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Vale inaugurates Brazil's first ferronickel plant in Pará

This month, Vale opened its first nickel operation in Brazil. Onça Puma, in Ourilândia do Norte, southeast Pará, is one of the largest ferronickel production plants in the world. The project, which covers the municipalities of Ourilândia do Norte, Tucumã and Parauapebas, has an annual production capacity of 220,000 tons of ferronickel, containing 53,000 tons of nickel, a highly valued product in the steel industry.

The start-up of this plant in Brazil further strengthens Vale's leadership position as the country's biggest net exporter. Total estimated investment in Onça Puma is approximately US\$2.84 billion. During the project's implementation phase, 8,000 jobs were created, and an additional 1,500 have been generated for the operational phase.

"Onça Puma is a milestone, not only because it is Vale's first nickel production plant in Brazil, but also as it provides an example of the building of sustainable relations with communities in the municipalities in the area covered by the project," says the company's director of South Atlantic Base Metal Operations, Ricardo Carvalho. Vale is the world's second biggest nickel producer, with operations in Canada, Indonesia and New Caledonia, as well as nickel refineries in the United Kingdom, Japan, Taiwan and China.

The first shipment, of 1,078 tons of ferronickel containing 385 tons of nickel, was made on May 11 at the Port of Itaqui in São Luís, Maranhão. The product was transported in 52 containers by the Carajás Railroad (EFC), and the final destination will be Asia and Europe.

The Onça Puma project was acquired by Vale in November 2005, with the aim of using deposits of lateritic nickel, a type of ore found close to the ground surface in hot and humid regions. The nickel production plant will use ore from two areas in the Onça Mountain, which is close to the plant, and the Puma Mountain, around 16 km away.

The project includes an electricity substation to serve the operational unit. Surplus power will be used by the Pará State electricity concession company to improve and extend the supply of power in the neighboring municipalities of Ourilândia do Norte, Tucumã, Xinguara and São Félix do Xingu.

Nickel is a metal that is resistant to oxidation and corrosion, and is used to make alloys with many different industrial applications. Most of it is consumed by the steel industry – 63% to produce stainless steel. Around 95% of Onça Puma's output will be shipped abroad, to countries such as China, Japan, Germany, Finland, Italy and the United States.

More information



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