

Slipping slope prompts close mine call

A slope below the tailings dam at Coeur Golden Cross mine near Waihi is moving one millimetre every 10 days.

Coeur Gold called meetings with Environment Waikato, Hauraki District Council and the inspector of mines on Thursday and yesterday to discuss the dam which holds 2.9 million tonnes of tailings.

Stabilising the tailings dam requires the movement of thousands of tonnes of sand and rocks.

In July cracks were noticed along the front embankment of the dam.

Ohinemuri Earthwatch spokesperson Mark Daniels wants the mine closed until the dam is verified as fixed.

"Our worst fear is that it will slip into to the Waitekauri River," says Mr Daniels.

Coeur general manager Richard Weston says independent consultants have advised the dam is safe.

"It is built to the highest engineering standards and in excess of those required in other parts of the world."

The company began work stabilising the dam three months ago - but it is still moving.

"We do not believe there's any

danger at this time, but any movement on the slopes below any dam is of concern and that's why we have notified the authorities."

Mr Weston says interim measures to reinforce the slope are being taken.

These include dewatering the slope, better drainage and buttressing to prevent further movement.

"Full remedial measures should be commenced by the end of January," Mr Weston says.

Sophisticated monitoring systems at the mine are being stepped up to cover the whole mine site.

However, Mr Daniels maintains operations should be stopped until the dam is fully stabilised.

"We are just beginning to see a glimpse of the potential of a worst case scenario," Mr Daniels says.

He says tailings dams worldwide are untested by the ravages of nature.

"Our concerns are coming to fruition - this industry should not be here."

Mr Weston says Environment Waikato holds a \$10 million bond from Coeur to ensure its commitment to environmental standards.