

# ELEKTROLITIČKO IZDVAJANJE CINKA IZ PRAŠINE INDUSTRIJSKE ELEKTROLUČNE PEĆI

## ZINC ELECTROWINNING FROM INDUSTRIAL ELECTRIC ARC FURNACE DUST

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### Abstrakt

Cilj ovog istraživanja je izdvajanje metalnog cinka iz prašine koja nastaje u industrijskoj elektrolučnoj peći (EAF prašina) postupkom elektrovinjaga. Ispitivanja su realizovana u laboratorijskim uslovima sa sumporno kiselim elektrolitima. Katodna gustina struje iznosila je 500 A/m<sup>2</sup>. Temperatura elektrolita održavana je u opsegu 38±2°C. Trajanje procesa je izračunato da bi se koncentracija Zn u elektrolitu smanjila za 30 g/l. Rezultati su pokazali iskorišćenje struje u opsegu od 50,4 % do 89,3 %, zavisno od sastava elektrolita i čistoće katodnih materijala. Rezultati ispitivanja potvrđuju da se EAF prašina može koristiti kao sirovina za elektrolitičko dobijanje cinka. Takođe, hemijska karakterizacija elektrolita na početku i na kraju svakog eksperimenta, kao i karakterizacija katodnih depozita dobijenih tokom procesa elektrovinjaga, skenirajuća elektronska mikroskopija sa energetske disperzivnom rendgenskom spektroskopijom (EDS), potvrdili su da nečistoće iz elektrolita imaju krucijalan uticaj na kvalitet depozita cinka.

**Ključne reči:** cink, elektrolučna peć, elektrovinjag, nečistoće, SEM EDS

### Abstract

The aim of this study was recovery of zinc metal from dust generated in the industrial electric arc furnace (EAF dust) by electrowinning process. Investigations are realized in the laboratory conditions with sulphury acid electrolytes. Cathode current density was 500 A/m<sup>2</sup>. Electrolyte temperature was in range 38±2°C. Process duration was calculated in order to reduce the Zn concentration in the electrolyte by 30 g/l. Results are shown that the current efficiency was in range from 50.4 mass % to 89.3 mass % in accordance with the electrolyte composition and purity of the cathode materials. The results of the tests are confirmed that the EAF dust can be used as a raw material for electrolytic zinc recovery. Also, chemical characterization of the electrolyte on the start and on the end of each test, as so as the cathode deposits characterization, scanning electron microscopy with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) of cathode deposits obtained during the electrowinning process, confirmed that the electrolyte impurities have the crucial influence on the quality of deposited zinc.

**Keywords:** zinc, electric arc furnace, electrowinning, impurities, SEM EDS

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Zinc dust generated as waste material in industrial electric arc furnaces is used in order to obtain zinc oxide for the paint industry and zinc sulfate for fertilizer industry. Electrolytic extraction of zinc metal from dust is a significant process for zinc extraction in countries such as India. The high chloride content in the ash limits the viability of the process due to severe corrosion on traditional lead anodes [1].

Today, approximately 30% of global zinc production arises from recycled zinc. Zinc dust generated as waste material in industrial electric arc furnaces is used in order to obtain zinc oxide for the paint industry and zinc sulfate for fertilizer industry. The growing interest in secondary zinc materials, as a valuable resource, and stricter environmental legislation that restricts dumping of these hazardous materials has increased interest in their recycling [2]. The disposal and utilization of EAFD are problems for all steel industries in the world. Steel production in electric arc furnaces generates a considerable amount of flue dust, about 15–20 kg per ton of steel [3–4]. In this article, the electrowinning process for the obtaining zinc from the EAFD leaching solution is described.

In the first phase, the dust of the electric arc furnace is leached with water, and then in the second stage with sulfuric acid, where the impurities dissolve together with zinc. Since the process of electrolytic production of zinc is an extremely sensitive process, especially to impurities that are more electropositive than zinc, impurities must be removed from the leaching solution by selective precipitation, cementation, solvent extraction and ion exchange methods [5–7].

### 2 EXPERIMENTAL AND DISCUSSION

All experiments were carried in electrochemical system shown in Figure 1, using different electrolyte obtained from dust generated in the industrial EAF. The electrolytes were obtained by multistage EAF dust leaching by sulfuric acid and purification of the leaching solution in order to remove harmful impurities. Duration of the electrowinning process was calculated in order to reduce the concentration of Zn by 30 g/l.

For characterization of electrolytes and zinc deposits the following methods have been used: Inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES) and Scanning electron microscope with using energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDS).

In the first phase of the research, the influence of cathode type was investigated. Experiments 1 and 2 were performed using electrolyte of the same chemical composition (Ex-1 and Ex-2: Table 2). In the second phase the influence of the electrolyte composition (content of impurities) on the quality of the cathode deposits was investigated Ex-3 and Ex-4: Table 2). Table 1 shows the chemical composition of the cathodes and Table 2 shows the composition of the electrolyte at the start and end of the process for all experiments. Technological parameters of the process are shown in Table 3.

Table 1. Chemical composition of the Al cathodes

Element	Content, ppm	
	Al (1 mm)	Al (5 mm)
Ca	31.0	18.2
Co	1.6	0.98
Cr	7.8	7.0
Cu	22.5	65.8
Fe	2743.8	1999.4
Ga	88.9	87.7
Mg	<1	298.5
Mn	21.2	241.2
Ni	13.8	34.0
V	55.0	72.6
Zn	347.7	139.8

Table 2. Chemical composition of the electrolyte at the start and end of the process

Element	Experiments							
	Ex-1		Ex-2		Ex-3		Ex-4	
	start	end	start	end	start	end	start	end
	Concentration, mg/l							
Al	126.3	98.6	126.3	173.3	35.4	42.8	32.4	45.9
Co	1.0	0.91	1.0	0.91	0.052	0.044	0.026	0.030
Cd	1.4	0.46	1.4	0.41	< 0.008	<0.008	<0.008	<0.008
Cu	0.055	0.34	0.055	0.012	0.020	0.025	0.035	0.035
Fe	11.4	10.3	11.4	10.4	0.38	0.28	0.35	0.36
Mn	2941.9	223.7	2941.9	343.2	1379.8	<0.007	1488.5	191.2
Ni	1.9	1.7	1.9	1.8	< 0.007	< 0.007	<0.007	<0.007
Sb	0.40	0.3	0.40	0.37	<0.011	<0.011	<0.011	<0.011
F-	315.0	400.0	315.0	475.0	480.0	388.4	508.8	533.8
Cl-	390.0	100.0	390.0	130.0	318.0	38.9	374.4	76.7
	Concentration, g/l							
Zn	122.0	97.9	122.0	105.92	120.6	93.65	90.64	63.9
H <sub>2</sub> SO <sub>4</sub>	109.45	111.8	109.45	110.5	125.0	148.5	135.0	147.5

Table 3. Technological parameters of the process

Technological parameters	Ex-1	Ex-2	Ex-3	Ex-4
Experiment				
Process parameters				
Anode	Pb+1% Ag			
Number of anodes, (pcs)	2			
Cathode	Al (5mm)	Al (1mm)	Al (1mm)	Al (1mm)
Number of cathodes, (pcs)	1			
Electrode arrangement in the system	A-K-A			
Cathodic current density, j (A/m <sup>2</sup> )	500			
Electrolyte volume, V (l)	5			
Electrolyte temperature, t (°C)	38±2			
Electrolyte circulation (number of cell volume changes/h)	2			
Process time for reduction the concentration of Zn in the electrolyte by 30 g/l, (h)	25.6	30.76	25.11	25.11
Electrochemical equivalent for Zn, (g / Ah)	1.219			
Mass of the cathode deposit - theoretic, (g)	150			
Glue- start, mg/l	50			
Measurements during the process				
Glue, (mg / l 24 h)	50	50	50	50
Cell voltage, min - max, U (V)	3.4 - 3.6	3.3 - 3.7	3.4-3.6	3.2-3.35
Current, min - max, I (A)	4.75-4.85	3.9-4.2	4.9-4.95	4.85-4.99
Electrolyte temperature, t (°C)	38	37	38	36
Measurements after the end of the process				
Duration of electrolysis process, (h)	25.6	30.76	25.11	25.11
Cathodic deposit mass (g)	75.6	115.5	133.95	131.6
Mass of anode sludge (g)	18.1	18.2	6.2	5.5
Current efficiency, η (%)	50.4	77.0	89.3	87.73

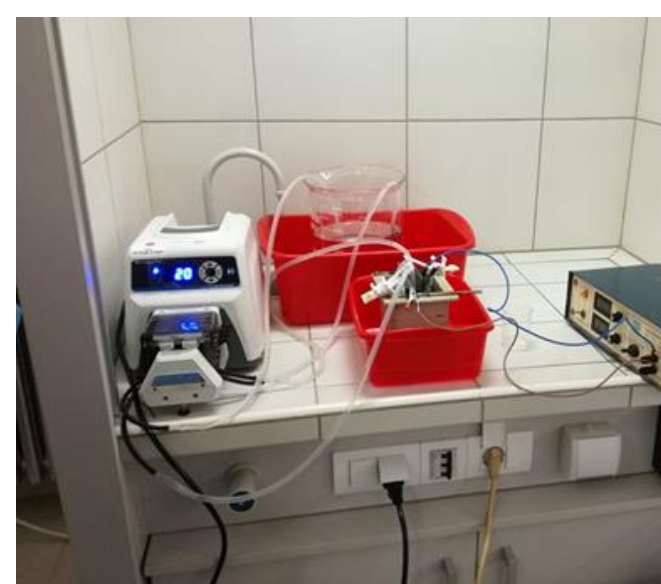


Figure 1. Electrochemical system for laboratory tests

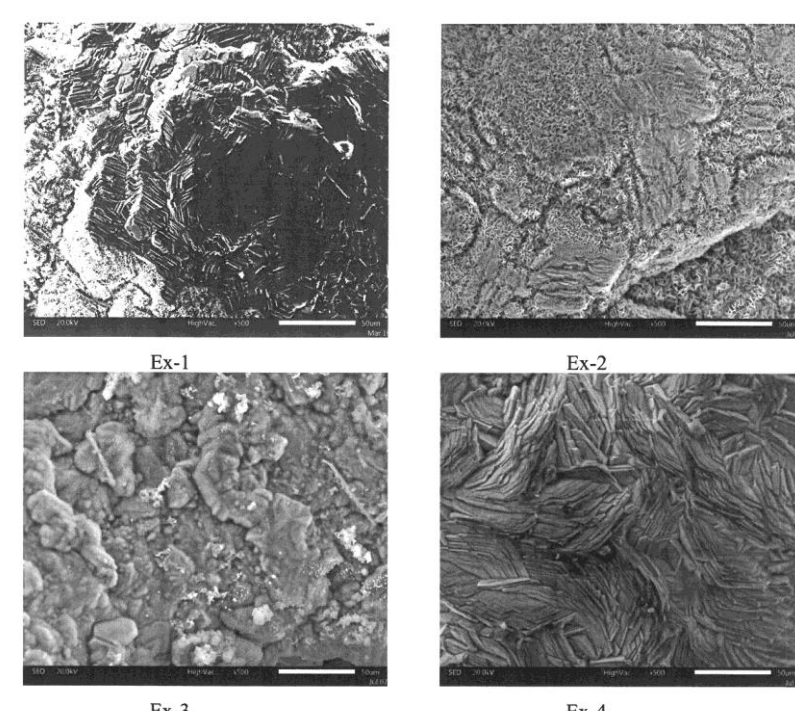


Figure 2. SEM images of zinc deposit

Based on SEM EDS analysis of cathode deposits (Figure 2) obtained from the same starting electrolyte (Ex-1 and Ex-2), of which composition is shown in Table 2 using different electrode systems: (Ex-1: cathode Al (5 mm) and anode Pb + 1% Ag and Ex-2: cathode Al (1 mm) and anode Pb + 1% Ag) it can be concluded follows:

- In Ex-1, an inhomogeneous, porous deposit was obtained over the entire surface of the cathode (the deposit is transparent) containing lead, manganese and cadmium, with a low current efficiency of 50.4%.

- In Ex-2, a cathode deposit was obtained with less impurity and fewer holes, with a current efficiency of 77.0%.

- In both experiments, the concentration of Co, Cd, Mn, Cl and Zn decreased during the process, while the concentration of Cu increased. The decrease in Cd content is almost identical in both experiments (Ex-1: 67.14% and Ex-2: 77%) and is a consequence of deposition on the cathode having in mind the position of Cd in the voltage series [5–6]. Decrease in chlorine ion concentration occurs as a consequence of the separation of elemental chlorine and the formation of chlorine-based compounds [5]. The decrease in the concentration of Ni and Co is a consequence of the simultaneous deposition on the cathode due to the lower overvoltage in relation to the value for zinc [6–7]. The concentration of Mn decreases as a consequence of the formation of manganese dioxide at the anodes and its deposition in the form of anode sludge. Based on the study of the influence of the type of cathode on the quality of zinc deposits, it can be concluded that the use of aluminum cathode of 1 mm (chemical composition shown in Table 1.) obtained cathode zinc of commercial quality while the quality of zinc obtained using aluminum cathode of 5 mm Table 1.) far below commercial quality. It should also be noted that in the second experiment, less current efficiency was achieved.

In the third and fourth experiments, the influence of very low content of impurities in the electrolyte on the current efficiency and the quality of deposits (Ni, Co, Cd, Cu) was investigated. The results showed a current efficiency of 89.3% (Ex-3) and 87.73% (Ex-4), respectively. The results confirm that zinc electrolysis is an extremely sensitive process, especially to impurities from electrolytes that are more electropositive than zinc, and that in order to obtain a quality deposit and achieve high current efficiency, the impurity content in the electrolyte must be very low [7].

The resulting anode sludge contains from 35.77% to 58.72% Mn (in the form of MnO<sub>2</sub>) and it can be used in zinc production for oxidation processes after washing and drying.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The results of laboratory tests of obtaining electrolytic zinc from electrolyte obtained by leaching and purification of filter dust of electric arc furnaces confirmed that electrolysis of zinc is an extremely sensitive process, especially to impurities that are more electropositive than zinc. These metals precipitate together with zinc and form cathode surfaces with low overvoltage of hydrogen evolution. In order to obtain a quality cathode deposit of zinc, it is necessary that the process electrolyte is almost completely free of impurities. In all experiments, a decrease in the concentration of chlorine ions was observed, which can be explained by the reactions at the anode, which leads to the separation of elemental chlorine and the formation of chlorine - based compounds. Anode sludge, which is almost pure MnO<sub>2</sub> in composition, can be used in zinc production for oxidation processes or as a commercial product after washing and drying.

### Acknowledgments

This work was financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, Grant Nos. 451-03-68/2022-14/200052 and 451-03-68/2022-14/200135.

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