Recommendations for the Ethical Production of Rare Earth Elements

Producers Group

Prepared in Advance of the Summit

Main Concerns of the Producers Group:

- Mining for rare earth elements could be more sustainable and could include effective systems for responsible waste management, but these practices are often costly. Remediating (cleaning up) pollution created by older practices is also expensive. Current market prices for rare earth metals do not generate enough money to pay for these actions.
- Illegal (black market) producers charge lower prices than legal producers who pay taxes and meet local and national environmental standards. The illegal practices undermine legal sales. Some manufacturers do not know (or do not care) that they are buying unauthorized rare earth metals.
- There is currently no financial incentive to “scale up” alternative production methods. While researchers have developed cleaner ways to mine and separate rare earths, the cost of these methods cannot compete with the much lower cost of the long-established production methods currently used in China.

Recommendations Based on Producers Group Concerns:

- The Sustainability Seal should be available only to producers that follow all local laws and can show that they have not used illegally mined ore.
- Certification for newly mined and processed metals should be possible, and this should also apply to metals produced through recycling.
- Activist groups and consumer organizations should assist in marketing and promoting the certified metals to help ensure that there is value in joining the certification process.
- The certification should accept that different wages prevail in different countries and acknowledge that people in some countries may be paid less for doing the same work as people in other countries.
- The main goal of the certification should be reducing local air and water pollution.