

Press Release

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Tailings pile covering at the K+S Werra plant starts in Hattorf The white mountains of the Werra Valley turn green

K+S begins covering its tailings piles at the Werra potash plant in Hattorf and Wintershall. Initially, with the start of construction on the tailings pile top in Hattorf, the focus is on the plateau covers, with the side covers to follow later. In the long term, the white mountains of the Werra Valley will become green and the environment will be sustainably relieved.

During the processing of crude salts extracted underground, large volumes of residues are inevitably produced due to their natural composition. These solid salt residues are deposited in tailings piles. If precipitation falls on the tailings pile, saline waters - so-called tailings pile waters - are generated, which are continuously collected and properly disposed of. By completely covering the tailings piles, the tailings pile waters are significantly reduced in the long term.

In spring, K+S had already announced the covering and greening of the potash tailings pile at the Neuhof-Ellers plant. "By covering all tailings piles, we will make a major contribution to a lasting reduction in the environmental impact associated with potash production in the Werra-Fulda region," says K+S Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors Dr. Burkhard Lohr. Covering the tailings piles is also an important aspect of the Weser River Basin Community's catalog of measures as it will improve the condition of the Werra and Weser rivers in the long term. "After we stopped injecting saline water into deep rock strata at the end of 2021, we are once again keeping our word and proving that K+S is the pioneer of environmentally friendly and sustainable mining," says Lohr.



Securing the future of the plant

The tailings pile covers are also an important component in securing the future of the Werra plant - with potash production that, as things stand at present, will last until the 2060s. "We want to secure domestic raw material extraction and therefore jobs as well as apprenticeships in the long term. The prerequisite for this is resource-conserving mining with modern processing and sustainable disposal methods," says K+S Plant Manager Martin Ebeling.

"We have been developing different methods of tailings pile covering since the 1980s to sustainably reduce the amount of tailings pile water. These have been tested in pilot projects and implemented on some existing tailings piles - adapted to the respective site conditions," explains Benedikt Kalbhenn, K+S Project Manager for Tailings Pile Covering. For the Werra plant, a combination of different technical variants represents the solution that is optimally adapted to the site and is the most sustainable. Benedikt Kalbhenn explains the way the tailings pile covering works as follows: "The covering prevents precipitation from entering into contact with the tailings pile body made of salt residue. Instead, the rainwater is temporarily stored or can evaporate directly on the surface of the tailings pile, which is later covered with vegetation." For this purpose, K+S is using soil material specific to the site; correspondingly, delivery traffic is being kept to an absolute minimum.

The sides will be vegetated later

The Kassel Regional Council as the responsible supervisory authority has approved the application for the plateau cover in Hattorf, and the neighboring municipalities have also given their consent. Following the start of construction on the tailings pile top in Hattorf, the second step should be the start of construction in Wintershall this year. "The covering of the sides will only take place at a later point in time. There are separate permit procedures to be completed," says K+S Project Manager Kalbhenn, giving an outlook. "We will inform the public about the current status in good time and get them on board right from the start," he promises.



“By permanently covering the two tailings piles, we are minimizing perpetual burdens and long-term consequences for future generations and the Company. The vegetated tailings piles ultimately fit into the landscape,” says Plant Manager Martin Ebeling. He also points out that the plant wants to use the newly created green spaces on the top to reduce the plant's CO₂ output and also promote the creation of biotopes.

About K+S and the Werra plant

We make an important contribution to society: We enable farmers securing the world's food supply. Our products keep numerous industries running. We enrich consumers' daily lives and ensure safety in winter. With around 11,000 employees, production sites on two continents, and a global distribution network, we are a reliable partner for our customers. At the same time, we are realigning ourselves: We are focusing even more strongly than before on fertilizers and specialties. We are becoming leaner, more cost-efficient, more digital, and more performance-oriented. On a solid financial basis, we are tapping into new markets and business models. We are committed to our responsibility towards society and the environment in all regions in which we operate. Learn more about K+S at www.kpluss.com.

The Werra integrated potash plant, with its sites at Hattorf and Wintershall in Hesse as well as Unterbreizbach and Merkers in Thuringia, is the largest site of K+S Minerals and Agriculture GmbH. The Werra potash plant produces not only fertilizers but also intermediate products for a wide range of technical and industrial applications as well as for the pharmaceutical, food, and animal feed industries. It employs almost 4400 people, including 300 trainees. It is therefore an important employer and training company in the triangle of towns between Bad Hersfeld, Bad Salzungen, and Eisenach. The plant is also an important customer for local small and medium-sized businesses and significantly contributes to value creation in the region. This makes it a key component in the economic and demographic development of the East Hesse/West Thuringia region.

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