

Tantalum-Niobium International Study Center



Project author or developer:
Tantalum-Niobium International Study Center

Where:
BE / Belgium / Flemish Brabant

Website:
tanb.org

Promote legal ethical ways to extract columbite-tantalite metal

Coltan, short for columbite-tantalite and known industrially as tantalite, (CONGO/BE) is a dull black metallic ore from which the elements niobium (formerly "columbium") and tantalum are extracted. The niobium-dominant mineral in coltan is columbite, and the tantalum-dominant mineral is tantalite. Tantalum from coltan is used to manufacture tantalum capacitors, used in consumer electronics products such as mobile phones, DVD players, video game systems and computers. Coltan mining has been cited as helping to finance serious conflict, for example in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Tantalum-Niobium International Study Centre in Belgium, a country with traditionally close links to the Congo, has encouraged international buyers to avoid Congolese coltan on ethical grounds because the central African countries of Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda and their neighbours used to be the source of significant tonnages. But civil war, plundering of national parks and exporting of minerals, diamonds and other natural resources to provide funding of militias has caused the Tantalum-Niobium International Study Center to call on its members to take care in obtaining their raw materials from lawful sources. Harm, or the threat of harm, to local people, wildlife or the environment is unacceptable. For economic rather than ethical reasons, a shift is also being seen from traditional sources such as Australia, towards new suppliers such as Egypt. This may have been brought about by the bankruptcy of the world's biggest supplier, Australia's Sons of Gwalia. The operations previously owned by Gwalia in Wodgina and Greenbushes continue to operate in some capacity.

