

Bentonite Processed Here To Serve Oil Industry

ONE OF Natrona county's newest industries and potentially a very important one is the processing and marketing of the colloidal clay bentonite.

That this clay is simply modified volcanic ash and lava is the opinion generally held by geologists. A more romantic theory is one presented in the much publicized book, "Worlds in Collision." The author of that volume presents the interesting argument that bentonite is cosmic dust rather than a product of volcanic eruptions, it is revealed by W. P. Clark, president of the Benton Clay company of Mountain View.

FOUND IN FEW AREAS

According to Mr. Clark, the mineral occurs in only a few areas of the world, a use for the material was found first only about 20 years ago and there are only four major companies and three or four independent companies processing the material for market.

In Wyoming it is found on a shelf of the Black Hills, and in the southern part of the Big Horn foothills. Deposits of commercial value have also been found in portions of the Black Hills region of South Dakota and on an island off the coast of Italy.

He further states that industrial use of the clay was made only two decades ago. Only three uses were known previously, the most important being that of an ingredient in Denver mud, a medicinal item. The phenomenal growth of its usefulness is indicated in the fact that today it is known to have 2,000 uses. Only two years ago a government survey listed only 1,600, Mr. Clark said.

Included in that impressive number are 83 pharmaceuticals, a number of cosmetics, tooth pastes, shaving creams, animal range foods (added to the foods to keep them from deteriorating), water clarification, as a seal for ponds and irrigation ditches. It is also used in foundries, industrial laundries, in the rotary oil drilling industry, in important, large cement projects (it acts as a flowing agent), in the foundations of business buildings to assure dry basements, it stabilizes the float material in the paper making industry and adds to the moisture resistant qualities of paper. The chemical industry uses a great deal of bentonite for various purposes. The entire production of the plant just west of Casper goes to one of

the big oil well drilling supply houses and its use as a lubricant of bits in drilling wells is commonly known in Wyoming. Farmers and ranchers all know of it. The reason it is so valuable in stoppage seepage in dams and irrigation ditches is that it expands from seven to eleven times in volume when wet. One ton of the material will absorb 8,200 barrels of water, as water weighs eight pounds to the gallon this means that 2,000 pounds of bentonite will absorb 3,411,200 pounds of water.

QUALITY VARIES

Qualities of individual deposits vary. Of the 53 characteristic kinds of bentonite analyzed, only two or three have the colloidal quality that makes it commercially valuable, according to Mr. Clark. Material from different deposits will be often suited to different purposes. For instance, Mr. Clark states that bentonite from the Immigrant Gap deposit is "foundry" material and that which is best for well drilling comes from the Kaycee deposits.

Proving the truth of the saying that its an ill wind that blows nobody good, Mr. Clark declares that the processing of bentonite is an industry peculiarly fitted for the local area. Because of its colloidal quality it doesn't blow in the wind, and wind will dry this clay a great deal faster than the heat of the sun. Drying is the first step, and a very important one, in the various steps of preparation for market.

The Benton clay company is planning enlargement of their plant as material becomes available and construction is again permitted. Production at present amounts to one carload per day. Six men are employed on staggered shifts. Processes of treatment are simple and handled chiefly by automatic machinery, controlled by "electric eyes."

"We have had wonderful cooperation from both the North Western and the Burlington railroads on the matter of freight rates and we ship to all parts of the country except the west coast," Mr. Clark stated.

Other officers in the company are Fred Carr, vice president, Henry Burgess of Sheridan, secretary-treasurer, and I. Kreiner, field manager.

Dry-Land 'Tanker'

The French have come up with a huge 55-ton tank truck which can transport 44,000 gallons of oil at a

53 Kinds with 2000 Uses, Could Bentonite Be Cosmic Dust?

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