Improvement in Sodium Reduction Process During TAC

Mehboob Hussain[1], Omar S Abdulla AlHashemi[2], Sufi Mubarak Ali[3], Rashid Al Awadi[4], Hassan Al Raqabani[5] and Sajjad Hussain Shah[6]

1. Senior Manager – Metallurgy
2. General Superintendent - Billet
3. Superintendent – Metallurgy
4. Senior Supervisor - Casting Ops
5. Superintendent - Reduction Services
6. Supervisor – Reduction Services

Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA), Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Corresponding author: rawadi@ega.ae
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Abstract

The Treatment of Aluminium in Crucible (TAC) process, integrated to sodium reduction skimming stations in Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA) Al Taweelah smelter, consists essentially in the addition of aluminium fluoride (AlF_3) to the molten metal during the first seconds of agitation and resulting in removal of alkali metal components through the formation of stable fluoride compound. This entire operation is to reduce aluminium oxidation and avoiding factors that could impact the performance of the final aluminium products. Despite its effectiveness, this process incurs substantial costs, due to the consumption of AlF_3 and TAC rotors. The continuous recirculation of AlF_3 particles in the molten metal induces erosion and abrasion on the TAC rotor, that necessitates frequent replacement and escalating maintenance and spare costs. In 2021, 861 t of high bulk density AlF_3 costing 4.9 MUSD were consumed. The use of high density AlF_3 with sharp and abrasive crystal faced particles for metal treatment leads to micro-cutting and more severe erosion and abrasion resulting in higher consumption of rotors. Comparing to low bulk density AlF_3 with rounded shape particles, micro-ploughing and built-up wedges were mainly observed. This leads to lower erosion and abrasion of the rotor surface. This paper proposes the optimization of TAC operation to achieve the required metal quality and process efficiency, while reducing the cost associated with AlF_3 and TAC rotors consumption. Consequently, it is proposed substituting high bulk density AlF_3 with low bulk density AlF_3 for molten metal treatment. This change aimed to reduce erosion and abrasion on the TAC rotor, thereby prolonging its lifespan and reducing operational costs. Indeed, the implementation of low bulk density AlF_3 yielded to promising results by achieving a remarkable 39 % reduction in AlF3 consumption, as compared to the initial target of 20 %, with operating life greater than 600 cycles per rotor. This represents a substantial reduction of 54 % in rotor consumption. These improvements not only enhanced process efficiency but also generated significant and validated savings of approximately 0.6 MUSD.

Keywords: Sodium reduction of molten aluminium, Low bulk density aluminium fluoride, Skimming station, Treatment of aluminium in crucible, Cost reduction.

1. Introduction

Treatment of Aluminium in Crucible (TAC) is a critical process used in EGA's Al Taweelah smelter. This process, integrated with sodium reduction skimming stations, involves the addition of aluminium fluoride (AlF_3) to molten aluminium. The primary objective is to remove alkali metal components, which can otherwise adversely affect the aluminium properties and performance. However, the traditional use of high bulk density AlF_3 leads to significant wear and tear on TAC rotors, incurring high costs for replacement and maintenance.

2. Background of the Process

The TAC process involves adding AlF_3 to molten aluminium during the initial seconds of agitation. This addition helps in forming stable fluoride compounds, which effectively remove alkali metals from the aluminium. This step is crucial in reducing oxidation of aluminium and maintaining the quality of the final product. Despite its effectiveness, the process is costly due to the consumption of AlF_3 and the wear on TAC rotors. In 2021, the smelter consumed 861 t of high bulk density AlF_3, costing approximately 4.9 MUSD. Figures 1 and 2 show the equipment at a sodium reduction skimming station.

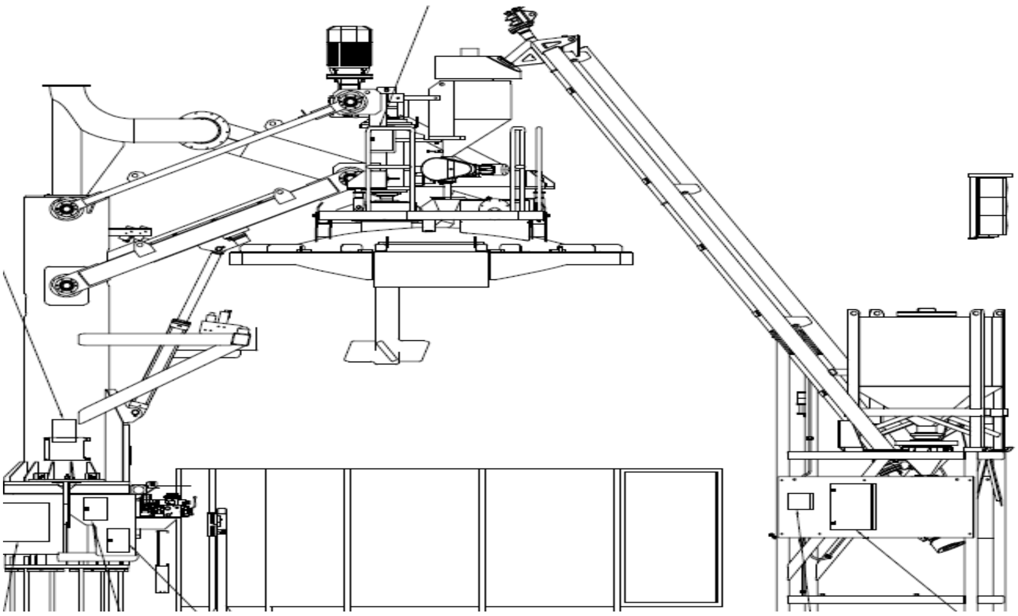

Figure 1. Sodium Reduction Skimming Station: Rotor and ALF_3 handling equipment [1].

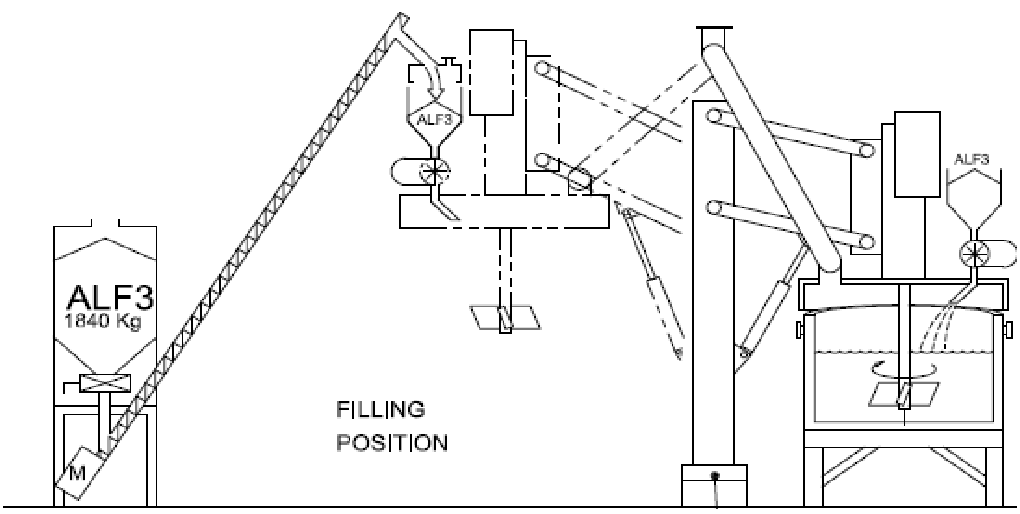

Figure 2. Metal treatment with AlF_3 and rotor and allied equipment [1].

7. Learning from the Project

The successful substitution of HBD AlF_3 with LBD AlF_3 highlights the importance of optimising material properties to enhance process efficiency and reduce costs. Key learnings from this project include:

1. The importance of particle shape and density in reducing wear and tear on machinery.
2. The significant cost savings achievable through material optimization.
3. The need for continuous monitoring and adjustment of operational parameters to maximize efficiency and lifespan of equipment.
4. This project demonstrates that with careful analysis and strategic changes, substantial improvements in process efficiency and cost savings can be achieved in industrial operations.

8. Conclusions

The optimization of the TAC process through the substitution of high bulk density AlF_3 with low bulk density AlF_3 has proven to be a successful strategy in reducing operational costs and improving process efficiency. The reduction in AlF_3 consumption and the extended lifespan of TAC rotors have resulted in significant cost savings and enhanced the overall performance of the smelter. This case study underscores the value of continuous process improvement and material optimization in achieving operational excellence in the aluminium industry.

9. References

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