

Multimillion-dollar cement plant coming

The National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) has given the green light to Canadian engineering firm Cemcorp to start construction of Jamaica's second cement-production plant.

Cemcorp, which will operate under the name Cemex Jamaica Limited, will construct a 1.5-million-tonne capacity plant at Port Esquivel, St Catherine, at a cost of US\$340 million - the single-largest Canadian investment in Jamaica. "We are happy that we can now move forward with our plans," Armand Nahmiache, Cemcorp's chief executive officer, told The Gleaner from his Canadian office yesterday. According to Nahmiache, his company is now preparing engineering and construction drawings and other documents, required by the St Catherine and Clarendon parish councils, to commence construction. "Hopefully, we will be breaking ground in another three months," Nahmiache said. "I expect construction to last for about two years." According to NEPA's website, the firm was granted environmental permits "with stipulated conditions" for the construction of a cement plant and coal-fired power plant; the establishment of a limestone and clay quarry; as well as the construction of an access road and conveyor belt. While Trinidad Cement Limited and its Rockfort, Kingston-based subsidiary, Caribbean Cement Company, are now the dominant players in the regional market, Nahmiache is of the view that there is room in the region for another player. Booming sector Jamaica's construction sector, when booming, is said to demand up to one million tonnes of cement per year. About 15 per cent is serviced by local importers. "We have no interest in a tussle for local market share, but one must realise that whether in the (wider) Caribbean market or in Jamaica, competition is good for any economy," Nahmiache said. The Morocco-born Nahmiache's relationship with Jamaica dates back to December 1999 when he brought in 15,000 tonnes of cement produced in Russia to test the local market. The Canadian company has a large international client base, which provides a guaranteed market for about 75 per cent of the approximately 900,000 tonnes of cement the company expects to produce annually at start-up. The remaining 25 per cent, or 225,000 tonnes of cement, will be distributed in Jamaica. The decision to set up operations on the south coast is a strategic one as the company plans to draw on red mud extracted from waste ponds at Windalco Bauxite Plant, gypsum from Caribbean Cement's facility at Rockfort and raw material from its existing quarrying operations at Rose Hall district in Clarendon, which will be expanded. The company is expecting to generate its own power from a 54 megawatt clean-coal power plant that will be set up at Port Esquivel. With the cement plant requiring about 35-39 megawatts to operate, the remainder could be sold to the Jamaica Public Service Company. Local importers, the Jamaica Manufacturers' Association and Incorporated Masterbuilders Association of Jamaica, have welcomed the news of the Canadian firm's plans. Source: Jamaica Gleaner