

ABRASIVES (MANUFACTURED)

(Fused aluminum oxide, silicon carbide, and metallic abrasives)
(Data in metric tons unless otherwise noted)

Domestic Production and Use: Fused aluminum oxide was produced by two companies at three plants in the United States and Canada. Production of crude fused aluminum oxide had an estimated value of \$7 million. Silicon carbide was produced by two companies at two plants in the United States. Production of crude silicon carbide had an estimated value of about \$26 million. Metallic abrasives were produced by 11 companies in 8 States. Production of metallic abrasives had an estimated value of about \$190 million. Bonded and coated abrasive products accounted for most abrasive uses of fused aluminum oxide and silicon carbide. Metallic abrasives are used primarily for steel shot and grit and cut wire shot, which are used for sandblasting, peening, and stonecutting applications.

Salient Statistics—United States:	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019^e
Production:					
Fused aluminum oxide, crude ^{1,2}	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Silicon carbide ²	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
Metallic abrasives	206,000	188,000	179,000	180,000	180,000
Shipments, metallic abrasives	224,000	204,000	197,000	196,000	190,000
Imports for consumption:					
Fused aluminum oxide	164,000	155,000	206,000	193,000	170,000
Silicon carbide	139,000	116,000	137,000	146,000	110,000
Metallic abrasives	52,800	54,100	29,600	29,900	30,000
Exports:					
Fused aluminum oxide	15,000	14,300	15,500	19,300	22,000
Silicon carbide	19,700	6,820	6,100	10,100	12,000
Metallic abrasives	35,900	28,600	31,000	33,600	32,000
Consumption, apparent:					
Fused aluminum oxide ³	159,000	151,000	201,000	184,000	160,000
Silicon carbide ⁴	154,000	144,000	166,000	171,000	130,000
Metallic abrasives ⁵	241,000	230,000	196,000	192,000	190,000
Price, average unit value of imports, dollars per ton:					
Fused aluminum oxide, regular	579	418	489	692	730
Fused aluminum oxide, high-purity	1,290	1,360	1,220	1,280	1,300
Silicon carbide, crude	552	452	479	670	800
Metallic abrasives	584	543	1,020	1,180	1,300
Net import reliance ⁶ as a percentage of apparent consumption:					
Fused aluminum oxide	>75	>75	>75	>75	>75
Silicon carbide	>75	>75	>75	>75	>50
Metallic abrasives	7	11	E	E	E

Recycling: Up to 30% of fused aluminum oxide may be recycled, and about 5% of silicon carbide is recycled.

Import Sources (2015–18): Fused aluminum oxide, crude: China, 69%; Hong Kong, 14%; France, 8%; Canada, 4%; and other, 5%. Fused aluminum oxide, grain: Austria, 19%; Brazil, 17%; Canada, 16%; Germany, 14%; and other, 34%. Silicon carbide, crude: China, 80%; South Africa, 7%; Netherlands, 5%; Hong Kong, 4%; and other, 4%. Silicon carbide, grain: China, 52%; Brazil, 19%; Russia, 10%; Norway, 5%; and other, 14%. Metallic abrasives: Sweden, 32%; Canada, 24%; China, 13%; Germany, 9%; and other, 22%.

Tariff:	Item	Number	Normal Trade Relations 12–31–19
	Artificial corundum, crude	2818.10.1000	Free.
	White, pink, ruby artificial corundum, greater than 97.5% aluminum oxide, grain	2818.10.2010	1.3% ad val.
	Artificial corundum, not elsewhere specified or included, fused aluminum oxide, grain	2818.10.2090	1.3% ad val.
	Silicon carbide, crude	2849.20.1000	Free.
	Silicon carbide, grain	2849.20.2000	0.5% ad val.
	Iron, pig iron, or steel granules	7205.10.0000	Free.

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Depletion Allowance: None.

Government Stockpile: None.

Events, Trends, and Issues: In 2019, China was the world's leading producer of abrasive fused aluminum oxide and abrasive silicon carbide. Imports, especially from China where operating costs were lower, continued to challenge abrasives producers in the United States and Canada. In recent years, imports of abrasives from Hong Kong have also increased. Foreign competition is expected to persist and continue to limit production in North America. The average unit value of imports has increased every year since 2016 for regular fused aluminum oxide and crude silicon carbide. The average unit values of imports of regular fused aluminum oxide and crude silicon carbide during the first 6 months of 2019 were 5% and 20% higher, respectively, than those in 2018 and 49% and 60% higher, respectively, than those in 2017.

Abrasives consumption in the United States is greatly influenced by activity in the manufacturing sectors, in particular the aerospace, automotive, furniture, housing, and steel industries. Steel grit can be reclaimed and used multiple times. The use of reclaimed metallic abrasives increased potentially owing to rising surcharges on scrap and waste disposal and increasing prices for new material.

One of the leading abrasives producers in the world divested its silicon carbide business to a private equity firm during 2019.

World Production Capacity:

	Fused aluminum oxide ^e		Silicon carbide ^e	
	2018	2019	2018	2019
United States	60,000	60,000	40,000	40,000
Argentina	—	—	5,000	5,000
Australia	50,000	50,000	—	—
Austria	60,000	60,000	—	—
Brazil	50,000	50,000	40,000	40,000
China	800,000	800,000	450,000	450,000
France	40,000	40,000	20,000	20,000
Germany	80,000	80,000	35,000	35,000
India	40,000	40,000	5,000	5,000
Japan	15,000	15,000	60,000	60,000
Mexico	—	—	45,000	45,000
Norway	—	—	80,000	80,000
Venezuela	—	—	30,000	30,000
Other countries	80,000	80,000	190,000	190,000
World total (rounded)	1,300,000	1,300,000	1,000,000	1,000,000

World Resources: Although domestic resources of raw materials for the production of fused aluminum oxide are rather limited, adequate resources are available in the Western Hemisphere. Domestic resources are more than adequate for the production of silicon carbide.

Substitutes: Natural and manufactured abrasives, such as garnet, emery, or metallic abrasives, can be substituted for fused aluminum oxide and silicon carbide in various applications.

^eEstimated. E Net exporter. — Zero.

¹Production data for aluminum oxide are combined production data from the United States and Canada to avoid disclosing company proprietary data.

²Rounded to the nearest 5,000 tons to avoid disclosing company proprietary data.

³Defined as imports – exports because production includes data from Canada; actual consumption is higher than that shown.

⁴Defined as production + imports – exports.

⁵Defined as shipments + imports – exports.

⁶Defined as imports – exports.