

Rare Earth Emergency #1

Thanks to the Shale Revolution, the United States has regained her energy security. Imports of oil and natural gas have plunged. In fact, as of September 2019 the U.S. was exporting more petroleum products than it imports for the first time in its history! And it's a net natural gas exporter as well.

But... unfortunately the U.S. has a different energy problem that is putting everything in our world at great risk. The United States is 100 percent dependent on numerous foreign countries for dozens of critical minerals, including rare earth elements.

This isn't just a big deal. It's a REALLY big deal.

If you like electricity, your car, smartphone, TV, the internet, jet travel, air conditioning, and just about everything else in your life, then you LOVE these minerals. Without them, our current way of life does not exist. And yet, America does very little mining for these essential resources.

It's not because the United States isn't endowed with enormous mineral wealth, because it is. Every state has some valuable rare earth minerals and/or critical metals such as copper, gold, silver, and zinc. The National Mining Association estimates we have more than \$6 trillion dollars in mineral wealth beneath our feet.

Authors of the book "Groundbreaking!" detail America's decline as a mining power. In 1970 President Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has done some good work. However, its excessive regulations have dramatically reduced America's ability to mine for resources. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of federal land is off limits to mineral exploration. In the 1990s America was the top producer and exporter of minerals. Today, it is the top importer. The Clinton Administration accelerated the downward spiral when it abolished the Bureau of Mines. America is the only global power that doesn't have a government agency focused on mining.

If that wasn't bad enough, successive administrations have sold off much of the nation's large stockpile of minerals, including rare earths. Today, when minerals and metals have never been more important, U.S. stockpiles are at their lowest point in history.

Why haven't most people heard about this extreme vulnerability and shocking disregard for our economic and national security? For the most part, the mainstream press isn't interested in this kind of stuff. And neither are most politicians. It's ironic because the media and political elites constantly express their love of wind turbines, solar panels, and electric cars. Don't they know these technologies eat up massive quantities of critical minerals and rare earth metals?

One bright spot is the Trump Administration, which has acknowledged the problem and taken action. In 2017 President Trump signed an executive order focused on building a secure supply of critical minerals. But that's only the first step in a long journey to reduce America's over-reliance on other countries for these resources. Once a mineral deposit is identified it can take a decade or longer to get a mining permit.

And there are other complications as well, since many rare earths cannot be mined directly. They are a co-product of other mining. For instance, rare earth elements, tellurium, rhenium, and cobalt are often found in copper ore.

As discouraging as all this is, there is even more cause for alarm. A single nation has a stranglehold on the production and processing of rare earth elements: China. We'll examine the world's dangerous dependence on China in Part 2 of America's Rare Earth Emergency.

For the Clear Energy Alliance, I'm Mark Mathis. Power On!



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