

From mine to market

- tin's safer journey from the earth to the consumer, *by Laila Zollinger*

Back in the days when the Worshipful Company of Pewterers first received its Charter (1474), the concept of 'responsible sourcing' was unknown. But it would have been relatively easy to track the source of the piece of tin or pewter you had just bought and to test its purity, even if you were not interested in how it had been dug out of the ground and smelted.

Until recently, it was far from easy to know where your tin came from and whether it was fully compliant with modern regulations. Well, I have news for you mining is a messy business.

Today, your purchase ideally needs to be REACH¹ compliant, conflict-free and from an environmentally-sustainable source. This article will examine some of the challenges facing the tin industry today (tin being, as you probably know, the main constituent of pewter).

In the United Kingdom, legislation ensures that child labour is outlawed, and that workers are paid and work free from the fear of human rights abuses.

This is not the case in other parts of the world, especially at the beginning of tin's supply chain, i.e. the mine. Just over 50% of the world's tin is mined by artisanal workers - from small family groups to government run co-operatives.

Small-scale mining is driven by poverty, when there is no other employment. The miners' first priority is to earn enough to feed their families. The work is hard, the pay is poor and there are fatalities. Child labour is not unknown. The land is destroyed and, in some parts of the world, militia groups terrorize workers.

So what can be done, I hear you asking, to ameliorate these conditions? A two-pronged approach seems to be bearing fruit - voluntary and legislative. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, a scheme has been set up whereby any mine wishing to be certified 'conflict free' can apply to iTSCi (a scheme set up by ITRI² which is a UK based organization funded by responsible mining corporations and smelters around the globe.)

That mine will be inspected, its DNA analyzed and, if found to be conflict-free (i.e. mining is not undertaken in an area of armed conflict and traded illicitly to finance the fighting) miners will be given numbered tags. These tags, tied to every bundle of concentrate coming out of the mine, allow every stage of a bundle's journey to a smelter to be tracked and recorded. As a result armed militia groups, who used to intercept and either steal the bundles or pay a very low price for them, and then resell for a profit, have moved on to other pickings.

As a consumer you can ask questions before you buy. It is my opinion that we should all raise awareness and promote good practice across the supply chain.

Laila Zollinger

Director of Wildshaw Limited; and Liveryman, the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. Please refer to *The Pewterer*, Vol 7.2 for an article on *Conflict Tin* by Jonathan Rickwood of ITRI.

1. REACH: REACH ([EC 1907/2006](#)) aims to improve the protection of human health and the environment through the better and earlier identification of the intrinsic properties of chemical substances. This is done by the four processes of REACH, namely the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals. REACH also aims to enhance innovation and competitiveness of the EU chemicals industry.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/reach/reach_en.htm

and [LINK](#) to ABPC Newsletter

2. ITRI: previously known as the International Tin Research Institute. The iTSCI: iTSCi is a joint industry programme of traceability and due diligence designed to address concerns over 'conflict minerals' such as cassiterite from central Africa.

<https://www.itri.co.uk/itsci/frontpage>

[Home](#)

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