



# Decarbonising UK Concrete and Cement

## Accelerating the net zero journey

# About UK Concrete

UK Concrete is part of the Mineral Products Association (MPA), the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, dimension stone, lime, mortar and silica sand industries, and has been set up to represent the UK's concrete industry.

The concrete and cement sector is a key part of a combined mineral products industry, which contributes around £16 billion to the UK's GDP and directly employs 81,000 people, supporting a further 3.5 million jobs.

[www.ThisisUKConcrete.co.uk](http://www.ThisisUKConcrete.co.uk)

Front cover image:

Miriam Joyce, Graduate Trainee Manager at Hanson UK's Ribblesdale cement plant in Lancashire oversees a trial to use a net zero fuel in the cement kiln as part of a world first demonstration using hydrogen technology.

# Foreword

Delivering net zero will require bold leadership from governments and industry around the world. Following the UN COP26 Summit there is an excellent opportunity for UK Government to put in place new domestic measures to support energy intensive manufacturing industries, which can help to accelerate decarbonisation and create UK net zero jobs. Concrete is an essential material for both our economy and our way of life, and its production remains critical for maintaining the resilience of the UK's national supply chain.

The UK concrete and cement industry is committed to working in close collaboration with Government to build a shared understanding and pathway to net zero. Policy, financial and infrastructure enablers must be coordinated to support the sector's decarbonisation and to manage a transition. This document sets out the UK concrete and cement industry's policy recommendations to Government to help support the pathway to net zero.

## A roadmap to beyond net zero

Buildings account for 42% of UK greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As essential construction materials, decarbonising concrete and cement is one of the key opportunities for reaching net zero and beyond and helping to reduce emissions from the built environment.

The UK concrete and cement industry has set out a clear a roadmap\* to deliver and go beyond net zero by 2050, removing more carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere than it emits each year.

## Early action

As a responsible industry, the concrete and cement sector has already taken considerable early action.

UK concrete and cement has reduced absolute CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 53% since 1990 – decarbonising faster than the UK economy as a whole.

We are under no illusion about the scale of the challenge facing our industry and the action required. Achieving net zero will require the wholesale decarbonisation of all aspects of concrete and cement production, supply and use. We cannot deliver net zero alone and we will need concerted support from Government, and significant change across the wider construction, energy and transportation sectors.

## Retaining jobs and economic value

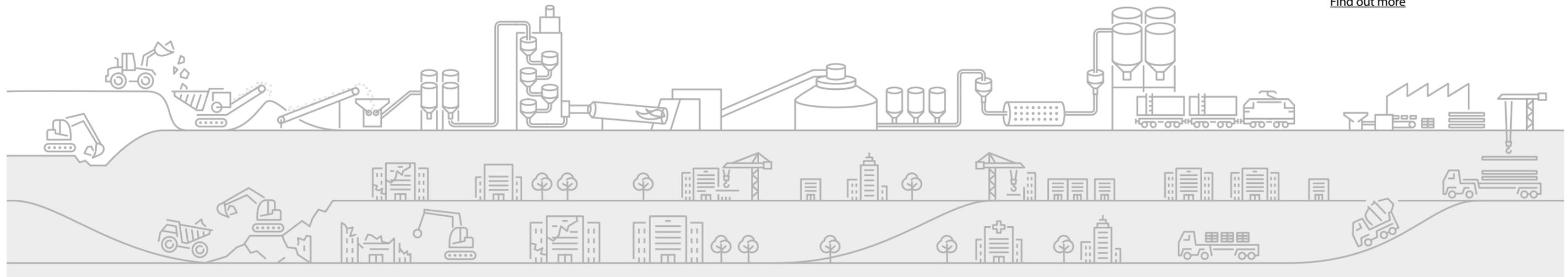
Our aim is to retain jobs and economic value in the UK whilst ensuring that the UK takes responsibility for the emissions it produces. It is therefore vital that we ensure a 'just transition' to net zero – one that maintains the competitiveness of UK manufacturing and jobs, is fair to consumers and society, and doesn't place additional environmental burden on other countries.

## Policy and financial enablers

Government support has already driven the decarbonisation of the power sector. A similar level of policy and financial support will be needed for trade-exposed, energy-intensive industries, including cement and concrete to decarbonise at the same scale and rate. Government is supporting the trial of new technologies such as hydrogen for cement production. Future and ongoing support would enable the industry to invest in the multiple technologies outlined in our roadmap, all of which are required to reach net zero by 2050.

The task of deeper decarbonisation gets harder and more complex as we progress. The scale of investment increases and with it the exposure to international competition, requiring Government intervention to safeguard UK jobs and UK-generated economic value added. New domestic policies are needed to create and retain green manufacturing jobs in our industry.

\*UK Concrete and Cement Roadmap to Beyond Net Zero  
[Find out more](#)



Summary – our requests to Government:

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>New domestic measures must eliminate the threat of carbon leakage and protect UK manufacturing jobs</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>The UK must adopt new carbon accounting measures to take full responsibility for its emissions</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Government sector-specific funding for UK energy intensive industries is needed to accelerate net zero innovation</b></p>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Whole life carbon assessment should be incorporated into Government policy to cut carbon and deliver improved social outcomes</b></p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>Government must use its procurement powers to drive adoption of new low-carbon technologies to help build back better</b></p>	

# 1 New domestic measures must eliminate the threat of carbon leakage and protect UK manufacturing jobs

Consuming imported goods that offshore CO<sub>2</sub> and move responsibility for emissions abroad is called carbon leakage. It is a very real threat to both the global environment and the UK economy. It is often preceded by the loss of inward investment and UK manufacturing jobs.

**Protecting UK jobs, delivering security of supply**

With unequal carbon pricing across borders and the cumulative impact of high domestic electricity prices, carbon leakage is both a present and future threat. If not tackled it could see even more cement production move outside the UK, resulting in further loss of manufacturing jobs and increased uncertainty on security of supply.

The precursor to carbon leakage is always investment leakage. This manifests itself in the running down of UK assets before manufacturing is offshored and jobs are lost. Investment leakage is often invisible and not always considered when looking for evidence of carbon leakage. It often incorrectly leads to the conclusion that carbon leakage isn't happening.

**Safeguarding UK production**

Cement imports currently represent 23% of the UK market. Without a package of transitional domestic measures there will be more imports of cement, further erosion of the UK market and continued loss of UK Gross Value Added (GVA). Together this will undermine the conditions necessary for investment in net zero delivery in the sector.

As acknowledged in the Government's Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy, climate diplomacy and negotiation with other countries regarding carbon pricing is important to tackling the threat of offshoring. However, climate diplomacy is only one facet of how to protect against carbon leakage in the UK. This alone will not deliver the carbon leakage protection that is needed now to halt the erosion of domestic production.

**Our recommendations**

- Ensuring that the free allocation of CO<sub>2</sub> in the emissions trading system remains effective against carbon and investment leakage until a more effective mechanism can be implemented
- Narrowing the cost disparity with other sectors and imports by addressing the indirect CO<sub>2</sub> costs passed on in electricity prices to UK cement producers
- Ultimately, fully balancing unequal international carbon prices by introducing border adjustments on imports



## 2 The UK must adopt new carbon accounting measures to take full responsibility for its emissions

The UK must provide an honest account of its progress to net zero by taking responsibility for emissions from both materials and goods produced in the UK, as well as those production emissions from foreign imports.

There is currently a significant shortcoming in UK net zero legislation because emissions targets can be met, or partially met, by buying more imported goods in place of domestic production. This simply moves emission responsibility to other countries.

### Taking responsibility for import product emissions

For the UK to provide an honest account of its progress to net zero, it should take responsibility for emissions from materials and goods produced in the UK, as well as production emissions from imports consumed. A failure to do this will undermine the UK Government's commitment to tackle climate change and the credibility of domestic action in the fight against climate change.

### Tackling offshoring

The UK is increasingly 'offshoring' its environmental responsibility. The Office for National Statistics has highlighted the divergent trend between the UK's territorial emissions and consumption-based emissions, including the net import of goods.

For concrete and cement imports/net imports currently equates to 2.6 million tonnes of manufactured cement and around 1.85 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> that the UK is not taking environmental responsibility for via national carbon accounting.

### Accounting for carbonation

Carbon accounting also needs to account for the process of carbonation – the ability of concrete to naturally absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere throughout its lifetime, at end of life and in any secondary use. The Sixth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognised concrete carbonation. There is not currently an approved method for calculating the emissions sink associated with the carbonation of concrete in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 2019 Refinement.

The Mineral Products Association is undertaking research to fill this gap. It is currently working on behalf of Government to calculate and measure the carbon dioxide emissions that are naturally absorbed by concrete used in UK buildings and infrastructure. The project will create a methodology which will inform the UK's Greenhouse Gas Inventory and the UK's national and international reporting obligations on climate change.

### Our recommendations

- Set a national net zero goal on consumption emissions, in addition to current targets for territorial emissions, to ensure net zero is not met or partially met by closing UK manufacturing and importing goods instead
- Improve the accuracy of UK emissions reporting by ensuring national greenhouse gas accounting includes the CO<sub>2</sub> permanently captured and stored by the carbonation of concrete

## 3 Government sector-specific funding for UK energy-intensive industries is needed to accelerate net zero innovation

While there is currently Government funding for net zero research and innovation, it is often disparate and difficult for the private sector to access. There is an opportunity to accelerate decarbonisation with sector-specific funding packages.

Of the UK's energy-intensive industries, only the steel sector currently has earmarked sector-specific funding for decarbonisation. There is therefore a need to introduce equivalent funding for other hard-to-abate sectors such as cement production, which should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of decarbonisation.

### Financial support to decarbonise all cement plants

The level of investment needed to deliver a net zero UK concrete and cement industry is significant. There are a range of economic instruments such as new business models that Government could use to support industry.

For example, industrial carbon capture business models using a contracts for difference (CfD) model could be used to reduce the initial gap between cost of decarbonisation and importers' carbon costs to make investments possible. These business models could support sector-specific decarbonisation funding by guaranteeing availability for at least the next decade, to enable businesses to transition to net zero production.

The Government's Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy has recognised the importance of decarbonising dispersed cement plants that are not geographically located in an industrial cluster. Equality of access to transport and storage infrastructure will be key to all sites, whether they are dispersed or operating in a cluster. The aim should be to develop local plans for each key industry to ensure necessary infrastructure is in place to tackle cross-chain risk for carbon capture and storage investment.

Net zero requires significant capital expenditure and a considerable increase in operational spending. The UK Government has, with its financial support packages, assisted in the decarbonisation of the power generation sector. To achieve comparable levels of decarbonisation in other industries, the attention now needs to shift toward energy-intensive production processes.

### Our recommendations

- Government should provide significant financial support to assist energy-intensive industries with transitional support for research, innovation and deployment of low-carbon technologies
- Deliver a robust financial support model for the capital and operational costs of carbon capture, including utilisation and storage, no later than the end of 2021, so that the technology can be developed, deployed and become an investable proposition in the 2030s
- Introduce a 'Beyond Net Zero Cement Support Programme' to finance a commercial scale waste biomass-fuelled carbon capture demonstrator for the UK cement industry
- Support the development of CO<sub>2</sub> utilisation processes and markets for products consuming captured CO<sub>2</sub> to enable emissions removals



# 4 Whole life carbon impact assessment should be incorporated into Government policy to cut carbon and deliver improved social outcomes

The construction industry needs to be encouraged to measure embodied carbon over the whole-life of the building or assets life and assess the carbon impacts of new construction through a whole lifecycle assessment.

Whole-life analysis measures carbon impacts over the lifetime of a building or asset. This includes extraction of raw materials, product miles and construction, through to maintenance, repair, reuse, and recyclability following demolition.

An exclusive focus on upfront embodied carbon fails to consider carbon over an asset's lifecycle. It does not give enough consideration to the relationship between embodied carbon and measures to reduce energy use. A holistic environmental approach is also required, to consider impacts of improved social outcomes such as fire protection, occupant safety and comfort, resilience to water escape and flooding.

## Measuring whole life, delivering long term impacts

To accurately reflect the carbon impacts of new construction a whole lifecycle analysis is required to understand the embodied, operational and end-of life carbon emissions.

Carbon should not be considered in isolation to climate adaptation, occupant safety, structural performance and circular economy principles such as re-use and recoverability.

Carbon should be measured to recognised international standards, such as EN 15804 and EN 15978.

If embodied carbon is measured this should be measured across the whole of the building, asset or systems.

The transition to a net zero society requires a greater understanding of holistic impacts. The Greater London Authority's London Plan 2021 requires designers and constructors to calculate the whole life carbon in materials emitted during the construction, maintenance and demolition of their projects. London's leadership on this issue is major step forward and should provide a template for Government policy moving forward.

### Our recommendations

- Require that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from buildings and infrastructure are assessed over their whole life and introduce this principle into public procurement policy
- Adopt the whole life carbon measures outlined in the London Plan into national planning policy
- Recognise that climate adaptation and resilience is an important part of sustainability and carbon reduction
- Ensure that embodied and operational CO<sub>2</sub> are never separated to ensure that comparisons are made on a whole-life basis

# 5 Government must use its procurement powers to drive adoption of new low-carbon technologies to help build back better

The Government is the largest construction client in the UK. It is therefore well placed to accelerate the adoption of new, low-carbon technologies to help the construction industry build back better.

Significant collaborative effort throughout the supply chain and the wider construction sector is needed to embed more sustainable behaviours. This will enable the technologies to be deployed that form part of the journey to beyond net zero for concrete, buildings and infrastructure, and deliver the climate mitigation and adaptation needed to protect UK society.

## Drive uptake of low-carbon cement and concrete

Lower-carbon cements and concretes are already manufactured and readily available across the UK but there is a need to drive greater industry uptake.

The Government and its agencies have an important opportunity to specify these materials for projects and set an example. By using its buying power, Government can drive the speed of transition and help promote locally produced construction materials and support local economies.

The London 2012 Olympics provided an excellent example of where Government used its procurement power to ensure that responsible sourcing of materials was embedded into construction procurement. There is now scope to embed this same principle to support lower-carbon concrete adoption while supporting the creation and preservation of UK green manufacturing jobs in established UK manufacturing industries.

## Government projects are the catalyst for change

Government procurement also provides an excellent opportunity to share and benchmark carbon performance data. Data on how built assets are delivered, how they are operated and managed, and what energy performance outcomes they create across their whole lifetime is not consistently collected or used effectively to improve performance. Government projects can be the catalyst for how the industry changes the way it collects, processes, manages, analyses and uses data to inform future construction decision making.

### Our recommendations

- Promote the specification and use of locally produced, lower-carbon construction materials across public sector construction projects
- Work with the concrete and cement industry and the supply chain to accelerate the development and use of standards to promote the use of lower-carbon cements and concretes
- Share carbon benchmark data and best practice from exemplar public sector projects
- Ensure procurement maintains focus on climate adaptation, resilience and fire safety of products used across the built environment





## UK concrete is...

- **Essential** for our economy, homes, buildings, infrastructure and quality of life
- **Sustainable**, local and responsibly sourced
- **Protecting people** and properties against fire, flooding and other threats
- **Tackling climate change** and key to a net zero carbon economy
- **Innovating** to meet the future needs of society
- **Enabling great design** that enhances our communities

UK concrete, both ready-mixed and precast, is produced from around

**1,000**  
sites nationwide



**10 cement plants**



Combined mineral products industry contributes around

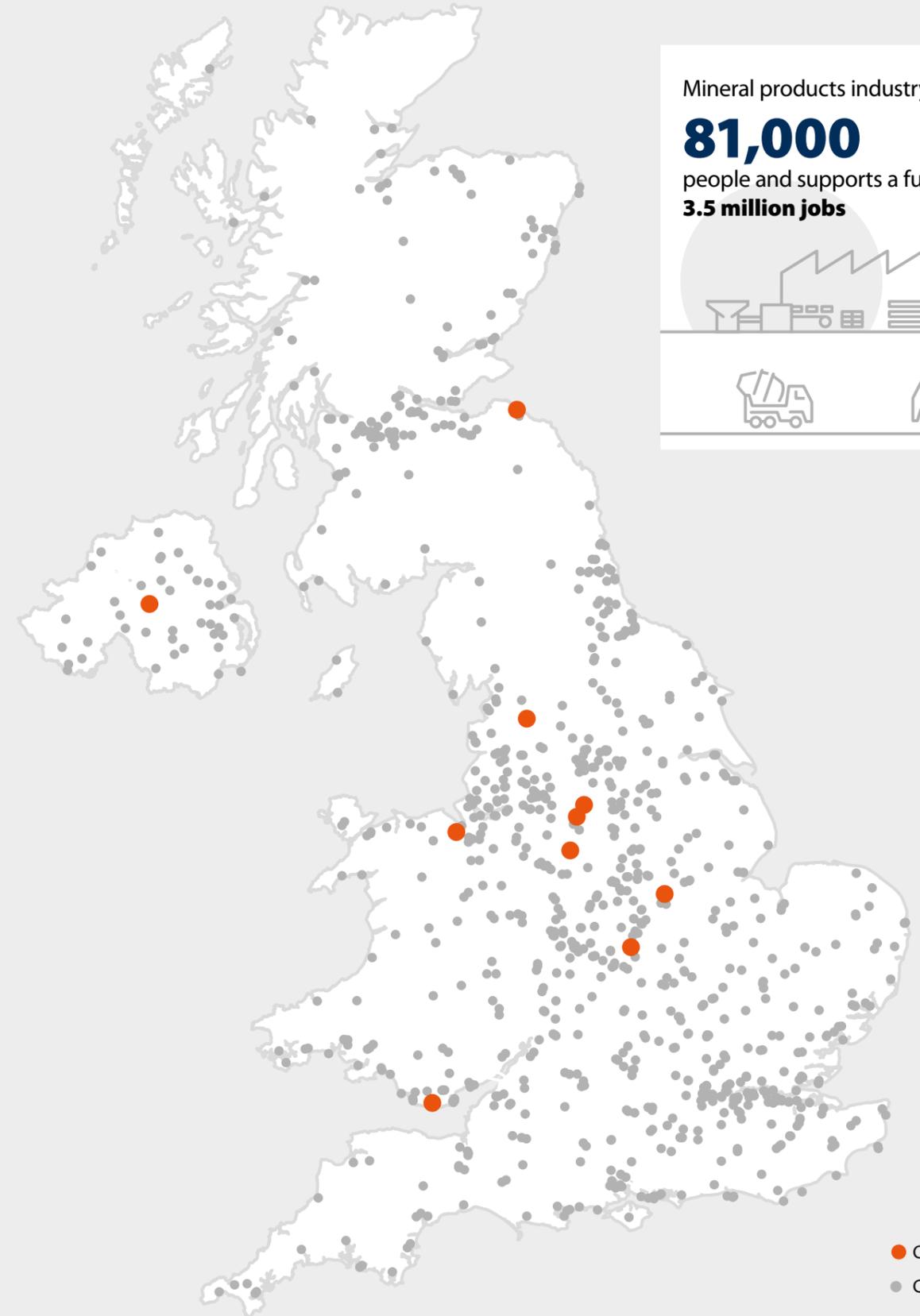
**£16 billion**  
to UK GDP



Mineral products industry employs

**81,000**

people and supports a further  
**3.5 million jobs**



● Cement plants  
● Concrete & mortar plants

# UK concrete is essential, sustainable, protecting people, innovating, helping to tackle climate change and enabling great design



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[www.mineralproducts.org](http://www.mineralproducts.org)

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