

Rio Tinto to shut furnace at South Africa mineral sands project

Miner Rio Tinto has decided to shut a furnace at its Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) project in South Africa, as supply of the raw material used to fuel it was hampered by an "escalation in the security situation".



The Rio Tinto mining company's logo is photographed at their annual general meeting in Sydney, Australia, 4 May, 2017. Reuters/Jason Reed

Last month, it declared a force majeure on customer contracts and halted mining and smelting operations at the project following a violent community unrest and a report that an employee was killed in May.



Rio Tinto declares a force majeure on violence-plagued Richards Bay operation

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The miner said shutting one of the four furnaces at the mineral sands project would reduce the use of its stockpile of feedstock and limit the long-term impacts of a shutdown on RBM's furnaces.

"Shutting a furnace has a major impact on the business and broader community and it not a decision we have taken lightly," Sinead Kaufman, chief executive of Rio's minerals division, said.

RBM will reassess the situation to decide on restarting the furnace or potentially shutting other furnaces depending on "when the safety and security position improves," Rio said.

All operations at RBM remain halted until further notice, the miner said.

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