

The removal of phosphorous impurities and subsequent
use of phosphogypsum in Portland Cement

by
Elizabet Margaretha van der Merwe

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Supervisor: Professor C A Strydom

Abstract

Phosphogypsum is a by-product in the production of wet phosphoric acid, and most of the phosphogypsum produced in the world remains unutilized at present. The impurities included in phosphogypsum seriously restrict its industrial use as a set retarder in the cement industry. The aim of this study was to investigate different methods to remove the phosphorous impurities contained in South African phosphogypsum. The application of treated phosphogypsum samples to replace natural gypsum as a set retarder in Portland cement was subsequently studied.

It was indicated that sieving could be applied to reduce the amount of phosphorous impurities in some phosphogypsum particle size fractions. However, the amount of phosphorous impurities contained in the particle size fractions with fewer impurities was still above requirements, and were therefore unacceptable for use in Portland cement.

A method involving thermal treatment followed by washing with water and milk of lime proved not to remove the phosphorous impurities contained in the phosphogypsum crystal lattice, but was successful in removing some of the water-soluble impurities. Some improvement was shown in the performance of cement containing these treated phosphogypsum samples when compared to cement containing untreated phosphogypsum. However, this improvement proved to be unsatisfactory for the replacement of natural gypsum by these phosphogypsum samples in Portland cement.

The application of a method comprising the combination of thermal and sulphuric acid treatment proved to be successful in removing most of the harmful phosphorous impurities from the phosphogypsum crystal lattice. Subsequently, South African phosphogypsum treated by this suitable method could successfully replace natural gypsum in Portland cement.

This study attempts to readdress the worldwide problem of phosphogypsum waste utilization, and shows that its application as a set retarder in Portland cement is possible after exposure to an effective purification method.

Samevatting

Fosfogips is 'n neweproduk in die vervaardiging van nat fosforsuur. Die oorgrote meerderheid fosfogips wat tans in die wêreld geproduseer word, word nie benut nie. Die onsuiverhede in fosfogips beperk die industriële gebruik daarvan as 'n set reguleerder in die sement industrie. Die doel van die studie was om verskillende metodes te ondersoek om die fosfor onsuiverhede uit Suid-Afrikaanse fosfogips te verwyder. Die toepassing van behandelde fosfogips om natuurlike gips as 'n set reguleerder in Portland sement te vervang, is daarna bestudeer.

Daar is aangetoon dat sifting gebruik kan word om die hoeveelheid fosfor onsuiverhede in sommige partikelgrootte fraksies te verminder. Die hoeveelheid fosfor onsuiverhede in die fraksies wat minder onsuiverhede bevat het was egter steeds hoog, en was onaanvaarbaar vir gebruik in Portland sement.

'n Metode wat termiese behandeling gevolg deur wassing met water en kalkwater insluit, kon nie die fosfor onsuiverhede uit die fosfogips kristalstruktuur verwyder nie, maar was suksesvol in die verwydering van sommige van die water-oplosbare onsuiverhede. 'n Verbetering in die werkverrigting van sement wat die behandelde fosfogips bevat is getoon in vergelyking met sement wat onbehandelde fosfogips bevat. Hierdie verbetering is egter nie bevredigend vir die vervanging van natuurlike gips deur hierdie fosfogips monsters in Portland sement nie.

Die toepassing van 'n metode bestaande uit die kombinasie van 'n termiese en swaelsuur behandelingsmetode was suksesvol in die verwydering van meeste van die ongewenste fosfor onsuiverhede uit die fosfogips kristalstruktuur. Suid Afrikaanse fosfogips wat met hierdie geskikte metode behandel is, kon natuurlike gips suksesvol in Portland sement vervang.

Hierdie studie poog om weer die wêreld-wye probleem van fosfogips afvalbenutting aan te spreek, en toon dat die aanwending van fosfogips as 'n set reguleerder in Portland sement moontlik is na blootstelling aan 'n effektiewe suiweringsmetode.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people, companies and institutions for their contribution to this study:

- My supervisor, Professor C Strydom, for her guidance, advice, financial support, and for sharing her expertise in the field of study
- Dr Linda Jacobs for her most valuable input, enthusiasm and encouragement throughout this project
- The University of Pretoria, Cement Industry of South Africa and the NRF for financial support
- The personnel at the Chemistry Department at the University of South Africa for creating the opportunity for me to conduct this study, and for their continuous assistance and encouragement
- ISCOR for XRF analyses of the samples
- PPC Technical services for conducting the cement tests
- Linda Prinsloo for her assistance on the FT-IR analyses
- Adelé Botha and Liana Swanepoel in the research group at the University of Pretoria for their advice, support with some experiments and useful discussions
- My parents, family and friends for their support and encouragement throughout my studies
- A special thanks to my husband, Tommie, for his participation in scientific discussions regarding this study, continuous emotional support, patience and understanding

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9.1 Introduction

Gypsum is mainly used in the production of plaster and as an additive in Portland-cement production. It is found and mined in all the continents, and a number of processing technologies that require very low capital investment. Gypsum is used in the production of gypsum as an industrial product is due to its ability to release water when heated. The then products contain or carry hydrated gypsum. In the presence of water, the dehydrated product can be rehydrated to the original natural and natural gypsum.

9.2 Gypsum

Although there are generally plentiful supplies of natural gypsum available, large quantities of by-product gypsum are used by the chemical industry. The gypsum is obtained from the chemical process of producing phosphoric acid from phosphate rock. The gypsum is then used for a variety of purposes, including disposal and recycling. In general, gypsum is a valuable by-product which can be recycled and used in a number of ways. Gypsum can be recycled by adding it to the water used in the production of cement. Gypsum can also be used in the making of plaster and in the production of paper. Gypsum can also be used in the production of other products.

Phosphogypsum is the largest single chemical by-product in the world. It is a waste product of the phosphoric acid industry (Mehra and Brady, 1977). It is often offered for sale at extremely favourable prices but contains impurities which need decontamination and neutralization. The use of phosphogypsum is a disadvantage in comparison with natural gypsum, because of higher transport and production costs. Its use will only be economical if it is close to a consumer region, where natural gypsum is not available, or where natural gypsum has a more expensive transport cost.