Axenova](#) or [María Ignacia Lopez](#). Part of IRMA engagement is increasing direct dialogue and information sharing between mining companies and diverse stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders.

If you have questions about the process that auditors followed or the evidence they reviewed, contact ERM CVS for more insights on the audit process: post@ermcvs.com

If you have questions about the IRMA Standard and the metrics there for measuring mining company performance, or IRMA rules for auditing, or IRMA's governance, accountability or other aspects of how the IRMA system works, please contact IRMA.

IRMA staff are dedicated to helping all stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders get answers to questions related to this audit report. Please contact us if you need help getting answers to questions.

Find contact info for all parties on the IRMA website at <https://responsiblemining.net/sqmatacama-audit>

What confidence can I have that the audit report is accurate?

The information in this audit report represents the work of an audit firm to measure a mining company's performance against IRMA's Standard for Responsible Mining. The Standard includes more than 400 requirements – it's more rigorous and detailed than any other mining standard in the world. It's also the only audit of large-scale mines that involves public notice and encouragement of workers and community members to participate in the audit.

Auditors review thousands of pages of documents shared by the company, spend several days on site of the mining operation, and speak with workers, community members and Indigenous rights holders without the company present. However, this does not mean all of the information in the audit report is complete, accurate or represents the perspectives of all people. The IRMA system is new, mining companies are still learning expectations, auditors are still learning how to measure achievement, and IRMA leaders are working to improve in real time.

If you have questions or concerns that information in the report isn't accurate, or if you have information and opinions different than what you read here, we encourage you to contact IRMA to make it more accurate: <https://responsiblemining.net/feedback>

Companies participating in IRMA audits are sharing a broad range of information with more transparency than has ever been done. Their effort is a work in progress and will further improve as direct communication increases between mining companies and the people most affected by their operations.

I'm a mining company contemplating doing an independent audit – if I do one, will civil society appreciate my effort, or just further criticize our work? Is this level of transparency going to be appreciated or just greater risk for us?

Trust is deeply broken between many mining companies and the stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders impacted by their operations. Key to building trust is sharing information, being responsive to concerns about impacts, and demonstrating timely responsiveness to community and worker concerns.

Changing the current context won't happen overnight. We appreciate the effort of companies voluntarily stepping forward during this time of change and uncertainty to increase sharing of information, making commitments to improve practices, and showing positive progress.

A voluntary initiative like IRMA can never replace the critical role of laws and government oversight. Increasingly, national governments and international institutions are seeking increased transparency in mineral supply chains, so an effort to engage in independent audits now can help companies to meet not only civil society and labor requests, but mandatory expectations for improved practices

Many stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders don't trust auditors or audit processes, broadly speaking. Could there have been "cheating" or inappropriate influence of auditors involved in this process?

IRMA and the two firms approved to do IRMA audits are aware of deep distrust of auditors and the audit process. In many cases, what has historically been described as "independent audits" are actually consulting work done by experts hired to serve a particular company. IRMA audits are different from these type of consulting contracts in a number of ways:

To date, IRMA has approved, trained and worked closely with just two firms (Applications for new firms to join are now being accepted). While the mining company must pay for the costs of the audit, the right to do an IRMA audit is conferred by IRMA. IRMA can remove that right to audit if a firm has not met expectations in terms of competency, has not demonstrated freedom from conflict of interest, and is

not working in service to the IRMA system and its commitment to all stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders.

IRMA-approved audit firms must be accredited to ISO 17021 or a similar standard for third-party auditing and are required to meet a number of strict requirements associated with maintaining impartiality and managing conflict of interest. These include prohibiting such audit firms from also providing consulting or internal auditing services to a site being audited, requirements to assess risks to impartiality and procedures to protect against conflict of interest, and recommendations for prohibiting certain relationships for a period of time prior to providing auditing services. Accredited audit firms are assessed annually by their accreditation body, and management of conflict of interest is a key component of this assessment. Audit firms that fail to properly manage and preserve impartiality risk losing their accreditation and therefore their ability to provide third party auditing.

Why would a mining company agree to do a rigorous audit like IRMA? Do they think they can control the process and influence auditors?

It's best to ask this question to each mining company engaged to hear their perspective. To date, the first mining companies engaging in IRMA audits have done so because their local community members have asked them, or a customer or investor has asked. Mining companies are evaluating which standards systems bring the greatest value for the time and effort to engage. While the IRMA process is more rigorous, which requires more time and financial investment to participate—and while the high-bar requirements don't yield an easy pass, mining companies are finding that this type of robust assessment is better informing the specific improvements sought by those most affected by their operations.

How can governments/regulators use this report?

A voluntary initiative like IRMA will never replace, nor be as valuable, as the role that governments serve, and the laws they set which apply to all operators. Where mining companies have agreed to do an independent IRMA audit, they are often sharing information on performance beyond legal compliance. We encourage mining companies and their regulatory government agencies to communicate together about the information shared in the IRMA audit report.

IRMA staff offer our time in direct support to government staff who want to learn more about the IRMA Standard and cross-stakeholder definitions for best practices to drive more responsible mining practices. We support governments doing gap analysis work to measure where IRMA goes beyond regulatory structure.

How can purchasers of mined materials, like a car maker, or investors in mining companies use, the SQM audit report? What can companies buying materials from this operation say about their sourcing?

Purchasers of mined material, and investors in mining companies, can use IRMA audit reports to better understand environmental and social impacts at operations that supply materials they buy or companies in which they invest. We encourage purchasers and investors to take an in-depth look at audit reports to understand the scores and performance for each chapter. No voluntary initiative's results replace the expectations expressed by the OECD and other international institutions for purchasers and investors to do their own due diligence to understand risks in the supply chain and to be active participants to reduce harm.

In being audited, SQM and other companies doing IRMA audits are sharing with purchasers, investors, workers and civil society metrics on their performance for more than 20 different areas of impact. This means that interested readers can understand more, and ask for further insights, so that performance isn't just about single issues like greenhouse gas emissions, or worker health and safety, or protecting water resources—but can be evaluated against a comprehensive range of issues relevant for large-scale mining.

As purchasers and investors learn more about mining companies' operations, they can encourage sites to

further share information on impacts, seek context and ask for improvement in areas of challenge, and value areas of strong performance. They can appreciate the effort SQM has made to be audited and can encourage further dialogue between the company and its stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders.

In terms of specific sourcing claims, IRMA has a new draft Chain of Custody Standard which will be released in 2023 for public review and comment. When finalized, this standard will provide a way to independently audit a purchaser's supply chain and ensure claims of responsible sourcing can be verified.

For more information

[Audit Packet](#) --including report, press release and supporting materials. [En Español](#)

[IRMA SQM Salar de Atacama audit page](#)

Aimee Boulanger, Executive Director
Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA)
contact@responsiblemining.net

Or visit responsiblemining.net