

Hop Boyd on the real advantage of having the right chemical processing engineer on the job

☒ April 10, 2014 – Hop Boyd Jr., Chief Manager, Process Engineering Associates LLC (PROCESS) speaks to Tracy Weslosky, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of InvestorIntel. Hop has been a chemical engineer for many years and he describes his job, in jest, as a “highly educated plumber”. Of course, PROCESS does much more than that. It offers process engineering services – as opposed to electrical, mechanical or structural – from design and to safety services, relying on its over 50 highly qualified, full-time chemical engineers. As a further analogy, Hop describes the typical scenario of a prospective client approaching PROCESS to shift from the small scale production of a given chemical to an industrial one. In other words Hop and his team will help the client by designing and developing a process on an industrial scale “that will manufacture methyl-ethyl-death or whatever it is in this person’ dreams to manufacture.”

The crucial issue for InvestorIntel, however, is what PROCESS can do for rare earth companies. Hop promptly says that PROCESS will not help them get the mineral out of the ground: “but when you get something out of the ground, you have to separate it or purify it, or even possibly convert it into another form. And that’s where we come in, designing, troubleshooting, and helping with processes to do that.” What should happen if the rare earth companies choose the wrong process engineering solutions? Hop offers a personal account to explain what can go wrong. Indeed, the story relates to the ‘genesis’ of Process Engineering itself. Hop “was working as a process engineer for another company at a major chemical

company client site and we were working on a separate process when an engineer said: come to the back, where there was a brand new process sitting there; it was beautiful...But, the engineer told me that it got 50% of the production that it was supposed to deliver." In other words the design of that chemical process was "messed up", because they didn't hire the proper chemical process engineering team from the very beginning.

PROCESS is a company made up exclusively by chemical engineers. As such PROCESS is uniquely qualified to evaluate the viability of a given project, offering as unbiased an answer as possible. That is because "other engineering companies have chemical as well as mechanical, civil, electrical engineering and in most cases they make their money mostly from these latter disciplines; therefore, there is a tendency...or a subtle pressure to have a project move forward, that the answer from the beginning of the chemical process design, the engineer says, yes, this makes sense, it needs to move forward," influencing the other disciplines. Hop explains that PROCESS does not have a "dog in the fight" as to whether or not a project goes forward. The risk, then, is that the comprehensive engineering companies are under more pressure to give a project a favorable evaluation in order to see a project proceed, whereas PROCESS is solely focused on evaluating the chemical aspects.

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