

CASA GRANDE Dispatch

Company plans to reopen Sacaton mine near CG

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**ASARCO Mine is seen in an aerial photo on Oct. 29, 2009
PinalCentral (2009)**

CASA GRANDE — The old Sacaton Unit mine may reopen under a new name.

Elim Mining has purchased the old open pit mine located northwest of Casa Grande and is exploring the possibility of reopening the mine under the new name Cactus Mine, said John Antwi, president, CEO and director of Elim Mining.

“The opportunity to do business in Arizona is a big deal to us,” said Antwi, who has worked in the mining industry for more than 30 years. He said Elim Mining is exploring the mine site in order to determine what equipment and how many employees the company would need to restart the mine.

The primary resource the company hopes to get from the mine is copper but it will also be looking for smaller deposits of gold, silver and molybdenum. Molybdenum is used to strengthen steel and other metals.

This would be the start-up company's first mine, he said, although certainly not the first mine that Antwi or Elim's Chief Operating Officer Ian McMullan have worked on. Both men have 30 years of experience in the mining industry.

Once the company has determined its needs, a date to reopen the mine will be set, he said.

The company is hoping to hire the majority of its employees from Casa Grande and Pinal County, McMullan said.

"We want to partner with the community on this," he said.

The company plans to contact Central Arizona College for help in finding skilled workers once the mine has been reopened.

The company is looking at a variety of the latest techniques and technology to efficiently and safely remove the ore from the ground, Antwi said. The mine does not plan to use in-situ mining techniques.

In-situ mining involves the pumping of chemicals into an ore deposit in order to dissolve the ore. The dissolved ore and chemicals are pumped out of the ground and processed. The technique avoids open pit or underground mining hazards but can cause problems if the chemicals leach into groundwater.

Antwi said the company places a high priority on protecting the environment, and in-situ mining techniques do not fit that priority for the site.

The company is also looking at ways to best conserve and efficiently use water at the mine.

"We understand how critical water is here," Antwi said.

McMullan said several public open houses will be held over the coming months so the public will know when the company will start the hiring process and when the mine will reopen.

ASARCO (American Smelting And Refining Co.) operated the mine between April 1974 and March of 1984, according to Arizona Geological Survey records. The open pit portion of the mine is about 3,100 feet in diameter and 980 feet deep. The mine produced about 11,000 tons per day and employed up to 400 people. The processed ore was shipped by rail to an ASARCO smelter in El Paso, Texas.

While working the open pit mine, ASARCO drilled a second, underground mine to the east of the pit to try and reach a deeper ore deposit. That underground mine was never fully developed and was closed with the pit in 1984.

In 1985, ASARCO considered turning the pit mine into a landfill. The company dropped the idea in 1987 after strong public opposition to the project.

In 2009, the state of Arizona reached a \$20 million settlement with ASARCO to clean up the site.