



## **Use of sulphuric acid in metal ore leaching – latest developments and trends**

Richard Hands  
Editor, *Sulphur Magazine*  
BCInsight

Copper demand, dominated by industrial and construction uses, has steadily been moving to Asia, particularly China, in recent years. Copper production, meanwhile, has seen increasing use of hydrometallurgical extraction techniques, especially in Chile, but also in the United States and Peru, and as a result copper has become the mainstay of sulphuric acid demand for metal ore leaching operations. However, this production increase has depended on the use of oxide ores, which form only 20% of global copper deposits, and geology militates against large volumes of new copper solvent extraction/electrowinning (SX/EW) capacity. Meanwhile, production of uranium for civil nuclear power continues to increase in spite of the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan, and uranium extraction in Kazakhstan in particular has been hungry for sulphuric acid for in situ leaching methods. However, it is nickel leaching where the largest new slice of sulphuric acid demand is likely to come, with up to 8-9 million tons per acre of extra sulphuric acid consumption over the next five years, mostly from high pressure acid leaching (HPAL) capacity.

**The above is an abstract of a presentation scheduled for the Sulphur World Symposium 2012 to be held April 23 – 25, 2012 in Antwerp, Belgium.**

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