

Optimizing Performance of Refractory Formulations Utilizing Premium Aluminas

Although the raw materials used to formulate today's refractory linings are numerous, choosing the right combination of raw materials can optimize the performance of refractory formulations. Almatis provides the premium aluminas necessary to enhance the overall performance of the formulation and meet the demands placed on today's high performance refractories.

Every refractory formulation contains a combination of natural and/or synthetic minerals. These minerals are available as coarse, fine or ground aggregates; ground calcined and reactive aluminas; sub-micron alumina; or silica fume fillers and binders. Specialty additives are also used for dispersing, deflocculating, minimizing liquid addition, controlling working life or strength development.

The Almatis Premium product focus is on synthetic minerals and on supplying value to the customer. Our high purity synthetic aluminas have proven to be cost effective as they are consistent over time and increase the life of the refractories in severe service applications.

Building Blocks of High Performance Refractories

The synthetic minerals of choice for dense refractories are tabular alumina, magnesia rich and alumina rich spinels, calcium aluminate cements, calcium hexaluminate bonite, calcined and reactive alumina, and silicon carbide. The specific mineral needs are defined by service temperature, frequency of thermal cycling, strength or loading requirements and service environment such as corrosive liquid or gas vapors. These synthetic minerals are available in different particle size distributions as this is a requirement for building the optimum formulation.

- **Coarse aggregates** are used as the bricks to build the foundation.
- **Fine aggregates** are used to fill the intermediate voids between the coarse aggregate
- **Matrix fines** fill the micron size voids without adding excess liquid. The amount used impacts rheology thus setting the properties for vibration, self flow or pumpable castables. The particle size distribution of the matrix fines can result in either dilatant or shear thinning behavior.
- **Binders** hold the formulations together until thermal sintering occurs.

- **Additives** are used as water reducing agents such as dispersants, deflocculants and plasticizers. They are also used as retarders or accelerators to control setting behavior of the refractory formulation.

The Importance of Particle Size Distribution within the Formulation

The overall particle size distribution of minerals impacts refractory performance by affecting wear resistance, chemical and thermal shock resistance, overall water required for installation and porosity of the finished product.

High quality tabular and spinel aggregates offered by Almatis in the coarse and fine fractions are instrumental in achieving the ultimate chemical and thermal shock resistance due to their dense structure, closed porosity and consistent particle size distribution.

Matrix fines in the Almatis portfolio such as ground aggregates and reactive and ground calcined aluminas, range in particle size from 0.4 to 75 microns. They strongly determine the rheology, strength and setting behavior of a refractory castable. Optimizing the combination of matrix fines in a formulation greatly reduces the water demand by filling the voids within the combination of synthetic mineral structures. The mono-modal reactive aluminas provide full flexibility in designing the refractory matrix particle size distribution. The multi-modal reactive aluminas can further enhance the performance by optimizing the particle size distribution with super-fine components that have been intensively homogenized while being manufactured. In true high performance refractories suited for temperatures greater than 1400 degrees C, reactive aluminas and ground tabular and spinel aggregates typically replace standard calcined aluminas and silica fume in order to attain the performance requirements.

Almatis dispersing aluminas combine water reduction and set-controlling additives with a fully ground matrix alumina. The dispersing additives are coated on the alumina allowing easy homogenization in the matrix fines. The set control capability is designed to function perfectly with Almatis 70% cement and hydrateable alumina binders. It offers the flexibility to achieve short, intermediate or long set time. The ADS-3/ADW-1 dispersing aluminas are for use in monolithics that do not contain silica fume. The M-ADS 1/M-ADW 1 are used in silica fume containing monolithics..

Upgrading Existing Formulations

The Almatis premium aluminas are used to upgrade the performance of existing refractories to meet the more demanding requirements of today's steel and non-ferrous industries. The synthetic aggregates may be required substitutions for natural minerals.

When the need is to improve the mineralogy or rheology of the matrix, the options and the opportunities are very broad. Well controlled, low water demand calcined aluminas are available to replace loosely controlled commodity aluminas. Fully ground reactive aluminas and ground aggregate minerals can replace partially ground calcined aluminas to dramatically lower the mixing water requirement, the in-service porosity, the molten metal and slag penetration, the in-service strength, and the ease of placement even in difficult installation conditions. If technical assistance is required, Almatis' experienced technical support is available in each global region.

When pre-formed alumina rich sintered spinel is utilized in severe service applications, such as steel ladles at 15% to 30% of a low or ultra low cement castable, slag and metal penetration is practically eliminated and erosion wear due to low strength is greatly reduced.

Choosing the Right Minerals and Sizes

Synthetic aluminas play an ever-increasing role in refractory requirements for modern steel making processes. Product consistency and chemical purity are critical to the successful performance of refractory formulations. Almatis takes great pride in having the ability to provide both premium aluminas and technical solutions to our refractory customers. With close to 100 years of technical alumina expertise and strategically placed global manufacturing capability, Almatis can quickly deliver a variety of consistent, high purity premium aluminas and the technical support to help customers meet today's challenges.

Authors: Leslie Power, Almatis Global Refractory Market Manager and Dr. Andus Buhr, Global Technical Director Refractories, Ceramics, Polishing

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