



System Overview

November 2023

1. **Strategies** – used by IRMA to achieve its sustainability outcomes

Industrialized societies rely on mined materials to function. From household electronics to vehicles, from batteries to renewable energy systems, products that are used daily come from material mined from the Earth. Mining provides investment and financial opportunities for host countries, and important employment and income for local communities. However, the exploration, extraction, and processing associated with mined materials also can negatively impact human rights and the environment on which people depend.

The Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) envisions a world where the mining industry respects the human rights and aspirations of affected communities; provides safe, healthy, and supportive workplaces; minimizes harm to the environment; and leaves positive legacies.

To achieve this vision, IRMA uses three main strategies:

- The *IRMA Standard for Responsible Mining and Mineral Processing*, as well as a chain of custody standard.
- A third-party independent assurance system.
- Equal multistakeholder governance for the system, where IRMA is governed equally by six houses, unique among mining standards and making IRMA the most trusted mining certification system among civil society.

Together, these strategies are implemented to achieve IRMA's sustainability outcomes in the mining sector which are grouped into these categories:

- Business Integrity
- Planning and Managing for Positive Legacies
- Social Responsibility
- Environmental Responsibility

2. **Standards and tools** – used by IRMA

The primary tool used by IRMA is its multi-stakeholder developed standard and accompanying third-party assurance system. The *IRMA Standard for Responsible Mining and Mineral Processing* (hereafter called the *IRMA Standard*) provides an internationally recognized shared definition of what constitutes best practices in social and environmental responsibility for mineral exploration, extraction, and processing. The IRMA Standard serves as the basis for a comprehensive system that is intended to create transparency into mining's impacts, and to improve practices across supply chains through independent verification.

Fundamentals of the IRMA Standard are:

- It is the world's most rigorous and detailed standard for mining, stronger than any country's laws. It is not a pass-fail standard and creates a pathway for continuous improvement (see section 4).
- It can be applied across large scale (industrial scale) mines¹ anywhere in the world, such as in lithium, nickel, gold, copper, iron ore, platinum and more. (Exceptions: thermal coal, oil and gas, uranium and deep sea).
- Assessment is at the mine-site level, not at the company level. Individual mines are audited and receive scores. It is also the only global mining standard that makes audit notices public and allows anyone to participate in giving input. The public results of each audit provide a significant level of details compared to other industry-driven and governed standards.

IRMA is also developing a Chain of Custody Standard to provide baseline requirements for tracing material coming from any IRMA-audited mine through the downstream processing of minerals into products, all the way to the end consumer.

¹ While artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is not in the scope of the IRMA Standard 2.0, we do have a chapter in the Standard that has requirements for large-scale mines who interact with, or have the potential to interact with, artisanal and small-scale mining due to proximity or through commercial relationships such as sourcing ore or minerals from these smaller entities.

3. How IRMA maintains **responsibility** for the decisions made by and about the system

IRMA's Board of Directors is made up of two seats each in the following sectors 1) NGOs, 2) labor unions, 3) mining-affected communities, 4) mining companies, 5) companies who purchase mined materials, and 6) companies who finance and invest in the mining sector (at company or project level).

The [current Board composition](#) can be found on our web site. Unless otherwise determined by the Board of Directors, all working groups and committees of IRMA, whose work shall result in recommendations to the Board, also ensure balanced representation by each of the sectors above.

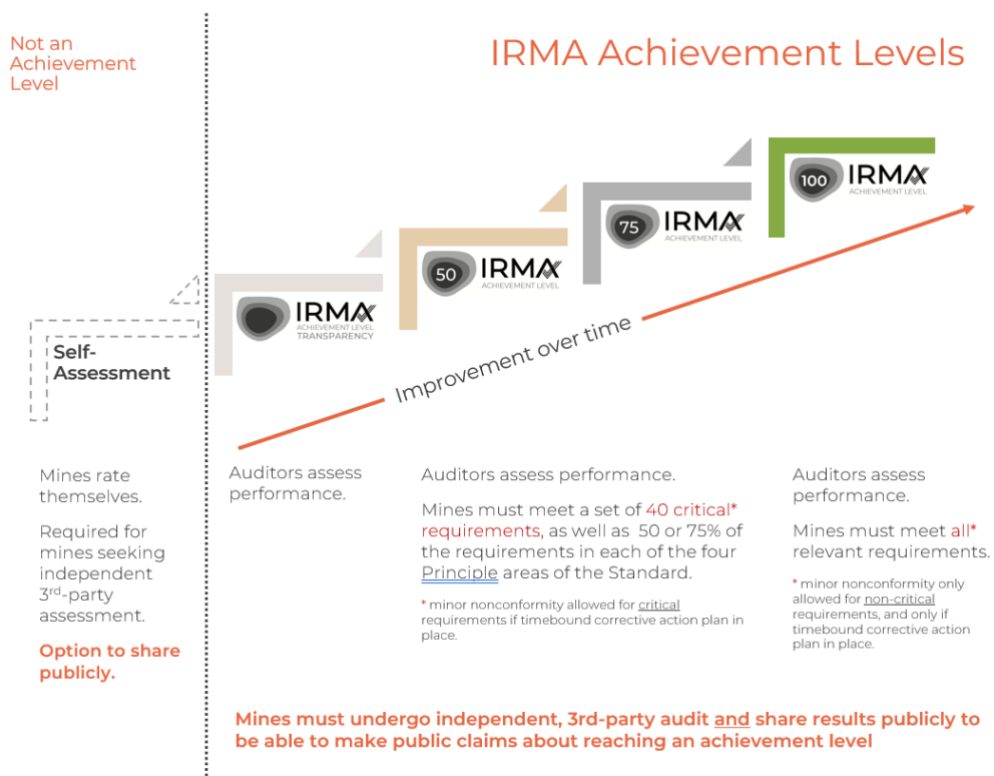
Decisions are made by and about the system through the IRMA Board of Directors and based on the IRMA Bylaws. Board members strive to make decisions by consensus. Where they cannot achieve this, they agree to vote. However, any vote that results in two "no" votes from the same sector does not pass and the issue must go back to the full group for further discussion and resolution. This means that a topic cannot pass if one of the stakeholder groups is fundamentally opposed.

Decisions related to the standards, their content and finalization are also made by the Board and based on the IRMA Bylaws. IRMA's standards revision process aims to follow international best practices including public consultation, robust stakeholder engagement and public summaries of comments received. Following this process, the IRMA Board of Directors shall approve and adopt the standard if it affirms that the standard development process was adequate and the standard is consistent with the specifications that the IRMA Board of Directors approved when the standard development or revision process was initiated; or not approve the standard if it deems otherwise.

4. How the IRMA systems demonstrates a commitment to improvement

The IRMA Standard aims to define, recognize, and incentivize best practices for environmental and social responsibility in mining and mineral processing. IRMA recognizes that this is a high standard that has not been described in regulatory frameworks in many countries, and many mining and mineral processing companies may not have seen market value or market differentiation for going beyond a base level of performance. Consequently, IRMA has developed a scoring tool that allows for a richer sense of performance than simply “pass/fail”, and furthermore allows for in-depth understanding of performance in each chapter of the IRMA Standard.

The graphic below shows how the IRMA Standard drives continuous improvement.



5. How the Standard is monitored and reviewed to ensure **relevance**

The IRMA Standard will be revised at least every five years (first revision: 2023; next date: 2028). The IRMA Standards Development Procedure requires that within five years after the approval date of the IRMA *Standard for Responsible Mining* (or five years of any substantive revisions to the approved standard) IRMA shall carry out a formal, publicized comment period of sixty days. However, as world events happen, society's expectations and best practices evolve, the Standard can be partially revised or have some addenda added into the chapters as we learn and improve the standard in real time. For example, when the Brazil mine tailings disaster occurred in January 2019, IRMA re-convened the committee for that chapter (waste and materials management) to re-assess the criteria considering the tragedy and what was being learned at the time.

One significant change from the 2018 IRMA Standard 1.0 to the 2023 proposed revisions for version 2.0 is that the requirements will now apply at any phase of the mineral development life cycle (e.g., exploration, project development, permitting, construction, mining and processing operations, reclamation and closure, post-closure). The Standard recognizes that different aspects of some requirements will be assessed at different phases of the life cycle (for example, while requirements related to the planning of mine closure may be assessed even during the construction phase, effective implementation of those requirements cannot be assessed until closure is under way or completed).

Version 1.0 of the IRMA Standard was written by the IRMA Secretariat and released in 2018 after a robust public consultation process that took place in 2014 and again in 2016 that resulted in more than 2,100 comments and recommendations that informed its content. The 2018 release of version 1.0 also was based on two field tests of the Standard, in Zimbabwe and in the United States.

The IRMA Standard 2.0 is being developed by the IRMA Secretariat through a similar, although shorter, public consultation process that seeks to engage diverse stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders around the world. In preparing for this review and revision process in 2023-2024, more than 20 different companies have already been piloting the draft requirements for exploration and development and also for mineral processing. Several others have been assisting with testing the draft expectations in the new draft Chain of Custody Standard that will support verification of responsible sourcing claims, from mine to end product. In addition, 139 diverse experts from 23 countries have engaged in 10 topical working groups to provide suggestions to inform and catalyze this revision process that now opens for broad public review and input.

6. How the IRMA Standard is **implemented**

The IRMA Standard is implemented through an independent, third-party [assessment](#) (audit) of a mining operation that provides the transparency that enables deepened dialogue between mining companies, the communities potentially affected by the mining operations, and other stakeholders.

Audits to the IRMA Standard 2.0 are authorized to take place in all countries, in accordance with the IRMA Assurance System. Operations considered illegal in the country where they take place cannot be audited.

Detailed IRMA audit reports are independent evaluations of a mine's environmental and social performance. These reports allow nearby communities, customers, investors, and even the mining company's headquarters to gain information they need to understand what's going well at each site—and what may require more attention. A third-party assessment under the IRMA Standard is not a one-time, but a step-by-step process toward continuous improvement.