PROCESSING OF OFF-BALANCE ORES: CHALLENGES AND TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

Karshiboyev Sh.B
PhD., Associate Professor of the Department of Metallurgy,
Sayfullayeva D.A
PhD student of the Department of Metallurgy. Almalyk Branch of the Tashkent State Technical University named after Islam Karimov (AB TSTU, Almalyk city, Uzbekistan).

Abstract: *Off-balance ores, also known as subeconomic or marginal ores, represent mineral resources that are not considered economically viable under current market conditions. However, due to the depletion of high-grade ore reserves and advances in mineral processing technologies, the utilization of these ores is gaining attention. This paper discusses the characteristics of off-balance ores, the challenges in processing them, and modern technological approaches for their efficient recovery.*

INTRODUCTION

Off-balance sheet ores refer to low-grade mineral deposits or ores that are not included on a company's balance sheet due to their low concentration or high processing costs, making them uneconomical to extract under current conditions. Enrichment of these ores involves various physical and chemical processes to separate valuable minerals from waste rock (gangue), increasing the concentration of the desired metal and making extraction economically viable. Off-balance sheet ores are mineral deposits that, while potentially containing valuable metals, are not currently considered part of a company's assets due to their low concentration or high extraction costs. These ores may be deemed uneconomical to mine under existing conditions, making them "off-balance sheet" because they don't significantly impact the company's financial statements. Off-balance ores At the "Yoshlik I" and "Kalmakkir" deposits in Uzbekistan, there are off-balance ores containing pyrite. According to The University of Chicago Press: Journals, the study also explored the enrichment of silver ores through processes such as dissolving silver carbonate in water saturated with carbon dioxide and precipitating silver from solutions of organic or carbonic substances. Gold-containing ore beneficiation involves processes such as the primary vibration of water in a precipitation machine for concentrating gold.

Off-balance ores are mineral resources that fall outside the classification of commercially viable ore reserves due to low metal content, complex mineralogy, or technological limitations. In many mining operations, such ores are stockpiled or discarded, leading to both environmental concerns and the underutilization of valuable minerals. Recent developments in extraction techniques, along with increased demand for metals, have sparked interest in re-evaluating and processing these ores.

Characteristics of Off-Balance Ores. Off-balance ores typically have:

- Low concentrations of target metals (e.g., copper, gold, molybdenum).
- Fine-grained or complex mineral associations.
- High levels of impurities.
- Difficult flotation or leaching characteristics.

Challenges in Processing. Processing off-balance ores presents several technical and economic challenges:

- Low metal recovery: Conventional techniques often fail to achieve sufficient recovery rates.
- High processing costs: Additional reagents, energy, and time are required.
- Environmental impact: Large volumes of tailings and waste may result.

Technological Approaches

1. Pre-Concentration Techniques
- Sensor-based ore sorting removes barren material before grinding.
- Gravity separation concentrates heavy minerals prior to flotation or leaching.

2. Advanced Flotation
- Modified reagent regimes improve selectivity and recovery.
- Microbubble or nanobubble flotation enhances performance on fine particles.

3. Bioleaching
- Bacteria such as Acidithiobacillus ferrooxidans oxidize sulfide minerals, making extraction more effective.

4. Hydrometallurgical Processing
- Pressure leaching and solvent extraction are applied to complex ores.
- Flotation-leaching hybrids are effective for mixed oxide-sulfide ores.

5. Reprocessing of Tailings
- Old tailings are revisited using modern techniques to recover previously lost metals.

Case Studies. Several mining operations have successfully processed off-balance ores:

- Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have pilot projects for copper and gold recovery.
- In Chile, heap leaching of marginal copper ores increases recovery rates.

Environmental and Economic Benefits. Processing off-balance ores contributes to:

- Reduced environmental footprint.
- Improved resource efficiency.
- Creation of economic value from ignored materials.

Cost-Benefit Analysis. The economic viability of enrichment processes needs to be carefully assessed, considering the costs of mining, processing, and metal recovery versus the value of the extracted metal.

Environmental Impact. Enrichment processes can have environmental consequences, such as the generation of tailings (waste material) and the potential for

chemical contamination. Sustainable practices and responsible waste management are crucial.

Conclusion

With rising metal demand and depletion of high-grade deposits, off-balance ores represent a valuable secondary resource. Through the integration of modern technologies such as advanced flotation, bioleaching, and pre-concentration, it is possible to turn these subeconomic materials into profitable sources of metals. Continued research and investment are essential to develop cost-effective and environmentally responsible solutions for processing off-balance ores. The enrichment of off-balance sheet ores is a crucial aspect of resource management and sustainable mining, enabling the economic recovery of valuable metals from deposits that would otherwise be left unexploited.

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