

The challenge of mining rare-earth materials outside China

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Five years ago, the cost of rare-earth materials that are critical for today's electronics went through the roof. An export quota set by China, which mines most of the world's rare earths, caused the price run-up. Though short-lived, the occurrence spurred calls for developing mines outside China, but whether others can challenge the country's dominance remains to be seen, reports *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society.

Melody Bomgardner, a senior editor at C&EN, notes that in the U.S., there is currently only one operational rare-earth mine. It's located in Mountain Pass, California, and is owned by a company called Molycorp. It boasts a reserve of about 1.5 million tons of rare earths—70 years' worth of output. But largely due to the challenges inherent in extracting rare earths, the mine is far from reaching its goal of producing 20,000 tons per year. It recently filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Other companies are also trying to help diversify the world's supply of [rare earths](#). Additional [mines](#) are planned in Brazil and Alaska. In case that's not enough to ensure a non-Chinese source, some U.S. policymakers are attempting to pass legislation to streamline the permitting process that would allow new mines to operate stateside.

More information: The Struggle to Mine Rare Earths - cen.acs.org/articles/93/i30/Strange-Struggle-to-Mine-Rare-Earths.html

Provided by American Chemical Society

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