Analysis and Mitigation of Microporosity in Spheroidal Graphite Cast Iron Castings

Andrea Montagnoli[1], Adriana Mura[1], Linda Mazzocco[1]
1. Proservice srl, Via Marco Polo 3 Borgoricco (PD), Italy
*Corresponding address: e-mail: a.montagnoli@proservicetech.it

Extended abstract: Microporosity in spheroidal graphite cast iron castings presents a critical defect that adversely affects mechanical properties and overall functionality. The unpredictable emergence of this defect complicates its analysis and mitigation. Despite rigorous process controls aimed at maintaining stability and consistency, foundries frequently encounter microporosity. These defects can appear in established castings or tooling even when the chemical composition and pouring temperatures are within specified limits.

1 Introduction

This study investigates the causes and solutions for microporosity defects that unexpectedly appeared in isolated areas of spheroidal graphite cast iron castings. The investigation involves a comprehensive examination of the underlying causes of these defects, followed by the implementation of corrective actions to mitigate the issue.

2 Methodology

In-depth analysis and mitigation of microporosity defects were facilitated by the integration of advanced process control systems. Thermal analysis was pivotal, providing real-time data on the cooling curves and solidification patterns of the molten iron. Additionally, the monitoring of late stream inoculation was crucial, using systems designed for accurate and consistent inoculant delivery during the pouring process. These advanced monitoring systems, combined with the foundry's existing control measures, enabled a detailed examination and a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to microporosity.

Findings

The investigation identified two primary factors contributing to the occurrence of microporosity: excessive inoculant addition and a high percentage of remelted cast iron returns.

In the case of excessive inoculant addition, inoculants were introduced to prevent carbide-related defects in thin-walled castings, since produced with vertical pouring lines. These castings were produced using pearlitic spheroidal graphite with a high carbon equivalent within the eutectic range. However, the increased use of inoculants resulted in over-inoculation, shifting the cast iron into the hyper-eutectic range. This shift disrupted the proper functioning of the feeding system, leading to the emergence of microporosity in isolated areas of the casting. Over time, this phenomenon resulted in a gradual increase in defect incidence, thereby increasing the scrap rate and, consequently, the amount of cast iron returns.

The high percentage of remelted cast iron returns further exacerbated the issue. As the scrap rate increased, a larger proportion of cast iron returns were remelted, becoming the predominant part of the metallic charge mix. This created a feedback loop, where the introduction of inoculants, both through external addition and the remelting of cast iron returns, perpetuated the defect.

3 Corrective Actions

To address the issue of microporosity, a series of corrective actions were implemented. The first corrective action involved reducing the introduction of inoculants through the metallic charge. A balanced charge mix of cast iron returns, steel scrap, and pig iron was developed to minimize the introduction of hereditary inoculants. This "clean-up" of the metal aimed to eliminate any residual effects of the inoculants.

The second corrective action focused on optimizing the amount and flow of inoculants introduced during the casting process. The quantity of inoculants was reduced, and a more precise and centered flow of inoculants with the cast iron was ensured. This adjustment was critical in preventing over-inoculation and maintaining the iron within the eutectic range.

Additionally, an operating procedure was established to guarantee precise and consistent eutectic solidification during the pouring process. This procedure involved the appropriate management of the melting furnaces, supported by thermal analysis systems.

4 Results

The introduction of this new operating procedure was instrumental in reducing the incidence of microporosity defects from percentages between 8% and 12% to below 2%. The advanced process control systems, combined with meticulous monitoring and adjustments to the charge mix and inoculant flow, proved effective in mitigating the issue. This case study underscores the importance of stringent process control in foundries, demonstrating that metallurgical defects such as microporosity can be resolved without modifying tooling or the feeding system, which could potentially worsen the situation.

5 Conclusion

The study highlights the critical role of advanced process control and meticulous, continuous monitoring in addressing microporosity defects in spheroidal graphite cast iron castings. By reducing inoculant usage and optimizing the charge mix, foundries can significantly improve casting quality and reduce defect rates. The introduction of a balanced charge mix and precise control of the inoculant flow were decisive in mitigating the microporosity issue. Furthermore, the establishment of an operating procedure to ensure consistent eutectic solidification was crucial in achieving the desired outcome.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that rigorous process control and advanced monitoring systems are essential in addressing metallurgical defects in foundries. The successful mitigation of microporosity in spheroidal graphite cast iron castings without the need for tooling modifications highlights the effectiveness of the implemented corrective actions. By maintaining stringent process controls and continuously monitoring key parameters, foundries can ensure the production of high-quality castings with minimal defects.