Development of Ceramic Membrane Reactors for High Temperature Gas Cleanup

Authors:
Roberts, D.L.
Way, J.D.

Contractor:
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025

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CONTRACT INFORMATION

Contract Number: DE-AC21-89MC26373
Contractor: SRI International
            333 Ravenswood Avenue
            Menlo Park, CA 94025
            Phone: 415/859-6224
Contractor Project Manager: Dr. Daryl L. Roberts
Principal Investigator: Dr. Daryl L. Roberts (Oregon State University)
METC Project Manager: Dr. Venkat Venkatsaraman
Period of Performance: September 27, 1989 to September 26, 1992

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DOE is seeking to develop high temperature, high pressure ceramic membrane technology to perform a variety of gas separation processes to improve the efficiency and economics of advanced power generation systems such as direct coal-fired turbines (DCFT) and the IGCC process. The temperatures encountered in these power generation systems are far above the temperature range for organic membrane materials which is typically 150-200°C for polymers such as silicone rubber, polysulfone, and cellulose esters. Inorganic materials such as ceramics are therefore the most likely membrane materials for use in advanced power generation systems. The focus of this project is IGCC systems wherein control of H2S and NH3 is a key element of the overall system. The IGCC process consists basically of a gasifier to produce synthetic gas that is then fed to a gas turbine generator. The temperature and pressure ranges encountered under IGCC conditions are 1,000°F to 2,000°F and 200 to 1,000 psia. There are several potential applications for a high temperature membrane reactor process in the IGCC flowsheet.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this project is to develop high-temperature, high-pressure catalytic ceramic membrane reactors and to demonstrate the feasibility of using these membrane reactors to control gaseous contaminants in Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle (IGCC) systems. These catalytic membrane reactors will decompose hydrogen sulfide (H2S) and ammonia (NH3) and separate the reaction products. The reactors will be designed to operate in the hostile process environment encountered in IGCC systems, including temperatures ranging from 1,000 to 2,000°F and pressures from 200 to 1,000 psia. The research involves novel catalytic materials, modification of commercially available inorganic membranes, and the making of laboratory membrane reactors from these catalysts and modified membranes.
are removed, some hydrogen loss will occur in which case the permeate stream might be useful in the molten carbonate fuel cell. Overall, the technology of membrane reactors is likely to impact several DOE program areas.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

SRI's approach is to combine novel catalytic materials with modified, commercially available inorganic membranes to make membrane reactors capable of decomposing H$_2$S and NH$_3$. The research also involves developing a theoretical basis for reactor performance and evaluating the economics of the performance at conditions typical of IGCC conditions. The work was conducted in the following five tasks:

- Task 1: Literature Search, Membrane Selection, Test
- Task 2: Experimental Test Program
- Task 3: Development of Theory
- Task 4: Technical and Economic Evaluation
- Task 5: Final Report.

The experimental test program (Task 2) included coating inorganic pre-ceramic polymers onto commercially-available inorganic membranes to try to make a hydrogen selective membrane that withstands IGCC conditions. It also included synthesis of appropriate catalysts for decomposing H$_2$S or NH$_3$. 

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Figure 1. Project Schedule Based on Start Date of September 27, 1989
RESULTS

Early in the project, we developed a computer code of the membrane reactor process and developed catalysts capable of decomposing H₂S and NH₃ separately.

The more difficult part of developing a membrane reactor was making a membrane with suitable permselectivity. Since both the ammonia and H₂S decomposition reactions produce H₂, we want a membrane that selectively permeates hydrogen. We have taken the approach of coating a substrate that has fine pores (a microfilter or ultrafilter) with a completely dense layer and then (except for palladium coatings) making super fine pores in the dense layer by leaching or pyrolysis.

We used four different substrates (Norton 0.2 μm alumina monolith, Refractron alumina microfilters, Vycor glass, Alcoa ultrafilter) and five different coating materials (Poly N-methyl silazane, Aremco 617 alumina-based glaze, Polycyclohydromethyl silazane, Aluminum phosphorus oxides, palladium). Only the palladium films on an alumina ultrafilter could be made regularly with a negligible defect population. The other approaches were plagued with cracks and poor reproducibility.

As an example of results with the inorganic polymer coatings, Figure 2 shows hydrogen and nitrogen permeation test results at room temperature for the Aremco 617 glaze coated onto an alumina microfilter (Refractron Corporation, Newark, NY). Most of the selectivities were below 3.74, the value predicted for a Knudsen barrier. There were two results where the selectivity exceeded the Knudsen value, indicating the feasibility of achieving the "molecular sieving" properties that we are trying to produce. We suspect, however, that unselective surface defects in most cases swamp the total permeation rate, leading to low selectivities.

We made palladium films on a tubular alumina ultrafilter (U.S. Filter, Warrendale, PA) by electroless plating from a platinum amine complex solution in hydrazine (Rhoda, 1959). The best results were achieved with an ultrafilter pore size of 100 angstroms and with pretreatment of the surface in a stannic/stannous chloride solution. The films were about 5 microns thick and appeared defect free under electron microscopy. We have not succeeded yet with permeation measurements with these films at high temperature because of problems making a seal on the membrane that withstands temperatures above 1000°F. Because defect-free palladium films are infinitely selective to hydrogen with respect to the other components of gasifier product gas, we expect that the selectivity of our palladium films will exceed 1000 even with the inevitable defects that accompany real membranes.

We have analyzed the performance and economics of membrane reactors for H₂S and NH₃ decomposition using the reaction rates determined experimentally in our catalyst development work and using the permeation behavior of palladium films reported in the literature (Uemiya, et al., 1988). Our results show that membrane reactors for H₂S decomposition cannot remove H₂S to as low a level as the zinc ferrite systems (99.3% removal) even though the membrane reactor decomposes H₂S more efficiently than a ordinary reactor (Figure 3). Further, the feed concentrations of H₂S and NH₃ are so low (3110 ppm and 750 ppm, respectively, in our base case taken from DOE/MC/26019-3004, December 1990) that the hydrogen losses from the feed gas through the membrane wall are unacceptable. Only if the H₂S or NH₃ is preconcentrated, such as by permeation through a molten salt membrane, can the cost of the membrane reactor system become reasonable (Figure 4).

FUTURE WORK

In the remaining time, we intend to acquire representative H₂ permeation data at high temperatures for the palladium films on the alumina ultrafilters. We will use these data in a few representative runs in our performance/economics computer code.

REFERENCES


Figure 2. Alumina Glaze on Refractron Microfilter

Selectivity greater than that given by the Knudsen mechanism (3.74) was rarely achieved.
Figure 3. Effect of Reactor Temperature on Decomposition of H₂S

Temperatures above 1500°F are necessary for reasonable fractional decomposition of H₂S even with a membrane reactor.
Figure 4. Effect of Ammonia Preconcentration on Total System Cost

If the NH$_3$ can be preconcentrated to 5% to 10%, decomposition costs can be reasonable.
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