

TELLURIUM

(Data in metric tons of tellurium content unless otherwise noted)

Domestic Production and Use: In the United States, one firm produced commercial-grade tellurium at its refinery complex in Texas, mainly from copper anode slimes but also from lead refinery skimmings, both of domestic origin. Primary and intermediate producers further refined domestic and imported commercial-grade metal and tellurium dioxide, producing tellurium and tellurium compounds in high-purity form for specialty applications.

Tellurium's major use is as an alloying additive in steel to improve machining characteristics. It is also used as a minor additive in copper alloys to improve machinability without reducing conductivity; in lead alloys to improve resistance to vibration and fatigue; in cast iron to help control the depth of chill; and in malleable iron as a carbide stabilizer. It is used in the chemical industry as a vulcanizing agent and accelerator in the processing of rubber, and as a component of catalysts for synthetic fiber production. Tellurium was increasingly used in the production of cadmium-tellurium-based solar cells. Production of bismuth-telluride thermoelectric cooling devices decreased owing to the reduced manufacturing of automobiles containing seat-cooling systems. Other uses include those in photoreceptor and thermoelectric electronic devices, other thermal cooling devices, as an ingredient in blasting caps, and as a pigment to produce various colors in glass and ceramics.

Salient Statistics—United States:	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009^e</u>
Production, refinery	W	W	W	W	W
Imports for consumption, unwrought, waste and scrap	42	31	44	102	60
Exports	51	4	15	50	5
Consumption, apparent	W	W	W	W	W
Price, dollars per kilogram, 99.95% minimum ¹	96	89	82	211	145
Stocks, producer, refined, yearend	W	W	W	W	W
Net import reliance ² as a percentage of apparent consumption	W	W	W	W	W

Recycling: There is little or no scrap from which to extract secondary tellurium because the uses of tellurium are nearly all dissipative in nature. Currently, none is recovered in the United States, but a very small amount is recovered from scrapped selenium-tellurium photoreceptors employed in older plain paper copiers in Europe.

Import Sources (2005-08): China, 43%; Belgium, 24%; Canada, 18%; Philippines, 6%; and other, 9%.

Tariff: Item	Number	Normal Trade Relations
Tellurium	2804.50.0020	<u>12-31-09</u> Free.

Depletion Allowance: 14% (Domestic and foreign).

Government Stockpile: None.

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Events, Trends, and Issues: In 2009, estimated domestic tellurium production remained the same as in 2008. Though detailed information on the world tellurium market was not available, world tellurium consumption was estimated to have decreased slightly in 2009. The price of tellurium decreased in 2009 because the economic downturn reduced demand for thermoelectronic devices and slowed the demand for solar cells. However, there was still an increase in demand for high-purity tellurium for cadmium telluride solar cells. The majority of Japanese production of tellurium was used in the Japanese steel industry to replace lead in steel products.

World Refinery Production and Reserves:

	Refinery production		Reserves ³
	2008	2009 ^e	
United States	W	W	3,000
Canada	19	20	700
Japan	40	40	NA
Peru	30	30	2,300
Other countries ⁴	NA	NA	16,000
World total (rounded)	NA	NA	22,000

World Resources: The figures shown for reserves include only tellurium contained in economic copper deposits. These estimates assume that less than one-half of the tellurium contained in unrefined copper anodes is actually recovered. With increased concern for supply of tellurium, companies are investigating other potential resources, such as gold telluride and lead-zinc ores with higher concentrations of tellurium, which are not included in estimated world resources.

More than 90% of tellurium is produced from anode slimes collected from electrolytic copper refining, and the remainder is derived from skimmings at lead refineries and from flue dusts and gases generated during the smelting of bismuth, copper, and lead ores. In copper production, tellurium is recovered only from the electrolytic refining of smelted copper. Growth in the global use of the leaching solvent extraction-electrowinning processes for copper extraction has limited the growth of tellurium supply.

Substitutes: Several materials can replace tellurium in most of its uses, but usually with losses in production efficiency or product characteristics. Bismuth, calcium, lead, phosphorus, selenium, and sulfur can be used in place of tellurium in many free-machining steels. Several of the chemical process reactions catalyzed by tellurium can be carried out with other catalysts or by means of noncatalyzed processes. In rubber compounding, sulfur and/or selenium can act as vulcanization agents in place of tellurium. The selenides of the refractory metals can function as high-temperature, high-vacuum lubricants in place of tellurides. The selenides and sulfides of niobium and tantalum can serve as electrically conducting solid lubricants in place of tellurides of those metals.

The selenium-tellurium photoreceptors used in some xerographic copiers and laser printers have been replaced by organic photoreceptors in newer machines. Amorphous silicon and copper indium diselenide are the two principal competitors to cadmium telluride in photovoltaic power cells.

^eEstimated. NA Not available. W Withheld to avoid disclosing company proprietary data.

¹Average price published by Mining Journal for United Kingdom lump and powder, 99.95% tellurium.

²Defined as imports – exports + adjustments for Government and industry stock changes.

³Estimates include tellurium contained in copper resources only. [See Appendix C for definitions](#). Reserve base estimates were discontinued in 2009; see [Introduction](#).

⁴In addition to the countries listed, Australia, Belgium, China, Germany, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, and Russia produce refined tellurium, but output is not reported, and available information is inadequate for formulation of reliable production estimates.