

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF

URUGUAY

By Pablo Velasco

The economy of Uruguay is strongly based on its natural resources of rich, arable, and agricultural land. Beef, leather products, rice and wool represent over 45% of exports, with mineral production taking a minor role. The mineral industry of Uruguay was largely dominated by cement manufacture and the extraction of construction materials, dimension stone, ornamental agate, and amethyst. The materials mined include basalt, dolomite, feldspar, gypsum, limestone, marl, quartz, sand and talc. In addition, amongst Uruguay's best known mineral products are its colored granites. Of special interest are the black granites (micro gabbros), which are valued for their brightness and polishing durability. The most recent and most significant development has been the commissioning of San

Gregorio, the only active gold mine in the country. The San Gregorio gold mine is owned by Rea Gold Corp., a Canadian-based mining company with properties in South America and North America. Rea's wholly owned subsidiary, Minera San Gregorio S.A., operates the mine, 450 kilometers north of Montevideo.

Most of the trade is with Argentina and Brazil, although almost 20% of exports went to the European Union in 1997. A similar picture is evident in imports, with Argentina, Brazil, and the European Union contributing 61% of the total. For more extensive coverage of the mineral industry of Uruguay, see the 1996 Minerals Yearbook, Volume III, International Review of Latin America and Canada.

TABLE 1
URUGUAY: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	1993 e/	1994 e/	1995 e/	1996	1997
Aluminum, secondary	42	50	45	45 e/	45 e/
Barite	15	15	15	15 e/	40
Bentonite	--	--	--	58	60
Cement, hydraulic	500,000	700,000 2/	600,000 r/	685,000 r/	770,000 e/
Clays, unspecified	150,000	150,000	150,000	40,796 r/	59,400
Coke, gashouse	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000 e/	6,000 e/
Corundum	45	50	45	-- r/	--
Feldspar	3,000	3,000	3,000	23,306 r/	12,579
Gemstones, semiprecious:					
Agate	100	100	100	154 r/	74
Amethyst	80	100	90	67 r/	49
Gold kilograms	300	300	900	1,000 r/	2,000 e/
Gypsum	145,000	145,000	145,000	130,175 r/	183,383
Iron and steel:					
Iron ore	5,000	5,000	5,000	845 r/	5,527
Metal:					
Ferroalloys, electric-furnace ferrosilicon crust	250	250	200	200 e/	200 e/
Steel, crude	35,933 2/	36,000	40,000 2/	40,000 e/	40,000 e/
Semimanufactures	38,535 r/ 2/	36,000	37,000 2/	37,000 e/	37,000 e/
Lime	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000 e/	12,000 e/
Petroleum refinery products:					
Liquefied petroleum gas thousand 42-gallon barrels	218 r/ 2/	284 r/	350 r/ 2/	375 e/	400 e/
Gasoline do.	596 r/ 2/	1,386 r/	2,175 r/ 2/	2,200 e/	2,250 e/
Jet fuel do.	100 r/ 2/	50 r/	-- r/ 2/	-- e/	-- e/
Kerosene do.	126 r/ 2/	269 r/	411 r/ 2/	450 e/	460 e/
Distillate fuel oil do.	729 r/ 2/	1,889 r/	3,048 r/ 2/	3,050 e/	3,100 e/
Lubricants do.	-- r/ 2/	-- r/	-- r/ 2/	-- e/	-- e/
Residual fuel oil do.	1,081 r/ 2/	2,259 r/	3,437 r/ 2/	3,440 e/	3,450 e/
Unspecified do.	225 r/ 2/	230 r/	234 r/ 2/	235 e/	240 e/
Refinery fuel and losses do.	-- r/ 2/	-- r/	-- r/ 2/	-- e/	-- e/
Total do.	3,075 r/ 2/	6,365 r/	9,655 r/ 2/	9,750 e/	9,900 e/
Sand and gravel:					
Sand, common thousand metric tons	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,775 r/	1,768
Gravel do.	500	500	500	17,700 r/	33,908
Stone:					
Flagstone	--	--	--	3,795	4,502
Granite:					
Dimension	10,000	10,000	10,000	7,552 r/	13,489
Crushed and broken, alum schist	8,000	10,000	10,000	425,585 r/	511,626
Dolomite	19,000	20,000	20,000	21,930 r/	21,847
Limestone	750,000	750,000	750,000	789,205 r/	1,118,031
Marble:					
Onyx, in blocks and broken	--	--	--	39	123
Travertine, in blocks and broken	--	--	--	10	11
Other, unspecified, in blocks and broken	--	--	--	134	141
Marl	7,000	10,000	10,000	23,909 r/	44,775
Quartz	300	500	500	23 r/	943
Other, including ballast thousand metric tons	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,104 r/	1,109
Sulfur, elemental, byproduct	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000 e/	2,000 e/
Talc, soapstone, pyrophyllite	1,500	1,500	1,000	898 r/	1,133
Tuff, tufa	3,500	3,500	3,500	975,929 r/	205,279

e/ Estimated. r/ Revised.

1/ Includes data available through April 30, 1998.

2/ Reported figure.