

Mineral Industry Surveys

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BAUXITE AND ALUMINA IN THE FIRST QUARTER 2020

Imports of crude and dried bauxite in the first quarter of 2020 were 775,000 metric tons (t), 23% less than those in the fourth quarter of 2019, 4% more than those in the first quarter of 2019, and 19% more than those in the first quarter of 2018 (fig. 1). Jamaica (72%), Sierra Leone (15%), and Guinea (13%) were the leading sources of crude and dried bauxite imports in the first quarter of 2020 (table 1).

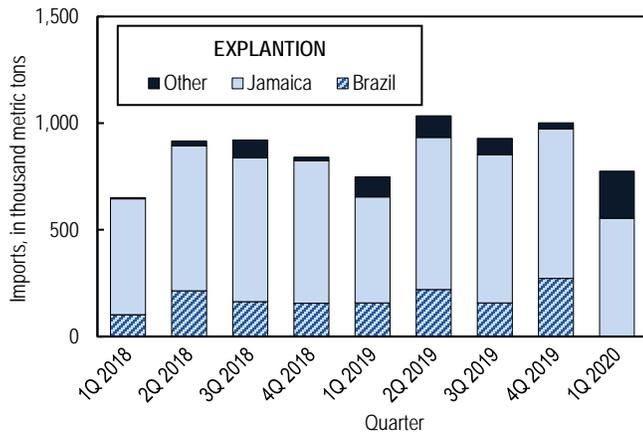


Figure 1. Quarterly imports of crude and dried bauxite from the first quarter of 2018 through the first quarter of 2020. Sources: Jamaica Bauxite Institute and U.S. Census Bureau.

Imports of alumina during the first quarter of 2020 were 357,000 t, 23% less than the revised amount in the fourth quarter of 2020, 43% less than the revised amount in the first quarter of 2019, and 22% less than those in the first quarter of 2018 (fig. 2). The leading sources of imported alumina in the first quarter of 2020 were Brazil (65%), Australia (14%), and Jamaica (9%) (table 3). Decreased imports of alumina in the first quarter of 2020 were attributed to the planned shutdown of an aluminum smelter in Ferndale, WA, announced by Alcoa Corp. in April. Low aluminum prices and high production costs were cited for the shutdown. (See Aluminum in February 2020.) The 279,000-metric-ton-per-year (t/yr) smelter would be

temporarily shut down by the end of July when its alumina stocks are consumed (Alcoa Corp., 2020, p. 3).

Exports of alumina during the first quarter of 2020 were 38,500 t, 36% less than those in the fourth quarter of 2020, 41% less than those in the first quarter of 2019, and 56% less than those in the first quarter of 2018 (fig. 2). The leading destinations for alumina exported in the first quarter of 2020 were Mexico (28%) and Canada (22%) (table 3).

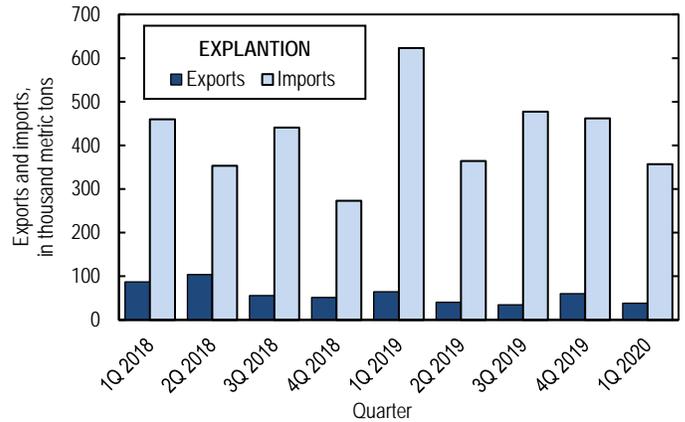


Figure 2. Alumina exports and imports from the first quarter of 2018 through the first quarter of 2020. Sources: Jamaica Bauxite Institute and U.S. Census Bureau.

Update

In China, alumina production increased in March by 16% compared with the amount produced in February. Many alumina refineries decreased production in January and February in response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Shortages of raw materials such as bauxite and caustic soda at inland refineries were reported as transportation was interrupted when health officials in China imposed travel and work restrictions. (See Bauxite and Alumina in the Fourth Quarter 2019.) As travel and work restrictions were lifted in March, production from many of the affected alumina refineries increased (Latham, 2020; Tang, 2020a, b).

United Company RUSAL Plc temporarily decreased production at its alumina refinery in Nickoleav, Ukraine, citing a dispute with customs officials. Local customs officials detained approximately 100,000 t of bauxite in port claiming that RUSAL must pay an import duty on the bauxite. Additional bauxite was reported to be on ships off the coast waiting to unload. RUSAL decreased production by one-half of the 1.7-million-metric-ton-per-year alumina refinery's capacity on May 1. On May 5, the dispute was resolved and RUSAL began preparing to increase production to full capacity once bauxite shipments arrive at the refinery (Bouckley, 2020a, b).

In the first quarter of 2020, production started from the Jajram alumina refinery in northern Iran. The 260,000-t/yr alumina refinery used bauxite from an adjacent bauxite mine and supplied an adjacent 130,000-t/yr aluminum smelter. The smelter was ramping up its production and was producing at a rate of 40,000 t/yr by the end of April. A schedule for the rampup of the alumina refinery and smelter was not available (Eqbali, 2020).

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TABLE 1
U.S. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF CRUDE AND DRIED BAUXITE, BY COUNTRY OR LOCALITY¹

(Metric tons)

Country or locality	2019				1st quarter– 4th quarter	2020 1st quarter
	1st quarter	2d quarter	3d quarter	4th quarter		
Imports for consumption:						
Brazil	157,000	220,000	157,000	272,000	806,000	--
Guinea	--	--	52,800	--	52,800	104,000
Jamaica ²	498,000	713,000	696,000	702,000	2,610,000	554,000
Sierra Leone	--	--	--	--	--	116,000
Turkey	89,500	99,100	22,100	28,200	239,000	--
Other	3,290	3,240	617	--	7,150	729
Total	748,000	1,030,000	929,000	1,000,000	3,710,000	775,000
Exports:						
Canada	277	768	541	535	2,120	652
Other	215	354	292	237	1,100	403
Total	492	1,120	833	772	3,220	1,060

-- Zero.

¹Data are rounded to no more than three significant digits; may not add to totals shown.

²Source: Jamaica Bauxite Institute.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; data adjusted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

TABLE 2
U.S. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF CALCINED BAUXITE, BY COUNTRY OR LOCALITY¹

(Metric tons)

Country or locality	2019										2020	
	1st quarter		2d quarter		3d quarter		4th quarter		1st quarter– 4th quarter		1st quarter	
	Refrac- tory	Other	Refrac- tory	Other	Refrac- tory	Other	Refrac- tory	Other	Refrac- tory	Other	Refrac- tory	Other
Imports for consumption:												
Australia	--	54,200	--	54,000	--	49,500	--	55,000	--	213,000	--	49,700
China	4,990	1,780	3,510	790	4,040	4,010	4,310	5,300	16,900	11,900	15,100	89
Guyana	8,780	23,700	23,600	23,200	13,500	47,100	5,670	38,900	51,600	133,000	5,440	51,300
India	--	--	125	--	--	--	--	--	125	--	--	--
Other	282	5	323	3,600	44	2	89	14	738	3,620	366	6
Total	14,100	79,700	27,600	81,600	17,600	101,000	10,100	99,200	69,300	361,000	20,900	101,000
Exports:												
Canada	853	--	1,360	--	1,110	--	856	--	4,170	--	1,260	--
China	149	--	181	--	100	--	1,080	--	1,510	--	241	--
Mexico	415	--	141	--	195	--	94	--	845	--	246	--
Other	203	33	421	1	70	--	20	2	714	36	308	--
Total	1,620	33	2,100	1	1,470	--	2,050	2	7,240	36	2,050	--

-- Zero.

¹Data are rounded to no more than three significant digits; may not add to totals shown.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; data adjusted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

TABLE 3
U.S. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF ALUMINA, BY COUNTRY OR LOCALITY¹

(Metric tons, calcined equivalent)

Country or locality	2019				1st quarter– 4th quarter	2020 1st quarter
	1st quarter	2d quarter	3d quarter	4th quarter		
Imports for consumption:²						
Australia	166,000	47,000	96,600	149,000	459,000	48,700
Brazil	296,000	234,000	288,000	189,000	1,010,000	233,000
Canada	20,000	20,800	21,300	16,400	78,500	17,100
Jamaica ³	86,500 ^r	29,200 ^r	30,100 ^r	71,700 ^r	217,000 ^r	33,800
Other	53,700	33,200	40,800	35,800	164,000	24,500
Total	623,000 ^r	364,000 ^r	477,000 ^r	462,000 ^r	1,930,000 ^r	357,000
Exports:⁴						
Canada	9,070	9,280	7,350	4,610	30,300	8,290
Iceland	--	--	--	20,800	20,800	--
Mexico	14,700	12,200	10,000	5,420	42,300	10,700
Netherlands	1,020	1,780	1,110	10,700	14,600	1,480
Venezuela	20,800	18	--	--	20,800	--
Other	19,200	17,600	16,000	18,300	71,100	18,000
Total	64,800	40,800	34,500	59,900	200,000	38,500

¹Revised. -- Zero.

²Data are rounded to no more than three significant digits; may not add to totals shown.

³Includes imports of aluminum hydroxide reported in calcined equivalent. As shipped, aluminum hydroxide: 395,000 metric tons (t) in 2019; 76,200 t in the first quarter of 2020.

⁴Source: Jamaica Bauxite Institute.

⁵Includes exports of aluminum hydroxide reported in calcined equivalent. As shipped, aluminum hydroxide: 83,000 t in 2019; 21,100 t in the first quarter of 2020.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; data adjusted by the U.S. Geological Survey.