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An analysis of how States and Indian tribes can develop coal mine reclamation plans to comply with provisions of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 is available from the Interior Department's Office of Surface Mining (OSM).

"This guide is intended to assist coal-producing States and Indian tribes in preparing their coal mine reclamation programs so that they can qualify to receive funds for reclaiming their abandoned mine land," said Walter N. Heine, OSM Director.

"The Surface Mining Act requires States and Indian tribes to have OSM approval on both their reclamation and regulatory programs before they can qualify for half the fees currently being collected from coal operators," Heine added.

The model plan was developed by an engineering consulting firm under a $96,000 contract with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and OSM. The plan incorporates ideas submitted by States and Indian tribes as well as the expertise of reclamation specialists in OSM, the ARC and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) of the Department of Agriculture.

"With this guide, the 25 coal-producing States and the Crow, Hopi and Navajo Tribes should be able to draft their mine land reclamation programs in accordance with our regulations," Heine added.

Under the Act, coal mining companies pay fees of 35 cents a ton for coal that is surface mined, 15 cents a ton for deep-mined coal and 10 cents a ton for lignite Since October 1, 1977, when the fee system became effective, coal producers have paid more than $235 million into the fund.

In addition to the 50 percent to be returned to the States and Indian tribes where the coal is currently being mined, up to 20 percent is used for the Rural Abandoned Mine Program (RAMP) conducted by Agriculture's SCS and $10 million is earmarked for use under the Small Operators Assistance Program (SOAP) for hydrology studies. The balance is reserved to the Secretary of the Interior for the Federal reclamation program.