

California Geological Survey Releases 2011 Non-Fuel Minerals Report - Boron is No. 1

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SACRAMENTO -- Boron was the leading non-fuel mineral commodity in California in 2011 by value, according to a new report from the California Geological Survey (CGS). About \$2.9 billion worth of minerals were produced by the state's 700 active mines.

"Boron is a relatively rare element; in fact California is the only state in which boron is mined," noted Dr. John Parrish, State Geologist of California and head of CGS. "It is used in a wide variety of products, though, from insecticides to bleach to insulation to ceramics to pharmaceuticals, and many others."

Because there are only two producers of boron minerals in the state, specific production values must be withheld to protect proprietary company information. The value of boron production is included in the "other" category in the table and chart that accompany the report here:

http://www.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/geologic_resources/mineral_production/Pages/Index.aspx.

However, the value of boron production is greater than the value of the second-ranked construction sand and gravel, which is \$591 million for 87 million tons produced. The third-highest dollar value mineral commodity produced was portland cement, valued at \$587 million for 8.3 million tons produced. Gold was fourth at \$324 million and crushed stone fifth at \$295 million.

"The use of construction aggregate (sand and gravel as well as crushed stone) is, of course, tied to construction activities," noted report co-author John Clinkenbeard of CGS. "Although the value of that material declined, there actually was a slight increase in aggregate production for the first time since the economic recession began in 2007. That may be an indicator of increased construction activity in some areas of the state."

California produced more than two dozen different non-fuel mineral commodities during the year. The state led the U.S. in the production of diatomite and natural sodium sulfate, and was the only producer of both boron compounds and rare earth minerals, an important component of many high tech products.

The only metals produced in California were gold and silver. California ranked fifth among 11 states that reported gold production for the year. Although gold production dipped slightly in California from 2010 to 2011 (198,980 ounces compared to 198,770), the value increased from \$244.3 million in 2010 to \$323.7 million in 2011 due to higher commodity prices.

The largest gold producer in California was New Gold Inc.'s Mesquite Mine in Imperial County with about 158,000 ounces for the year. The Briggs Mine in Inyo County, operated by Atna Resources Ltd., resumed gold production in early 2009 and produced about 32,000 ounces in 2011. Atna received permission from the Bureau of Land Management in February 2012 to expand its operation by 94 acres, which is expected to extend the mine's life by three to five years.

Approximately 5,300 people were employed at California's mines and processing facilities in 2011, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The CGS report is based on preliminary data compiled by the U.S. Geological Survey.

CGS's Mineral Land Classification Project, a mandate of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act, provides local lead agencies with mineral resource maps and reports to assist them in land-use planning and mineral resource conservation. CGS has completed mineral resource studies in about one-third of the state.

ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION:

In addition to mapping and classifying areas containing mineral deposits, the DOC studies and maps earthquakes and other geologic phenomena; ensures reclamation of land used for mining; regulates oil, gas, and geothermal wells; and administers agricultural and open-space land conservation programs. More information about DOC programs is available at www.conservation.ca.gov.