

# Conflict tin

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Conflict tin? I'd heard of conflict diamonds, though never knowingly handled any. So what is conflict tin, who might be using it, and does my tankard contain any?

Conflict tin is tin which workers are forced to mine, usually by armed groups who then sell the tin for their profit. In the past, this tin would have found its way into the supply chain. It was to combat this illegal trade that the iTSCi was founded.



Do you know how many countries there are in the world which mine and export tin: five, ten, fifteen, twenty? (Answer below)

There are probably issues relating to tin mining in every country, but the principal sources of conflict tin are, or were, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. I asked Jonathan Rickwood of ITRI to tell me more.

“My organisation, the global tin industry association, became aware of conflict related issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo and a result was the formation, some five years ago, of the iTSCi Membership Programme. iTSCi: the ITRI Tin Supply Chain Initiative. This joint industry due diligence programme assists and encourages companies in the upstream supply chain which wish to purchase their 3T<sup>1</sup> minerals from the great lakes<sup>2</sup> region of Africa to do so whilst avoiding past mistakes, such as funding armed groups. iTSCi brings international companies (from large multinationals through to SME's<sup>3</sup> and co-operatives) together to work constructively and efficiently throughout the supply chain.



“The iTSCi Programme is designed to enable governments and downstream companies across the great lakes region to show the process of traceability and due diligence required by OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) guidance. iTSCi works with regional governments and authorities to train local agents in weighing and tagging at source, making the minerals traceable throughout

<sup>1</sup> Tungsten, tin and tantalum

<sup>2</sup> Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi

<sup>3</sup> Small to middling enterprises

transportation and the eventual supply to smelters and producers. Together with the continuous checks made by the international NGO Pact (International NGO and iTSCi partner on the ground in Africa), agents are then able to report suspicious activity and investigate anomalies and security concerns that may occur throughout the supply chain.

“The Dodd Frank Act, introduced in the USA in 2010, requires American companies to meet a number of regulations, including the requirement to display the origins of the minerals used in their products and to confirm that they are conflict-free. Hundreds of mines serving communities across the great lakes region were hit by *de facto* embargoes after Dodd Frank was enacted. This meant that families dependent upon the legitimate mining industry saw their income drop drastically. iTSCi has provided assistance to the region, enabling local companies to address the requirements of the Dodd Frank Act and OECD due diligence guidance, and so to secure the livelihoods of tens of thousands of miners and the hundreds of thousands of dependents who rely on their income.

“The iTSCi Programme has brought about powerful change in some of the most challenging regions of the world, allowing small mining co-operatives in remote areas the societal and financial benefits of free and responsible trading. Today, miners can see that the minerals they provide to the international market have a greater value as a result of due diligence and traceability whilst communities previously threatened by violence and poverty now enjoy the increased peace and stability that has come to the great lakes region.”

I asked Jonathan what the chances were of my tankard containing conflict tin. He said it was difficult to tell, but very low, and much less now than in the past. “This is all part of the bigger picture of knowing where the pewter sheet manufacturers buy their tin,” he said.

Jonathan found it difficult to estimate how many tons of conflict tin might have been smuggled into the supply chain - of its very nature the trade was very secretive - but no doubt many thousands before iTRSi got on top of the problem.

Answer: the number of countries mining and exporting tin: globally, around ten.

## Alan Williams

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