

## PYRITE ROASTING, AN ALTERNATIVE TO SULPHUR BURNING

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### Abstract

The roasting of sulphide ores and concentrates is often the first step in the production of metals or chemicals. In many processes, the production of sulphuric acid is viewed as a by-product, while in some plants production is an important economic factor. Regardless of the purpose, a pyrite roasting plant consists of mainly three plant sections: roasting, gas cleaning and sulphuric acid. With the addition of air, the pyrite concentrates are transformed into solid oxides and gaseous sulphur dioxide at temperatures of 600 - 1000° C. After cleaning and cooling, the sulphur dioxide in the roasting gas is further processed to sulphuric acid. Two types of reactors are used depending on the application: stationary or circulating fluid bed .

**For over 60 years, Outotec** has progressively been developing the principle of fluidised bed technology in several different reactor types for a multitude of process applications. The versatility of the fluidised bed reactor system has manifested itself in the treatment of minerals, including solid fuels, and for metallurgical processes both in the ferrous and non-ferrous fields. Process applications have included roasting, calcining, combustion and charring of coals, as well as off-gas treatment.

This paper provides a summary of the pyrite roasting technology currently used along with a simple cost comparison of pyrite roasting and sulphur burning processes.

### Introduction

Pyrite roasting and sulphur burning plants are built for the production of sulphuric acid. Whereas the burning of elemental sulphur is the main source for sulphuric acid, the roasting process is an interesting alternative once pyrite concentrate is available. In addition to these two applications, Figure 1 shows a wider variety of sources for the production of sulphuric acid, as there are also sulphidic ores, tail/flue gases, iron sulphate to name only a few.

In some countries, pyrites and iron sulfide ores still constitute today, an important raw material basis for sulfur dioxide production, especially as the primary stage for sulfuric acid manufacture. The most important iron sulfide minerals are pyrite  $\text{FeS}_2$  as well as pyrrhotite  $\text{Fe}_7\text{S}_8$ . They occur in varying purity as sedimentary rocks in all formations, and as minor constituents in coal deposits. , Apart from gangue materials which are present in varying proportions in pyritic ores, other constituents include sulfides of nonferrous metals, especially copper, zinc, and lead and to a lesser extent cobalt, nickel, and gold. In some cases, pyrites may also contain significant amount of arsenic as well as fluorides and chlorides. The production of pyrites, either as crude pyrites or as beneficiated pyrites,

is highly dependent on the fertilizer market, sulphur prices and the amount of produced sulfuric acid. Flotation pyrites are, however, obtained in marketable quantities as a byproduct of nonferrous metal sulfide beneficiation plants.

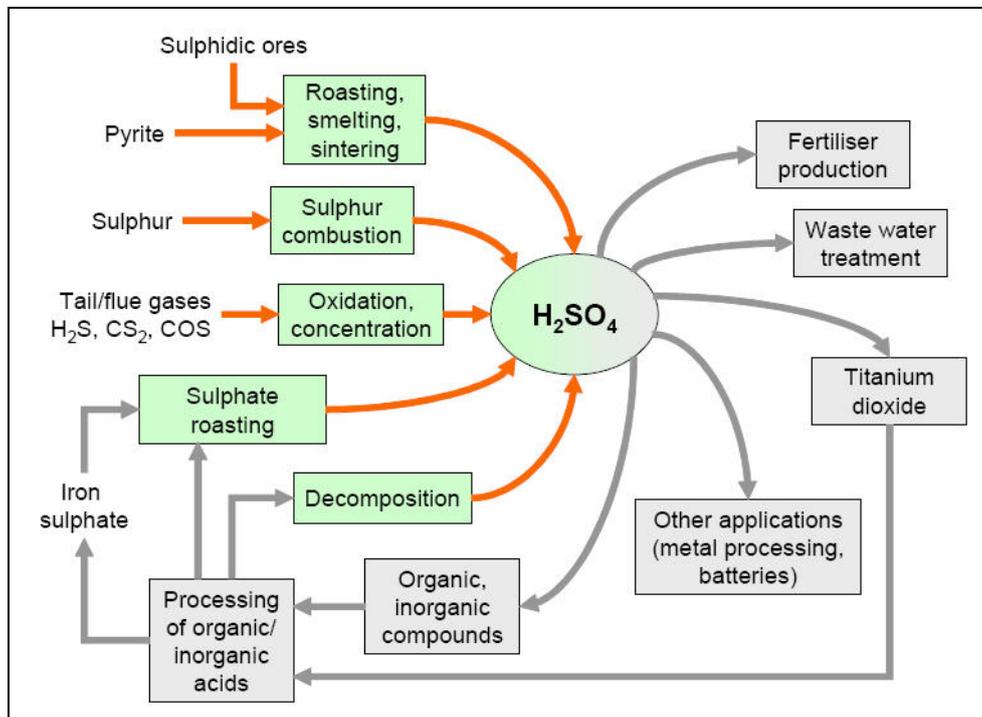


Figure 1: Source and Demand for sulphuric acid plants

The roasting processes as shown in Figure 1 are related to the fluid bed reactor. The largest single line stationary fluid bed roasting plant in operation today has a capacity of 1,130 t/d of pyrite/pyrrhotite concentrate. Further development has now been done to increase this maximum capacity for a single roasting line up to 1,800 t/d of concentrate. From an economic and technical standpoint, this throughput can only be achieved for one line by applying circulating fluid bed technology. In similar applications, the throughput e.g. in whole ore gold roasting plants can reach up to 3,800 t/d.

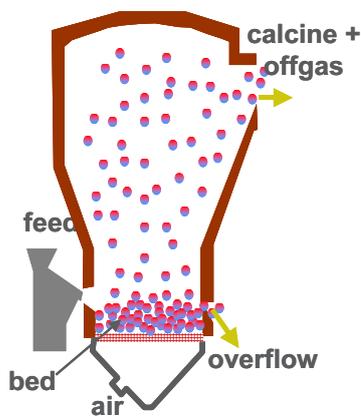


Figure 2: Principle of Stationary Fluid Bed Roasters (SFB)

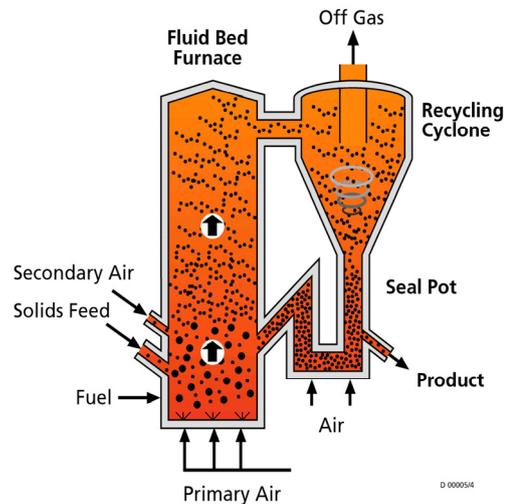


Figure 3: Principle of circulating Fluid Bed

*Stationary Fluid Bed Furnace (SFB).* This roaster was developed for dry pyrite feeding and designed to recover the maximum amount of heat for steam production. The temperature of the fluid bed is kept constant by indirect cooling; the surplus heat is removed in the fluid bed by immersed cooling elements which form part of a waste heat system for the production of high-pressure steam.

Pyrite grain size is usually up to 6mm in diameter. The coarser the grain, the higher the gas velocity must be to maintain the bed in a fluidized state. Even flotation pyrites with a grain size less than 70  $\mu\text{m}$  can be processed in the fluid bed roaster. Gas velocity in the fluid bed ranges from 0.4 – 1.5 m/s at 1 bar and 850°C.

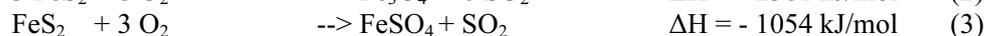
*Circulating Fluid Bed Roasting (CFB).* A further step towards more efficient roasting in terms of higher throughput rates and process controllability is the CFB process. This technology was originally applied in the calcination of hydrated alumina or clay and combustion of coal, and was later adapted for the roasting gold-bearing minerals. Following extensive pilot plant tests, the first industrial-scale plant was built by Lurgi – now Outotec – and commissioned in 1991 in Australia. The company has been responsible for commercially introducing the advantages of the technology to the industry throughout its development. Contrary to a “normal” stationary fluid bed, circulating fluid bed roasters are operated at higher gas velocities in the range of 3 – 6 m/s. Due to the velocity, the fine solids are entrained with the gas and partly recycled to the roaster via a cyclone.

Year	Location	Number & Plant Type	Concentrate
2009	Syama, Mali	1 x 590 t/d CFB	Pyrite (Gold)
2007	Tongling, China	1 x 1130 t/d SFB	Pyrite / Pyrrhotite
2004	ETI, Turkey	1 x 630 t/d SFB	Pyrite
1996	Wengfu, China	2 x 600 t/d SFB	Coarse Pyrite
1991	KCGM/Gidji W.A.	2 x 575 t/d CFB	Pyrite (Gold)
1984	Almagrera, Spain	1 x 725 t/d SFB	Pyrite
1983	Siilinjärvi, Finland	1 x 420 t/d SFB	Pyrite

Table 1: Outotec roasting technology for pyrite concentrate, latest plants installed

### Pyrite dead roasting

The major objective of the roasting process is to eliminate the sulphur contained in the concentrate and to provide a calcine product and SO<sub>2</sub> containing gases. A roasting temperature of 600-1,000°C is generally the most suitable range, depending on the process and mineralogical requirements. As the sulphur content of the sulphide concentrate is primarily pyrite (FeS<sub>2</sub>), the following simplified main equations may apply, whereas the predominants of the reactions depend on partial pressure of oxygen and the temperature range:



Since all three equations represent strictly exothermic reactions, a considerable amount of excess heat is developed during the roasting process in the fluid bed system and is recovered in the waste heat boiler system.

The oxygen necessary for the roasting reactions is supplied to the fluid bed system as atmospheric air.

The products gained from the roasting process are calcine and roasting gas. The calcine consists of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, FeSO<sub>4</sub> and gangue material, while the roasting gas has SO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>3</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O as steam. Depending on the chlorine content in the roaster feed, HCl may also exist in the roasting gas in corresponding concentrations.

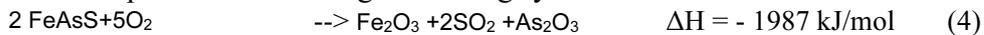
The design of a roasting plant depends on the type of concentrate. Some of the main process relevant figures are the sulphur content and the particle grain size. Additional important process figures are the reaction temperature and the concentrate throughput.

The pyrite concentrates can be classified as:

Type	Composition	Grain Size
Pyrite Concentrate (flotation)	S 47-48 wt%; Fe 42-43 wt%	fine particles 55% < 45µm
Coarse Pyrite	S 47-48 wt%; Fe 42-43 wt%	coarse particles 0 – 6 mm
Pyrrhotite Concentrate (flot.)	S 34-38 wt%; Fe 50-54 wt%	fine particles 55% < 45µm
Coarse Pyrrhotite	S 28-29 wt%; Fe 47-50 wt%	coarse particles 0 – 4 mm

Table 2: Types of pyrite concentrate

In case of a high arsenic content in the pyrite, a special treatment is required using a two-stage roasting process. Arsenic occurs in pyrites as arsenical pyrite ( $\text{FeAsS}$ ;  $\text{FeAs}_2 \cdot \text{FeS}_2$ ). Under the usual roasting conditions, with a slight excess of oxygen in relation to the stoichiometric requirement for converting the iron content of the pyrite to hematite, the majority of the arsenic is oxidized to As(V) and will react with the hematite to form stable iron arsenate ( $\text{FeAsO}_4$ ). In this way, about 70 – 80% of the arsenic content in the pyrite feed becomes bound to the cinder. This conversion can be optimized in a CFB reactor according to special process conditions. The remaining arsenic, which is oxidized to As(III) as shown in Equation (4), is volatilized and entrained by the roaster gas and must be separated in the wet gas cleaning system:



In instances where the cinder is to be used in steelmaking, high arsenic pyrites must be processed in a two-stage fluid-bed roasting system. In the first stage, operating under oxygen-deficient conditions, no hematite, nor iron arsenate will form. The arsenic is thus almost completely volatilized and discharged with the roaster gases. In the second fluid bed stage, the separated cinder is oxidized to hematite. This principle is applied on an industrial scale using the Boliden roasting process.

#### **Sulphuric acid plant based on roasting of pyrite concentrate**

The technology for the roasting of fine flotation pyrite concentrates is a stationary fluid bed for small throughputs or a circulating fluid bed for high throughputs up to approx. 1,800 t/d. . With a heat recovery system, this roasting plant layout can be considered classic consisting of a fluid bed roaster, waste heat boiler, gas cleaning and calcine handling equipment. The  $\text{SO}_2$ -off-gas produced is then recovered in the sulphuric acid plants. The dry feed throughput can reach up to 370,000 tpa in an SFB and 590,000 tpa in a CFB plant.

The cinder product consists of 58 percent iron and is about 80 percent by weight smaller than 50 microns. This cinder product is a competitive source material for the cement industry as the iron containing additive. However, the extreme fineness of the cinder and its dusting tendency are undesirable and an agglomerating technique is needed. In order to keep the price of agglomerated pyrite cinders at a competitive level, the agglomerating method must be chosen so that the capital and operating costs (maintenance, power and water consumption) are low.

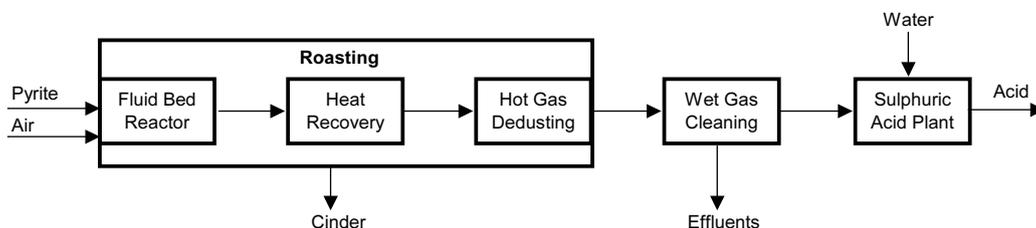


Figure 4: Block diagram Pyrite roasting plant

### Roasting

The roasting of sulphide concentrates is often the first process step in the production of metals or chemicals. With the addition of air, iron sulphides are transformed into solid oxides and gaseous sulphur dioxide at temperatures of 600 – 1,000°C. After cooling in a waste heat boiler to 320 – 400 °C, the waste gases, laden with 50 – 150 g/Nm<sup>3</sup> of dust, pass through a cyclone for preliminary separation of the coarse particles. The majority of the dust remaining in the hot gas is then removed in a hot-gas electrostatic precipitator. After cleaning and cooling, the sulphur dioxide in the roasting gas is further processed in the wet gas cleaning section.

		Gidji (Gold)	ETI (Pyrite)	Tongling (Pyrite/Pyrrhotite)
Location		Kalgoorlie/Australia	Bandirma/Turkey	Tongling/China
Roaster Type		CFB	SFB	SFB
Roaster Grate Area	m <sup>2</sup>	8.5	100	138
Raw Material		flot. Pyrite	flot. Pyrite	flot. Pyrite/Pyrrhotite
Feed		slurry	dry (9% H <sub>2</sub> O)	dry (6% H <sub>2</sub> O)
S content in feed	wt%	33	48	37
Capacity	t/d	575	650	1130
Roast Temperature	°C	640	850	900
Steam Production	t/h	no steam	43	82
Steam Parameters	MPa/°C	no steam	4.2/400	3.82/450
Cinder	t/h	20	20	41
Offgas Roaster	Nm <sup>3</sup> /h	58,000	60,000	100,000
Acid Production	t/d	no acid	750	1200
Power Consumption	kW	1000	1250	1400

Table 2: Example of Pyrite roasting plants

### Gas cleaning

The gas cleaning section can be divided into the hot area, which usually consists of the roasting section and the wet gas cleaning area, which starts at the quench throat of the Venturi scrubber. The gas is cooled to approx. 65°C by water evaporation in the circulating weak acid.

The weak acid bleed is discharged from the scrubber to the effluent treatment plant. The amount of weak acid bleed can vary in a wide range and depends on the process conditions and impurities in the concentrate / off-gas (an average value is ~3 m<sup>3</sup>/h, max. 10 % H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>). To allow for a convenient treatment of the weak acid, the contaminating, dissolved SO<sub>2</sub> gas is removed in an SO<sub>2</sub> stripping column.

The gas cooling to an outlet temperature of approx. 40°C takes place in a packed gas cooling tower. For the removal of fine particles and acid aerosols, normally two wet

electrostatic precipitators (ESP) arranged in a series are used. The Wet ESPs are of proven design and are constructed from acid-resistant material.

### **Sulphuric acid section**

The de-dusted, demisted, and cooled but humid gas from the gas cooling and cleaning section is conveyed to the drying tower by the SO<sub>2</sub> blower. The gas might be diluted with atmospheric air to ensure the right operation parameters. The dried gas is then compressed by means of one SO<sub>2</sub> gas blower arranged downstream the drying tower. The vertical converter comprises four catalyst beds of vanadium pentoxide type catalyst facilitating the exothermic oxidation of SO<sub>2</sub> to SO<sub>3</sub>. The final conversion efficiency will be approx. 99.8 percent. To allow for a plant's improved energy recovery, a boiler feed water economizer at the inlet of the final absorber.

In the intermediate absorption tower the SO<sub>3</sub> formed in catalyst beds 1-3 is absorbed by circulating acid (98.5 %). The gas leaving the tower practically contains no SO<sub>3</sub>, thus shifting the equilibrium to the SO<sub>3</sub> area of the reaction in the fourth catalyst bed.

In the final absorption tower, the SO<sub>3</sub> formed in the fourth catalyst bed is absorbed by sulphuric acid (98.5 %, 80 °C), which is collected in the pump tank, cooled and recirculated to the tower.

The gas leaving the tower passes a high efficiency candle type mist eliminator before it is released to the atmosphere via a stack. The product acid is cooled in a separate heat exchanger to 40 °C and is discharged from the pump tank by a product acid pump to the product acid tank.

### **Sulphuric acid plant based on sulphur combustion**

The layout of a sulphur burning plant consists of the sulphur melting section, the sulphur burning section, including the heat recovery, and the sulphuric acid itself.

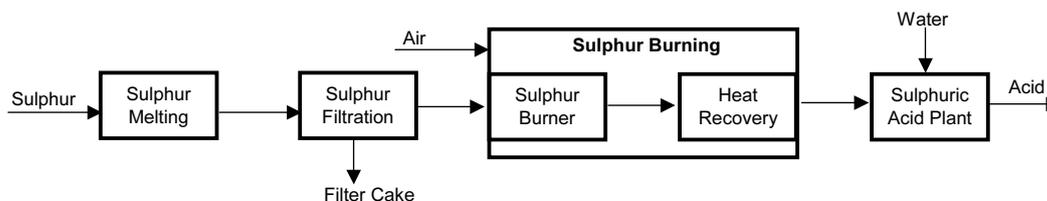


Figure 5: Block diagram sulphur combustion plant

Solid sulphur is supplied to the melting tank with a conveyor belt. Steam heating coils are provided in the melting tank, which automatically controls the liquid sulphur temperature by adjusting the steam flow. The integrated pre-coating section is used to precoat the leaf filter prior to the sulphur filtration cycle. Filter aid (diatomaceous earth) and lime are added to liquid sulphur and homogeneously mixed by the agitator. Pre-coating will be necessary at the beginning of each sulphur filtration cycle. Leaving the sulphur filter, the sulphur will be treated in an additional cartridge filter, which has only a guard function.

Outotec's LURO burner will be provided for atomisation of the liquid sulphur. The sulphur combustion furnace is of a horizontal design, with a multi-layer refractory lining.

After the furnace, the gas is cooled down in a waste heat boiler for the production of high pressure steam. The gases from the combustion section are fed to the converter system. In addition, the excess heat from the SO<sub>2</sub> oxidation is recovered and used to produce high-pressure super-heated steam. Various vessels are used as an integrated part of the sulphuric acid plant.

### Comparing the two processes

The comparison of pyrite roasting and sulphur burning can only be done on a general basis with some specific assumptions. Depending on the location of each project and actual market prices for the feed material, the cost analysis might look completely different. Transportation costs for sulphur have not been considered for this comparison, as well as any extra costs for cinder deposits or revenue for iron/hematite content or the recovery of valuable metals in the concentrate/cinder such as nickel, copper, zinc, gold, uranium etc.. Table 3 shows a parameter comparison of the two types of sulphuric acid plants. The pyrite roasting process has a maximum capacity of 1,200 t/d using an SFB and 1,500 t/d with a CFB. Sulphur burning can reach a capacity of 5,000 t/d.

If pyrite is available – and the cinder can be further processed for recovery of valuable metals or even be used in other industry sectors – roasting is definitely more beneficial than sulphur burning. In order to be even more flexible and independent from the world market there is also the possibility of a combination between pyrite roasting and sulphur burning.

		Pyrite Roasting		Sulphur Burning	
		SFB	CFB		
Capacity sulphuric acid	tpd	1200	1500	1500	5000
Feed Rate	tpd	1130	1800	490	1630
Furnace Offgas volume	Nm <sup>3</sup> /h	10500	130000	12000	26000
		0		0	0
SO <sub>2</sub> content in process gas	vol%	~ 11		11.5	18
High pressure steam	t/mt Mh	1.35 - 1.6		1.25 - 1.4	
Power Consumption	kWh/mt Mh	~ 70		~ 50	
By-Product	-	Cinder		no by-product	
Effluents / Waste	-	Weak acid		Filter Cake	

Table 3: Example and Comparison of Process Parameters of recently designed Acid Plants

The investment costs on a lump sum turnkey basis for both plants with the scope as indicated in the block diagrams shown in Figures 4 and 5 would result in 40 Mio € for a sulphur burning plant and 80 Mio € for a pyrite roasting plant with a capacity of 1,000 t/d sulphuric acid. In this case, the pyrite roasting plant has been estimated with a one line stationary fluid bed reactor.

To present a clearer view of the comparison, a break-even analysis was conducted for both processes and the results are shown in Figure 6. It is interesting to note that at a capacity of 1,000 t/d the consumption figures for factors such as fuel, water and even

labour are not significantly different. In fact, the only element that has a significant effect on the operating cost is the feed rate and consequently the feed price. Even though almost three times as much pyrite is needed per hour to produce 1,000 t/d of sulphuric acid, the operating cost for a pyrite roasting plant is still lower than that of a sulphur burning plant because the price of sulphur is much more expensive than pyrite.

At the time the analysis was conducted, the cost of pyrite was estimated at USD 35/ton whilst the cost of sulphur was estimated at USD150/ton. Based on these prices, the operating cost for pyrite roasting was estimated at USD 41/ton of acid produced whilst the operating cost for sulphur burning was estimated at USD 74/ton of acid produced.

The analysis reveals that because the capital cost for the sulphur burning plant is comparatively lower than pyrite roasting, it naturally breaks even earlier than the pyrite roasting plant at three years. However, because the operating cost for pyrite roasting is so low, not only does pyrite roasting break even a mere 12 months after the sulphur burning plant, but it also gains equal returns by the fifth year and exceeds the returns of sulphur burning by the sixth.

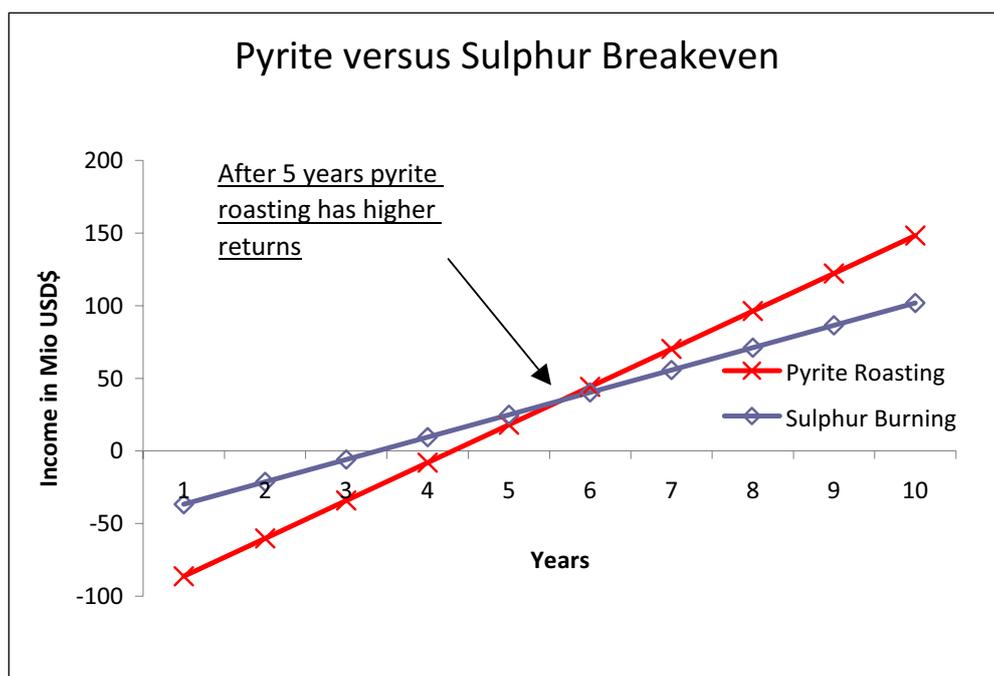


Figure 6: Pyrite versus Sulphur Breakeven (example 1000 t/d H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>)

### Conclusion

With broad experience in the fluid bed technology, especially in the area of roasting, Outotec has optimized and developed roasting plants with increased throughput capacities. This development now reaches throughputs in a single roasting line for stationary fluid beds of up to 1,130 t/d and circulating fluid beds of up to 1,800 t/d based

on pyrite concentrate and depending on chemical composition. At the capacity range described, the pyrite roasting process is the favourite process route especially when looking at long-term revenues. The economic benefit of a roasting plant as an alternative to the sulphur burning will be significant after an operation of approximately five years.

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Marcus Runkel received his Dipl.Ing. Degree in Process Engineering in 2000 from the University of Applied Science in Mannheim, Germany. The diploma thesis with the title "Characterization of catalysts for the conversion of SO<sub>2</sub>" was done together with Lurgi Metallurgie. In 1995 he finished his apprenticeship as a laboratory assistant in physics. During his professional career at Outotec he was the responsible senior process engineer for acquisition, design and commissioning of different roasting plants in specific for zinc and pyrite concentrates. One of his latest projects was for a nickel pyrohydrolysis fluid bed reactor.

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Development and Pilot Plant operation of various Fluid Bed Processes like: - Alumina Calcining, Pyrite and Zinc ore roasting, Magnesite and Dolomite calcining, Gold Ore roasting etc., various Fluid Bed related patents, Commissioning experience with Industrial Fluid Bed Systems like Pyrite Roasters, Alumina Calciners and CFB-Boilers