

One of the last gold mines in California operating in Kern County

Kyle Harvey, Bakersfield Now, 7-29-16

MOJAVE, Calif. — A gold mine just south of Mojave that was shuttered by the U.S. War Board during World War II has been reopened.

One of the last remaining gold mines in the Golden State, the Soledad Mountain Project, is now being operated by Golden Queen Mining LLC.

Golden Queen purchased the land 30 years ago, but changes in the price of gold and increasingly heavy regulatory burdens slowed the project's advance.

Unlike the operation closed in the 1940s, Golden Queen doesn't tunnel into the mountain. The company uses large machinery to literally take it apart, removing 20 vertical feet of rock from different portions of the hill at a time.

The rock is then fed through three different crushing machines to reduce the rock to tiny, pebble-sized fragments. The pebbles are then treated with a chemical mixture that extracts the precious metals.

Those metals - gold and silver - are then refined and poured into bricks.

The plant supports about 175 local jobs and continues to grow. It is the only active gold mine in Kern County.

The company's CEO, Thomas Clay, told Eyewitness News that his mine is actually cleaning the site, removing hazardous debris left over from the previous miners. The mountain has been a significant contributor of dust and other unhealthful particulate matter for years. Clay says they are actively reducing those particles.

In addition to gold and silver, Golden Queen also produces large amounts of aggregate material used in construction. The mine's proximity to railroad track, highways and electricity allows the group to transport large quantities of materials with relative ease. Most gold mines around the world are in isolated places that make transportation difficult and expensive, Clay said.