



University of Belgrade,
Technical Faculty in Bor

Chamber of Commerce
and Industry of Serbia

XVI International Mineral Processing & Recycling Conference



Proceedings



Editors:
Zoran ŠTIRBANOVIĆ
Milan TRUMIĆ

28-30 May 2025
Belgrade, Serbia





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLENARY LECTURES	1
Pablo R. Brito-Parada	3
A MINERAL'S JOURNEY – UNRAVELLING FLOTATION PHENOMENA THROUGH PARTICLE TRACKING	
Srečko Stopic, Duško Kostić, Mitar Perušić, Richard Schneider, Bernd Friedrich	9
RECOVERY OF VALUABLE METALS FROM BAUXITE RESIDUE (BR) USING DECARBONIZING TECHNOLOGIES	
Corby G. Anderson	19
HOW THE RARE EARTHS BECAME THE LANTHANIDES AGAIN	
Junbeum Kim	21
EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND EMERGING WASTES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	
INVITED LECTURES	23
Aleksandar Nikoloski, Pritam Singh, Tina Chanda Phiri	25
AN OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL COPPER SMELTING SLAG PRODUCTION AND REPROCESSING APPROACHES	
Maria Sinche-Gonzalez	37
EDUCATION IN MINERAL PROCESSING AND FILLING THE GAP OF TALENTED MINERAL PROCESSING ENGINEERS	
Predrag Umičević, Ivica Karoglan, Gregor Radišić, Viktor Simončič	44
INNOVATIVE BIODEGRADABLE WASTE TREATMENT AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION FOR RECULTIVATION OF TAILINGS AND SLAG LANDFILLS	
Kerstin Forsberg	50
CRYSTALLIZATION CHALLENGES IN HYDROMETALLURGY	
Belinda McFadzean, Avuyile Wali, Megan Becker, Stefan Geldenhuys	55
CRITICAL MINERALS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN PLATINUM GROUP MINERAL FLOTATION	
Alexandre Chagnes, Pierric Hubert, Safi Jradi	62
INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR METAL RECOVERY FROM LFP-NMC LITHIUM-ION BATTERY BLENDS	
Michal Šyc, Jiří Hykš	66
FROM LINEAR TO CIRCULAR ECONOMY – STORY OF THE BOTTOM ASH	
Przemysław B. Kowalczyk	70
CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS (CRM) RECOVERY FROM NORWEGIAN DEPOSITS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	

SESSION LECTURES	73
Massoud Aghamirian Vu Truong, Kristina Muntu, Jean-Gabriel Fraboulet, Sean Salour, Brian Kawenski Cook INVESTIGATIONS INTO LITHIUM MINERALS PROCESSING	75
Héctor Muñiz Sierra, Michal Šyc, Ayse Asya Arslanturk THE APPLICATION OF PHYSICAL CONCENTRATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE RECYCLING OF NEW WASTE STREAMS	86
METALS YOUNG RESEARCHER AWARD	89
Diego Poblete, Claudio Leiva, Maria Sinche-Gonzales, Claudio Acuña HOLLOW DROP BUBBLES A PROPOSED NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR OPTIMIZED METAL EXTRACTION VALIDATED IN THE LABORATORY	91
Wanjia Zhang, Zhitao Feng, Zhiyong Gao PREDICTION OF COLLECTOR FLOTATION PERFORMANCE BASED ON MACHINE LEARNING AND QUANTUM CHEMISTRY: A CASE OF SULFIDE MINERALS	98
Helir Muñoz, Sophia Korili, Antonio Gil SYNTHESIS OF MOF@ALUMINUM SALINE SLAG COMPOSITES FOR CO ₂ CAPTURE AS A NEW STRATEGY OF VALORIZATION OF SECONDARY ALUMINUM WASTES	106
Jernej Imperl, Mitja Kolar, Vilma Ducman, Gorazd Žibret, Lea Žibret SELECTIVE SEPERATION OF MAGNESIUM FROM SLOVENIAN DOLOMITES	113
Vladan Nedelkovski, Dragana Medić, Aleksandar Cvetković, Sonja Stanković, Žaklina Tasić, Milan Radovanović, Snežana Milić ANODE NANOMATERIAL RECOVERED FROM SPENT BATTERIES FOR PEROXIDE-ASSISTED CRYSTAL VIOLET PHOTOCATALYTIC DEGRADATION	119
Dragana Marilović, Sonja Stanković, Grozdanka Bogdanović EFFECT OF TEMPERATURE ON THE LEACHING COPPER FROM FLOTATION TAILINGS WITH IONIC LIQUID	125
PAPERS	131
Iyiola Olatunji Otunniyi, Oluwayimika Olasunkanmi Oluokun CLEAN GOLD SOLUTION FROM PRINTED CIRCUIT BOARD PHYSICAL PROCESSING DUST BY SELECTIVE COMPLEXATION	133
Ugur Ulusoy Fırat Burat, Guler Bayar, Behrad Mojtahedi, Gulsah Guven CHARACTERIZATION AND COMPARISON OF THE PARTICLE SHAPE OF MICRONIZED GRAPHITE GROUND IN DIFFERENT MILLS USING DIA	142
Aleksander Sokolov, Edvins Letko, Vitalijs Kuzmovs, Ulises Miranda Ordonez ON-LINE XRF ANALYSIS OF ELEMENTS IN MINERALS ON A CONVEYOR BELT	148
Aleksandra Mitrovic, Jelena Vucicevic LABORATORY-SCALE REACTORS EMPLOYING MOVING BED BIOFILM REACTOR (MBBR) TECHNOLOGY: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW	154

Vesna Marjanović, Emina Požega, Miomir Mikić, Milutin Stojadinović INCREASING RECYCLING RATES IN THE FIELD OF CONSTRUCTION AND DEMOLITION WASTE MANAGEMENT BY IMPLEMENTING THE LEGAL ACT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION	160
Radmila Marković, Vesna Marjanović, Aleksandra Ivanović, Milutin Stojadinović CHARACTERISTICS OF COPPER POWDER OBTAINED AT LOWER VALUES OF CATHODE CURRENT DENSITY	166
Messai Ali, Berrekbia Linda, Meramria Ikram, Juan M. Menéndez-Aguado, Begoña Fernández Pérez, Vladimir Nikolić, Milan Trumić, Boustila Amir POTENTIAL OF USING ZINC PROCESSING TAILINGS (ZPT's) IN THE PRODUCTION OF BURNT CLAY BRICKS	171
Aleksandra Božić, Dominik Brkić, Marina Stamenović, Marija Miletić DETERMINATION OF PCB CONCENTRATION IN SOIL	179
Stefan Milanović, Nikola Simić, Lazar Kričak, Milanka Negovanović, Miljan Gomilanović, Nikola Đokić ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT WITH THE GREENHOUSE GASES AND AIR POLLUTANT PREDICTION BY DRILLING AND BLASTING WORKS	184
Dragan Milošević, Jasmina Nešković, Pavle Stjepanović, Svetlana Polavder LANDFILL FOR COMBUSTION PRODUCTS FROM THE KOSTOLAC THERMOELECTRON	190
Fatma Arslan, Gülay Bulut EVALUATION OF MINERAL PROCESSING AND METALLURGICAL PLANTS WASTES	196
Abhishek Gupta, Tom Newman, Frank Hrach BENEFICIATION OF MINERAL ORES USING TRIBO-ELECTROSTATIC SEPARATOR	202
Valentin Alexeyevich Chanturia, Valeriy Valentinovich Morozov, Galina Petrovna Dvoichenkova, Elena Leonidovna Chanturia THE SELECTION OF APPLICATION MODES OF AGENTS MODIFYING DIAMOND SPECTRAL CHARACTERISTICS IN THE PROCESS OF X-RAY LUMINESCENCE SEPARATION	208
Valeriy Valentinovich Morozov, Galina Petrovna Dvoichenkova, Irina Vasilyevna Pestryak, Valentina Anatolyevna Chut-Dy UP-TO-DATE METHODS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF FOAM SEPARATION OF DIAMOND-BEARING KIMBERLITES	214
Plamen Georgiev, Marina Nicolova, Irena Spasova, Mihail Iliev, Ralitsa Ilieva NON-FERROUS METALS BIOLEACHING FROM PYROMETALLURGY COPPER SLAG USING SPENT MEDIUM OF DIFFERENT FUNGAL SPECIES	220
Milica Zdravković, Vesna Grekulović, Edina Huseinović, Robert Vianello, Nada Štrbac, Melita Huremović, Milan Gorgievski UV-VIS IDENTIFICATION OF COPPER COMPLEXES WITH INHIBITOR ORGANIC COMPONENTS IN THE ELECTROLYTE	226

Moloud Nazeri, Maria Sinche-Gonzalez, Emad Abkhoshk DISSOLUTION KINETICS OF LOW-GRADE ZINC SILICATE ORE IN HYDROXIDE SOLUTION	232
Ivana Smičiklas, Mihajlo Jović, Jelena Amidžić, Snežana Dragović EVALUATION OF WASTE MATERIALS FOR CADMIUM REMOVAL: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SORPTION CAPACITY AND STABILITY	238
Tanja Kalinović, Ana Radojević, Jelena Kalinović, Jelena Jordanović, Snežana Šerbula CASE STUDY ON METAL(LOID)S DISTRIBUTION IN LINDEN TREE PARTS, IN AREAS WITH HIGHT ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION	244
Branimir Farkaš, Ana Hrastov, Iva Štefičar POSSIBILITY OF INSTALLATION OF SOLAR POWER PLANTS IN EXPLOITATION SITES	250
Marija Simić, Marija Kovačević, Katarina Stojanović, Branislava Savić Rosić, Dragana Vasić Anićijević, Tanja Brdarić, Danka Aćimović ELECTROCHEMICAL OXIDATION OF BISPHENOL S WITH SnO ₂ -MWCNT ELECTRODES	256
Marija Simić, Marija Kovačević, Katarina Stojanović, Marija Ječmenica Dučić, Dragana Vasić Anićijević, Danka Aćimović, Tanja Brdarić COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ELECTROCHEMICAL DEGRADATION OF RHODAMINE B USING GLASSY CARBON, STAINLESS STEEL, AND NICKEL ELECTRODES	261
Marija Kovačević, Marija Simić, Katarina Stojanović, Danka Aćimović, Sanja Živković, Tanja Brdarić, Dragana Vasić Anićijević PHOTODEGRADATION OF CIPROFLOXACIN WITH COPER-MODIFIED TITANIUM(IV)-OXIDE	267
Francielle Câmara Nogueira, Carlos Alberto Pereira, Leandro Vinícius Alves Gurgel, Stephânia da Consolação Silva Nogueira, Iranildes Daniel Santos PROCESS WATER REUSE IN IRON ORE FLOTATION: REDUCING AMINE CONSUMPTION	273
Jovica Sokolović, Ivana Đolović, Dejan Tanikić, Zoran Štirbanović, Ivana Ilić THE EFFECT OF PARTICLE SIZE ON THE FLOTATION KINETICS OF RAW AND WASTE COAL	279
Zuzana Danková, Alexandra Bekényiová, Zuzana Kollová, Erika Fedorová, Pavel Bačo, Jaroslav Briančin SLOVAK DOLOMITE AS A RAW MATERIAL SOURCE FOR METAL MAGNESIUM PRODUCTION	286
Fatma Arslan, Cüneyt Arslan RECYCLING OF WASTE CELL PHONES	292
Fulya Mennik, Nazlım İlkyaz Dinç, Beril Tanç Kaya, Fırat Burat THE RECYCLING OF PLASTICS AND METALS FROM END-OF-LIFE NMC-TYPE ELECTRIC VEHICLE LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES USING SELECTIVE FROTH FLOTATION	298

Paul Delaney	306
PERFORMANCE OF IRON ALUMINIUM AND COPPER IRON BIMETALLIC PARTICLES IN REMOVAL OF HEAVY METALS AND METALLOIDS	
Samah S. Abdallah, Samah M. El-Sayed, Mohamed A. Abdel-Khalek	313
SELECTIVE BIO-FLOCCULATION OF HEMATITE MINERAL USING BACILLUS SUBTILIS FOR PHOSPHOROUS REMOVAL FROM IRON ORES	
Patrycja S. Bednarek, Nima Razavi, Przemyslaw B. Kowalczyk	320
THE ROLE OF ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING IN MINERAL AND METAL EXTRACTION	
Zeynep Üçerler Çamur, Tülay Türk, Murat Olgaç Kangal	327
INVESTIGATION OF SURFACE PROPERTIES OF PVC FOR SELECTIVE RECOVERY	
Martin Straka	333
ELECTROCHEMISTRY OF INDIUM IN METHYL-TRIOCTYLAMMONIUM BIS(TRIFLUOROMETHYLSULFONYL)IMIDE IONIC LIQUID	
Seyed Hamzeh Amiri, Maria Sinche-Gonzalez	340
GRADE IMPROVEMENT OF IRON ORE CONCENTRATE BY APPLYING PLANT AUDITS, STANDARDIZATION AND PROCESS OPTIMIZATION	
Henrique Dias Gatti Turrer, Josue Mesquita De Souza Junior, Gillian Nikka Omega, Juliette Laine, Marcello Rodrigues Cruz, Nubia Bottosso, Vinicius Seerig	347
ADVANCEMENTS IN MINERAL PROCESSING: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS AT ARCELORMITTAL	
Zuzana Kollová, Pavel Bačo, Zuzana Danková, Zoltán Németh	353
THE POTENTIAL SOURCES OF CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS IN SLOVAKIA	
Amalia Andreas, Titus Nghipulile, Godfrey Dzinomwa	359
SELF-FLOTATION OF GALENA IN A COMPLEX SULPHIDE ORE FROM A COPPER MINE IN NAMIBIA	
Janine Rodrigues Figueiredo, Érica Linhares Reis, Arthur Silva de Oliveira	368
PROCESSING OF FINE LITHIUM MINERAL TAILINGS	
Theodor Steller, Stefan Eisert, Bernd G. Lottermoser	375
EXPLORING ELECTROHYDRAULIC FRAGMENTATION FOR PROCESSING ELECTRIC ARC FURNACE SLAGS	
Yergeshev Akim Ruslanovich, Tokpayev Rustam Rishatovich, Khavaza Tamina Narimanovna, Karmeyeva Marina, Naurzybayev Mikhail Kasymovich, Ignatkina Vladislava Anatolyevna	381
REFRACTORY POLYMETALLIC ORES BY FLOTATION. DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVING METALLURGICAL BALANCE	
Valentine A. Chanturia, Igor Zh. Bunin, Maria Ryazantseva	389
THE USE OF DIELECTRIC BARRIER DISCHARGE TO REGULATE THE TECHNOLOGICAL PROPERTIES OF CHALCOPYRITE AND SPHALERITE	

Luis Verdugo, Barbara Etschmann, Maryam Abdus-Salam, Andrew Hoadley, Jorge Menacho, Joel Brugger MECHANOCHEMICAL LEACHING OF CHALCOPYRITE IN LOW MOISTURE CONDITIONS	395
Miomir Mikić, Milenko Jovanović, Radmilo Rajković, Daniel Kržanović, Sandra Milutinović RECOLTIVATION PROCEDURE OF FLOTATION TAILINGS AT THE LOCATION OF RTH IN BOR	401
Vandana Kumari Jha, Christophe Duwig, Samaneh Teimouri, Kerstin Forsberg METAL RECOVERY FROM SPENT BATTERIES THROUGH ANTISOLVENT CRYSTALLIZATION IN A T-MIXER USING A COUPLED CFD-PBE APPROACH	407
Luka Ceyskens, Nina Miladinović, Giuseppe Granata, Tom Van Gerven MECHANOCHEMICAL ACTIVATION OF ARGON OXYGEN DECARBURIZATION SLAGS FOR IMPROVED MINERAL CARBONATION	413
Miomir Mikić, Vesna Marjanović, Emina Požega, Radmilo Rajković TREATMENT OF ACIDIC MINE WATERS BY THE NEUTRALIZATION PROCESS	416
Julio Valenzuela Elgueta, Silvia Ahualli Yapur, Angel Vicente Delgado Mora INFLUENCE OF CATIONIC SURFACTANTS ON THE ELECTROKINETIC PROPERTIES AND STABILITY OF SILICA-KAOLINITE SUSPENSIONS UNDER COPPER HYDROMETALLURGY CONDITIONS	422
Dragana Medić, Maja Nujkić, Žaklina Tasić, Vladan Nedelkovski, Stefan Đorđievski, Slađana Alagić, Snežana Milić CHARACTERIZATION OF ELECTRODE MATERIALS FROM SPENT BATTERIES IN THE PROCESS OF RECOVERING VALUABLE METALS	429
Stefan Đorđievski, Dragana Adamović, Miloš Đukić, Ana Petrović, Jelena Petrović, Zoran Štirbanović IMPROVEMENT OF BOR RIVER WATER QUALITY THROUGH TREATMENT AND RECIRCULATION OF MINING AND METALLURGICAL WASTEWATER	435
Kristina Pavićević, Danica Jovašević, Maja Rajković, Ivana Jelić, Marija Janković, Marija Šljivić-Ivanović BIOCHAR IN WASTEWATER REMEDIATION: A BRIEF REVIEW OF CHARACTERISTICS AND PREPARATION MATERIALS	441
Semra Kurama, Hüseyin Boğaç Poyraz, Zahide Bayer Öztürk A PROPOSAL FOR ZERO WASTE IN THE IRON AND STEEL INDUSTRY: ZIRCONIA NOZZLE WASTE EVALUATION	449
Boris Borche Fidanchev, Afrodita Zendelska NEW SAG-BALL MILL AND FLOTATION LINE FOR RECONSTRUCTING OF "ZLETOVO" FLOTATION PLANT-PROBISHTIP, NORTH MACEDONIA	457
Nela Vujović, Vesna Alivojvodić, Dragana Radovanović, Marija Štulović, Miroslav Sokić, Filip Kokalj POTENTIAL OF RECYCLING AND REUSE MINING WASTE IN SERBIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS	463

Haldun Kurama DISSOLVED AIR FLOTATION: IS IT REALLY A SUITABLE SOLUTION FOR INDUSTRIAL PURIFICATION PROCESSES?	469
Carmen M. Neculita, Flavia L. Braghiroli VALORIZATION OF RESIDUAL MATERIALS IN THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF CONTAMINATED MINE WATER AND AIR	476
Vladimir Topalović, Ana Vujošević, Anja Antanasković, Veljko Savić, Marija Djošić, Zorica Lopičić, Jelena Nikolić CHEMICAL STABILITY AND FERTILIZER EFFICIENCY OF BIOGLASS AND BIOCHAR ON ROSE PLANTINGS	483
Vladimir Topalović, Veljko Savić, Marija Djošić, Danijela Smiljanić, Snežana Zildžović, Snežana Grujić, Jelena Nikolić THE EFFECT OF FLUXING AGENT CATIONS IN FLY ASH-BASED GLASS ON CHEMICAL STABILITY	490
Aleksandar Cvetković, Marija Petrović Mihajlović, Žaklina Tasić, Milan Radovanović, Ana Simonović, Vladan Nedelkovski INFLUENCE OF ORGANIC COMPOUND STRUCTURE ON BRASS CORROSION INHIBITION EFFICIENCY	497
Aleksandar Cvetković, Vladan Nedelkovski, Dragana Medić, Sonja Stanković, Žaklina Tasić, Milan Radovanović, Snežana Milić WASTE TO RESOURCE TRANSFORMATION: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO RECYCLING CATHODE MATERIALS FROM LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES	503
Gašper Tavčar, Davide Mombelli, Carlo Mapelli, Gianluca Dall'Osto, Dragan Radulović, Ivica Ristović, Mateusz Ciszewski, Jasna Kastivnik, Ana Mladenović, Alenka Mauko Pranjič OPTIMIZING METAL RECOVERY FROM EAF DUST: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH BEYOND THE WAEZ KILN PROCESS	509
Amir Mohammad Bidmeshki, Mahmoud Abdollahy SOLVENT EXTRACTION OF La, Ce, AND Nd ELEMENTS FROM THE NiMH BATTERIES LEACH SOLUTION	515
Igor Zh. Bunin LOW-TEMPERATURE ATMOSPHERIC PLASMA IN THE COMPLEX PROCESSING OF HARD-BENEFICIATION MINERAL RAW MATERIALS	522
Xiaopeng Peng, Lijie Guo, Xingshan Jin THE STUDY ON THE STRESS CHARACTERISTICS OF BACKFILL BARRICADE IN UNDERGROUND METAL MINES BASED ON SIMULATION EXPERIMENTS	529
Sonja Stanković, Vladan Nedelkovski, Milan Radovanović, Stefan Đorđević, Dragana Medić, Snežana Milić SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION OF GRAPHENE OXIDE AND ZINC OXIDE NANOPARTICLES FROM SPENT Zn-C BATTERIES	537

Jasna Kastivnik, Gašper Tavčar, Dragan Radulović ENHANCING EU ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: EXPLORING NEW SOURCES AND BENEFICIATION OF CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS NIOBIUM AND TANTALUM FROM CENTRAL AFRICA	543
Džafer Dautbegović, Mirsada Hasanbašić THE IMPACT OF THE TRANSFER STATION ON THE ORGANIZATION OF MUNICIPAL WASTE COLLECTION	549
Genc Demi, Bukurosh Koci, Islam Nika RECYCLING OF CHROMIUM TAILINGS IN BULQIZA PLANT	556
Mafeni Samuel Ramatsoma, Veruska Govender, Deshenthree Chetty, Olga Bazhko KINETIC AMD PREDICTION FOR A MINE TAILINGS DUMP: A SOUTHERN AFRICAN MINE CASE STUDY	562
Dragan S. Radulović, Jovica Stojanović, Gašper Tavčar, Vladimir Jovanović, Dejan Todorović, Branislav Ivošević, Sonja Miličević CHARACTERIZATION OF AN ORE SAMPLE FROM CONGO BASED ON TANTALUM AND NIOBIUM FOR POSSIBLE FURTHER TECHNOLOGICAL TESTS	568
Dragan S. Radulović, Jovica Stojanović, Grozdanka Bogdanović, Vladimir Jovanović, Dejan Todorović, Branislav Ivošević, Vladimir Simić STUDY OF MINERALOGICAL AND PHYSICOCHEMICAL PROPERTIES OF SAMPLES OF FLOTATION TAILINGS "RUDNIK" MINE	575
Sara Živojinović, Živko Đorović, Miloš Vuleta OPTIMIZATION RECYCLING IN IRON AND STEEL METALLURGY: UTILIZATION OF BY-PRODUCTS FOR EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY	581
Aleksandra Milosavljević, Marijana Pavlov - Kagadejev, Ana Kostov IR CAMERA APPLICATION IN CONTROL OF THE CURRENT STATE OF AN INDUCTION FURNACE IN LABORATORY CONDITIONS	587
Kostović Milena, Bajić Sanja WASTE FOUNDRY SAND REGENERATION	592
Ilhan Bušatlić, Nadira Bušatlić, Nevzet Merdić, Nedžad Haračić, Lejla Mujezinović GEOPOLYMERS BASED ON FLY ASH WITH THE ADDITION OF GRANULATED BLAST FURNACED SLAG	598
Sadaf Samadi-Tavanaa, Saeid Karimi, Mehdi Pourabdoli, Zoran Štirbanović RECYCLING OF PRINTED CIRCUIT BOARDS (PCBS) USING VARIOUS DEEP EUTECTIC SOLVENTS (DESS) AND INSIGHTS FROM DFT SIMULATIONS	605
Kristina Muntu, Jean-Gabriel Fraboulet, Sean Salour, Christine Bonnet, Enkhzul Bayarmagnai, Brian K. Cook, Massoud Aghamirian VARIABILITY IN FLOTATION PERFORMANCE OF LEPIDOLITE SAMPLES FROM THE EMILI DEPOSIT, FRANCE	613

Titus Nghipulile, Theophile Mwaku, Godfrey Dzinomwa, Benjamin Mapani, Jaquiline Tatenda Kurasha REPROCESSING OLD MINE TAILINGS TO RECOVER COPPER AND PRECIOUS METALS USING FROTH FLOTATION	620
Sonja Milićević, Jovica Stojanović, Ivana Jelić, Snežana Zildžović, Vladimir Jovanović, Dejan Todorović ZEOLITE ACID (UN)STABILITY AS MAJOR DISADVANTAGE FOR ITS HUMAN CONSUMPTION	626
Paweł Tomach, Jacek Feliks, Marta Łuczak, Grzegorz Fabijański INVESTIGATION OF ULTRA-FINE GRINDING OF AGGLOMERATED BASALT DUST	632
Francesco Ferella, Svetlana B. Zueva, Ionela P. Birloaga, Valentina Innocenzi, Nicolò M. Ippolito, Francesco Vegliò PRODUCTION OF HIGH-PURITY QUARTZ FOR OPTICAL APPLICATIONS	639
Roshanak Adavodi, Adriana Zuffranieri, Soroush Rahmati, Pietro Romano, Francesco Ferella, Francesco Vegliò SELECTIVE EXTRACTION OF MOLYBDENUM, NICKEL, AND COBALT FROM SECONDARY RESOURCES USING BIFUNCTIONAL IONIC LIQUIDS	646
Predrag Stolić, Zoran Jovanović, Željko Mravik, Marko Jelić, Sonja Jovanović SELECTED ASPECTS OF SENSOR APPLICATION IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTELLIGENT INSTRUMENTATION FOR RECYCLING SYSTEMS	652
Maja Trumić, Katarina Balanović, Tamara Gavrilović PREDICTION OF RESULTS OF FLOTATION PROCESS USING ARTIFICIAL NEURAL NETWORKS	659
Tomasz Suponik, Paweł Friebe, Umut Kar, Dawid Franke, Pengbo Chu FINANCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF ECO-EFFICIENT RECYCLING OF WASTE ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT	665
David Oluwasegun Afolayan, Adamu Hassan Abubakar, Samuel Olumide Ogunmodimu GRAVITY CONCENTRATION OF FINE PARTICLES COMPLEX ORES-CONTAINING BARYTE USING LABORATORY-BUILT MINERAL JIG	674
Olajuyi Seun Isaiah, Afolayan David Oluwasegun, Ogunmodimu Samuel Olumide PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ON NIGERIAN LITHIUM ORES FOR EFFICIENT LITHIUM OXIDE EXTRACTION	681
Anđelija Bogdanović, Hassene Affouri, Ivan Kojić, Ksenija Stojanović ORIGIN, DEPOSITIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND MATURITY OF ORGANIC MATTER IN EOCENE COALS FROM TUNISIA	690
Andriela Dutra Norberto de Oliveira, Luis Gonzaga Santos Sobral, Armando Lucas Cherem da Cunha THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF MINERAL PROCESSING ON THE BIO-OXIDATION OF SULPHIDE MINERALS BEARING GOLD	696

Andriela Dutra Norberto de Oliveira, Luis Gonzaga Santos Sobral, Armando Lucas Cherem da Cunha BIODESULPHURISING HIGH SULPHUR CONTENT TAILINGS FROM COAL MINING IN BRAZIL	702
ABSTRACTS	707
Maria Cristina Vila, Maria Lurdes Dinis, Laura Ferrando-Climent, Nirosham Gajendra, Deniz Avsar, Duygu Yilmaz, Erika Levei, Iulia Török INNOVATIVE PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDIES TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION OF RARE EARTH CONCENTRATES FOR SELF-SUPPLY IN EUROPE	709
Randal Tzeou Hah Fauline, Agnès Grandjean, Antoine Leydier, Emeric Brun, Florian Herbelet, Xavier Heres, Justine Taurines MODELING AND SIMULATION OF SOLID PHASE EXTRACTION FOR LEACHED ORE PURIFICATION	711
Michelle Airah N. Pablo, Joshua P. Pocaan, Jacob Louies Rohi W. Paulo, Piolo N. Gervacio, Arnel B. Beltran, Carla Mae J. Pausta, Aileen H. Orbecido LEACHING OF CALCIUM FROM PHOSPHOGYPSUM FOR CARBON SEQUESTRATION	712
Michael Angelo B. Promentilla A PROBLEMATIQUES APPROACH FOR UNDERSTANDING CIRCULAR ECONOMY INTEGRATION BARRIERS IN THE MINING AND MINERAL PROCESSING SECTOR	713
Joshua Pocaan, Brian Gerald Bueno, Jaica Mae Pagaduan, Aileen Orbecido, Carlito Tabelin, Ana Santos, Anne Jungblut, Vannie Joy Resabal, Renan Ma. Tanhueco, Michael Angelo Promentilla, Arnel Beltran DEVELOPMENT OF LIMESTONE-BASED PASSIVE TREATMENT SYSTEM FOR COPPER-RICH ACID MINE DRAINAGE	714
Mathilde Perrin, Emmanuel Billy BLACKMASS FLOTATION OF END-OF-LIFE BATTERIES: HOW TO DO WITHOUT PRE-TREATMENT?	715

EFFECT OF TEMPERATURE ON THE LEACHING COPPER FROM FLOTATION TAILINGS WITH IONIC LIQUID

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ABSTRACT – Flotation tailings of copper ore contain a high concentration of valuable metals such as copper, gold and silver. Minerals are mainly found in the form of oxides and less in the form of sulfides that have not been separated by flotation concentration. Recovering these valuable resources would reduce the environmental impact and increase the economic benefits. Compared to sulphide ores and minerals, the presence of oxidising agents is generally not required for the leaching of raw materials rich in oxides. This paper presents the results of the study the influence of temperature on the copper leaching degree from flotation tailings by ionic liquid solutions of different concentrations. Based on the results obtained, it was found that increasing the leaching temperature significantly affects the leaching efficiency. After 120 minutes of leaching at 70°C, a copper leaching degree of 99.7% was achieved at lower ionic liquid concentration than at ambient temperature.

Keywords: Leaching, Flotation Tailings, Ionic Liquid, Copper, High Temperature.

INTRODUCTION

Copper is produced mainly from sulfide ores and usually occurs together with iron in a variety of minerals. Flotation tailings is a raw material consisting mainly of oxides and less of sulfides. Considering the fact that natural resources of rich sulphide ores are becoming increasingly depleted, the processing of secondary raw materials is becoming more important [1]. These particular raw materials are known for their low copper content, quick oxidation, an extremely fine particle size and complex copper phase composition [2]. The complexity creates challenges in their extraction, turning them into a difficult resource to process. Due to its composition, flotation waste, when disposed of in nature, contributes to the formation of acid mine drainage (AMD), which can pose a risk to the environment. In recent years, handling complex copper oxide raw materials has become as a significant and challenging issue for researchers in mining and metallurgy. The studies of flotation tailing leaching indicate that these raw materials have many impurities including silicate, iron and calcium which influence the quality of the product [3-5]. The hydrometallurgical method is an eco-friendly option, which includes processes like sulfuric acid leaching and chloride leaching with oxidants or ammonia

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leaching with oxidants. Leaching with acid leaching agents, the impurities, especially iron can easily be dissolved [6].

Sulphuric acid leaching has advantages such as a higher copper extraction rate, lower environmental impact and lower energy requirements.

Newer generation reagents, such as ionic liquids (ILs), are increasingly taking the leading position in the leaching of mineral raw materials. Their application has been reported for mineral leaching, solvent extraction and electrochemical processes, showing that these compounds can play an important role in the recovery and purification of high-value metals from raw materials [7, 8].

Ionic liquid 1-butyl-3-methylimidazolium hydrogen sulfate ([bmim]HSO₄) was used as a leaching agent due to its advantages such as water solubility, low cost, environmentally safe and easy availability. Previous research has reported that [bmim]HSO₄ acts as an acid in the aqueous solutions [9-11].

Hydrogen ions, released from ionic liquid, along with dissolved oxygen, are important for the oxidative leaching of sulfide minerals. Compared with traditional acid solutions, [bmim]HSO₄ and its aqueous solutions showed higher efficiency at higher temperatures, which was attributed to increased oxygen solubility and improved transport of dissolved oxygen, accelerating the oxidation reaction [12].

This paper was focused on copper leaching with different concentration of ionic liquid [bmim]HSO₄ from a low-grade flotation tailing at a high temperature.

EXPERIMENTAL AND METHODS

For the experiments flotation tailings samples with the chemical composition showed in Table 1 were used.

Table 1 Chemical composition of copper flotation

Element	Cu	Cu _{ox}	Fe	Zn	Pb	S	SiO ₂	Fe ₃ O ₄	MgO	CaO	As _{ppm}
%	0.13	0.09	4.22	0.01	0.01	4.70	60.02	0.03	0.48	3.50	13.24

Based on the obtained qualitative mineralogical analysis, the following mineral composition was determined: Pyrite, Covellite, Chalcopyrite, Limonite, Rutile, Silicates, Quartz and Carbonates.

The leaching experiments were performed with an ionic liquid, 1-butyl-3-methylimidazolium hydrogen sulfate solution ([bmim]HSO₄) without oxidising agent at ambient temperature and at 70 °C. A 600 cm³ glass reactor with a magnetic stirrer was used for the experiments. Once the operating conditions were established, 10 g of tailings were added to 200 ml of a solution with a specific concentration. The stirring speed was set to 400 rpm. At predetermined time intervals (5, 10, 15, 30, 60, 90 and 120 minutes), samples of 1 ml were taken and filtered. The concentration of copper and iron in the diluted samples was determined using optical emission spectrometer with inductively coupled plasma (ICP-OES Optima 8300; Perkin Elmer) and a multiparameter photometer Hanna HI 83200. This paper was focused on copper leaching with different concentration of ionic liquid from a flotation tailings at a high temperature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Influence of [bmim]HSO₄ concentration on the copper leaching degree at ambient temperature

The effect of [bmim][HSO₄] concentration on the copper leaching degree is shown on Figure 1. The leaching experiments at ambient temperature were done using three ionic liquid concentration 0.001, 0.1 and 1 mol/dm³.

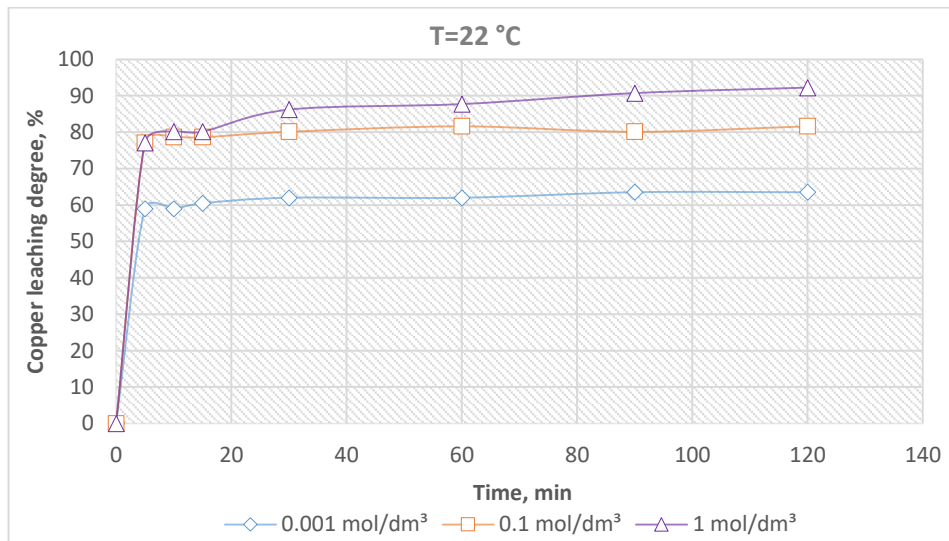


Figure 1 Effect of [bmim][HSO₄] concentration on copper leaching degree at ambient temperature, agitation speed 400 rpm, S:L ratio 1:20

The results show that the copper leaching rate is very rapid at ambient temperature in the initial leaching time for all concentrations of ionic liquids. The observed is probably due to the fact that the copper is predominantly in the oxide form. After the initial leaching of easily soluble copper oxide minerals, leaching of copper sulphide minerals begins, which can be observed during leaching with 0.1 mol/dm³ and 1 mol/dm³ [bmim][HSO₄]. With increasing duration of leaching, dissolution of copper minerals occurs at a lower rate for all concentrations of ILs studied.

The leaching of flotation tailings at ambient temperature using the lowest reagent concentration of 0.001 mol/dm³ resulted in a copper leaching degree of 63.4% after 120 minutes of process time. Increasing the concentration of the ionic liquid to 0.1 mol/dm³ increased the copper leaching degree up to 80%, while the highest concentration examined of 1 mol/dm³ achieved a copper leaching degree of 90% in the same period. For all concentrations, no significant changes in copper leaching degree were observed after 90 minutes.

These results suggest that higher reagent concentrations are required to achieve higher copper recovery from flotation tailings at ambient temperature. Other authors [9] conducted experiments with a sample containing copper mainly in metallic form under conditions similar to those used in this work. The copper leaching degree they achieved without oxidants was less than 30%.

Influence of [bmim]HSO₄ concentration on the copper leaching degree at 70 °C

The effect of ionic liquid [bmim][HSO₄] concentration (0.001, 0.01 and 0.1 mol/dm³) on the copper leaching degree at 70 °C is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that the copper leaching degree increases with the increase in [bmim][HSO₄] concentration. The copper leaching rate from the tailings is highest during the leaching time of about 10 minutes due to the dissolution of the copper oxide minerals. The copper leaching degree ranges from 61% (0.001 mol/dm³) to 79% (0.01 mol/dm³ [bmim][HSO₄]). With a further increase in leaching time, leaching of the tailings occurs at a slower rate at [bmim][HSO₄] concentrations of 0.001 and 0.01 mol/dm³. A greater influence of the ionic liquid at higher temperatures is observed in the leaching of tailings with 0.1 mol/dm³ [bmim][HSO₄]).

At the lower reagent concentration (0.001 mol/dm³) temperature does not significantly affect the leaching process and the copper leaching degree remained the same (63.49%). It can be because of the low ionic liquid concentration which shows that there may not be enough leaching agents to significantly affect the mineral dissolution kinetics even at high temperature.

When flotation tailings was leached with an ionic liquid solution concentration 0.01 mol/dm³ a copper leaching degree of 78% was achieved. At the highest examined reagent concentration of 0.1 mol/dm³, a copper leaching degree of 99.7% was achieved which indicates that copper sulphide minerals are also leaching. The final concentration of copper in pregnant leaching solution was 64.8 mg/dm³. Comparing these results with those obtained at ambient temperature, it can be concluded that temperature has a significant impact on copper leaching. Higher recovery was achieved at a lower reagent concentration under high temperature conditions than at a higher concentration at ambient temperature.

Temperature significantly affects the process of copper leaching from primary and secondary raw materials, as an increase in temperature can improve the kinetics of mineral dissolution, increase the solubility of minerals and reduce the viscosity of the solution, which facilitates the diffusion of ions [13]. When studying the leaching of chalcopyrite by ionic liquids at higher temperatures, the authors found that the rate of chemical reaction almost doubles with every 10°C increase in temperature. It is assumed that this is due to the fact that sufficient activation energy is supplied to the molecules in this way to increase the kinetics of the reaction [14].

Research has shown that higher temperatures accelerate the leaching of copper from certain minerals. Earlier research concluded that the leaching of copper from minerals

with sulfuric acid is most affected by temperature, then particle size, concentration of reagents, leaching time and at the end agitation speed [2].

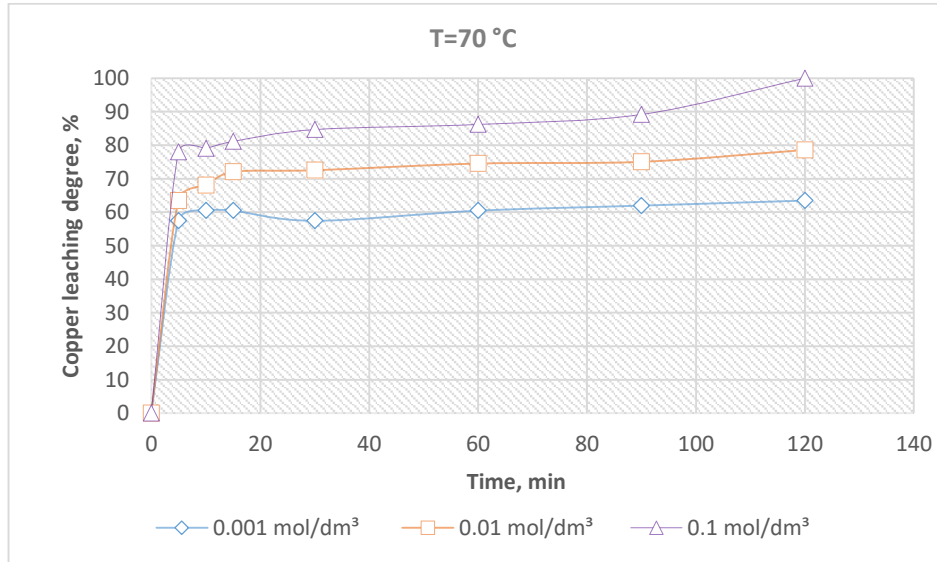


Figure 2 Effect of ionic liquid concentration on copper leaching degree at 70°C, agitation speed 400 rpm, S:L ratio 1:20

CONCLUSION

This paper shows the influence of temperature on the copper leaching degree from flotation tailings. Leaching experiments were done with ionic liquid different concentration at ambient temperature and high temperature without the presence of oxidizing agents. Based on the obtained results, it was found that the temperature has a significant influence on the leaching of copper from the flotation tailings.

The highest copper leaching degree of at room temperature was achieved at 1 mol/dm³ [bmim][HSO₄] and was 92.2% after 120 minutes of leaching. When leaching at a temperature of 70°C, a lower concentration of leaching agent (0.1 mol/dm³) is required to transfer the copper present almost quantitatively into the solution.

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