

Mobile telecommunications industry initiatives to reduce use of coltan conflict metal

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The mobile telecommunications industry shares concerns about environmental, social and economic impacts of mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Members of the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) are involved in a global initiative to assist companies in sourcing “conflict-free” minerals used in the manufacture of mobile telecommunications products.



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Coltan

Coltan is a black metallic ore used in the manufacture of tantalum capacitors, which are used in a range of electronic products, including: mobile telecommunication handsets, PCs and pagers. Also, tantalum is used for high-tech cutters, air and space technology, turbines, aircraft, the optical industry and electric cars.

Coltan is twice as dense as steel and its ability to store electrical signals and its conductive ability at extreme temperatures make it a key component of a range of consumer electronic products and superalloys.

Mining

The United States Geological Survey in 2011 said Australia, Brazil and Canada have large reserves of coltan, however, a European Economic Policy briefing paper in 2012 estimated that roughly one-fifth (there is a lack of reliable data) of the world market volume for tantalum production had been supplied from illegal trade or so-called “conflict minerals” from central Africa.¹

Mining to obtain tantalum-bearing minerals is carried out in a variety of ways ranging from artisan mining of surface alluvial deposits using picks and shovels in Central Africa to large-scale open cut operations in Australia and underground mining in Canada.

Conflict minerals

Illegal mining and trading of coltan ore in the DRC has been exploited to fund armed conflict and human rights abuses. The DRC, which is one of the poorest countries in the world, has been involved in a long-running bloody civil war in which rebel groups fight over access to minerals and profit from illicit trade.

Uncontrolled mining in the DRC is eroding land, polluting lakes and affecting the habitat of gorillas, chimpanzees and other wildlife. Miners hunt gorillas for food and the suffering of people and gorillas will only end with government intervention to stop the war.²

It is estimated between 8-10 million or up to 16% of the DRC’s population depend on mining, which provides their only source of income. The United Nations³⁴ and others, including

¹ Coltan from Central Africa, International Trade and Implications for Any Certification, Department of European Economic Studies, College of Europe

² ABC’s Foreign Correspondent *The Congo Connection*, 08/09/2009:

<http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2009/s2680172.htm>

³ United Nations (UN). (2001.c) *Report of the panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Security Council. S/2001/357*. April 12.

⁴ United Nations (UN). (2002) *Report of the panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Security Council. S/2002/1146*. October 15.

Amnesty International,⁵ have cautioned against a total ban on all minerals from the DRC because of the economic hardship it would impose on the Congolese people.

A better way forward is to put the conflict over raw materials into a framework of sustainable resource management and international governance for trade in natural resources.⁶

Global industry initiatives

NGO campaigns such as [MakelTFair](#) and [Enough](#) have highlighted social, environmental and humanitarian issues associated with the extraction of certain metals used in components of Information Communications Technology (ICT) equipment.

Mining of coltan (a tantalum-bearing ore), tin, tungsten and gold in conflict regions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo is a particular concern and AMTA shares the concerns about the plight of species, such as chimpanzees and gorillas, in this region.

In response to concerns raised by NGOs around the world, in 2008 the ICT industry launched the Conflict-Free Smelter Initiative (CFSI) to assist electronics manufacturing companies to source responsibly and reduce the risk of conflict minerals ending up in their products.

AMTA members are part of this joint global initiative by Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition in partnership with the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI), which promotes responsible procurement of minerals through accountability and traceability of the status of minerals in global supply chains.

The initiative offers companies and their suppliers an independent, third-party audit that determines which smelters and refiners can be validated as “conflict-free,” in line with current global standards through their flagship [Conflict-Free Smelter Program](#) .

In 2011 the United States government passed the Dodd Frank Law, which requires companies publicly traded in the US to disclose whether their products contain any of these minerals and similar directives are expected in the near future in the EU.

In early 2014, the CFSI [announced](#) it had validated conflict-free smelters or refiners of all four conflict minerals for the first time. Audits of tantalum, tin, tungsten and gold (3TG) smelters and refiners are carried out by independent third party auditors, and smelters and refiners found to meet the requirements of the audit protocols are validated as conflict-free. The CFSI publishes the names of those smelters and refiners in order to facilitate conflict-free sourcing choices by companies.

Over 150 companies and associations from seven different industries [participate in the CFSI today](#), and they regularly [collaborate with other complementary programs and initiatives in this area](#).

They also run a twice-yearly [Conflict-Free Sourcing Initiative Workshop](#), which brings together hundreds of representatives from industry, government and civil society for updates, in-depth discussions and guidance on best practices on responsible mineral sourcing.

The EICC and GeSI partnership is working on involving industries other than electronics manufacturers to join the global initiative to use conflict-free supply chains and supporting peaceful developments in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

For more information contact AMTA on (02) 6239 6555 or 0421 240 55

⁵ Coltan Mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo: How tantalum-using industries can commit to the reconstruction of the DRC, Fauna & Flora International

⁶ Coltan from Central Africa, International Trade and Implications for any Certification