

Paul Mickey

ENGL 1013

November 30th, 2017

Conflict Minerals

Imagine getting a new shiny electronic device and the average person may not know what is inside that device or where the raw materials come from. gold, tin, tungsten, and Tantalum are minerals found in electronic components (Intel Corp.). These minerals mostly come from overseas because the labor to mine is cheap and other continents have better minerals. One country that this comes from is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (also known as East Congo). Innocent people in this country are forced to mine so war lords can sell off these minerals to help fund the war effort there. Personally, I did not know about this until almost two years ago when I was watching a technology presentation and this topic was brought up and after I did some research it turned out to be a major problem. Today we will look the into the info about this issue, a trader's experience, what was done law wise to combat it, what non-profits do as a third-party, the travel warning the US has on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, things to do there, what e-waste does, the opposition, and the future. Personally, this is a bad thing and it will take a long time to fix completely.

First, let's consider some info about this issue. In the book "Conflict Minerals: Responsible Sourcing Issues and Factors Impacting SEC Rule," the author talks about how there are armed groups in the East Congo that violate human rights every day while profiting on it. These materials are mined to be melted down then put in our new shinny devices. The CTA (Consumer Technology Association) is projecting in a press release from July 2017, "Consumer enthusiasm for both emerging technology and resilient mature categories is exceeding

expectations – driving the U.S. consumer technology industry to an estimated 3.2 percent revenue growth in 2017, earning \$321 billion in retail revenues...” This means that the components are having to come somewhere and its not just from recycling.

Now, here is some insight about a mineral trader that works in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This 2013 Wall Street Journal article by Nicholas Bariyo talks about how Justin Basimuka a mineral trader pays rebels \$60 a day to keep him safe while walking to mines. Then on the way back he walks alone having to pay rebels not to hurt him. He did say, “Sometimes I can earn a double profit if the checkpoints are not many.” This isn’t good a person having to be afraid for their life every day just to provide for their family. This mining also happens for other things like, “...cars, airplanes, lighting, and jewelry” (Intel Corp.). These minerals help with other things that are essential and non-essential to our everyday life.

Then, The US needed to put laws into effect to help with this problem of conflict minerals. Senator Brownback of Kansas introed the Congo Conflict Minerals Act of 2009 but that died in the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs (Congress.gov). Then in 2010 Section 1502 of the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act was passed making companies report that they are sourcing from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the SEC, so consumers know where the materials come from (Global Witness). Then in 2014 Intel the big desktop CPU manufacturer started the initiative to become Conflict-Free (Kaufman). They then achieved being Conflict-Free in 2016 and Intel made the announcement at a CES (Consumer Electronics Show) Keynote that I watched live online. They achieved that by developing a reasonable supply chain that tracks where the minerals come from. According to Intel’s website, the minerals are tracked by have the bag of minerals that are mined tagged and

then cataloged so these minerals can be traced all the way back to the beginning. By doing this system this allows miners to get paid better and have them be safer.

At this point, there are non-profits in this country that work with manufacturers and the suppliers to help rid this problem. One of these non-profits is the Enough Project. They work with Intel their goals are, “to counter genocide and crimes against humanity.” That quote is straight from their website. They also claim that this minerals help funds the, “world’s deadliest war since World War II, with 5.4 million people dead as a result of war-related causes,” as a result of political problems in East Congo also known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Personally, this is all good but can cause issues if the wrong people get involved while sourcing raw materials.

At this point, if someone were to go onto the U.S. Department of State’s Travel website, and then go to their travel warnings section for the Democratic Republic of the Congo a travel warning will pop up. The State Department released this warning because, “of ongoing instability and sporadic violence in many parts of the country.” In my opinion, I would not just use a third party to track the sourcing, but I also try to find another country to mine from that isn’t full of conflict, so that innocent people don’t have to work there on behalf of these countries and must watch out for their lives. By leaving the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this would show the war-lords and government there that these electronic companies are serious about conflict minerals.

Now, let’s get into something positive for a moment. Things someone could do on a vacation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I am going to keep this simple by just going to Trip Advisor which is a travel review site that is popular among people around the globe because it uses peoples’ experiences to rank attractions. Someone could visit Mount Nyiragongo an

active volcano that has five-star reviews, (TripAdvisor LLC). From the looks of reviews most people go to this volcano as part of a trekking trip. Another thing someone could do is go to Zongo Falls a 65-meter waterfall and from the pictures online it looks breathtaking and there is a four-and-a-half-star review online (TripAdvisor LLC). These were just two things that can be done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with most of the other attractions being national parks, a body of water, or places like churches. While things are bad there are a few interesting things to do here though. With that said though there isn't much to do here because of the things that are going on right now.

Another thing that is important to the electronics industry is e-waste recycling. E-Waste is (also known as electronic waste) is mainly is electronics that are broken, working, old, or just aren't used anymore and are thrown away when they should be recycled. According to ifixit.org around sixty percent of e-waste ends up in the landfill. Even when a device is recycled that forty percent that is recycled thirty percent of the electronic material cannot be recycled. This is important to know because the mining of new minerals is still needed for the growing electronics industry. The amount of mining can be cut down if consumers recycle old electronics when they are done with time. The boxes even say to recycle afterward and this is because of reuse and there are hazardous materials like the battery in the device. Personally, I have been recycling my mobile electronics since 2012 by utilizing trade-in programs, buy-back programs, selling devices on eBay, or just taking them to a local e-waste recycling center.

With all this said, there are some people oppose being "Conflict-Free." According to Forbes there is a rumor that, "President Donald Trump is planning to issue a directive targeting a controversial Dodd-Frank rule that requires companies to disclose whether their products contain "conflict minerals" from a war-torn part of Africa, according to sources familiar with the

administration's thinking.” This is not a good thing because Republicans do not like anything that limits business even if it is the right thing to do. The proposed net neutrality repeal is a perfect example of this belief. The support for these types of things will come from the older generation that have old fashioned beliefs and by people who can be easily persuaded by propaganda spread through the media we have today. With that said though, Donald Trump hasn't tried to repeal the Dodd-Frank rule on conflict minerals at this moment. Only time will tell on what will happen with the opposition.

Finally, let's consider the future of being Conflict-Free. At this point we can all agree that we have a long way to go. Apple even admitted in a 2016 SEC filing that, “Apple does not believe that Third Party Audit program participation alone is sufficient to label products “Conflict-Free.” The above statement holds true because this third-party audit still needs work. Also, the DRC needs to resolve the conflict in their country and in my opinion, fixing political conflict would fix most of the problems associated with conflict minerals and other problems in the DRC.

In conclusion, the mining for minerals by forcing people against their will is not a good thing to do. While most places are conflict-free it is not over, and it will not be for a long time. Personally, this basic info about the issue, a trader's experience, what was done law wise to combat it, what non-profits do as a third-party, the travel warning the US has on the DRC, what things people can do there, what e-waste does, the opposition, and the future of conflict minerals help can help consumers be aware of this issue. That Gold, tin, tungsten, and Tantalum is valuable for new electronic devices, but is it worth someone's life over it? In the future make sure you look for the Conflict-Free symbol anytime you buy a new electronic gadget and if you don't see it do some research before you buy.

Works Cited

- Apple Inc. "Apple Inc. | 2015 Conflict Minerals Report." *SEC.gov*, US Securities and Exchange Commission, 31 Dec. 2015,
www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/320193/000119312516523320/d168894dex101.htm.
- Bariyo, Nicholas. "Inside Congo's Link in the Gold Chain." *Health Management Database*, 15 Apr. 2013,
libcatalog.atu.edu:443/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1326715062?accountid=8364.
- Congress.gov. "S.891 - Congo Conflict Minerals Act of 2009." *Congo Conflict Minerals Act of 2009*, 23 Apr. 2009, www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-bill/891.
- Consumer Technology Association. "2017 Tech Growth Exceeds Expectations: Industry Revenue to Reach Record Levels as Emerging Categories." *Consumer Technology Association*, 19 July 2017, www.cta.tech/News/Press-Releases/2017/July/2017-Tech-Growth-Exceeds-Expectations-Industry-Re.aspx.
- The Enough Project. "Democratic Republic of Congo." *The Enough Project*,
enoughproject.org/conflicts/congo.
- Global Witness. "The Dodd Frank Act's Section 1502 on Conflict Minerals." *Global Witness*, 10 Aug. 2011, www.globalwitness.org/en/archive/dodd-frank-acts-section-1502-conflict-minerals/.
- iFixit. "The Problem with E-Waste - iFixit." *Repair Is Noble - iFixit*, ifixit.org/ewaste.
- Kaufman, Alexander C. "How Intel Eliminated War From Its Supply Chain." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 12 Jan. 2016, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/intel-conflict-free-minerals_us_569520e5e4b05b3245da6ea7.

Oboth, Carly. "Why It's a Good Thing That Apple Isn't Declaring Its Products Conflict Free."

Global Witness, 11 Apr. 2016, www.globalwitness.org/en/blog/why-its-good-thing-apple-isnt-declaring-its-products-conflict-free/.

Simmons, Gary L. "Preface." *Conflict Minerals: Responsible Sourcing Issues and Factors*

Impacting SEC Rule, Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2014, pp. vii-vii. *Academic EBook Collection (North America)*,

libcatalog.atu.edu:443/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=940567&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_v.

TripAdvisor LLC. "The Top 10 Things to Do in Democratic Republic of the Congo 2017 - Must

See Attractions in Democratic Republic of the Congo." *TripAdvisor*,

[www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g294186-Activities-](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g294186-Activities-Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo.html)

[Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g294186-Activities-Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo.html).

U.S. Department of State. "Democratic Republic of the Congo Travel Warning." *U.S. Passports*

and International Travel, U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs, 16 Oct.

2017, travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-travel-warning.html.

Worstall, Tim. "Trump's Executive Order To Repeal The Worst Law Of The Year." *Forbes*,

Forbes Magazine, 9 Feb. 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2017/02/09/trumps-xo-to-repeal-the-worst-law-of-the-year-section-1502-of-dodd-frank-on-conflict-minerals/#44abc9df47f5.