

Metals from Ores: An Introduction

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Introduction

A mineral is a naturally occurring substance having a definite chemical composition, constant physical properties, and a characteristic crystalline form. Ores are a mixture of minerals: they are processed to yield an industrial mineral or treated chemically to yield a single or several metals. Ores that are generally processed for only a single metal are those of iron, aluminium, chromium, tin, mercury, manganese, tungsten, and some ores of copper. Gold ores may yield only gold, but silver is a common associate. Nickel ores are always associated with cobalt, while lead and zinc always occur together in ores. All other ores are complex yielding a number of metals.

Ores undergo a beneficiation process by physical methods before being treated by chemical methods to recover the metals. Beneficiation processes involve liberation of minerals by crushing and grinding then separation of the individual mineral by physical methods (gravity, magnetic, etc.) or physicochemical methods (flotation) Figure 1. Chemical methods involve hydrometallurgical, pyrometallurgical, and electrochemical methods. Metals and metalloids obtained from ores are shown in Figure 2.

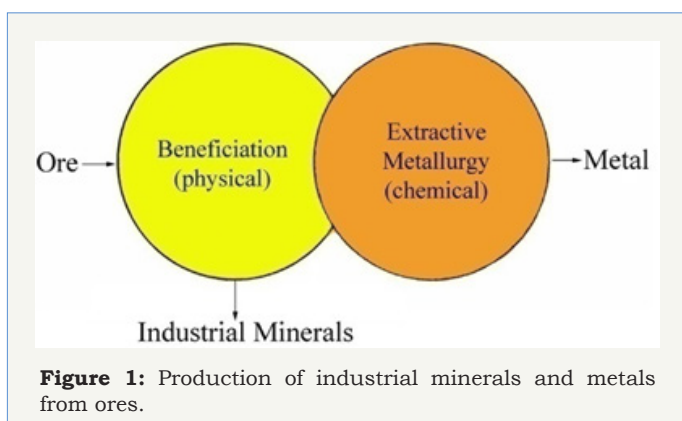


Figure 1: Production of industrial minerals and metals from ores.

Classification of Minerals

Minerals may be classified into two groups: metallic and non metallic. Metallic minerals are the chief raw materials for the manufacture of metals. Non metallic minerals which constitute about 75% of all the minerals, are so-called because they are not used for the manufacture of metals and also because of their lack

of metallic lustre. Of these about 300 are used industrially in the chemical industry, in building materials, in fertilizers, as fuels, etc., and are known as the industrial minerals Figure 3.

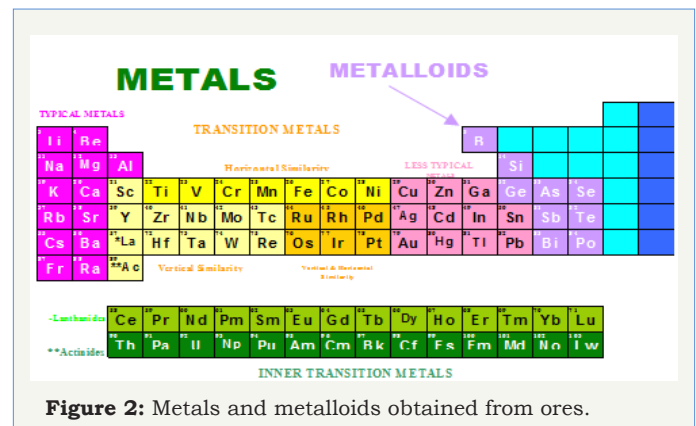


Figure 2: Metals and metalloids obtained from ores.

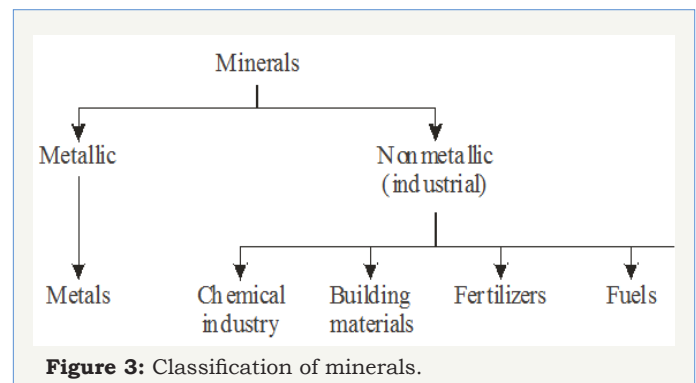


Figure 3: Classification of minerals.

A metallic mineral may be used for the production of a metal, or after a minor treatment for the production of refractoriness or pigments. For example Table 1. Bauxite, the main source of aluminium: 90% is used in the manufacture of the metal and 10% in the manufacture of refractoriness, abrasives, and chemicals. Chromate, the main mineral for chromium, is used for manufacturing certain refractoriness as well as chemicals for the tanning industry. Magnetite is used for iron production and as a black pigment. Zircon, the main zirconium mineral is used for the production of specialized refractoriness. Beryl, the main beryllium mineral, when occurring in large transparent crystals, is a gemstone. When a mineral is used for more than one purpose, then its grade

and the impurities present are the decisive factors in its utilization for metal production or otherwise. For example: Chromites ores [1]. These are classified into three grades: Metallurgical Ore with a high chromium content (minimum 68% chromium) and the chromium/iron ratio must not be less than 2.8/1, will be suitable for the manufacture of ferrochrome alloy or chromium metal.

Table 1: Metallic minerals for other uses than metal production.

Mineral	Metal Produced	Non-metallic Use
Bauxite	Al	Refractories
Chromite	Cr	Refractories, Chemicals
Magnetite	Fe	Pigment
Zircon	Zr	Refractories
Beryl	Be	Gemstone

Refractory Ore with a high aluminium oxide (the sum Cr_2O_3 and Al_2O_3 is more than 59%) would be suitable for the manufacture of refractoriness. Chemical Low-grade chromites, that are those with high iron content, are mainly used for the manufacture of dichromate needed for the electroplating and tanning industry Table 2.

Table 2: Classification of chromite ores.

Grade	Specifications	Use
Metallurgical	68% Cr minimum	Production of ferrochrome alloy or chromium metal
	Cr/Fe ratio <2.8/1	
Refractory	$Cr_2O_3 + Al_2O_3 \geq 58\%$	Manufacture of Refractories
Chemical	Low-grade ores	Manufacture of dichromates for electroplating and tanning industry

Table 3: Classification of manganese ores.

Grade	Specifications	Use
Metallurgical	>40% Mn	Manufacture of ferromanganese and special manganese alloys
Battery	>75% MnO_2	Manufacture of batteries
Chemical	>80% MnO_2	As oxidizing agent in chemical processes, potassium permanganate, and other manganese chemicals

Manganese ore classified as follows Table 3. Metallurgical Ore with high manganese content (minimum 40% Mn) are suitable for the manufacture of ferromanganese and special manganese alloys.

An ore at least 75% MnO_2 suitable for the manufacture of batteries.

An ore at least 80% MnO_2 suitable for use as an oxidizing agent in chemical processes or in the production of potassium permanganate and other manganese chemicals.

Pyrite and pyrrhotite which are iron sulphides are usually considered as metallic minerals because of their metallic lustre but they are mainly evaluated for their sulphur and not for their iron content, they are used to make sulphuric acid. Few plants however, process the remaining ferric oxide to extract traces of nonferrous metals contained in them; the purified ferric oxide may then be used for making iron. The presence of pyrite and pyrrhotite in sulphide ores is undesirable and usually methods have to be found to remove them [2].

Ilmenite is a source of titanium as well as iron. Although titanium minerals are used for producing titanium metal, yet 99% of the tonnage is used for TiO_2 pigment manufacture. Furthermore, ilmenite reserves are far larger than those of rutile; ilmenite supplies about 85% of the world demand and rutile the remaining 15%.

While dolomite, $(Mg,Ca)CO_3$, is used for producing metallic magnesium and to some extent as a refractory, magnetite, $MgCO_3$, is used mainly as a refractory: hence it is classified as a non-metallic mineral. One reason for that is that MgO prepared from magnetite has a higher melting point than $(Mg, Ca)O$ prepared from dolomite hence more suitable as a refractory.

Metallic

Table 4: Gives a list of the most important metallic minerals classified according to chemical composition.

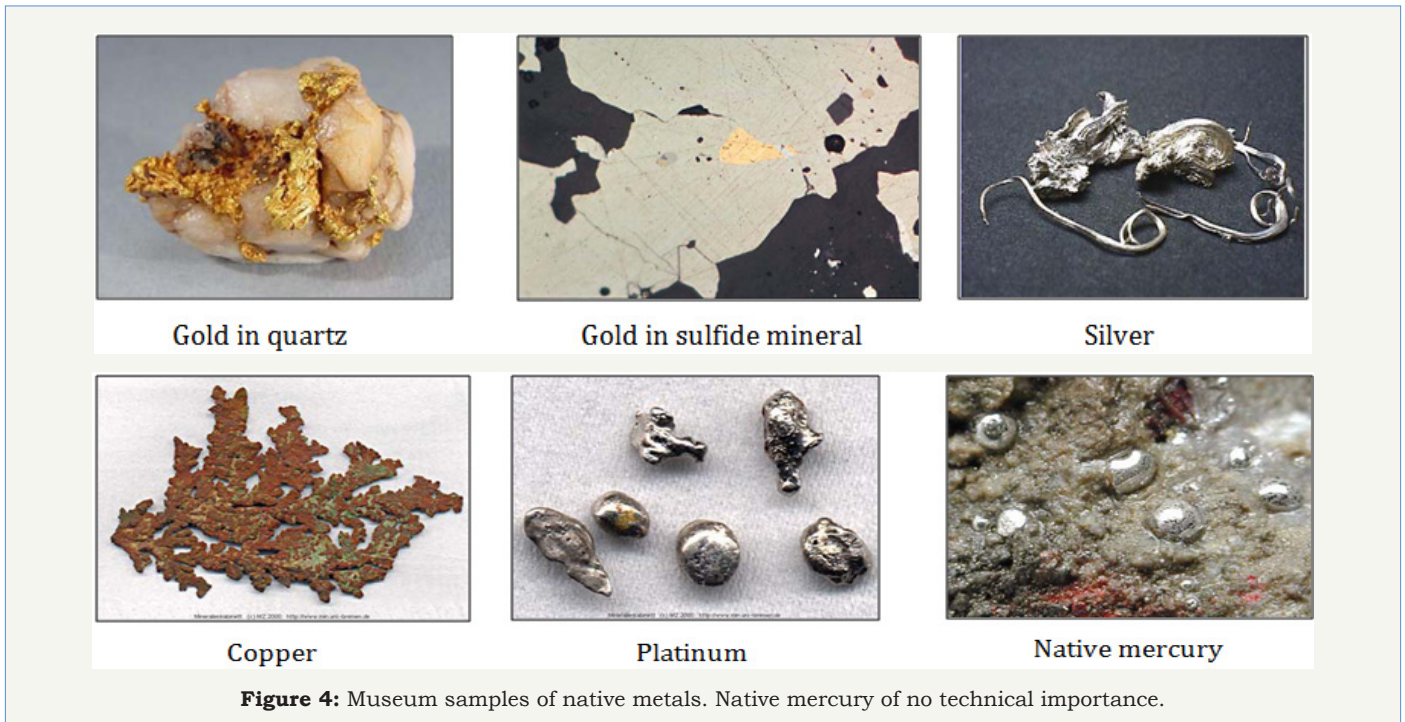
Group	Minerals	Composition
Native Metals	Gold	Au
	Silver	Ag
	Electrum	Au-Ag
	Platinum metals	Pt, Ir, Os, Ru, Rh, Pd
	Copper	Cu
	Awarite	$FeNi_2$
	Josephinite	$FeNi_3$
	Native mercury	Hg



Oxides, Hydroxides and Carbonates	Aluminium	Gibbsite	$\text{Al}(\text{OH})_3$	Anhydrous	Beryllium	Beryl	$3\text{BeO}\cdot\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3\cdot 6\text{SiO}_2$	
		Böhmite	AlOOH		Lithium	Spodumene	$\text{Li}_2\text{O}\cdot\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3\cdot 4\text{SiO}_2$	
		Diaspore	AlOOH		Zirconium	Zircon	ZrSiO_4	
	Copper	Cuprite	Cu_2O		Hydrated	Cesium	Pollucite	$2\text{Cs}_2\text{O}\cdot 2\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3\cdot 4\text{SiO}_2\cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$
		Tenorite	CuO			Copper	Chrysocolla	$\text{Cu}_3(\text{OH})_2\cdot \text{Si}_4\text{O}_{10}\cdot n\text{H}_2\text{O}$
		Malachite	$\text{CuCO}_3\cdot \text{Cu}(\text{OH})_2$			Nickel	Garnierite	$(\text{Ni,Mg})_3(\text{OH})_4\cdot \text{Si}_2\text{O}_5\cdot n\text{H}_2\text{O}$
		Azurite	$2\text{CuCO}_3\cdot \text{Cu}(\text{OH})_2$		Sulfides	Antimony	Stibnite	Sb_2S_3
	Iron	Magnetite	Fe_3O_4			Arsenic	Realgar	As_4S_4
		Hematite	Fe_2O_3				Orpiment	As_2S_3
		Ilmenite	$\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\cdot n\text{H}_2\text{O}$	Arsenopyrite			FeAsS	
		Goethite	FeOOH	Cobalt		Linnæite	Co_3S_4	
			FeCO_3			Copper	Chalcocite	Cu_2S
	Magnesium	Dolomite	$(\text{Ca,Mg})\text{CO}_3$	Covellite			CuS	
		Manganese	Pyrolusite	MnO_2			Digenite	Cu_9S_5
	Manganite		$\text{Mn}_2\text{O}_3\cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$	Bornite			Cu_5FeS_4	
	Hausmannite		Mn_3O_4	Chalcopyrite			CuFeS_2	
	Rare earths	Bastnasite	LnFCO_3 (Ln=lanthanide)	Cubanite			CuFe_2S_3	
	Tin	Cassiterite	SnO_2	Enargite			Cu_3AsS_4	
	Titanium	Rutile	TiO_2	Iron		Pyrite	FeS_2	
	Uranium	Pitchblende	U_3O_8			Marcasite	FeS_2	
		Uraninite	UO_2			Pyrrhotite	FeS	
	Zinc	Zincite	ZnO	Lead	Galena	PbS		
		Hydrozincite	$\text{ZnCO}_3\cdot 2\text{Zn}(\text{OH})_2$	Mercury	Cinnabar	HgS		
Smithsonite		ZnCO_3	Molybdenum	Molybdenite	MoS_2			
Complex Oxides	Chromium	Chromite	$\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3\cdot \text{FeO}$	Nickel	Pentlandite	$(\text{Fe,Ni})\text{S}$		
		Niobium	Columbite	$\text{Nb}_2\text{O}_5\cdot (\text{Fe,Mn})\text{O}$	Silver	Argentite	Ag_2S	
	Pyrochlore		$\text{Nb}_2\text{O}_5\cdot (\text{Ca,Ba})\text{O}\cdot \text{NaF}$	Zinc	Sphalerite	ZnS		
	Tantalum	Tantalite	$\text{Ta}_2\text{O}_5\cdot (\text{Fe,Mn})\text{O}$	Phosphate	Rare earths	Monazite	LnPO_4	
	Titanium	Ilmenite	$\text{TiO}_2\cdot \text{FeO}$		Xenotime	LnPO_4		
		Scheelite	$\text{WO}_3\cdot \text{CaO}$	Sulphate	Lead	Anglesite	PbSO_4	
	Tungsten	Wolframite	$\text{WO}_3\cdot \text{FeO}$		Aluminium	Alunite	$\text{KAl}_3(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})_6$	
		Silicates			Telluride	Gold	Calaverite	AuTe_2
				Arsenide	Cobalt	Smaltite	CoAs_2	

Table 4 Classification of the most important metallic minerals according to chemical composition of no technical importance Ln stands for lanthanide.

Native metals

**Table 5:** Analysis of telluric and meteoric iron.

	Telluric %	Meteoric %
Nickel	0.5-4	5-20
Cobalt	0.1-0.4	0.5-0.7
Carbon	0.2-4.5	0.03-0.10
Basalt	5-10	nil

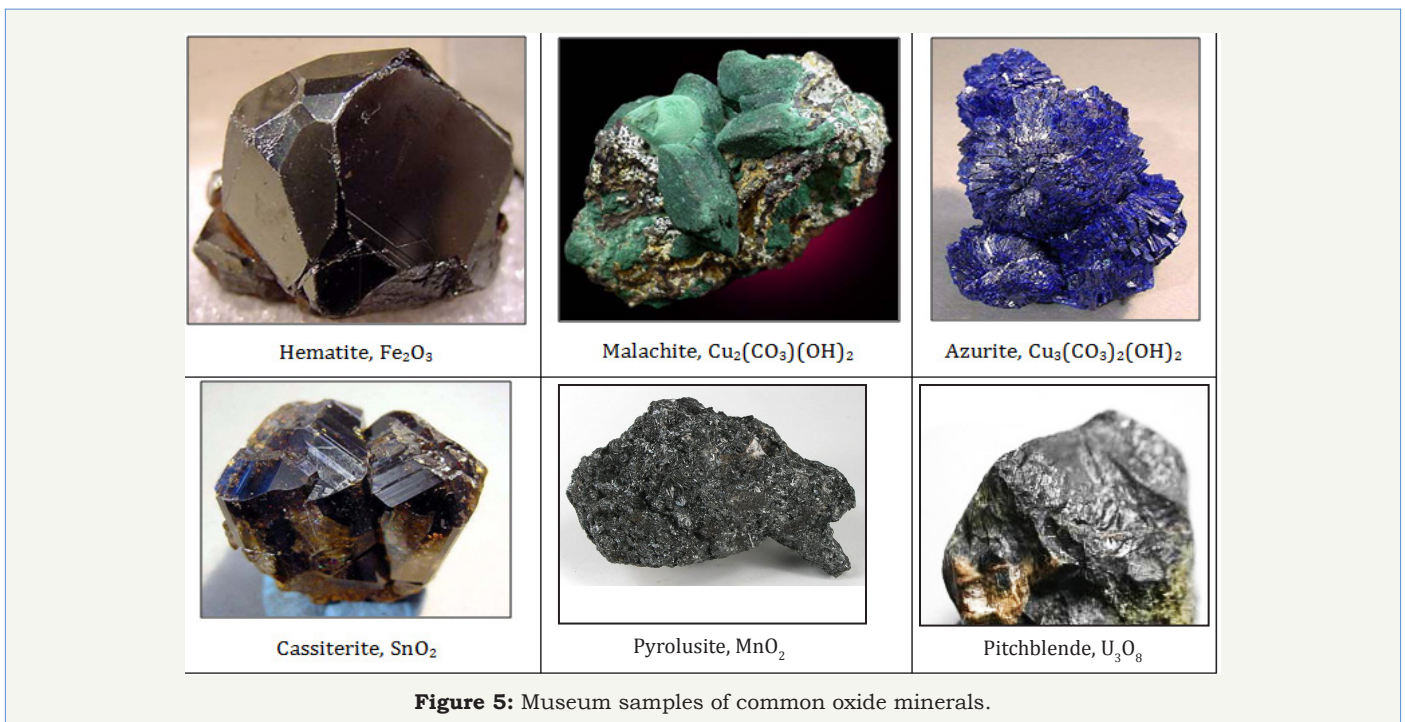


Figure 4 shows museum samples of native metals. Iron also occurs in a rare form of large boulders 20 to 80 tonnes, which may be mistaken for a meteorite, but because of its different analysis Table 5 absence of Widmanstätten structure characteristic of meteoric iron when a piece is polished, etched, and examined by the optical microscope, it is known as telluric iron, i.e., terrestrial iron.

The major occurrence of telluric iron is in association with the basalts of Western Greenland. Large boulders are on exhibit at the Natural History Museums in Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Helsinki. Telluric iron is found also as small millimetre-sized pea-shaped grains disseminated in the basalt, characterized of their low

Table 6: Formation of hydrated silicates.

$3KAlSi_3O_8 + 4H_2O + 2CO_2 \rightarrow Al_4(Si_4O_{10})(OH)_8 + 2K_2CO_3 + 8SiO_2$ <p style="text-align: center;"><small>orthoclase</small> <small>kaolinite</small></p>
$4MgSiO_3 + H_2O + CO_2 \rightarrow Mg_3(Si_4O_{10})(OH)_2 + MgCO_3$ <p style="text-align: center;"><small>enstatite</small> <small>talc</small> <small>magnesite</small></p>
$4Mg_2SiO_4 + 6H_2O \rightarrow Mg_6(Si_4O_{10})(OH)_8 + 2Mg(OH)_2$ <p style="text-align: center;"><small>forsterite</small> <small>serpentine</small> <small>brucite</small></p>
$4Mg_2SiO_4 + 4H_2O + 2CO_2 \rightarrow Mg_6(Si_4O_{10})(OH)_8 + 2MgCO_3$ <p style="text-align: center;"><small>forsterite</small> <small>serpentine</small> <small>magnesite</small></p>
$3KAlSi_3O_8 + H_2O + CO_2 \rightarrow KAl_2(AlSi_3O_{10})(OH)_2 + K_2CO_3 + 6SiO_2$ <p style="text-align: center;"><small>orthoclase</small> <small>muscovite</small></p>

Silicates: These may be anhydrous and hydrated silicates Table 6. The first group comprise minerals of beryllium, lithium, and zirconium, while the second group comprise those of caesium, copper, and nickel.

carbon content, usually less than 0.7%. These were extracted from the basalt by the natives by crushing and then cold-hammering the collected metallic particles into coin-sized flakes to insert them into grooves in bone and use them as knives [3].

Oxides, hydroxides, and carbonates

These comprise the important minerals of aluminium, iron, magnesium, manganese, rare earths, tin, titanium, and uranium; those of copper and zinc are of minor importance. Figure 5 shows some common oxide minerals. Complex oxides comprise minerals of chromium, niobium, tantalum, titanium, and tungsten.

Sulphides: These comprise the most important minerals of antimony, arsenic, cobalt, copper, lead, mercury, molybdenum, nickel, silver, and zinc. Figure 6 shows some common sulphide minerals.



Others: Phosphates are mainly the rare earths in the form of monazite sand. Sulphates of lead, gold telluride, and cobalt arsenide -all are of minor importance.

Non-metallic and industrial

According to their abundance, industrial minerals can be classified into three main groups: Rare: These occur in small quantities, in limited areas, used in small quantities, and command a high price. For example, diamonds, sheet mica, graphite, corundum, precious stones, and the semi-precious stones. Widely available: These occur in large quantities in few geologic environments, are used in appreciable amounts, and command a moderate price. For example asbestos, coal, phosphate, gypsum, kaolin, potash, salt, sulphur, talc, trine, barite, borates, feldspar, fluorite, magnetite, and diatomite.

Abundant: These are abundant in all geologic environments, used in large amounts, and are relatively cheap. For example, clay, limestone, sand, gravel, and stones. Strictly speaking, some of the members of these groups are not minerals but ores having a geological name. For example, phosphate rock is neither a rock nor a mineral; it is a geological name for a certain type of formation containing phosphate minerals associated with gangue minerals such as calcite, iron oxides, clays, etc. The major phosphate mineral of economic value in this type of deposit is apatite, which is principally calcium phosphate. Similarly, clay is a geological name for a large variety of hydrated aluminium silicate minerals, of which kaolinite is one. Table 7 gives an alphabetical list of these minerals and their chemical composition. Industrial minerals can also be classified according to their use as shown in Table 8.

Table 7: Chemical composition of important industrial minerals.

Mineral	Composition		Remarks
Apatite	Calcium phosphate	$\text{Ca}_{10}(\text{PO}_4)_6\text{X}_2$	
[X is F, Cl, or (OH).]	Main mineral in phosphate rock		
Asbestos	Hydrated magnesium silicate	$\text{Mg}_6(\text{Si}_4\text{O}_{12})(\text{OH})_3$	In form of long fibres
Barite	Barium sulphate	BaSO_4	Filler for pigments
Betonies	A clay mineral	$(\text{Al},\text{Mg})_8(\text{Si}_4\text{O}_{10})_3(\text{OH})_{10} \cdot 12\text{H}_2\text{O}$	Agglomeration additive
Borax	Sodium borate	$\text{Na}_2\text{B}_4\text{O}_7 \cdot 10\text{H}_2\text{O}$	
Clays	Hydrated aluminium silicates		Used in paper making
Cryolite	Sodium aluminium fluoride	Na_3AlF_6	Low melting point
Diamond -industrial	Crystalline carbon	C	The hardest mineral
Diatomite	Hydrated silica		Marine fossils, large surface area
Feldspar	A mineral group	K, Al silicates	
Fluorspar	Calcium fluoride	CaF_2	Main source of fluorine
Garnet	A group of silicates that crystallize in the cubic system		Abrasives, gemstones
Graphite	Carbon (crystalline)	C	
Gypsum	Calcium sulphate	$\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$	
Kaolinite	A clay mineral	$\text{Al}_2(\text{Si}_4\text{O}_{10})(\text{OH})_2$	
Limestone	Calcium carbonate	CaCO_3	
Magnetite	Magnesium carbonate	MgCO_3	
Marble	Calcium carbonate	CaCO_3 crystalline	
Mica		K, Al silicates	
Nepheline syenite	Sodium aluminum silicate		
Potash	Potassium chloride and carbonate	KCl, K_2CO_3	Fertilizer
Pumice	Silicate		Porous, light, volcanic rock, large surface area
Quartz	Silica	SiO_2	
Salt	Sodium chloride	NaCl	
Sand and gravel	Silica	SiO_2	
Sulfur	Sulfur	S	
Talc	Hydrated magnesium silicate	$\text{Mg}_3(\text{Si}_4\text{O}_{10})(\text{OH})_2$	Also known as soapstone
Trona	Sodium carbonate	$\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3 \cdot \text{NaHCO}_3 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$	
Vermiculite	Hydrated silicates		Expands and swells on heating
Zeolite	Hydrated alkali alumino silicates	$\text{Na}_x(\text{AlO}_2)_x(\text{SiO}_2)_y \cdot n\text{H}_2\text{O}$	Ion exchanger

Table 8: Classification of industrial minerals according to their use.

Industry	Minerals Used	Remarks
Abrasive	Corundum	
	Sandstone	
	Diamonds (industrial)	
Building	Sand, gravel	
	Limestone	
	Gypsum	
Ceramics & Glass	Clay	
	Feldspar	
Chemical	Clay	Cement
	Sulfur	Sulphuric acid
	Salt	Alkali, chlorine
	Trona	Sodium carbonate
	Gypsum	Cement
	Borax	
	Fluorite	Hydrogen fluoride and fluorine
	Zeolite	Water treatment
	Diatomite	Adsorbent
Fertilizer	Phosphate rock	
	Potash	
	Nitrates	Chile is the main supplier
Fuels	Coal	Used to make coke
	Lignite	
	Peat	
	Natural gas	
	Petroleum	Distilled into many fractions
	Tar sands	Petroleum
Insulation	Asbestos	
	Mica	
Jewellery	Diamonds (gem)	
	Amethyst	
	Aqua marine	
Metallurgy (flux)	Quartz	
	Limestone	
Pigment	Iron oxides	Yellow, red, black
Pigment Filler	Clay	
	Barite	
Refractories	Clay	
	Magnetite	
	Chromite	

Metals from the Sea

Magnesium is the only metal produced today from sea water. Sea water contains 0.13% magnesium from which magnesium hydroxide is precipitated and magnesium metal is produced. Dead Sea on the other hand contains a higher percentage of magnesium.

Summary

Metals used in daily life are produced by treatment of ores

which contain minerals of these metals. Magnesium is the only metals obtained from sea water.

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