

# THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF FRENCH GUIANA

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Because French Guiana is a French Overseas Department, the mining laws and regulations of France prevail in the country. Although the main mine output was gold, the value of production amounted to about 4% of the total gross domestic product of almost \$800 million in 1995. Primary gold occurs in the well-known Precambrian shield area shared by French Guiana with Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela, but more than 90% of the gold produced in 1995 came from placer operations. Recently, however, exploration activity began to probe the greenstone belts of the Precambrian shield, which in Canada and elsewhere to be the most mineralized parts of the old shield rocks.

The Bureau de Recherches Géologique et Minières (BRGM) of France completed the mineral inventory of the "North Guiana Trough." Given the significance of the gold potential in the Guiana Shield, the French Ministry of Industry organized a gathering in June 1995 and presented BRGM's latest results of the mineral inventory of the country, including five recently discovered and/or studied gold prospects in northern French Guiana.

Gold had been mined at a number of placer sites in the interior since 1853. Columbite and tantalite also were produced from alluvial deposits. Sand was dredged from the major rivers in the western region of the country, primarily the Mahury and the Maroni. Stone was quarried at Cayenne and to the southeast of Kourou. (*See table 1.*) "Guyanor Ressources S.A. (Guyanor)," a French corporation wholly owned by Golden Star Resources Ltd. (GSRL) of Canada, was issued an "Autorisation Personnelle Minière" (Personalized Mining Authorization) to hold exploration permits, mining licenses, and mining concessions in the country. Guyanor and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of French Guiana issued a "Declaration of Principle" to facilitate Guyanor's activities in the country, benefiting both interests.

According to GSRL, Guyanor acquired the mineral rights and exploration permits for the Yaou project about 210 kilometers (km) southwest of Cayenne, near Maripasoula. The Dorlin project, about 180 km southeast of Cayenne and 47 km east of Yaou, consisted of six exploration permits, where there is thought to be an excellent potential for the discovery of base metals and gold. Guyanor granted to "Asarco Guyane Francaise S.A.R.L.(ASARCO)," of the

United States, an option to acquire a 50% joint venture in the Saint-Elie mining concession, 120 km west of Cayenne. ASARCO is required to spend up to \$10 million on the property during 1994-99 to explore and evaluate the property, including a feasibility study. Saint-Elie's exploration plans included line cutting, topographical surveying, geologic mapping, geochemical soil sampling, and airborne magnetic and radiometric surveys. There are two additional important gold prospects, the Espérance, in the extreme western part of French Guiana, 100 km south of Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, and the Regina East, 80 km south-southeast of Cayenne.

France dominated French Guiana's trade, accounting for more than 50% of total imports and exports. Most of the gold produced was exported to France; however, some gold was mined and smuggled out of the country by the Brazilian "garimpeiros" (small-scale independent miners) along the southeastern border. Sand and stone were consumed by the local construction industry. The country depended on imports for its other mineral requirements, especially cement and fuels, which were shipped through the port at Cayenne.

Interest in gold mining was expected to grow further as increasing numbers of companies and investors from Australia, Canada, France, South Africa, and the United States focused on gold opportunities in French Guiana as well as in adjacent Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela.

## Major Sources of Information

Direction Regional de l'Industrie, de la Recherche et l'Environnement  
B.P. 7001  
97307 Cayenne, French Guiana

## Major Publications

BRGM, Chronique de la RECHERCHE MINIERE, No. 518, Orléans Cedex 2, 1995.  
Gédim (Paris, France): Réalités Industrielles, Annales de Mines, monthly.  
LAMI, The South American Investment and Mining Guide. French Guiana Update-011-March 1994.

TABLE 1  
FRENCH GUIANA: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES *e/ 1/*

Commodity		1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Clays	metric tons	6,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Columbite and tantalite	kilograms	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100
Gold, mine output, Au content	do.	1,417 <i>2/</i>	2,140 <i>2/</i>	2,500	2,500	2,500
Sand	thousand tons	1,500	1,000	1,000	1,500	1,500
Stone, crushed	do.	1,500	1,400	1,400	1,500	1,500

*e/* Estimated.

*1/* Includes data available through Apr. 1996.

*2/* Reported figure.