CESIUM

(Data in metric tons of cesium oxide unless otherwise noted)

Domestic Production and Use: In 2020, no cesium was mined domestically, and the United States was 100% import reliant for cesium minerals. Pollucite, mainly found in association with lithium-rich, lepidolite-bearing or petalite-bearing zoned granite pegmatites, is the principal cesium ore mineral. Cesium minerals are used as feedstocks to produce a variety of cesium compounds and cesium metal. The primary application for cesium, by gross weight, is in cesium formate brines used for high-pressure, high-temperature well drilling for oil and gas production and exploration. With the exception of cesium formate, cesium is used in relatively small-scale applications, using only a few grams for most applications. Owing to the lack of global availability of cesium, many applications have used mineral substitutes and the use in any particular application may no longer be viable.

Cesium metal is used in the production of cesium compounds and potentially in photoelectric cells. Cesium bromide is used in infrared detectors, optics, photoelectric cells, scintillation counters, and spectrophotometers. Cesium carbonate is used in the alkylation of organic compounds and in energy conversion devices, such as fuel cells, magneto-hydrodynamic generators, and polymer solar cells. Cesium chloride is used in analytical chemistry applications as a reagent, in high-temperature solders, as an intermediate in cesium metal production, in isopycnic centrifugation, as a radioisotope in nuclear medicine, as an insect repellent in agricultural applications, and in specialty glasses. Cesium hydroxide is used as an electrolyte in alkaline storage batteries. Cesium iodide is used in fluoroscopy equipment—Fourier-transform infrared spectrometers—as the input phosphor of x-ray image intensifier tubes, and in scintillators. Cesium nitrate is used as a colorant and oxidizer in the pyrotechnic industry, in petroleum cracking, in scintillation counters, and in x-ray phosphors. Cesium sulfates are soluble in water and are thought to be used primarily in water treatment, fuel cells, and to improve optical quality for scientific instruments.

Cesium isotopes, which are obtained as a byproduct in nuclear fission or formed from other isotopes, such as barium-131, are used in electronic, medical, metallurgical, and research applications. Cesium isotopes are used as an atomic resonance frequency standard in atomic clocks, playing a vital role in aircraft guidance systems, global positioning satellites, and internet and cellular telephone transmissions. Cesium clocks monitor the cycles of microwave radiation emitted by cesium's electrons and use these cycles as a time reference. Owing to the high accuracy of the cesium atomic clock, the international definition of 1 second is based on the cesium atom. The U.S. civilian time and frequency standard is based on a cesium fountain clock at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Boulder, CO. The U.S. military frequency standard, the United States Naval Observatory timescale, is based on 48 weighted atomic clocks, including 25 cesium fountain clocks.

A company in Richland, WA, produced a range of cesium-131 medical products for treatment of various cancers. Cesium-137 may be used in industrial gauges, in mining and geophysical instruments, and for sterilization of food, sewage, and surgical equipment. Because of the danger posed by the radiological properties of cesium-137, efforts to find substitutes in its applications continued.

Salient Statistics—United States: Consumption, import, and export data for cesium have not been available since the late 1980s. Because cesium metal is not traded in commercial quantities, a market price is unavailable. Only a few thousand kilograms of cesium chemicals are thought to be consumed in the United States every year. The United States was 100% import reliant for its cesium needs.

In 2020, one company offered 1-gram ampoules of 99.8% (metal basis) cesium for $65.20, a 3.5% increase from $63.00 in 2019, and 99.98% (metal basis) cesium for $84.70, a 4.4% increase from $81.10 in 2019.

In 2020, the prices for 50 grams of 99.9% (metal basis) cesium acetate, cesium bromide, cesium carbonate, cesium chloride, and cesium iodide were $120.00, $72.90, $104.40, $107.20, and $121.20, respectively, with increases ranging from 1.4% to 3.6% from prices in 2019. The price for a cesium-plasma standard solution (10,000 micrograms per milliliter) was $77.80 for 50 milliliters and $119.00 for 100 milliliters, and the price for 25 grams of cesium formate, 98% (metal basis), was $41.40.

Recycling: Cesium formate brines are typically rented by oil and gas exploration clients. After completion of the well, the used cesium formate brine is returned and reprocessed for subsequent drilling operations. Cesium formate brines are recycled, recovering nearly 85% of the brines for recycling to be reprocessed for further use.

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Import Sources (2016–19): No reliable data have been available to determine the source of cesium ore imported by the United States since 1988. Prior to 2016, Canada was thought to be the primary supplier of cesium ore.

Tariff: Item	Number	Normal Trade Relations 12–31–20
Alkali metals, other	2805.19.9000	5.5% ad val.
Chlorides, other	2827.39.9000	3.7% ad val.
Bromides, other	2827.59.5100	3.6% ad val.
Iodides, other	2827.60.5100	4.2% ad val.
Sulfates, other	2833.29.5100	3.7% ad val.
Nitrates, other	2834.29.5100	3.5% ad val.
Carbonates, other	2836.99.5000	3.7% ad val.
Cesium-137, other	2844.40.0021	Free

Depletion Allowance: 14% (domestic and foreign).

Government Stockpile: None.

Events, Trends, and Issues: Domestic cesium occurrences will likely remain uneconomic unless market conditions change. No known human health issues are associated with naturally occurring cesium, and its use has minimal environmental impact. Manufactured radioactive isotopes of cesium have been known to cause adverse health effects. Certain cesium compounds may be toxic if consumed. Food that has been irradiated using the radioisotope cesium-137 has been found to be safe by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

During 2020, no primary cesium mine production was reported globally. Mine production of cesium from all countries, excluding China, ceased within the past two decades. Production in Namibia ceased in the early 2000s, followed by the Tanco Mine in Canada shutting down and later being sold after a mine collapse in 2015. The Bikita Mine in Zimbabwe was depleted of pollucite ore reserves in 2018, and the Sinclair Mine in Australia completed the mining and shipments of all economically recoverable pollucite ore in 2019.

A company completed an updated mineral resource estimate for the Karibib project in Namibia, reporting 8.9 million metric tons of measured and indicated resources containing 0.23% rubidium and 302 parts per million cesium. Located in the Karibib Pegmatite Belt, lithium would be the primary product, with cesium, potassium, and rubidium as potential byproducts.

World Mine Production and Reserves:[1] There were no official sources for cesium production data in 2020. Cesium reserves are, therefore, estimated based on the occurrence of pollucite, a primary lithium-cesium-rubidium mineral. Most pollucite contains 5% to 32% cesium oxide. No reliable data are available to determine reserves for specific countries; however, Australia, Canada, China, Namibia, and Zimbabwe were thought to have reserves totaling less than 200,000 tons.

World Resources:[1] Cesium is associated with lithium-bearing pegmatites worldwide, and cesium resources have been identified in Australia, Canada, Namibia, the United States, and Zimbabwe. In the United States, pollucite occurs in pegmatites in Alaska, Maine, and South Dakota. Lower concentrations occur in brines in Chile and China and in geothermal systems in Germany, India, and Tibet. China was thought to have cesium-rich deposits of geyserite, lepidolite, and pollucite, with concentrations highest in Yichun, Jiangxi Province, although no resource, reserve, or production estimates were available.

Substitutes: Cesium and rubidium can be used interchangeably in many applications because they have similar physical properties and atomic radii. Cesium, however, is more electropositive than rubidium, making it a preferred material for some applications. However, rubidium is mined from similar deposits, in relatively smaller quantities, as a byproduct of cesium production in pegmatites and as a byproduct of lithium production from lepidolite (hard-rock) mining and processing, making it no more readily available than cesium.

[1]See Appendix C for resource and reserve definitions and information concerning data sources.