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Cuba: Report On Nickel Production

by Barbara Khol

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In a recent interview with Cuba International magazine, Walter Lao, president of the nickel export company CUBANIQUEL, said production this year is estimated at 50,000 metric tons, worth US$350 million in foreign exchange. Cuba's nickel deposits are located in the eastern provinces, Camaguey (central) and Pinar del Rio (western) provinces. The island accounts for an estimated 37.3% of global reserves, or about 20 million MT. Cuban nickel production was heavily dependent on assistance from the former Soviet Union. Soviet technicians set up the island's most important processing plants located in Moa. The breakup of the USSR disrupted the industry; in 1991, output was down to 43,000 tons. Loa said recovery is now in full swing. A new technology, known as "acidlixiviation with pressure," is being tested at one of the Moa plants. The technology, developed in a joint project with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), separates nickel from cobalt. According to UNDP officials in Havana, application of this technology in all eastern Cuban plants is likely to triple earnings. The technology is also known to drastically reduce pollution generally associated with nickel processing plants. Loa said Cuba currently has nickel business deals with 50 companies in 25 countries. (Source: Radio Havana Cuba, 09/15/92)

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