



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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POTENTIAL OF USING ZINC PROCESSING TAILINGS (ZPT's) IN THE PRODUCTION OF BURNT CLAY BRICKS

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ABSTRACT – Zinc processing tailings (ZPTs) from the Kharzet Youcef processing complex (Setif- Algeria) are mainly stockpiled in tailings dumps without use, occupying a significant area with potentially influencing the environment and human health. Incorporating ZPTs in building materials manufacturing is an effective solution to meet the dual objectives of environmental protection and economic development. The study investigates the influence of integrating ZPTs to partially replace clays and firing temperature on the physic-mechanical properties of fired clay bricks (FCB). Microstructural, chemical, and mineralogical analyses of ZPT and clays were carried out by SEM-EDS, XRF and XRD, respectively. Seven mixtures were produced with various percentages of ZPTs added to clays (0%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 25% and 30%) and were fired to three different temperatures (950, 1000 and 1050 °C) at a ramp rate of 5 °C. Physic-mechanical tests were carried out on different brick specimens, and the results obtained showed the FCB incorporated with 30% of ZPTs produced the highest flexural strength of 6.24 MPa, compressive resistance of 29.78 MPa, bulk density of 1.37 g/cm³ and water absorption of 15.1% at 900 °C. Therefore, recycling ZPTs for FCB manufacturing is a feasible alternative waste disposal solution for sustainable development while reducing negative environmental impacts.

Keywords: Zinc Processing, Fired Clay Bricks, Construction, Kharzet Youcef, Tailings Valorisation.

INTRODUCTION

Mineral resources, as non-renewable, are the basic blocks for global economic and social growth [1]. The exponential increase in mining activities has generated large amounts of waste and various types of waste. These wastes, mainly in tailings disposed of in dumps without proper management, inevitably affect the environment [2]. In this

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context, zinc mining and processing tailings are a primary source of toxic heavy metals to the environment [1,3].

In this regard, recycling and utilisation of mining wastes and tailings as alternative raw materials is regarded as an environmentally friendly solution to mitigate its impacts on the environment on the one hand and to maximise the returns on investments by reusing all extracted materials on the other hand [4].

Furthermore, zinc wastes have a chemical composition similar to natural raw materials used in construction industries [5]. So they can be used as partial replacements in bricks [6-8], cement [9], concrete admixture [10], mortar [11], the production of ceramics [12-14], and cementitious paste [15].

In Algeria, Chaabet El Hamra deposit is the only zinc deposit currently exploited in the country; it's operated by the National Company of Non-Ferrous Mining Products (ENOF). Raw ore is extracted using the room and pillar method and directed to the mineral processing plant to increase quality. Froth flotation is the method used to produce a final high-grade concentrate while the rejects are deposited in a dump. This dump occupies an area of 07 ha, and it has been receiving Chaabet El Hamra treatment waste of ore since 1994.

Subsequently, the authors designed a research plan focused on characterising ZPTs generated from the Kharzet Youcef mineral processing factory and evaluating its suitability as a partial replacement of clays in fired brick manufacturing. Physical-mechanical testing and the microstructure of produced brick specimens were investigated.

STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

Geographic location

The mineral processing plant of Kharzet Youcef ore (Chaabet El Hamra Mine) is located in Eastern Algeria, 5 km northwest of Ain Azel and approximately 50 km southeast of Setif municipality (Figure 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

The clays used in this study were obtained from El Amel brick factory in El Taref, Algeria. The sampling is done manually from the discharge of the rolling mill (<1 mm).

The ZPT samples were obtained from five distinctive dump locations at the zinc processing plant of Kharzet Youcef. Then, the subsamples of each zone were homogenised, and five samples were finally obtained. After that, the materials (Clays and ZPTs) were dried at 105 °C for 24 h. ZPTs are ground using a planetary ball mill type Welte WTR 950 W/R-V and then sieved to select particles with an average diameter of less than 0.074 mm.

Five samples of ZPTs collected from Kharzet Youcef dumps were thoroughly mixed and prepared by coning and quartering to prepare a single representative sample.

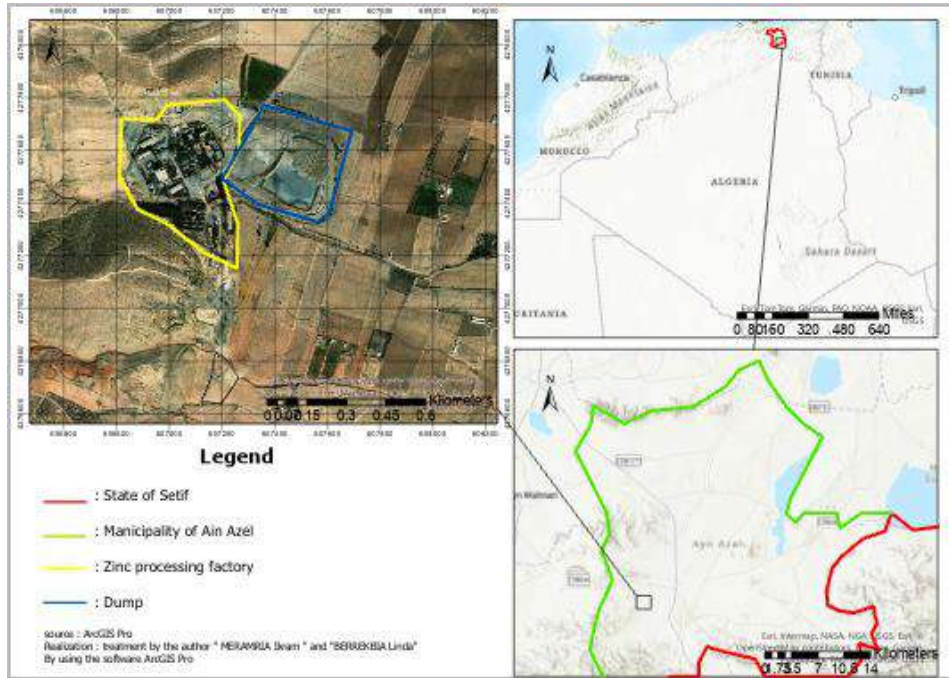


Figure 1 Geographic location of the study area

Molding and sintering of brick specimens

ZPTs were mixed with clays in varying portions to manufacture bricks (Table 1). The different mixtures were blended for 10 minutes in a blender, with 10% by mass of water, to get semi-dry homogenous mixes. Homogenised mixtures were manually pressed using a 40 × 40 × 160 mm mould to produce nine brick specimens for each combination.

Table 1 Mixtures specification

Formulations	F0	F5	F10	F15	F20	F25	F30
ZPT's (%)	0	5	10	15	20	25	30
ZPT's (g)	0	15	30	45	60	75	70
Clays (%)	100	95	90	85	80	75	70
Clays (g)	300	285	270	255	240	225	210

The obtained specimens were left in ambient air for 24 h, then dried in an oven at 105 °C for 24 h to decrease moisture content. The dried specimens were fired in a laboratory electrical furnace at a rate of 5 °C/min from room temperature to the desired firing temperature, where two different temperatures were targeted (900 °C and 1000 °C) and held for two hours at the desired firing temperature. After firing, natural convection inside the laboratory electrical furnace cooled bricks to room temperature.

Characterisation

The main chemical composition of the raw materials was determined by X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF PANalytical AXIOS minerals) and Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emission spectroscopy (Agilent Technologies 5900). The plasticity and liquidity limits of mixtures were determined according to ASTM D4318 and ASTM D4943—the sintered samples' bulk density and water absorption values. Linear shrinkage (%) was determined from the lengths of the brick specimens after drying and after sintering treatment by a calliper with a precision of ± 0.01 mm according to ASTM C326-09. The compressive resistance and flexural strength were measured using a mechanical testing machine called the Bera Test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ZPTs and clay characterization

Chemical composition

Chemical analysis of the clays used in this study (Table 2) reveals a high content of SiO_2 (42.9) and Al_2O_3 (23.3), accompanied by significant levels of Fe_T (8.25) and CaO (8.9).

Table 2 Chemical composition of used clays

Elements	SiO_2	Al_2O_3	Fe_T	CaO	K_2O	MgO	TiO_2	Na_2O	LOI
Percentage (%)	42.9	23.3	8.25	8.9	2.8	4.1	2.7	1.1	5.95

The main components of ZPTs of composite samples are presented in Table 3. The sample is dominated by CaO (31.62%) and a high loss on ignition (LOI) of 35.46%, indicating a large amount of volatile or organic matter. SiO_2 and MgO are also in significant quantities, representing 9.45% and 10.74%, respectively.

Table 3 Chemical composition of Kharzet Youcef ZPT's

Elements	SiO_2	Al_2O_3	Fe_2O_3	CaO	K_2O	MgO	MnO	Na_2O	P_2O_5	S	LOI
Percentage (%)	9.45	2.2	5.05	31.62	0.38	10.74	0.08	0.54	0.05	3.18	35.46

In conclusion, the silica and alumina content in ZPTs can qualify them as a partial replacement for clays in brick manufacturing.

Physic-mechanical tests

The mass and volume of mixtures prepared for briquetting reveal interesting trends in density. The mass of the briquettes gradually increases with ZPT's added percentage, leading to higher material compactness. These results suggest that adding ZPTs to clays provides denser briquettes, enhancing strength.

The results of plasticity limits for mixtures illustrated in Figure 3 demonstrate the inverse correlation between adding ZPTs and plasticity. These results suggest that incorporating ZPTs affects clays' physical properties.

Figure 4 represents the results of the water absorption test in two cases: 900°C and 1000°C. At 900°C, a general increase in water absorption is evident, suggesting increased porosity of the briquettes. At 1000°C, variations in water absorption are less pronounced.

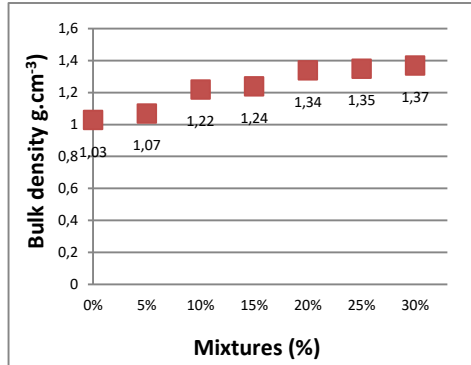


Figure 2 Variation of bulk density of different clay mixtures

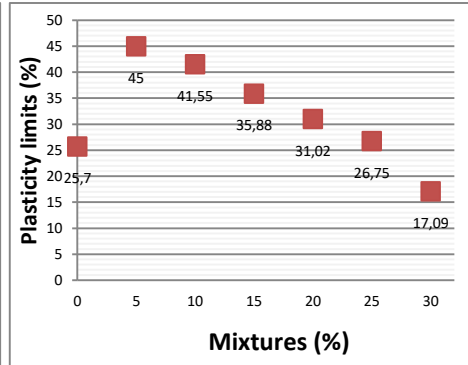


Figure 3 Results of plasticity limits

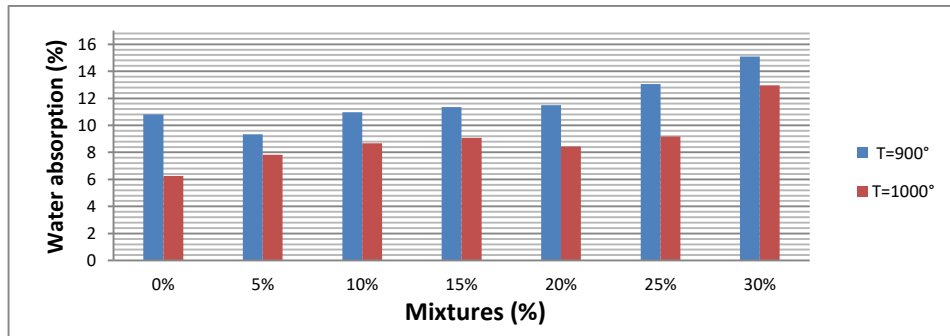


Figure 4 Water absorption as a function of mixtures fired at 900 °C and 1000 °C

Bulk density of bricks:

These results indicate that the firing temperature and the percentage of ZPTs significantly impact the compactness and density of the briquettes after firing, which can influence their mechanical properties and performance in practical applications.

The bulk density of the produced bricks for different proportions of ZPTs fired at various temperatures (900-1000 °C) was presented in Figure 5. The results reveal significant variations in the density depending on the added quantity of ZPTs and the firing temperature. As presented, the samples without ZPT's bulk density, fired at 900 °C and 1000 °C, were 1.18 and 1.40 g/cm³, respectively. The addition of the ZPTs influences the bulk density of the bricks. At 900 °C, the density varies irregularly, with peaks at 5%

and 10% of added ZPTs. On the other hand, at 1000°C, density augmentation with the increase of ZPTs is observed, reaching maximum values at 15% and 20% added.

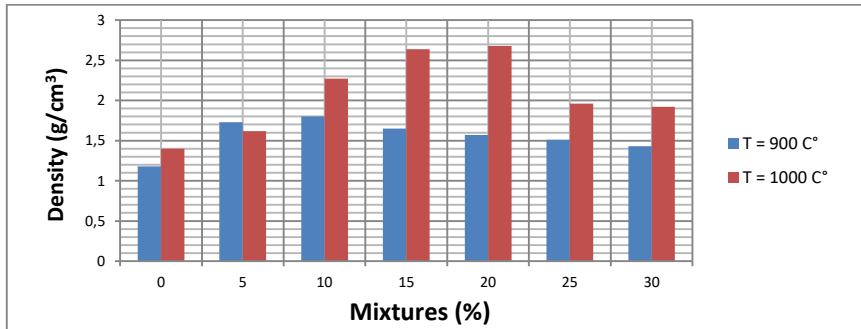


Figure 5 Density variation as a function of mixtures and firing temperature

Linear shrinkage:

Figure 6 shows a general reduction trend in linear shrinkage with increasing percentage of ZPTs, suggesting less contraction of the briquettes at higher added concentrations. This can be attributed to better adhesion and a more homogeneous structure of the materials at these concentrations, which reduces the internal tensions responsible for shrinkage. These results highlight the impact of the percentage of ZPTs on the physical properties of the briquettes, mainly their behaviour during drying, which may have implications on their final sizing and compatibility with the intended applications.

Figure 7 represents the shrinkage results obtained after the firing of bricks at 900 and 1000 °C. A significant variation in material shrinkage has been shown depending on the percentage of ZPTs and the firing temperature. At 900°C, linear shrinkage increases with the increase in the rate of ZPTs up to 15%, and then a decrease to 20% and 25% is added. In contrast, at 1000°C, linear shrinkage appears to vary irregularly, with maximum values observed at 10%, 20% and 30% of ZPTs.

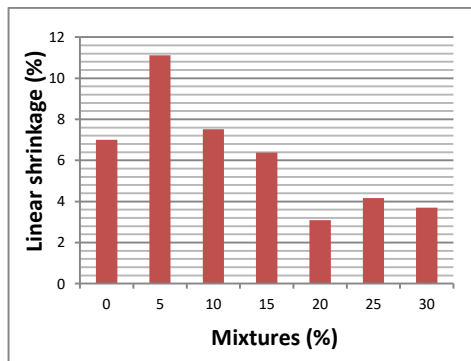


Figure 6 Linear shrinkage of bricks after drying

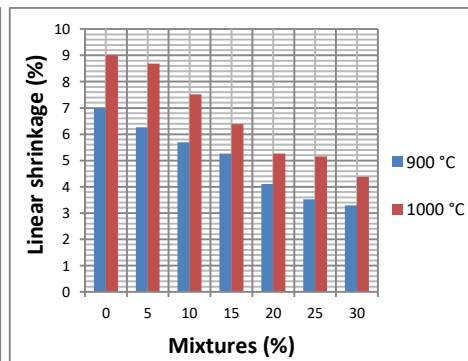


Figure 7 Linear shrinkage of bricks fired at 900 and 1000 °C

Mechanical resistance

The results of mechanical resistance tests of bricks manufactured with different mixtures of ZPTs and clays and subjected to different firing temperatures provide in-depth information on the mechanical performance of these materials. At the firing temperature of 900 °C, the flexural strength (R_F) shows an overall decrease with the increasing percentage of ZPTs, suggesting a reduction in the ability of the bricks to withstand flexural stresses.

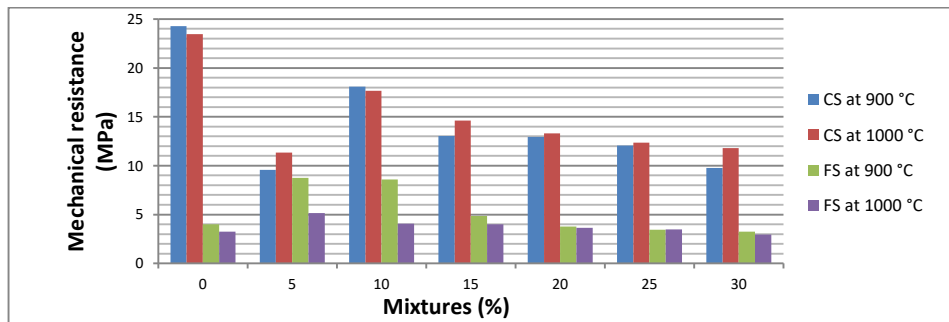


Figure 8 Mechanical resistance of fired clay bricks at 900-1000 °C with 0 to 30 wt% of ZPT's additions (CS: compressive strength; FS: flexural strength)

In contrast, the compressive strength (R_c) varies in a more complex manner, reaching maximum values at 0% and 30% ZPTs, which could indicate a better capacity of the briquettes to support axial loads at these concentrations. At a higher temperature of 1000°C, the downward trend in flexural strength is confirmed, while compressive strength shows more pronounced fluctuations, with peaks observed at 25% and 30% ZPTs. These results highlight the importance of considering both the percentage of ZPTs and the firing temperature in the design of the mixtures to obtain the desired mechanical properties because these parameters significantly influence the ability of the briquettes to resist the different forces and constraints to which they could be subjected in practical applications.

CONCLUSION

The advantage of this research is to reutilise the zinc processing tailings (ZPTs) as a partial replacement in manufacturing clay-fired bricks, an effective alternative treatment for waste resource recycling. It is possible to summarise the experimental findings that ZPTs can partially replace clays in fired clay bricks manufacturing with a percentage of 10% and a firing temperature equal to 900 °C.

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