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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA** [CA/CA];
University-Industry Liaison Office, 103 - 6190 Agronomy
Road, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z3 (CA).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **DIXON, David G.**
[US/CA]; 6716 London Drive, Delta, British Columbia
V4K 4W7 (CA). **RIVERA-VASQUEZ, Berny** [PE/PE];
Av. Andres A . Caceres # B-11, Samegua, Moquegua
(PE).

(74) Agents: **MCGRUDER, David J.** et al.; Oyen Wiggs
Green & Mutala LLP, 480 - The Station, 601 West Cor-

dova Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 1G1
(CA).

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(54) Title: LEACHING PROCESS FOR COPPER CONCENTRATES WITH A CARBON CATALYST

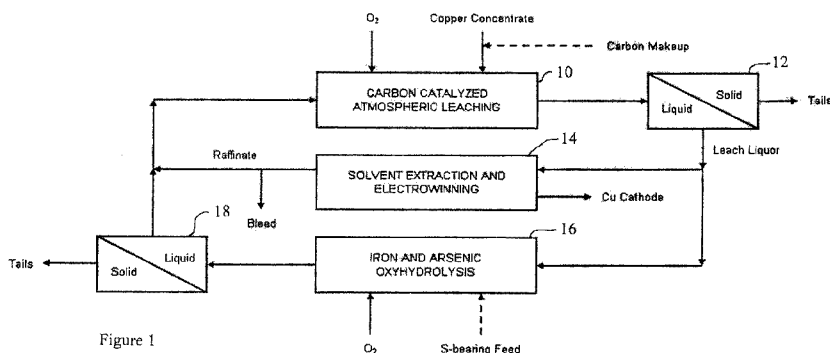


Figure 1

(57) Abstract: A method of recovering copper from a copper sulfide concentrate comprising a copper arsenic sulfosalt or a copper antimony sulfosalt, using carbon as a catalyst. The concentrate and carbon are added to an acidic sulfate leach solution. The copper is leached from the concentrate, in the presence of an oxygen-containing gas. The operating potential is maintained above a selected level. The carbon copper sulfide ratio of the carbon being added to the copper sulfide present in the concentrate being added is at least 1 :20. The carbon may be maintained above a selected concentration in the leach solution. The leached copper is recovered from the solution by conventional methods.

LEACHING PROCESS FOR COPPER CONCENTRATES WITH A CARBON CATALYST

Technical Field

The invention pertains to a hydrometallurgical chemical leaching process for the extraction of copper from concentrates containing copper arsenic sulfosalt and copper antimony sulfosalt minerals, using a carbon catalyst.

Background

Copper sulfides containing arsenic or antimony are commonly-occurring minerals. Arsenic-containing copper sulfides include sulpharsenites, such as enargite (Cu_3AsS_4), and sulpharsenates, such as tennantite ($\text{Cu}_{12}\text{As}_4\text{S}_{13}$). Antimony-containing copper sulfides include sulfantimonites, such as famatinite (Cu_3SbS_4), and sulphantimonates, such as tetrahedrite ($\text{Cu}_{12}\text{Sb}_4\text{S}_{13}$). It is difficult to recover the copper from such minerals. For example enargite has proven resistant to virtually every leaching process other than total pressure oxidation in autoclaves with oxygen at temperatures exceeding 200°C , which is not an economic process. Additionally, submitting enargite-containing copper concentrates to smelters for toll treatment incurs heavy financial penalties due to the high arsenic levels, when they are accepted at all.

There are two different approaches to leaching copper from concentrate, namely, bioleaching and chemical leaching. The distinction between bioleaching and chemical leaching is well established in the copper leaching art.

Bioleaching relies on the presence of bacteria or other microorganisms to enable the recovery of copper. Typically, bioleaching requires a slurry containing carbon dioxide and other microbial nutrients, sulfide concentrate and microorganisms as well as inoculant tanks, microbial monitoring systems, and control of acidity, pH and redox potential. Bioleaching of copper concentrates is typically very slow, with incomplete recoveries achieved even after many weeks to months of leaching.

Chemical leaching relies solely on a chemical interaction between minerals and does not require microorganisms. Chen, US 3,930,969, discloses a process whereby enargite is

anodically dissolved in an electrolytic cell containing a chloride solution with activated carbon added to the concentrate slurry. Approximately 28% of the copper was recovered.

It would be desirable to be able to recover copper from mineral concentrates containing copper arsenic sulfosalt and copper antimony sulfosalt minerals by an economically viable, hydrometallurgical chemical leaching process.

Summary of the Invention

The invention provides a hydrometallurgical method for extracting copper from copper concentrates containing copper arsenic sulfosalt and/or copper antimony sulfosalt minerals by a chemical leaching process which uses carbon as a catalyst for the leaching reaction. The concentrate and carbon are added in particulate form to an acidic sulfate leach solution. Copper is chemically leached from the concentrate in the leach solution in the presence of an oxygen-containing gas to produce a solution containing copper ions. The leached copper is then recovered from the solution.

In one embodiment of the invention, the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio of the carbon to the copper sulfide present in the concentrate is at least 1:20, or alternatively at least 1:9, or alternatively in the range of 1:5 to 20:1, or alternatively in the range of 1:2 to 4:1.

According to another embodiment, the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 5 grams per liter, or alternatively at least 10 grams per liter, or alternatively at least 20 grams per liter, or alternatively at some higher concentration.

According to one embodiment, the leaching is done under conditions whereby the operating potential of the leach solution is at least 390 mV versus Ag/AgCl, or alternatively at least 450 mV, or alternatively at least 470 mV, or alternatively at least 480 mV. Pyrite may be present in the copper sulfide concentrate, and, in such case, the leaching is done under conditions whereby the pyrite is not significantly oxidized, for example by maintaining the operating potential of the leach solution at less than 600 mV.

These and other features of the invention will be apparent from the following description and drawings of the preferred embodiments.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a process flowsheet for carbon-catalyzed atmospheric chemical leaching of copper concentrates, involving the steps of leaching (with internal carbon recycle), copper recovery (by SX-EW) and iron and arsenic rejection and makeup acid generation (by oxyhydrolysis).

Figure 2 is a graph of copper extraction versus reaction time, showing the effect of activated carbon addition on copper extraction from a copper concentrate containing copper arsenic sulfides in the form of enargite, luzonite and tennantite.

Figures 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are graphs of copper extraction versus reaction time, showing the effect of various concentrate and carbon treatments and operating conditions on copper extraction from a copper concentrate containing copper arsenic and copper antimony sulfides in the form of enargite and antimonian luzonite. **Figure 3** shows the effect of carbon addition and concentrate regrinding. **Figure 4** shows the effect of carbon recycle. **Figure 5** shows the effect of redox potential. **Figure 6** shows the effect of different carbon mass additions. **Figure 7** shows the effect of impeller speed.

Figure 8 is a graph of copper extraction versus reaction time for a further sample of enargite, showing the effect of various activated carbon catalysts.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

The Leaching Reaction

The process of the invention is described below in respect of the recovery of the copper from enargite, as an example of the copper sulfide minerals to which the process can be applied.

In one embodiment of the copper-recovery method, particulate enargite concentrate and particulate carbon are added to an acidic ferric sulfate leach solution. The weight ratio of the carbon to the enargite present in the enargite concentrate is at least 1:20. The copper is leached in the presence of an oxygen-containing gas, for example air or O₂ gas, producing a solution containing copper ions. The leached copper is then recovered from the solution.

Alternatively, rather than directly controlling the weight ratio of carbon to enargite being added to the leach solution, the method may include the step of maintaining the carbon in the

leach solution at a suitable concentration, by adding coarse or granular carbon to each leaching vessel and retaining most of this carbon within the vessel, for example with the use of screens. In this way, the ground concentrate slurry passes easily from tank to tank, while the carbon is retained within the tank. A certain amount of attrition of the carbon occurs and this carbon is made up by the addition of fresh carbon. In this embodiment of the method, enargite concentrate and carbon are added to an acidic sulfate leach solution. The copper is leached from the concentrate, in the presence of an oxygen-containing gas, while maintaining the carbon at a concentration of at least 5 grams per liter of the leach solution, alternatively at least 10 grams per liter, or alternatively at least 20 grams per liter.

The carbon catalyst used in the leach step may comprise one or more of activated carbon, coal, brown coal, coke, hard carbon derived from coconut shells or elemental carbon, and mixtures thereof.

Carbon does not typically occur with primary copper ores and is added to the leach reaction. The carbon may be recycled via a carbon recycle stream and reused within the system. In some embodiments of the process, coarse, hard carbon (e.g. coarse activated carbon derived from coconut shells) is used, which may be retained in the leaching reactors with screens.

In order for the leaching process to proceed at an adequate rate the operating solution potential (i.e. the potential at which the process is carried out) is maintained at at least about 390 mV versus Ag/AgCl (all solution potentials stated herein are expressed in relation to the standard Ag/AgCl reference electrode). Alternatively, the operating solution potential is at least 450 mV, or alternatively at least 470 mV, or alternatively at least 480 mV.

This control of the operating potential may be achieved by means of controlling the oxygen flow rate, or the intensity of agitation of the leaching solution, or the pulp density level. Increasing the oxygen flow rate increases the supply of oxygen, and hence increases the maximum rate at which oxygen can be taken up by the leaching reactions. Increasing the rate of agitation increases the surface area of the gas-liquid interface, which also increases the maximum uptake of oxygen. In the absence of other factors, either of these will increase the redox potential. Increasing the pulp density increases the demand for oxygen, which will cause the potential to decrease in the absence of other factors. Typically, pulp density and agitation rate are fixed at constant values by design of the leaching apparatus, and potential is controlled by means of the oxygen flow rate.

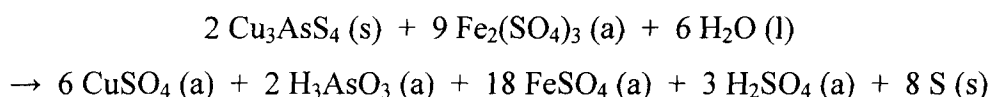
The process may be carried out on a batch basis or as a continuous process, the latter being preferred. In batch mode, as the level of enargite in the leaching reactor (and, concurrently, the demand for oxidant) diminishes with time, it may be necessary to regulate the flow of oxygen to the reactor, particularly when pure oxygen gas is used rather than air.

Alternatively, in a continuous process consisting of a number of leaching tanks in series, one simply supplies oxygen to each tank at the appropriate rate. This may be facilitated in practice by supplying pure oxygen or oxygen-enriched air to the first one or two tanks and air to the remaining tanks, or running the final tank without oxygen.

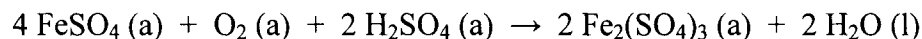
Also, it is desirable that the leach solution have an initial iron level of at least 1 gram per liter to initiate the leaching process. Preferably the iron level is maintained above about 5 grams per liter or alternatively above about 10 grams per liter. This iron may be derived from iron sources in the ore, for example pyrite or chalcopyrite.

An example of a process flowsheet for carrying out the process on a continuous basis, and recovering the extracted copper, is shown in Figure 1. The process involves three basic steps, namely, leaching **10**, copper recovery (by SX-EW) **14**, and iron and arsenic rejection and optional makeup acid generation (by oxyhydrolysis) **16**. Optional flow streams are indicated in the figure in dotted lines. In the leach reactor, copper is leached selectively at low potential in the presence of the carbon catalyst, producing a solid sulfur residue, while ferrous is oxidized to ferric with dissolved oxygen gas:

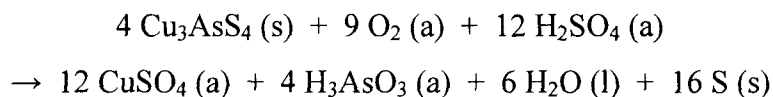
Leaching:



Ferrous oxidation:



Overall:



In the process shown in Figure 1, a bulk concentrate containing a carbon:enargite ratio of at least 1:20 is subjected to the leaching process. Alternatively, the carbon:enargite ratio is at least 1:9, or between about 1:5 and 20:1, or between about 1:2 and 4:1. Carbon is added from an external source or is recycled to make up the desired ratio in the bulk concentrate. Other copper or base metal sulfides may also be present in the concentrate being leached. Pyrite may also be present or may optionally be added from an external source. It is believed that additional pyrite increases the rate of reaction and also constitutes an important source of iron in the absence of other iron sources.

The leaching process is done under agitation whereby the solution is agitated sufficiently to suspend the particulate concentrate and particulate carbon.

The leaching process is run at temperatures between about 50°C and the melting point of sulfur (about 110 to 120°C). Alternatively, it is run at a temperature of between about 70°C and the melting point of sulfur, or alternatively, at a temperature of between about 80°C and the melting point of sulfur. The leaching process can be run under any pressure between about atmospheric pressure and those pressures attainable in an autoclave. Preferably, it is run under about atmospheric pressure.

The leaching process is run under an atmosphere of oxygen-containing gas such as air, oxygen-enriched air, substantially pure oxygen, or any combination thereof, in a series of leaching tanks. Given the relatively modest oxygen requirements of the process, this oxygen gas can also be supplied by a low-cost vapor pressure swing absorption (VPSA) plant, or by a more conventional cryogenic oxygen plant for larger applications.

Ultrafine grinding of the concentrate and/or the carbon is not necessary, although the process will work with ultrafine materials. In this specification, the term P80 denotes the particle size at which 80% of the mass of material will pass through the specified size of mesh. For use in the leaching process, the P80 particle size of the enargite concentrate can vary over a wide range. For example, a P80 particle size of about 210 microns can be used. The enargite particle size may be below about 106 microns, or alternatively below about 75 microns, or alternatively below about 38 microns. Alternatively the P80 particle size of the enargite concentrate may be in the range of 38 to 106 microns.

The leach can be run at any pulp density that will seem reasonable to one skilled in the art. Higher pulp densities facilitate the control of solution potential by ensuring high ferric demand, and may also enhance the effectiveness of the carbon and enargite interaction.

According to the overall leach stoichiometry given above, at least one mole of sulfuric acid should theoretically be added to the leach for every mole of copper recovered from enargite. In practice, however, the acid requirement may fluctuate depending on the exact composition of the concentrate and the degrees of pyrite, sulfur and ferrous oxidation, and iron precipitation that occur during the leach.

Carbon does not typically occur with primary copper ores. Hence the carbon has to be purchased and delivered to the minesite. In order for the process to be economically viable, the carbon should be efficiently recycled. In one embodiment this is accomplished by maintaining coarse carbon within each leaching reactor with screens. In this way, the ground concentrate slurry passes easily from tank to tank, while the carbon is retained within the tank. Coarse, hard carbon such as the coarse activated carbon derived from coconut shells can be used in this embodiment. A certain amount of attrition of the carbon occurs, particularly given the requirement for high-shear mixing to ensure adequate gas-liquid mixing. Hence, in this scenario, a certain amount of carbon passes through the screens and is lost to the tailings, and this carbon has to be made up by addition of fresh carbon.

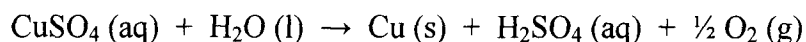
The carbon particle size may be coarse as in commercially-available activated carbon, or alternatively the carbon may be finely ground. A smaller carbon particle size may be used to obtain a larger surface area on the carbon. A larger particle size may be used to enable retention and recycling in the leaching vessels with screens and provide a more economically viable process.

Solid-Liquid Separation and Solvent Extraction

Following the leaching process, copper can be extracted from the leach solution. After a solid-liquid separation (step 12 in Figure 1), producing a liquid solution containing the copper, the liquid solution is subjected to conventional solvent extraction (SX) and

electrowinning (EW) **14** to produce pure copper cathodes according to the following overall reaction:

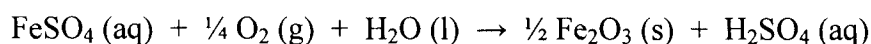
SX-EW:



Oxyhydrolysis

In order to reject iron and to recover the remainder of the acid, a raffinate bleed stream is subjected to oxyhydrolysis **16** with oxygen gas to oxidize ferrous to ferric and form a stable ferric precipitate. One preferred method involves the formation of hematite thus:

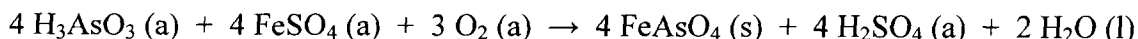
Iron oxyhydrolysis:



This process involves a small amount of oxygen gas. The hematite can simply pass through the leach circuit and be rejected to the tails. Alternatively, a separate solid-liquid separation **18** can be inserted between the oxyhydrolysis reactor and the atmospheric leach circuit to remove hematite. The steady state concentration of dissolved iron entering the leach circuit is inversely related to the proportion of raffinate bled to oxyhydrolysis.

Trivalent arsenic in the leach solution is oxidized to the pentavalent state by ferric and precipitated as ferric arsenate, FeAsO_4 (scorodite) during the oxyhydrolysis step:

Arsenic oxyhydrolysis:

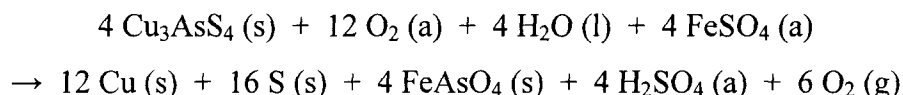


Scorodite is a stable compound which can be safely discharged to a tailings impoundment.

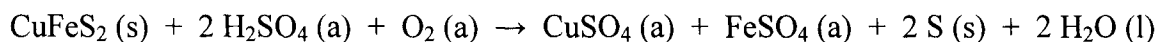
In the event that the concentrate does not contain sufficient iron to precipitate all the arsenic as scorodite, a source of iron may be added, for example pyrite, to bring the molar ratio of iron:arsenic to 1:1 or greater, alternatively at least 1.4:1.

Overall Process Stoichiometry

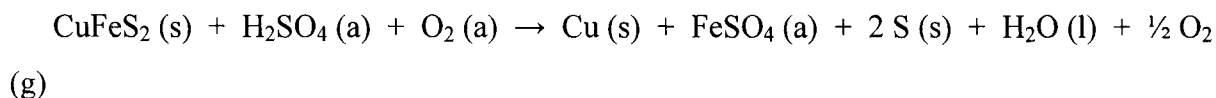
Combining the reactions for enargite leaching, SX-EW, and arsenic hydrolysis gives the overall process stoichiometry for copper recovery from enargite:



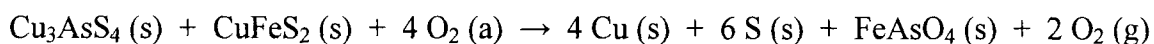
The oxygen on the left is consumed in the leach, while the oxygen on the right is produced in electrowinning. Hence, they do not cancel each other. The ferrous sulfate for arsenic oxyhydrolysis can be extracted from either chalcopyrite or pyrite in the atmospheric leach, the autoclave, or both; if the concentrate contains little chalcopyrite or pyrite, the iron is added as ferrous or ferric sulfate. For example, chalcopyrite is oxidized in the atmospheric leach to give the following stoichiometry:



Combining this reaction with SX-EW, one obtains the following:



Combining this result with the overall enargite stoichiometry, assuming just enough iron to satisfy the demands of arsenic oxyhydrolysis (any excess will be rejected by iron oxyhydrolysis), gives the following:



Hence, the ideal molar ratio of enargite to chalcopyrite in the concentrate is 1:1. Additional enargite would require an alternative iron source, such as pyrite, for complete arsenic rejection as scorodite. Most enargite deposits are pyrite-rich. Also, when sufficient iron is present for arsenic oxyhydrolysis, the process is essentially acid neutral.

Examples

Copper was leached from high-arsenic copper concentrates in an acidic ferric sulfate leach solution in accordance with the method of the invention, using activated carbon as a leaching catalyst. The tests were done at a temperature of 80°C, a leach solution volume of 1500 mL,

and using pure oxygen gas. Further conditions are described in the particular examples. The copper concentration in solution was measured at various time intervals, and the percentage of copper leached was calculated on that basis.

Example 1

A sample of enargite concentrate from Peru having the following mineralogical composition (by XRD-Reitveld analysis) was leached:

Mineral	Ideal Formula	Mass %
Pyrite	FeS ₂	57.3
Enargite	Cu ₃ AsS ₄	22.2
Quartz	SiO ₂	8.6
Alunite	K ₂ Al ₆ (SO ₄) ₄ (OH) ₁₂	4.0
Chalcopyrite	CuFeS ₂	3.9
Luzonite	Cu ₃ AsS ₄	2.9
Tennantite	(Cu,Ag,Fe,Zn) ₁₂ As ₄ S ₁₃	1.1
Total		100.0

The operating potential was 480 mV versus Ag/AgCl. The agitation speed was 1200 rpm. The initial ferric:ferrous weight ratio was 1:3. The initial sulfuric acid content was 60 g/L. The activated carbon was Calgon (trademark) CPG LF 12 x 40 acid-washed granular activated carbon, with an approximate particle size of 12 x 40 mesh (1.68 x 0.42 mm). The leaching tests were done on the concentrate alone (90 g sample) as a control and with the addition of 100 g activated carbon. The weight ratio of carbon to copper arsenic sulfides (enargite + luzonite + tennantite) was accordingly 4.2:1. The results are shown in Figure 2.

It is apparent that the addition of the activated carbon substantially enhanced the leaching, resulting in over 99% of the copper being leached in 22 hours.

Example 2

A sample of enargite concentrate from Peru having the following mineralogical composition was leached:

Mineral	Ideal Formula	Mass %
Pyrite	FeS ₂	61.5
Enargite	Cu ₃ AsS ₄	20.4
Quartz	SiO ₂	7.4
Chalcopyrite	CuFeS ₂	3.9
Alunite	K ₂ Al ₆ (SO ₄) ₄ (OH) ₁₂	3.9
Luzonite (antimonian)	Cu ₃ (As,Sb)S ₄	2.9
Total		100.0

The initial weight ratio of ferric to ferrous was 1:5.7 (17 g Fe₂(SO₄)₃·5H₂O = 3.9 g Fe³⁺; 110 g FeSO₄·7H₂O = 22.1 g Fe²⁺). The sulfuric acid content was 80 g (53.3 g/L).

Thirteen leaching tests are reported, the concentrate and a generic activated carbon having the following characteristics. The references to “pulverized 90 s” means that the concentrate sample was processed in a ring-disk pulverizer for 90 seconds prior to leaching, while “rodmilled 20 min” means that the concentrate sample was processed in a rod mill for 20 minutes prior to leaching. In the figure legends, “C” refers to activated carbon and “conc” refers to concentrate.

Unless otherwise noted, test conditions include: concentrate pulverized 90 s, a redox potential of 490 mV versus Ag/AgCl and an impeller speed of 1200 rpm.

- Test A 40 g concentrate (no additional grinding, no carbon)
- Test B 40 g concentrate (no carbon)
- Test C 40 g concentrate (no additional grinding) + 40 g activated carbon
- Test D 40 g concentrate + 40 g activated carbon
- Test E 40 g concentrate rodmilled 20 min + 40 g activated carbon
- Test F 20 g concentrate + 20 g carbon recycled from Test D
- Test G 40 g concentrate + 40 g activated carbon at 450 mV
- Test H 40 g concentrate + 40 g activated carbon at 515 mV
- Test I 40 g concentrate + 40 g activated carbon at 530 mV
- Test J 40 g concentrate + 20 g activated carbon at 515 mV

Test K 40 g concentrate + 10 g activated carbon at 515 mV

Test L 40 g concentrate + 40 g activated carbon at 515 mV and 750 rpm

Test M 40 g concentrate + 40 g activated carbon at 515 mV and 450 rpm

The weight ratio of carbon to concentrate for Tests C-I and L-M was 1:1 and accordingly the weight ratio of carbon to copper arsenic/antimony sulfides (enargite + luzonite) was 4.3:1.

The weight ratio of carbon to concentrate for Test J was 1:2 and accordingly the weight ratio of carbon to copper arsenic/antimony sulfides (enargite + luzonite) was 2.2:1. Finally, the weight ratio of carbon to concentrate for Test K was 1:4 and accordingly the weight ratio of carbon to copper arsenic/antimony sulfides (enargite + luzonite) was 1.1:1.

The effects of activated carbon addition and regrinding are shown in Figure 3. In the absence of activated carbon, the degree of copper extraction was incomplete, and the leaching rate was a strong function of regrinding, with only 36% Cu extraction after 93 hours from the sample as delivered, and 77% Cu extraction after 68 hours from the pulverized sample. In the presence of activated carbon, leaching was rapid and complete after 40 hours without regrinding, and after just 24 hours with regrinding. Pulverizing and rod milling gave similar results.

The effect of carbon recycle is shown in Figure 4, which shows that recycled carbon was nearly as effective as fresh carbon as a catalyst for enargite leaching.

The effect of solution potential is shown in Figure 5. At 450 mV versus Ag/AgCl, Cu extraction only reached 74% after 63 hours. However, at 490 mV and above, leaching was rapid, with complete Cu extraction within 24 hours. It bears noting that 530 mV was the maximum potential which could be maintained in these tests, presumably because the large amount of pyrite in the concentrate consumed oxidant rapidly at potentials above this level.

The effect of activated carbon mass addition is shown in Figure 6. At carbon levels one half and one quarter of the baseline, leaching was still rapid, with complete Cu extraction within 30 hours.

Finally, the effect of impeller speed is shown in Figure 7. Leaching at a low impeller speed is desirable in order to minimize the loss of carbon by attrition. However, decreasing the impeller speed had a significant negative effect on the rate of leaching, although at 750 rpm

complete Cu extraction was still attained within about 30 hours. It bears noting that the potential was maintained at 515 mV in all of the tests shown in the figure, so a decrease in redox potential was not the cause of the lower leaching rates. The impeller was unable to suspend the solids effectively at 450 rpm, and this is the most likely cause of the decrease in leaching kinetics. This result suggests that a low-shear, high-flow impeller may be more suitable for this application than a high-shear turbine.

Example 3

A massive enargite sample from Montana having the following mineralogical composition was leached:

Mineral	Ideal Formula	Mass %
Enargite	Cu_3AsS_4	62.0
Pyrite	FeS_2	16.1
Quartz	SiO_2	7.9
Tennantite	$(\text{Cu}, \text{Ag}, \text{Fe}, \text{Zn})_{12}\text{As}_4\text{S}_{13}$	6.5
Bornite	Cu_5FeS_4	2.7
Covellite	CuS	2.3
Sphalerite	$(\text{Zn}, \text{Fe})\text{S}$	1.3
Siderite	$\text{Fe}^{2+}\text{CO}_3$	0.8
Talc	$\text{Mg}_3\text{Si}_4\text{O}_{10}(\text{OH})_2$	0.5
Total		100.0

The operating potential was 485 mV. The initial weight ratio of ferric to ferrous was 1:5 (18 g $\text{Fe}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ = 4.1 g Fe^{3+} ; 102 g $\text{FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ = 20.5 g Fe^{2+}). The sulfuric acid content was 80 g (53.3 g/L).

Six leaching tests were done, the concentrate and the activated carbon having the following characteristics:

- Test 1 15 g pulverized sample (no carbon)
- Test 2 15 g pulverized sample + 15 g generic activated carbon
- Test 3 15 g pulverized sample + 15 g Norit DARCO H2S M-1621, formulated for H_2S oxidation in wastewater

- Test 4 15 g pulverized sample + 15 g Norit GCA 830 M-1607, formulated for gold absorption in CIL circuits (hard, coconut-shell carbon)
- Test 5 15 g pulverized sample + 15 g Norit GCA 612 M-1617, formulated for gold absorption in CIL circuits (hard, coconut-shell carbon)
- Test 6 15 g pulverized sample + 15 g Calgon 12 x 20, formulated for general water purification applications (soft, activated charcoal)

The weight ratio of carbon to concentrate for Tests 2-6 was 1:1 and accordingly the weight ratio of carbon to copper arsenic sulfides (enargite + tennantite) was 1.46:1. The results are shown in Figure 8.

The test results show that with lower pyrite concentrate than in the Peru concentrates of Examples 1 and 2, the leaching is slower, suggesting that pyrite and activated carbon may be working together in the Peru concentrate tests. It is also noted that the coconut shell carbon is a superior catalyst to the other activated carbons used, possibly because it maintains its integrity better under agitation.

Claims:

1. A method of recovering copper from a copper sulfide concentrate comprising one of a copper arsenic sulfosalt and a copper antimony sulfosalt, comprising the steps of:
 - (a) adding the concentrate and carbon to an acidic sulfate leach solution, the concentrate and the carbon being in particulate form;
 - (b) leaching the copper from the concentrate in the leach solution, in the presence of an oxygen-containing gas, to produce a solution containing copper ions; and
 - (c) recovering the leached copper from the solution.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises a copper arsenic sulfosalt selected from one of a sulpharsenite and a sulpharsenate.
3. A method according to claim 2, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises enargite.
4. A method according to claim 2, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises tennantite.
5. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 4, further comprising maintaining a selected operating potential of the leach solution during the leaching.
6. A method according to claim 5, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 390 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
7. A method according to claim 5, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 450 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
8. A method according to claim 5, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 470 mV versus Ag/AgCl.

9. A method according to claim 5, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 480 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
10. A method according to claim 5, wherein the concentrate further comprises pyrite, and wherein the selected operating potential is less than 600 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
11. A method according to any one of claims 5 to 10, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling oxygen flow rate.
12. A method according to any one of claims 5 to 10, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling intensity of agitation of the leach solution.
13. A method according to any one of claims 5 to 10, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling pulp density level.
14. A method according to any one of claims 5 to 10, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling one or more of oxygen flow rate, intensity of agitation of the leach solution or pulp density level, or any combinations thereof.
15. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 14, further comprising, in step (b), agitating the leach solution to suspend the concentrate and carbon in the leach solution.
16. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 15, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio of the carbon being added to the copper sulfide present in the concentrate being added is at least 1:20.
17. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 15, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio of the carbon being added to the copper sulfide present in the concentrate being added is at least 1:9.
18. A method according to claim 16, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio is in the range of 1:5 to 20:1.

19. A method according to claim 16, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio is in the range of 1:2 to 4:1.
20. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 19, wherein the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 5 g/L.
21. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 19, wherein the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 10 g/L.
22. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 19, wherein the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 20 g/L.
23. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 22, wherein at least some of the carbon is recycled for use in the leaching step.
24. A method according to claim 23, wherein the recycling is done by retaining with a screen at least some of the carbon in a leaching reactor in which the leaching is done.
25. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 24, wherein the concentrate and the carbon are added in the form of a mixture.
26. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 25, further comprising adding particulate pyrite to the leach solution.
27. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 26, wherein the leaching step is carried out at atmospheric pressure.
28. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 26, wherein the leaching step is carried out above atmospheric pressure.
29. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 28, wherein the step of recovering leached copper comprises solvent extraction and electrowinning.

30. A method according to claim 29, wherein ferrous ions in a raffinate stream from the solvent extraction step are oxidized to ferric ions by oxygen gas and precipitated as a stable ferric precipitate.
31. A method according to claim 29, wherein arsenite ions in a raffinate stream from the solvent extract step are oxidized to arsenate ions in the presence of dissolved iron and precipitated as a stable ferric arsenate precipitate.
32. A method according to any one of claims 2 to 31, wherein the carbon comprises one of activated carbon, coal, brown coal, coke, hard carbon derived from coconut shells, and elemental carbon, or mixtures thereof.
33. A method according to claim 1, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises a copper antimony sulfosalt selected from one of a sulfantimonite and a sulphantimonate.
34. A method according to claim 33, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises famatinite.
35. A method according to claim 33, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises luzonite.
36. A method according to claim 33, wherein the copper sulfide concentrate comprises tetrahedrite.
37. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 36, further comprising maintaining a selected operating potential of the leach solution during the leaching.
38. A method according to claim 37, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 390 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
39. A method according to claim 37, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 450 mV versus Ag/AgCl.

40. A method according to claim 37, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 470 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
41. A method according to claim 37, wherein the selected operating potential is at least 480 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
42. A method according to claim 37, wherein the concentrate further comprises pyrite, and wherein the selected operating potential is less than 600 mV versus Ag/AgCl.
43. A method according to any one of claims 37 to 42, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling oxygen flow rate.
44. A method according to any one of claims 37 to 42, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling intensity of agitation of the leach solution.
45. A method according to any one of claims 37 to 42, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling pulp density level.
46. A method according to any one of claims 37 to 42, wherein the maintaining is done by controlling one or more of oxygen flow rate, intensity of agitation of the leach solution or pulp density level, or any combinations thereof.
47. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 46, further comprising, in step (b), agitating the leach solution to suspend the concentrate and carbon in the leach solution.
48. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 47, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio of the carbon being added to the copper sulfide present in the concentrate being added is at least 1:20.
49. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 47, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio of the carbon being added to the copper sulfide present in the concentrate being added is at least 1:9.

50. A method according to claim 48, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio is in the range of 1:5 to 20:1.
51. A method according to claim 48, wherein the carbon:copper sulfide weight ratio is in the range of 1:2 to 4:1.
52. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 51, wherein the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 5 g/L.
53. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 51, wherein the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 10 g/L.
54. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 51, wherein the carbon is maintained at a concentration in the leach solution of at least 20 g/L.
55. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 54, wherein at least some of the carbon is recycled for use in the leaching step.
56. A method according to claim 55, wherein the recycling is done by retaining with a screen at least some of the carbon in a leaching reactor in which the leaching is done.
57. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 56, wherein the concentrate and the carbon are added in the form of a mixture.
58. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 57, further comprising, in step (a), adding particulate pyrite to the leach solution.
59. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 58, wherein the leaching step is carried out at atmospheric pressure.
60. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 58, wherein the leaching step is carried out above atmospheric pressure.

61. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 60, wherein the step of recovering leached copper comprises solvent extraction and electrowinning.
62. A method according to claim 61, wherein ferrous ions in a raffinate stream from the solvent extraction step are oxidized to ferric ions by oxygen gas and precipitated as a stable ferric precipitate.
63. A method according to claim 61, wherein antimonite ions in a raffinate stream from the solvent extract step are oxidized to antimonate ions in the presence of dissolved iron and precipitated as a stable ferric antimonate precipitate.
64. A method according to any one of claims 33 to 63, wherein the carbon comprises one of activated carbon, coal, brown coal, coke, hard carbon derived from coconut shells, and elemental carbon, or mixtures thereof.

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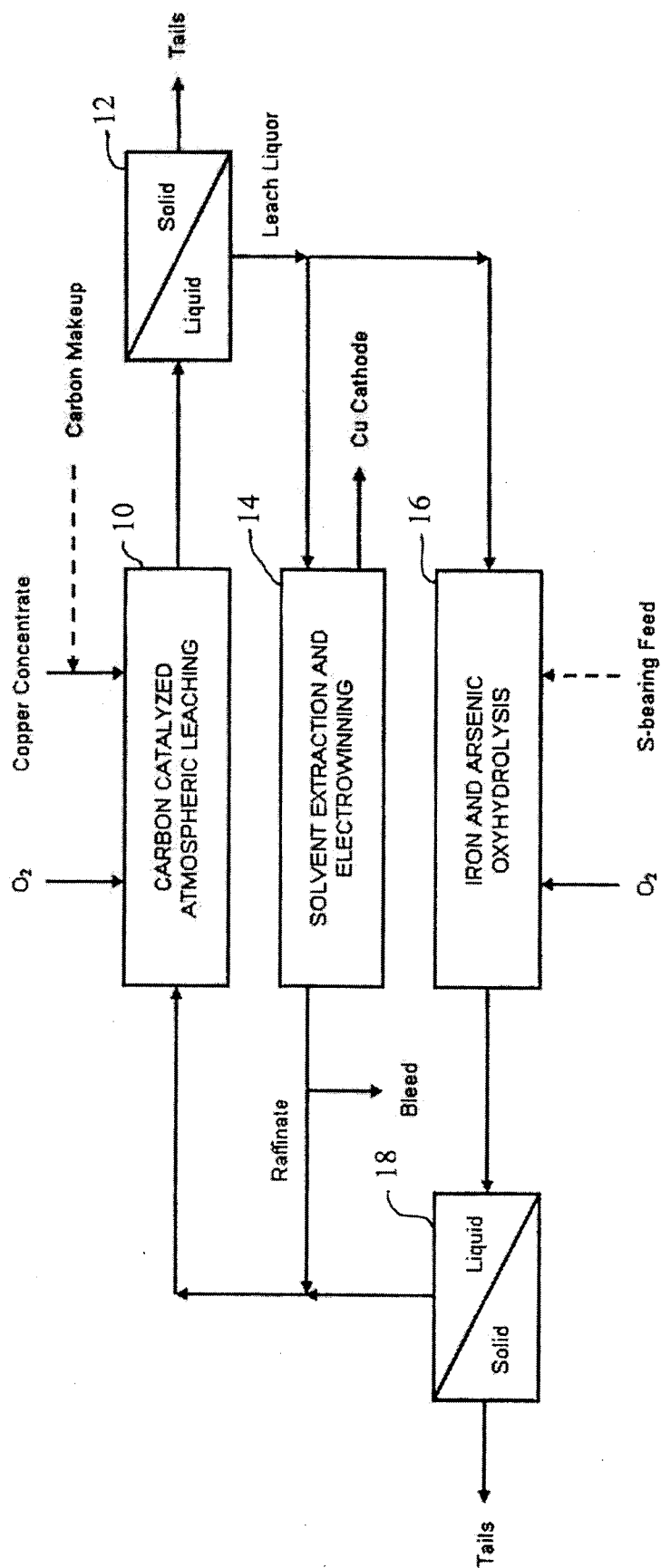


Figure 1

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Example 1

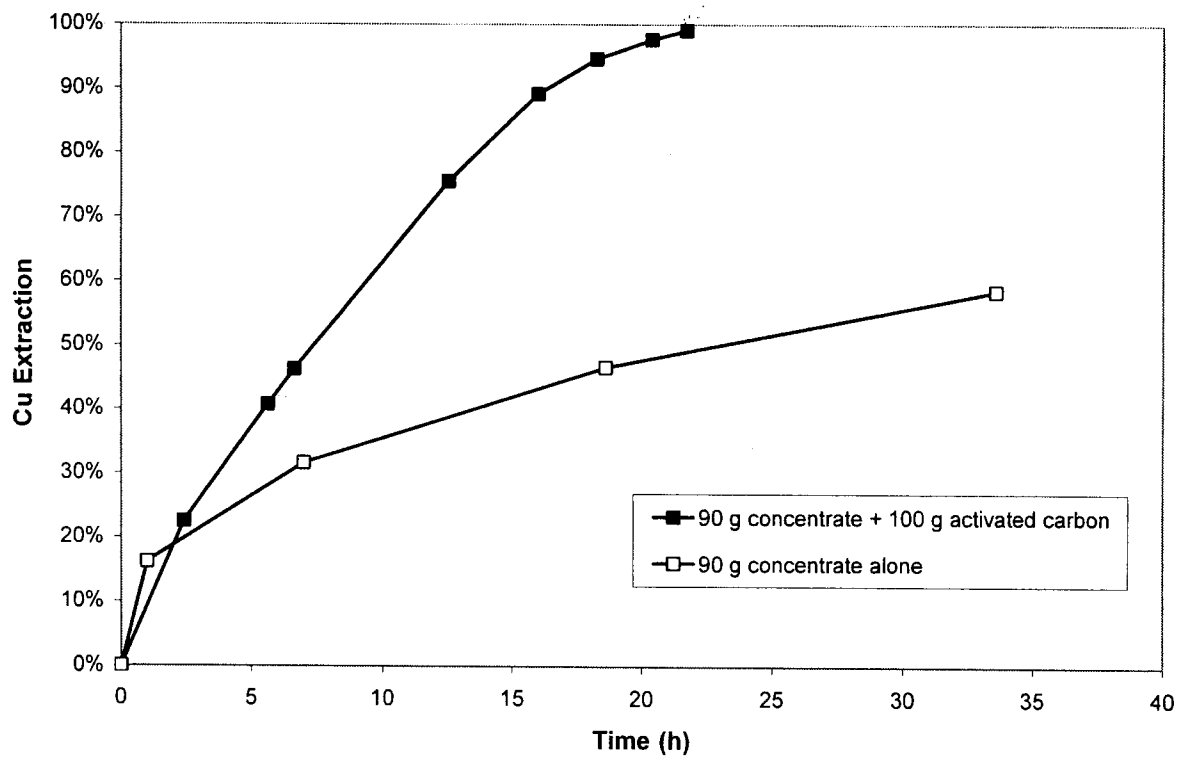


Figure 2

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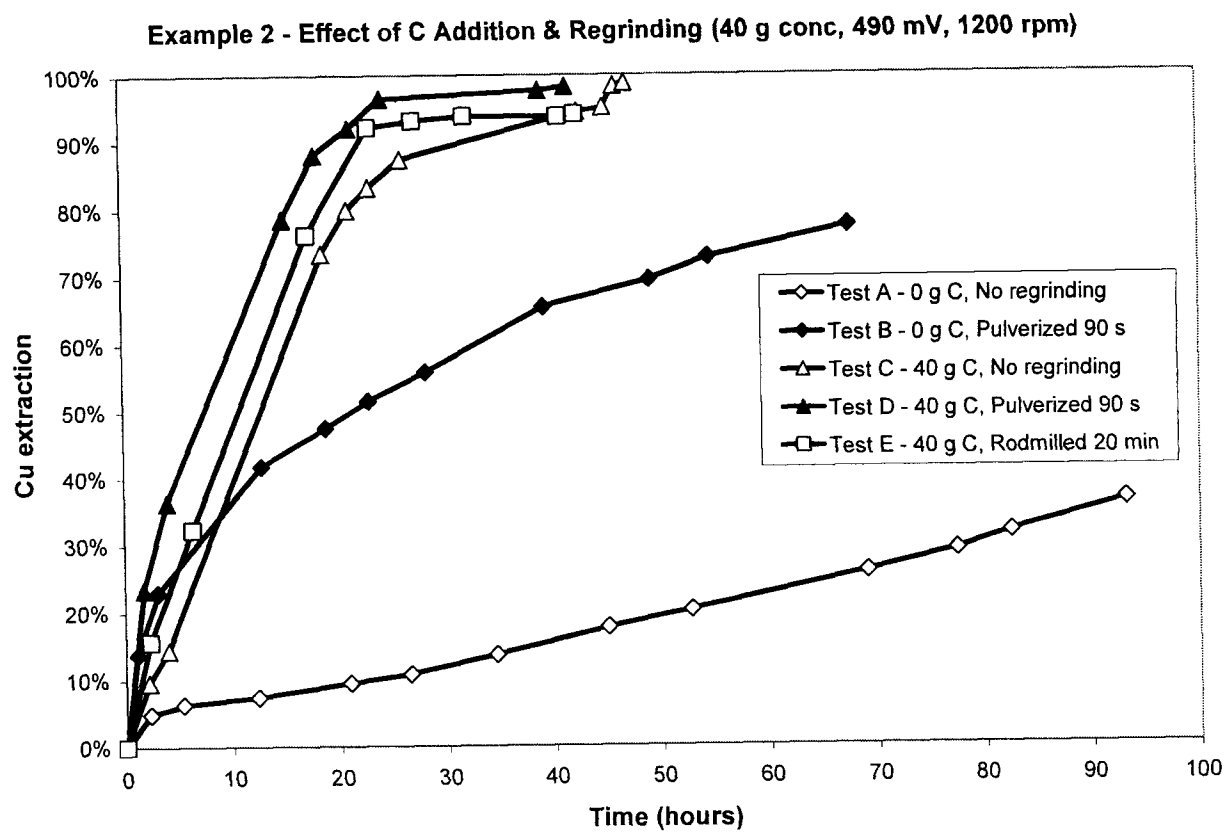


Figure 3

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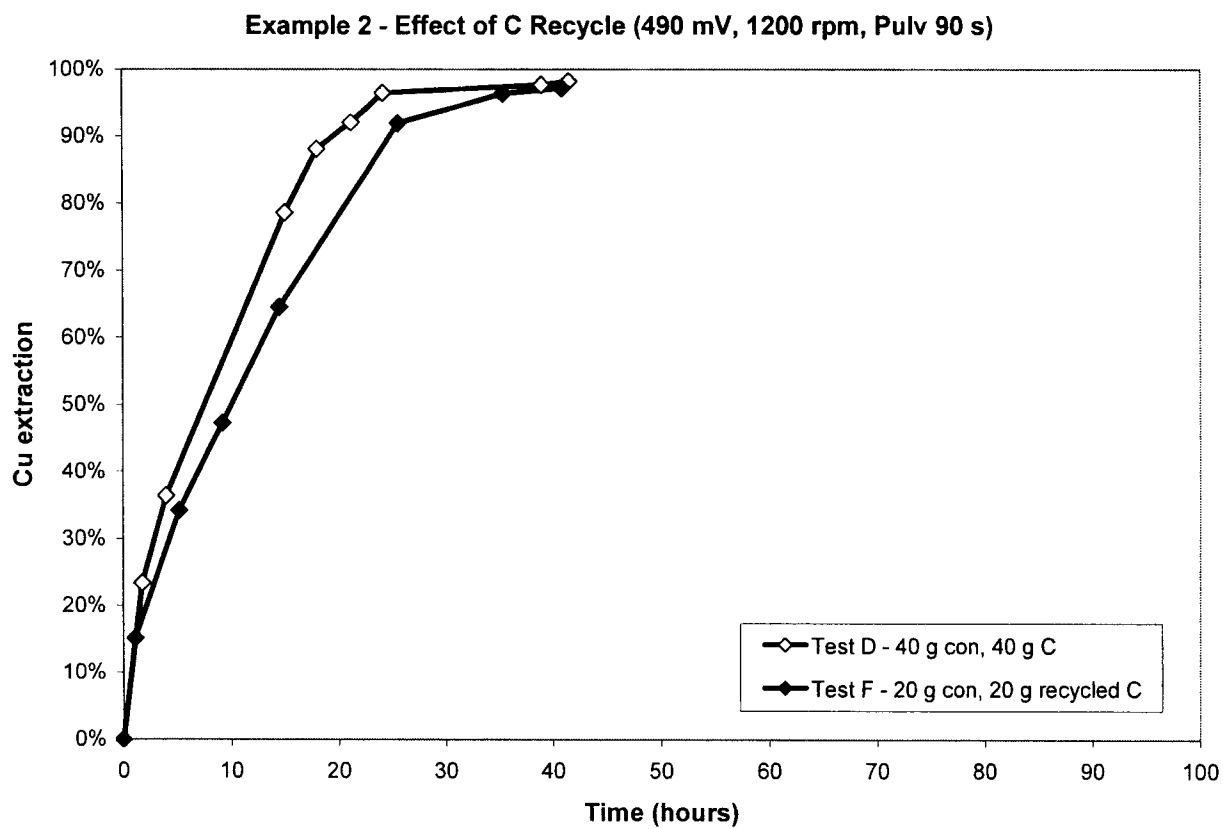


Figure 4

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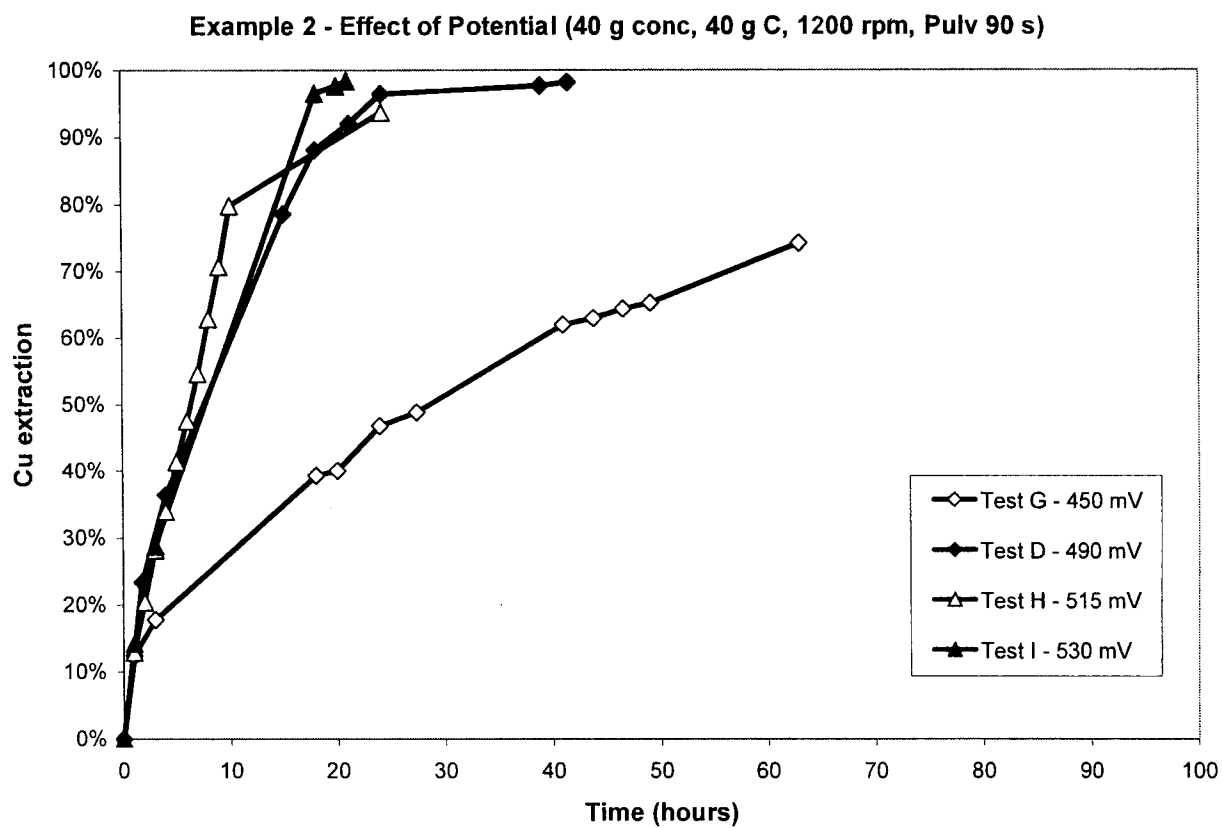


Figure 5

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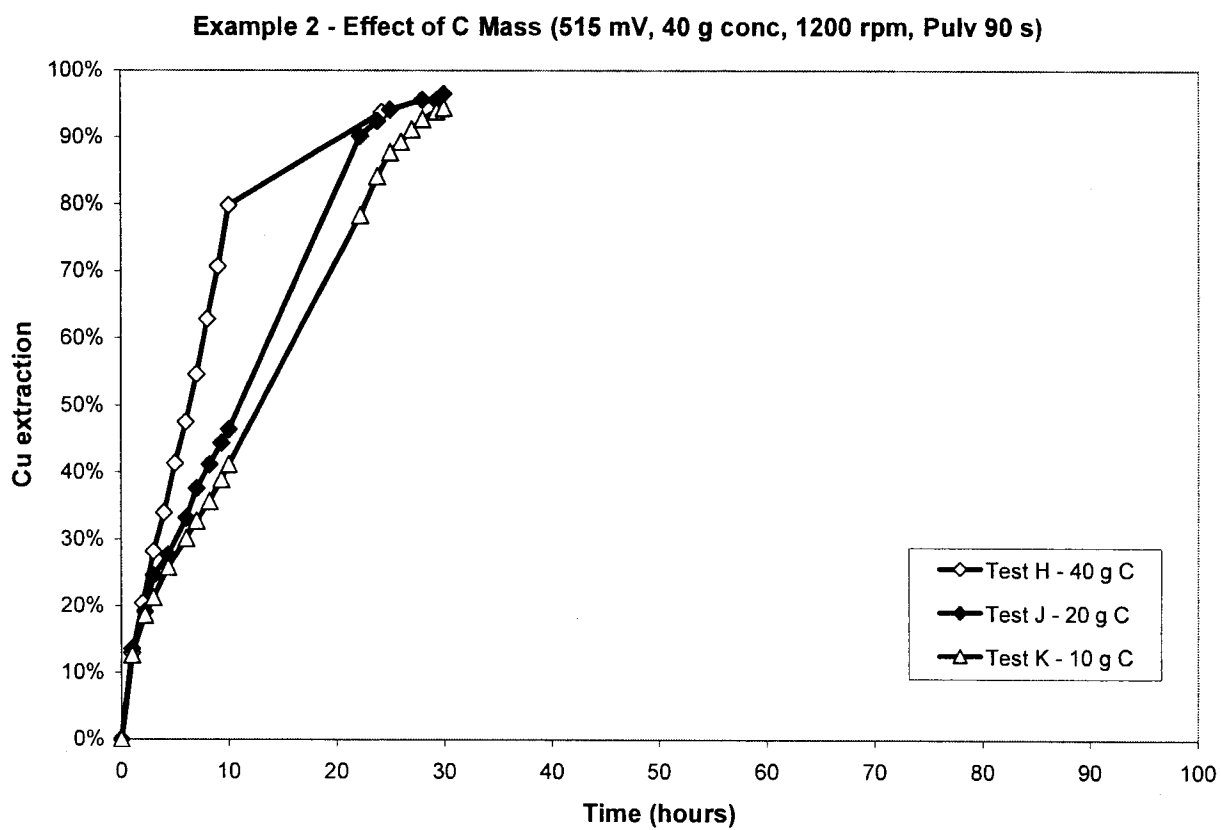


Figure 6

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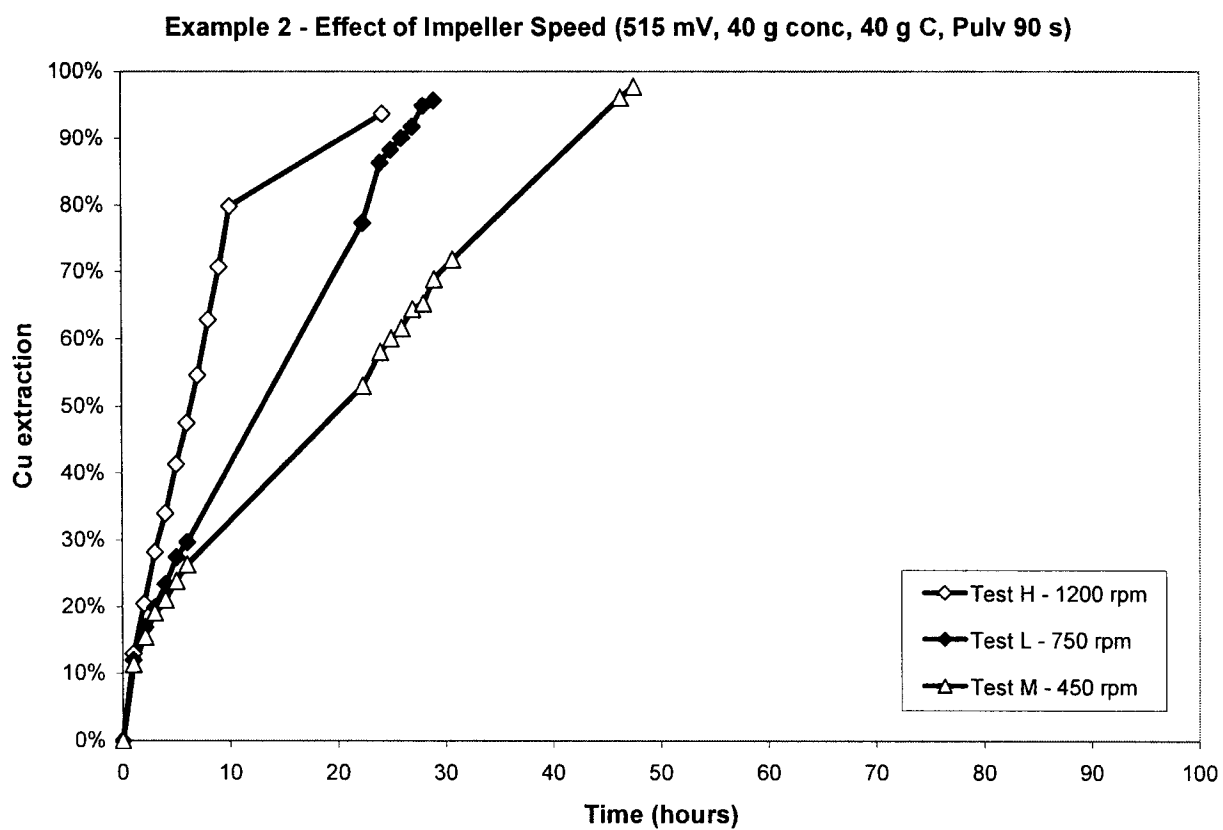


Figure 7

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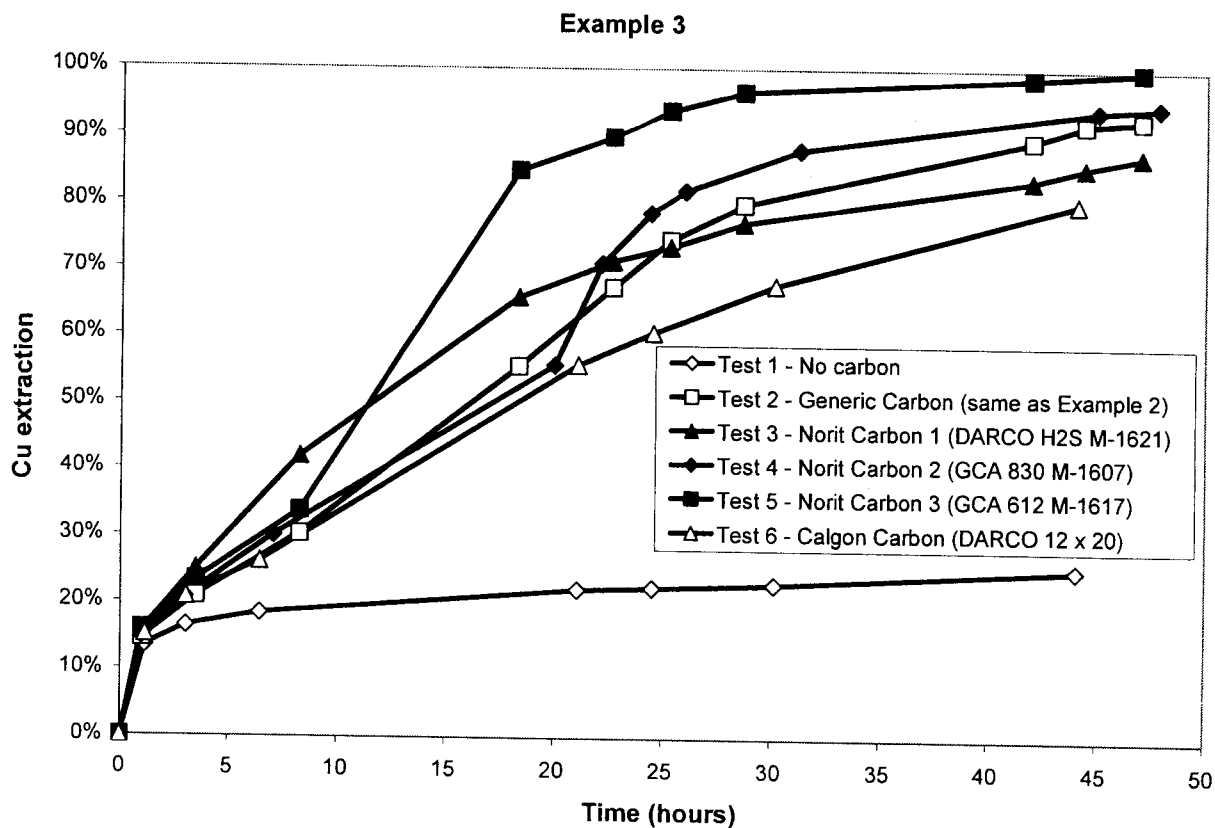


Figure 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/CA2010/001668

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC: **C22B 15/00** (2006.01) , **C22B 3/06** (2006.01) , **C25C 1/12** (2006.01)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC: **C22B 15/00**, **C22B 3/06**, **C22B 3/08**

USPC: 75, 423

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic database(s) consulted during the international search (name of database(s) and, where practicable, search terms used)

DB: Epoque (Epodoc), WEST, CPD, Scopus, Google Scholar

Keywords: carbon+/coal/coke, arsenic/enargite/tennantite, antimony/tetrahedrite/luzonite/etc., oxygen/air, cataly+, sulfate/sulphate/so4

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X --- Y	US4483827A (HEIMALA) 20 November 1984 (20-11-1984) * whole document *	1, 2, 4, 5, 15-23, 27, 32-33, 36-37, 47-55, 59, 64 6-9, 11-14, 24, 26, 28, 34, 35, 38-41, 43-46, 56, 58, 60
X --- Y	WO9627030A1 (COLLINS et al.) 6 September 1996 (06-09-1996) * p.6-11 *	1-3, 15, 25, 27-29, 32-33, 36, 47, 57, 59-61, 64 26, 30-31, 34, 35, 58, 62-63
Y	Dreisinger D, The Hydrometallurgical Treatment of Arsenical Copper Concentrates: New Process Options to Unlock Metal Values and Fix Arsenic in Waste. 2005. (http://www.mmat.ubc.ca/research/hydrometallurgy/papers)	30-31, 62-63
Y	Nadkarni RM, Kusik CL, Hydrometallurgical Removal of Arsenic from Copper Concentrates. Arsenic Metallurgy Fundamentals and Applications; proc. of symposium, Phoenix, Arizona, 25-28 January 1988.	26, 58

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

[X] See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&" document member of the same patent family
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

23 December 2010 (23-12-2010)

Date of mailing of the international search report

27 January 2011 (27-01-2011)

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Authorized officer

Jay Fothergill (819) 997-4842

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORTInternational application No.
PCT/CA2010/001668

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US3930969A (CHEN) 06 January 1976 (06-01-1976)	
A, P	WO2009135291A1 (DIXON et al.) 12 November 2009 (12-11-2009)	

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

International application No.
PCT/CA2010/001668

Patent Document Cited in Search Report	Publication Date	Patent Family Member(s)	Publication Date
US4483827A	20 November 1984 (20-11-1984)	AU550180B2 AU8662382A CA1193448A1 FI66647B FI66647C	06 March 1986 (06-03-1986) 03 March 1983 (03-03-1983) 17 September 1985 (17-09-1985) 31 July 1984 (31-07-1984) 12 November 1984 (12-11-1984)
WO9627030A1	06 September 1996 (06-09-1996)	AR001356A1 AU722390B2 AU4710696A BR9607447A CA2213972A1 CA2213972C EP0813615A1 GB9503877D0 MX9706507A US5730776A ZA9601547A	22 October 1997 (22-10-1997) 03 August 2000 (03-08-2000) 18 September 1996 (18-09-1996) 30 June 1998 (30-06-1998) 06 September 1996 (06-09-1996) 18 April 2006 (18-04-2006) 29 December 1997 (29-12-1997) 19 April 1995 (19-04-1995) 30 August 1998 (30-08-1998) 24 March 1998 (24-03-1998) 27 January 1997 (27-01-1997)
US3930969A	06 January 1976 (06-01-1976)	AU499312B2 AU8254275A CA1052586A1 DE2528861A1 ES438915A1 FR2276258A1 FR2276258B1 GB1511323A JP51018991A MX3706E ZA7504138A	12 April 1979 (12-04-1979) 06 January 1977 (06-01-1977) 17 April 1979 (17-04-1979) 15 January 1976 (15-01-1976) 01 February 1977 (01-02-1977) 23 January 1976 (23-01-1976) 09 June 1978 (09-06-1978) 17 May 1978 (17-05-1978) 14 February 1976 (14-02-1976) 12 May 1981 (12-05-1981) 28 July 1976 (28-07-1976)
WO2009135291A1	12 November 2009 (12-11-2009)	AR071416A1 CA2721709A1 PE03382010A1	16 June 2010 (16-06-2010) 12 November 2009 (12-11-2009) 07 May 2010 (07-05-2010)