

Responsible sourcing of raw materials – at home and abroad.

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A 'low carbon economy' is a 'metals economy'. To manufacture electric cars, wind turbines, solar panels, and all the other low carbon technologies, we will need more metals in the next 30 years than ever mined before. Ensuring that this can be done without causing problems such as pollution, biodiversity loss, or human rights abuses requires responsible sourcing initiatives. Many of us buy fairtrade coffee, tea or bananas, but how many of us think about the origin of the raw materials in our manufactured goods? We may look for a forestry stewardship council tag on wooden furniture but are less likely to enquire about complex products such as cars or computers. With their thousands of components and long supply chains, responsible sourcing of these goods is difficult to assure but is just as important. It is often single high profile issues such as conflict minerals ('blood diamonds and 'coltan') or child labour (cobalt) that are driving change. Responsible sourcing of minerals is gathering pace though, with multiple schemes, and new research to establish how best to measure and compare different types of deposits and mines. Geologists sit right at the beginning of these supply chains and there is much that we can do to be involved in the responsible sourcing agenda. When thinking about metals mining, we tend to imagine overseas mines but we can also discuss what responsible sourcing might look like for technology metals such as lithium, tungsten and tin for which there are active exploration and mine development projects in the UK.