



In this Dec. 16 photo, kitty litter products are displayed at a local store in Cheyenne. The market for a peculiar type of clay mined in Wyoming is looking up, thanks to a better outlook for oil and gas drilling and to kitty lites.

## Kitty litter helps bentonite

Oil and gas drilling also boost market for peculiar clay

MEAD GROVES  
Associated Press

CHEYENNE — The market for a peculiar type of clay is looking up thanks to improved prospects for oil and gas drilling and to cat owners who use the stuff to soak up their pets' business.

Over 90 percent of all bentonite mined in the U.S. and almost all worldwide comes from beds of ancient volcanic ash in Wyoming. Some call bentonite the mineral of 1,000 uses: It clarifies wine and other alcoholic beverages, forms an impervious liner to keep landfills from leaking, removes ink during paper recycling, and goes into a slew of homeopathic remedies.

But two of the biggest uses are in kitty litter and drilling mud. The group pumped down a oil and gas wells during drilling to keep the bit cool and carry cuttings to the surface.

As the oil and gas industry's



MARTIN KIRSTON, THE BILLINGS GAZETTE

A truck hauls a fresh load of bentonite from a mine run by M-I Swain east of Greybull to a nearby processing plant.

fortunes rise and fall, so run with the oilfield services industry suffered while the oil and gas years, bentonite mining companies that do a lot of business

Now, oil and gas prices have recovered somewhat, and petroleum companies look to drill more soon. Bentonite sees likewise show new signs of life, said Rick Magstadt, vice president of manufacturing for bentonite miner Wyo-Ben Inc.

"I'm not going to heck it by saying that I think it's going to be a lot better, but we expect a better year than we did last year," Magstadt said.

Bentonite assists drilling because of a property called thixotropy, which causes drilling mud to liquefy in the friction of drilling and solidify when the other steps.

Cat litter has helped the industry ride out the oil and gas downturn, said Wyoming Mining Association Executive Director Travis Bell.

"The pet litter industry has been very steady," Bell said. "That's a remarkable thing that I don't think people realize. We're kind of like the pet litter capital of the world."

Drilling mud accounts for the

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## Kitty Litter Helps Wyo-Ben Survive Downturn

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