



ASA METALS PROJECT NEARS COMPLETION

Leading smelter and sinter specialist Metix is extremely proud of its involvement with Sinosteel's Project Sunrise at ASA Metals' ferrochrome plant near Burgersfort.

Metix Engineering Director, Andrew van Niekerk, says: "As our first ASA Metals project, the opportunities are exciting. It is also our largest lump sum turnkey (LSTK) project ever, which has proven challenging in recent market conditions."

The project includes the engineering and construction of a 600 000 ton per annum pelletising and sinter plant, from conceptual design to final hand over to ASA Metals. It is similar in scope to three other 600 kilo-tons per annum sinter plants that Metix has built for clients such as Xstrata and Samancor Chrome.

"This plant is important for ASA Metals' environmentally sound closed furnaces, as it allows the use of chromite fines or concentrates without adverse effects," says van Niekerk. "South African mined chromite concentrate recoveries are much higher than lumpy ore, and the safe utilisation of these fines is key. It balances the use of mined ore, increases profit margin due to the export of value added product, improves recoveries in smelting and contributes to operational stability."

The Metix team has been involved in the design, construction and operation of 9 out of 11 of these plants in South Africa over the last ten years. "We began the ASA Metals project at the end of October 2007, with a Ready-for-Hot-Commissioning (RHC) target set towards the end of the second quarter of 2009. With some 543 construction personnel currently active on site, we have increased our construction management team to over 20 to ensure that we reach our target date."

Construction is complete in most of the plant areas and cold commissioning is currently being undertaken. The arrival of the ball mill shell at the end of April saw Metix staff working swiftly to get the structure erected. "The ball mill ensures that the proportioned mix that feeds

the pelletising and sinter furnace has the correct particle size distribution," van Niekerk explains. The gearbox for the drive was also recently delivered, and the final drive installed and carefully aligned.

The mill's shell was manufactured in South Africa, with other components being sourced from various parts of Europe. "The ball mill has one of the longest lead times of all components, from procurement to arrival on site. Metix placed this order at a very early stage in the project, and we were pleased with its arrival and our ability to erect the unit quickly," van Niekerk notes.

With many local tenders and prospects put on hold during the economic downturn, Metix sought to "spread its wings" and become more involved in international joint ventures and agreements. "Offers on the table include the basic engineering and technology equipment package for a 70 MVA SiMn furnace in China; clean development mechanism (CDM) projects; R&D ventures; as well as final contractual negotiations on a 600 000 ton per annum international sinter plant," van Niekerk says.

However, he insists that Metix will remain focused on local projects and development and will spend most of its resources in 2009 on the completion of existing projects, such as ASA Metals' ferrochrome project at Burgersfort, Middelburg Ferrochrome's sinter plant and the enclosing of Herculon Ferrochrome's open furnace.

With the ASA Metals development due for completion around the middle of 2009, Metix is in the final stage of construction and is currently preparing for some of the pre commissioning activities, after completion of the build.

The sinter plant will be available and producing pellets to feed ASA Metals' new furnaces in July. The company's plant expansion – which includes this plant, two new smelting furnaces and an upgrade to its infrastructure – is progressing well, and Metix wishes the ASA team good luck with the new plant and looks forward to starting the sinter plant.