

## Alex Stewart International expands to serve growing metal markets

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Alex Stewart International has invested £1 million in new facilities in Liverpool, UK, in order to meet growing demand for the assaying services it provides to the global metal markets, MD Graham Stewart told Metal Bulletin.

Even as the commodities boom of the past decade fades, Alex Stewart International expects business conditions to remain strong in markets that have, in some cases, expanded by several million tonnes in recent years, and are continuing to grow.

Copper, which was a 15 million-tonne market in 2003, has grown by 33% over the past ten years, despite its chronic supply constraints. The 48-million tonne aluminium market is 70% larger than it was a decade ago.

Alex Stewart expects to inspect, sample and assay more than 5 million tonnes worth of traded copper, zinc and lead over the coming year and also forecasts further expansion in markets such as cobalt and tantalum, Stewart said.

It also expands continued growth in its scrap inspection business from operational bases across the USA, Europe, Southeast Asia and China, Stewart said.

"Having a reliable inspection network is very important because the quality of the samples can affect the quality of the assay as a whole. Due to the diversity in materials being traded, inspection experience in the field is vital; laboratory testing is by comparison less risky," he said.

The explosive growth in concentrates, metals and scrap markets has stretched the assaying industry as a whole, and the company expects to continue to operate at or near full capacity following its Liverpool expansion, he said.

"The assaying industry probably as a whole hasn't quite grown as quickly as forecast in recent years, but as a company we've performed our own kind of miracle in coming as far as we have during that time," Stewart told Metal Bulletin.

"While there is room for other companies to enter the sector, success within the assaying and inspection industry is built upon trust, experience and reputation, which takes a long time to establish," Stewart said.