



University of Belgrade  
Technical Faculty in Bor,  
Mining and Metallurgy  
Institute Bor

**54<sup>th</sup> International  
October Conference  
on Mining and Metallurgy**

# PROCEEDINGS

**Editors:**

**Ljubiša Balanović**

**Dejan Tanikić**



**18-21 October 2023, Bor Lake, Serbia**

**PROCEEDINGS,  
54<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL OCTOBER CONFERENCE  
on Mining and Metallurgy**

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## PREFACE

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, it is a great honor and pleasure to welcome all esteemed participants of the 54<sup>th</sup> International October Conference on Mining and Metallurgy (IOC 2023), scheduled to take place at the picturesque Bor Lake, Serbia, from October 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> 2023.

The collaborative efforts of the University of Belgrade, the Technical Faculty in Bor, and the Mining and Metallurgy Institute Bor have meticulously organized this year's IOC. Our focus remains unwavering on showcasing the latest research findings and advancements in geology, mining, metallurgy, materials science, technology, environmental protection, and other engineering disciplines. Our primary objective is to foster a dynamic environment where academics, researchers, and industry professionals can come together to share their knowledge, experiences, and innovative ideas while exploring opportunities for collaborative research endeavors.

Our conference agenda is rich and diverse, encompassing plenary sessions, engaging invited lectures, technical presentations, enlightening oral and poster sessions, informative technical tours, a diverse exhibition, and memorable social gatherings. At the heart of this event lies our strong commitment to sustainable development within the mining and metallurgy sector. We are dedicated to exploring ecologically conscious methodologies, responsible resource extraction practices, and cutting-edge technologies that reduce the industry's environmental impact and enhance the well-being of local communities.

The conference proceedings comprise 129 papers authored by individuals from universities, research institutes, and industries in 22 countries. We are proud to welcome participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Libya, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, United States, and, of course, Serbia.

We are excited to host the 8<sup>th</sup> International Student Conference on Technical Sciences (ISC 2023) as part of IOC 2023. This event offers students from Serbia and the wider region a unique chance to showcase their research and discuss the future of their fields with experts.

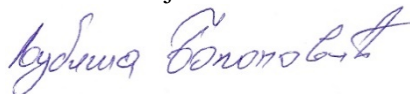
We sincerely thank the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia for their generous financial support. In addition, we express our profound gratitude to all our sponsors, exhibitors, and friends of the Conference for their contributions and unwavering support for playing a pivotal role in ensuring the success of IOC 2023.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all authors, committees, reviewers, speakers, and chairpersons for their invaluable contributions in shaping IOC 2023.

We look forward to welcoming you to the 55<sup>th</sup> International October Conference on Mining and Metallurgy (IOC 2024), which will be held in October 2024.

On behalf of the 54<sup>th</sup> IOC Organizing Committee,

Prof. dr Ljubiša Balanović





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## CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE AND DENSITY OF COPPER DURING THE REFINING SMELTING PROCESS

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### Abstract

*The technology of pyrometallurgical copper production ends with a fire-refining process. This process, as the first stage of refining blister copper, should reduce the impurity content in blister copper to a level that, in accordance with existing standards, allows for the optimal management of electrolytic refining technology. In terms of mechanism and physical-chemical changes, this process is identical to the refining smelting process and it is increasingly being used as a supporting process in a wide range of processing operations. Both processes go through a series of steps that are different in their mechanism and characteristics and must be monitored throughout the entire process. Effective monitoring of these steps enables the installation of the optimal technology for those processes. In this study, changes in density and microstructure that impact the quality of copper during the fire refining and refining smelting processes were observed.*

**Keywords:** *pyrometallurgy, fire-refining, blister copper*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Copper, thanks to its properties, is the third most commonly used metal in the world, with a wide range of applications, and demand for it continues to grow. Due to its excellent characteristics, it is used as an alloying element in metallurgy. The processes for obtaining copper can be divided into pyrometallurgical and hydrometallurgical methods. Approximately 90% of copper is obtained through pyrometallurgical processes, while the use of hydrometallurgical methods is limited to copper oxide ores [1].

Copper is required to possess the highest possible electrical conductivity, high plasticity, and, simultaneously, appropriate mechanical properties. The production of copper of this quality is possible by two-stage purification of blister copper. The first phase of purification, known as fire-refining, is important for removing a higher level of impurity constituents from liquid blister copper. The basic impurities present in raw copper are as follows: Fe, Ni, S, O, Pb, Zn, Sn, Bi, As, Sb, Se, Te, Ag, and Au. These impurities, considering their impact on the quality of copper, can be categorized into groups of impurities that significantly affect electrical conductivity, plasticity, mechanical properties, and so on [2]. Blister copper with an average purity of 98.5 - 99% Cu is fire-refined so that the content of impurities in the refined copper is reduced from 0.8 - 2.5% to 0.2 - 0.3%. In this purification stage, nearly all of the contained S, Fe, O, As, Sb, Pb, and Bi are removed [2, 3].

The fire-refining process is applied to both liquid and solid raw copper. Processing liquid charge significantly saves on fuel, shortens the overall operation time, and increases furnace productivity. Through the fire-refining process, the purified copper is cast into anodes, known as anode copper, which is then sent to the electrolytic refining operation [4].

The complete fire-refining process is organized into several phases: the furnace preparation and charging phase, the oxidation phase, the slag removal phase, the reduction (smelting) phase, and the copper casting phase. During each operation, the most sensitive parts of the furnace, casting

machine, and other additional equipment deform or are destroyed. For this reason, it is essential to prepare the furnace and other devices before the start of each operation [4, 5].

The density of copper during the refining process varies at different stages. Before oxidation, and especially during the oxidation phase, copper has the lowest density due to the presence of impurities in the liquid copper, which have a lower density than copper itself [6]. By removing these impurities, the density of copper increases, reaching its highest value at the end of the reduction phase. According to studies, the amount of hydrogen, SO<sub>2</sub>, and other gases in copper impacts its density. The temperature at which the procedure is performed, more precisely the temperature at which a sample is collected, also affects the density of copper during the process. The density of the sample taken during casting is one of the key indicators of copper quality, and it is used to determine the purity of refined copper [7].

## 2. EXPERIMENTAL

The practical part of this study was realized with the previous technology of the Smelter in Bor, by taking samples from the anode furnace. In order to become familiar with all aspects of refining technology and to organize the sample collection, the process of the fire-refining activities was tracked before starting the experiment. The collection of the sample during the operation was the first stage of the experiment. A special spoon was used just for collecting samples. In the first series, the furnace operating regime was recorded, and a specific number of samples of liquid copper were collected from each phase. Samples were collected at 30 minute intervals. The final phase of the experiment was analyzing the process by examining changes in copper density and changes in the microstructure of copper.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The density of each collected sample was measured to monitor density changes during operations. The determination of density was carried out using a hydrostatic scale. Changes in copper density during the fire-refining process are shown in Figure 1.

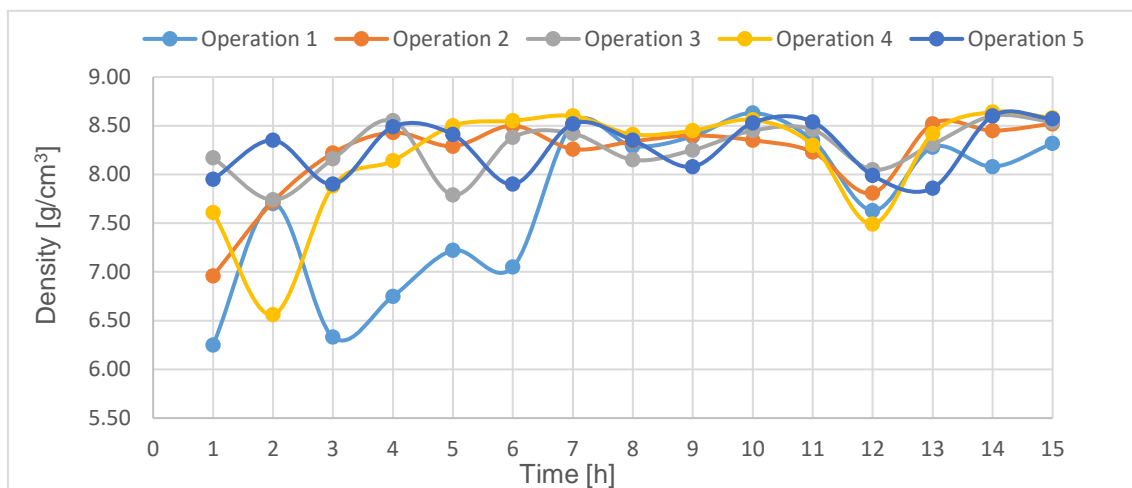


Figure 1 - Change in copper density during fire-refining operations

By analyzing the obtained results, it was determined that the average density of copper consistently rises during the oxidation phase. This increase in density is caused by a reduction in the weight percentage of impurities in the liquid copper system, which has a lower density than copper. In the following stage, which includes the poling and reduction operations, the average density of copper significantly decreases. It's important to mention that the furnace atmosphere also influences on the density of copper samples collected during the fire-refining process.

Studying the changes in microstructure in solidified copper samples obtained during the operations is one way to monitor the fire-refining process. Monitoring was performed by taking samples during the refining operations at specific time intervals, approximately every 25 minutes. The samples were then put through to a complete metallographic study. Microphotographs can be used to determine the oxygen content in the molten metal, specifically the increase or decrease in the oxygen percentage during the refining process. There are numerous methods for determining the amount of  $\text{Cu}_2\text{O}$  or  $\text{O}_2$  in copper throughout the refining process. For samples that have a hypoeutectic composition with a lower  $\text{O}_2$  content, the percentage of oxygen can be determined by comparing the surface of the samples with the GOST standard at the same magnification (200:1). The microstructure of copper with variable oxygen concentration during the fire-refining process is shown in Figure 2.

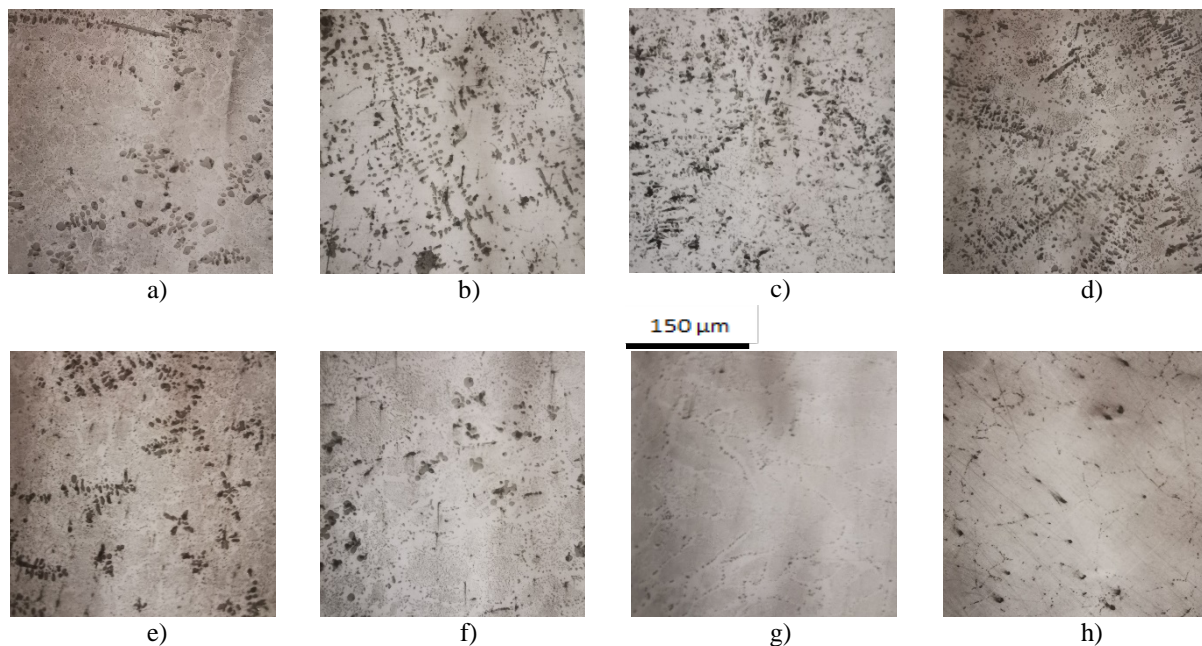


Figure 2 - Microstructure of copper with variable oxygen content during the fire-refining process: (a) 0.77%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (b) 0.91%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (c) 1.1%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (d) 1.34%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (e) 0.82%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (f) 0.52%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (g) 0.39%  $\text{O}_2$ ; (h) 0.01%  $\text{O}_2$

In Figure 2(a), the microstructure of samples from the phase of initial filling of the anode furnace with blister copper is presented.  $\text{Cu}_2\text{O}$  is precipitated in the form of primary dendritic crystals in the eutectic ( $\text{Cu} + \text{Cu}_2\text{O}$ ). Image 2(b) displays the microstructure of a sample taken during the final stage of loading the anode furnace with blister copper. It can be observed that the microstructure has a hypereutectic composition, so in addition to the eutectic ( $\text{Cu} + \text{Cu}_2\text{O}$ ), it also contains primary crystals of  $\text{Cu}_2\text{O}$ , as well as the presence of non-metallic inclusions. The initially formed crystals have a dendritic shape oriented in the direction of cooling. The microstructure of a sample taken during the middle phase of oxidation is presented in Figure 2(c). The amount of primary  $\text{Cu}_2\text{O}$  crystals that have formed in the eutectic is higher than it was in the previous sample. Figure 2(d) shows the sample's microstructure at the end of the oxidation phase. The microstructure of a sample during the slag removal procedure is shown in Figure 2(e).  $\text{Cu}_2\text{O}$  crystals have precipitated in the form of primary crystals within the eutectic ( $\text{Cu} + \text{Cu}_2\text{O}$ ). Figure 2(f) displays the microstructure of copper samples during the reduction phase. The image shows a reduced number of primary  $\text{Cu}_2\text{O}$  crystals precipitated within the eutectic. The microstructure at the end of the reduction phase is shown in Figure 2(g). The percentage of oxygen in copper is very low. The structure of the copper sample at the end of the casting phase is shown in Figure 2(f). From the image, it is evident that the oxygen content in the copper has increased slightly.

Figure 3 shows the change in copper's oxygen content during the fire-refining process. From the image, it can be observed that the oxygen content in copper decreases during the fire-refining process.

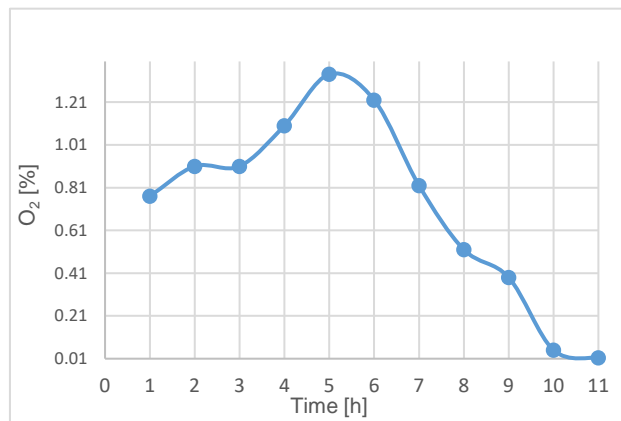


Figure 3 - Change in oxygen content in copper during the fire-refining process

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Through a literature review and based on experimentally obtained results, it is possible to identify the potential for more efficient monitoring of the fire-refining and refining smelting processes. Based on the obtained results, through density measurements and the determination of oxygen content in copper, along with metallographic analysis, it becomes possible to predict and determine the phase of the operation in progress. The density of copper must be understood as a parameter that results from the interplay of various factors crucial for the proper management of the process (temperature, the degree and type of impurities present in copper, oxidation intensity, quality of reducing agents, and so on). The density of the copper samples taken at the end of each observed operation is lower than expected in all cases. Values obtained through such analytical methods must find their place in monitoring the technology of the fire-refining process.

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