

JPC Minerals SA

JPC Minerals has recently reopened for business. IM talked to **Jean Pierre Collart**, managing director, and asked about its rejuvenation and role in today's market



Jean Pierre Collart, managing director of JPC Minerals SA

Background & business summary

JPC Minerals SA is a small, privately-owned, trading company established in 1986 and located in Brussels, Belgium. It specialises in the global trade and sale of industrial mineral products and more specifically the basic raw materials used in the production of ceramics, glass, refractory and foundry products, plastics and polymers.

Jean Pierre Collart, managing director, has thirty years of experience in trading, first in non-ferrous metals and later in industrial minerals. He has been involved in the worldwide sale of South American type calcined bauxite for over 10 years, acquiring experience in the refractory industry and traded in bauxite, chamotte and mullite.

In the past, the rising markets of cheaper Chinese bauxites and grogs meant alternative materials and markets had to be found and amongst these were andalusite from South Africa and the sale of French kaolin in Europe and the Middle-East.

This has brought JPC Minerals in close contact with the global ceramic industry and it continued to build its trade in zircon and wollastonite. Meanwhile, owing to a previous experience in South Africa, an activity also developed in chrome sands for the foundry and refractory markets. (See www.jpccminerals.com for more details.)

Describe your company's role and position

Today, JPC Minerals is mainly trading in zircon sands and flours, wollastonite (powder and acicular grades), chrome ores and sands. Sources are mainly from Australia, China and South Africa. Our markets are the main ceramic and refractory producing countries such as Spain, Italy, France and Germany. We also sub-contract packing, bulking, shipping, transport and milling.

We offer package deals both to our sources and customers including the various steps of the transactions allowing them to concentrate on their own concerns.

What are the biggest problems facing traders?

It is more and more difficult for smaller traders to find a determinant role to play because groups created by mergers often establish their own "in-house" trading opportunities. But some of our expertise cannot always be replaced in a short time and most of our goodwill is based on our privileged and sometime personal relationships with the customers. However, it is not unusual that larger groups call upon us when they need something quickly or special or a material that is in short supply.

What are the main challenges in sourcing materials?

The main challenge is the huge and almost uncontrollable

demand from the very few markets of China, India and Brazil for raw materials. It's of concern when one looks at the instability of some producing countries. Some basic ores and alloys can be replaced and substituted, but some others cannot. In the past, substitution was caused by technical shortage or unreasonable price rises. Today it's a different cause: huge demand versus a running out of vital resources.

Which regions do you consider as emerging markets?

Obviously China and India are the main emerging markets. Brazil should be looked at more and more in terms of sources of raw material and local processing should be increased to offer high quality mineral products. Africa could be a main player soon, and the Chinese have understood this very well by investing heavily in several African countries that were previously western orientated.

What do you see as growth opportunities?

In view of earlier described shortages, recycling will become more important. It happens already extensively for silica and chrome sands in foundries and others minerals will follow certainly. Recovery yields are improving constantly.

We have no particular views on the Middle East which we consider an ever-increasing consuming market mainly for building materials and ceramics. We don't have any business in Russia although some minerals we deal with can be sourced there. Europe, due to its high technical education system such as universities and laboratories, has a real role to play in research and development of environmentally-friendly materials. It could create jobs and be a substitute for the present loss of production to other cheaper countries.

How has trading changed over the years?

I am a bit nostalgic about the old days of metal and mineral trading, mainly because the relationship amongst traders has changed. The internet is partly responsible, with hundreds of emails pouring in, people hardly have the time to pick up the phone. One of the important aspects of trading, personal relationship, is suffering in my opinion. Few young traders will realise that firm offers used to be sent by post with the order only being received two weeks later. Phone calls had to go via the main switch-board with hours of waiting time.

There are many examples that make our trading job a rather pleasant experience and at almost 67 I still find trading can be a lot of fun. I am happy to carry on with the job, but once I find the fun is gone, I will stop and play golf...!

Want to become a Trading Face? contact Mike O'Driscoll, Editor, modriscoll@indmin.com

