

State of the PM Industry in North America—2019

John F. Sweet, PMT, President, Metal Powder Industries Federation

The powder metallurgy (PM) industry began 2019 facing a subdued business outlook. Red flags warned caution ahead. But first, let us begin with a review of 2018 posting modest growth for most PM sectors.

The traditional press-and-sinter sector gained last year, along with metal injection molding (MIM) companies enjoying stronger sales increases in the 5% to 10% range. Metal powder producers and PM equipment builders reported positive gains with equipment companies reporting rising demand for automation packages and robotics. Interest in metal additive manufacturing (AM) continues at a rapid pace. But AM companies are still tackling challenges related to qualifying parts for commercial production runs.

Metal Powder Shipments & Trends

North American iron powder shipments in 2018 grew by 1% to 392,995 mt (433,203 st), Figure 1. PM and friction grade powder shipments were almost even with 2017 at 357,590 mt (394,176 st). Iron powder shipments for welding applications increased by 11% to 15,839 mt (17,460 st). Iron powder going into other uses increased rose by 5.7% to 19,565 mt (21,567 st).

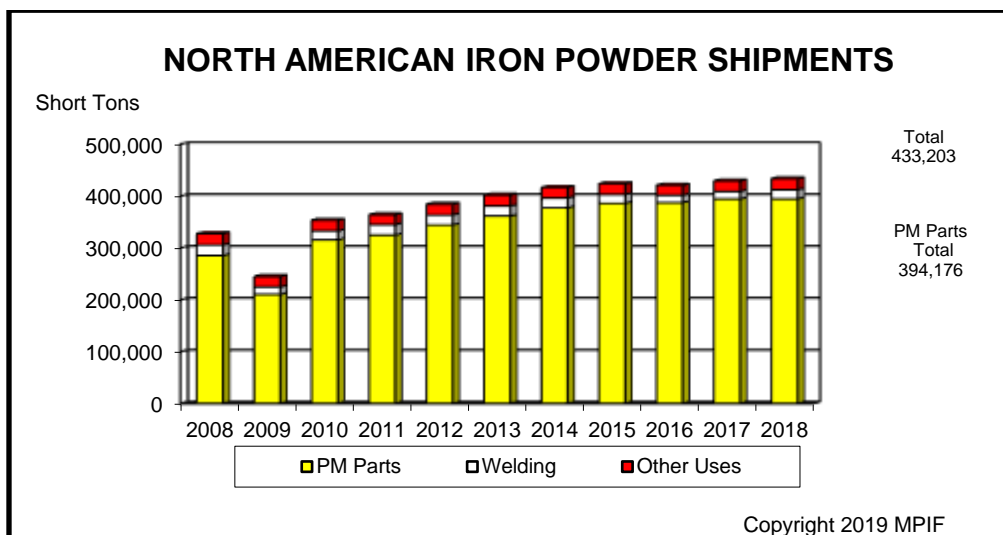


Figure 1. North American Iron Powder Shipments (1 st = 0.907 mt)

2018 iron and steel powder shipments in Europe and Japan were almost even with 2017, a similar result to North America.