

Andalusite

# Imerys to enhance its andalusite footprint

- Imerys' plans for a sustainable supply
- Prices growing due to increasing costs
- Premium andalusite from Guadalupito in Peru

**Antonio Torrisi**

World-leading industrial minerals producer Imerys SA told **IM** it continues to invest in the andalusite market to guarantee a sustainable supply with consistent quality.

Imerys Refractory Minerals (IRM) told **IM** that the company has invested in its Segorong andalusite mine in Limpopo province, South Africa, expanding mineral reserves and coarse size products, as well as engaging in a long term project with local communities.

"We just mothballed our Krugerpost mine to have a more balanced production capacity, whereas at the same time we invested in the Thabazimbi plants to upgrade this asset and to increase both output and quality of our Purusite product," said an IRM spokesperson.

Imerys, the world-leading andalusite producer, also opened a new pit in Glomel, France, to assure sustainability of its Kerphalite products, as well as invested in China to increase the quantity and quality of its Yilong site to better serve local customers.

"China is a key market for us; we will continue to work with local universities, institutions and prescribers and continue to

educate the refractory market on the advantages of using andalusite in refractory formulation," said IRM.

"Andalusite based bricks show good creep behaviour at high temperatures compared to bauxite-based bricks, as well as having good thermal shock resistance compared to fireclay bricks or bricks based on fused or sintered alumina," Walter Hammer, head of purchasing raw materials at Austria-based refractory firm RHI-AG, told **IM**.

**Demand growing globally**

Imerys told **IM** that andalusite is increasingly used in Asia, with demand growing in China owing to its healthy economy and a more intensive use of the product in its refractory industry.

"India is also a key market for the future as the refractory market should grow strongly in the medium term as the quality and standards are expected to increase," IRM said.

"In the last three years, andalusite demand grew in Asia thanks to the more intensive use of andalusite into refractory production. We observed also a positive trend in the US following the good health of the economy whereas in Europe the economy is suffering from a slowdown."

IRM also added that the refractory projects works (contrary to consumables) are negatively impacted by the lack of capital investment into the aluminium, cement, or glass industries, which resulted in projects being postponed or even canceled.

Imerys told **IM** that prices for andalusite can vary regionally according to differences in iron content, particle sizes and freight conditions.

Costs increases during the last few years (including electricity

and labour) have forced IRM to increase prices, it added.

**Latin Resources**

In Peru, ASX-listed Latin Resources Ltd announced in May that it had successfully recovered premium andalusite from a 10%-grade mineral sand concentrate, containing 23% andalusite, at its Guadalupito project.

Latin said it has recovered almost 80% of its andalusite, grading at 60% alumina (Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) and 0.2% iron oxide (Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>).

In July, the company announced the appointment of funding advisers Northcott Capital to help identify project funding alternatives to take Guadalupito through feasibility and into production.

Rob Bartelink, South African specialist andalusite consultant, told **IM** that the high alumina and low iron contents of Guadalupito's andalusite make it a very suitable product for refractories and other markets.

"Currently, commercially available andalusites have Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> contents above 0.6%. The Guadalupito deposit has produced material with a much lower iron content than other andalusites currently available," Bartelink said.

He added that the alkali earths content of the deposit appears to be lower, or at least the same as, commercially available products from South Africa.

Bartelink explained to **IM** that refractory materials, particularly in applications of molten metal contact, are required to have very low permeability.

According to Bartelink, the greater purity of Guadalupito's andalusite, compared with commercially available products, is of particular interest to the refractory industry.

"This [purity] will produce an advantage in the coarse fractions, and even more in the matrix of fine fractions of refractories, which have long been identified as the most common method of failure due to their reactivity and/or attack by corrosive slags or gases," Bartelink told **IM**.

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