

Metal shortages alert from leading geologists

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Geologists are warning of shortages and bottlenecks of some metals due to an insatiable demand for consumer products.

A meeting of leading [geologists](#), reported in the scientific journal *Nature Geoscience*, highlights the dangers in the inexorable surge in demand for metals.

Dr. Gawen Jenkin, of the Department of Geology, University of Leicester, is the lead convenor of the Fermor Meeting of the Geological Society of London which met to discuss this issue.

Dr Jenkin said: "Mobile phones contain copper, nickel, silver and zinc, aluminium, gold, lead, [manganese](#), [palladium](#), platinum and tin. More than a billion people will buy a mobile in a year - so that's quite a lot of metal. And then there's the [neodymium](#) in your laptop, the iron in your car, the aluminium in that [soft drinks](#) can – the list goes on...

"With ever-greater use of these metals, are we running out? That was one of the questions we addressed at our meeting. It is reassuring that there's no immediate danger of 'peak metal' as there's quite a lot in the ground, still – but there will be shortages and bottlenecks of some metals like indium due to increased demand.

"That means that exploration for metal commodities is now a key skill. It's never been a better time to become an economic geologist, working with a mining company. It's one of the better-kept secrets of employment in a recession-hit world.

"And a key factor in turning young people away from the large mining companies – their reputation for environmental unfriendliness – is being turned around as they make ever-greater efforts to integrate with local communities for their mutual benefit."

So, our appetite for technological goodies will be satisfied for some time to come still – as long as sufficient people with the skills to seek out the metals emerge into the marketplace.

More information: 'Beyond mining', *Nature Geoscience*, 4 (October 2011), p. 653.

Provided by University of Leicester

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