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Slag Grinding Boosts Business at Essroc Cement

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MIDDLEBRANCH, Ohio -- Recent advancements in the production of ground, granulated blast-furnace slag at Essroc Cement Co.'s plant here are improving the overall performance of its cement and boosting sales, the company reports.

The Stark County plant produces ground, granulated slag, a by-product of steelmakers' blast furnaces. "Basically, ground granulated slag enhances the performance and appearance of portland cement," said Dale Lewis, Middlebranch plant supervisor. "This simple by-product of steelmaking is changing our business."



The ground, granulated slag has helped Essroc realize steady growth in product sales to ready-mix cement customers, he reported. In 1998, shortly after Essroc began grinding slag, he added, the company sold 20,000 tons. Today slag sales are projected to exceed 100,000 tons.

Essroc's Middlebranch plant employs 10 full-time workers who operate two finishing mills that grind slag around the clock to the approximate fineness of Type III cement.

The product improvements are helping to keep cement production humming at Essroc's plant in Bessemer, Pa., where 130 are employed. The Bessemer plant turned out 60,500 metric tons of cement in 2003, a figure company executives expect to significantly increase.

"We're getting more and more inquiries about our process and these are keeping our Bessemer sales force busy," said Jack Whitlinger, Essroc marketing manager for the slag product. "This is clearly a growth area for Essroc and with good reason. Ground granulated slag improves concrete quality for everything from stadiums to airport runways. We are really optimistic about its potential."

Slag grinding is one more first for the Middlebranch plant, which began operations in 1892 -- the first cement plant built west of the Appalachian Mountains. The plant was purchased by Essroc in 1990. When Essroc decided to grind granulated slag in 1998, the finishing mills, which had been idle for several years, were re-opened. They haven't stopped production since, Lewis said.

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