O-atom production in water ice: Implications for O_2 formation on icy satellites

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ABSTRACT

We have found that O-atoms are a primary product in the irradiation of water-ice with 0.8 MeV protons. This observation has implications in understanding the chemical reactions that occur to produce molecular oxygen (O_2) in such laboratory ices, as well as ices found on the surfaces of Ganymede and Europa, and the ice particles present in Saturn's rings. We estimate that in irradiated water-ice O_2 can be formed at a lower limit of 0.07% by number relative to water and is in agreement with observations of the icy Jovian satellites.

MAIN TEXT

There have been several recent laboratory investigations of the formation of molecular oxygen from irradiated water ice (Orlando and Sieger et al., 2003; Petrik et al., 2005; Teolis et al., 2006). The formation of oxygen is of particular interest in the formation of O_2 on the surface of the icy Galilean satellites (Spencer et al., 1995; Spencer and Calvin, 2002) and also an O_2 atmosphere associated with Saturn's rings (Tokar et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2006). In both cases, O_2 is postulated to be formed from the radiolytic and/or photolytic destruction of H_2O molecules in the ices of these objects.

Despite ongoing efforts from various research groups, there is still a void in our understanding of the chemical processes that form O_2 molecules in irradiated water ice. The problem is not helped by the weak electronic and vibrational transitions of O_2 that make detecting solid-phase O_2 by optical spectroscopic methods difficult. Consequently, the detection of O_2 is commonly performed by quadrupole mass spectrometry (QMS) of molecules sputtered during the irradiation process, or later released in temperature programmed desorption (TPD) experiments.

A good review of the field can be found in Johnson et al. (2003). Here we shall present a brief summary of the literature published since then and at the same time describe each O_2 production model. The focus will be on the chemical steps involved rather than the kinetics of each model. Details of our experiments will then be given.

The papers by Johnson et al. (2003), Orlando and Sieger (2003) and Sieger et al. (1998) culminated in the publication of Johnson et al. (2006) with what shall be referred to here as the J(2006) model. This model proposes that O_2 is produced from the decomposition of H_2O to H_2 and O-atoms.

$$H_2O + \text{energy} \rightarrow H_2 + O \qquad (1)$$

The O-atoms are trapped in the form of a stable precursor, possibly an $H_2O{\cdot}O$ complex, before a second excitation produces H_2 and O_2.

$$H_2O{\cdot}O \rightarrow H_2 + O_2 \qquad (2)$$

Alternatively a non-thermal O-atom from a secondary dissociation may form O_2.

$$H_2O{\cdot}O + O \rightarrow H_2O + O_2 \qquad (3)$$

An alternative model recently proposed by Petrik et al. (2006), and which shall be referred to here as the P(2006) model, proposes that the stable precursor is HO_2 and that more steps are required than in the J(2006) model. First, H_2O is dissociated into H and OH.

$$H_2O + \text{energy} \rightarrow H + OH \qquad (4)$$

Next the OH, which is formed within the sample, migrates to the surface of the ice. Multiple OH's then react to form H_2O_2 and subsequently HO_2.

$$OH + OH \rightarrow H_2O_2 \qquad (5)$$

$$H_2O_2 + OH \rightarrow HO_2 + H_2O \qquad (6)$$

The hydroperoxy radical (HO_2) is then dissociated by an energetic excitation to form O_2.

$$HO_2 + \text{energy} \rightarrow H + O_2 \qquad (7)$$

Both models predict very specific but different atomic and/or molecular intermediates, yet in the experiments from which these models are constructed, the researchers never actually identified any of the chemical intermediates.

The direct detection of radiolytically produced O-atom in an ice sample poses many experimental challenges. Perhaps the best evidence for the production of O-atoms in ice in the literature is found in the work of Matich et al. (1993) that detected Herzberg emission lines of O_2 in UV-irradiated water ice. The authors reasoned that the O_2 was formed from O-atom recombination, although other reactions not involving O-atoms were possible. Here we present new laboratory results on the observation of O-atom production in H_2O ice using the detection of isotopologues of ozone in irradiated H_2O + $^{18}O_2$ thin-film samples.

The experimental details are similar to those described in Cooper et al. (2006). In brief, we prepared gaseous mixtures of $H_2{}^{16}O$ + $^{18}O_2$ (6:1) in a vacuum manifold. Millipore water was freeze-pump-thaw cycled multiple times to remove dissolved atmospheric gases. The $^{18}O_2$ (Isotec; purity of > 97%) was used without further purification. Blank experiments on irradiated pure $^{18}O_2$ produced $^{18}O_3$ and no other detectable scrambled isotopes. The H_2O + $^{18}O_2$ gaseous mixtures were then deposited onto an aluminum mirror, pre-cooled to 10 K by a closed-cycle helium refrigerator. The samples were then warmed to 80 K, at ~2 K/min. The 80 K irradiation temperature was chosen to approximate ice temperatures on the Galilean satellites. An increase in the vacuum-chamber's base pressure when the pre-irradiated ice was warmed to ~30 K indicated that some of the O_2 sublimed out of the sample. This observation is consistent with previous work (Loeffler et al. 2006). Due to the sublimation of some of the O_2, the exact H_2O/O_2 ratio in the irradiated ice is unknown. The samples were then irradiated at 80 K with 0.8

MeV protons generated by a Van de Graaff accelerator. IR spectra were measured using a Nicolet 6700 Nexus spectrometer at 4 cm^{-1} spectral resolution.

Figure 1 shows spectra of a $H_2{}^{16}O$ + $^{18}O_2$ sample before and after irradiation. As the dose increased two broad but shallow absorption bands appeared at 980 and 990 cm^{-1} associated with the formation of the 888 and 886 isotopologues, where 8 represents an ^{18}O-atom and 6 represents a ^{16}O-atom. The 888 was produced from residually trapped $^{18}O_2$ molecules that were nearest neighbors. The irradiation of pure $^{18}O_2$ did not yield any measurable ozone isotopes containing ^{16}O and there was no measurable amount of CO_2 atmospheric contaminant in our sample, so the ^{16}O-atom in the 886 must have been produced from H_2O. This was the first ozone mixed isotopologue observed as the dose increased, and it is thought to be due to the first reaction step shown in Figure 2, i.e. the combination of a radiolytically produced ^{16}O-atom from water with $^{18}O_2$ that was trapped in the ice. The 888 species was gradually destroyed (as shown in Figure 2) with increasing dose by the replacement of ^{18}O by radiolytically-produced ^{16}O to form 886.

We considered the possibility that the source of ^{16}O in these experiments could be ^{16}OH formed in the radiolytic destruction of H_2O. An ozone molecule containing a ^{16}O-atom could then be produced by the following reactions.

$$^{16}OH + {}^{18}O_2 \rightarrow H^{16}O^{18}O^{18}O \rightarrow H + {}^{16}O^{18}O^{18}O \qquad (8)$$

However, calculations by Varandas (2002) and Yu and Varandas (2001) show that reaction 8 probably does not occur to any great extent since the energy of the HO_3 intermediate is only marginally below that of $OH + O_2$ on the ground-state HO_3 potential energy surface. These workers have shown that the $O + HO_2$ and $H + O_3$ states are accessible in the gas-phase when the reacting O_2 and OH are in highly excited vibrational states. These excited states are likely to be very rapidly quenched in the cold ices discussed in the present work.

Radiolytic dissociation from a stable HO_3 precursor (Reactions 9a-c) could also be possible.

$$HO_3 + \text{energy} \rightarrow H + O_3 \qquad (9a)$$

$$HO_3 + \text{energy} \rightarrow O + HO_2 \qquad (9b)$$

$$HO_3 + \text{energy} \rightarrow OH + O_2 \qquad (9c)$$

However, from the potential energy surface (Varandas, 2002), reaction 9c would be expected to dominate due to the small difference in potential energy. Reaction 9a would be the least significant due to the largest difference in potential energy of reactants and products. In addition, the HO_3 abundance in irradiated $H_2O + O_2$ ices at 80 K is small compared with the amount at 10 K (Cooper et al. 2006).

Once the 886 ozone species is produced, further reactions can occur. Other radiolytic ^{16}O-atoms may add to either end of the 886 molecule and displace an O-atom from the opposite end. Alternatively, an ozone isotopologue may decompose to a molecular oxygen isotopologue and an O-atom (16 or 18). A ^{16}O-atom originating from radiolyzed water may then react with the O_2 isotopologue to form either the 686 or 866 species which are observed at 1003 and 1022 cm^{-1} respectively. The 866 can then form 686 or 666, and the 686 may form 866 which can feedback into the former reaction channel. The 666 isotopologue is observed at 1035 cm^{-1}. The positions of these isotopologues are summarized in Table 1.

Assuming that oxygen atoms cannot add in between two other O-atoms in an ozone molecule, the 868 isotopologue would need to form from the reaction between an 886 or 686 molecule and an ^{18}O-atom. The absence of the 868 (~1016 cm^{-1}) isotopologue in the sample indicates that ^{18}O is irreversibly lost to the water lattice once it is displaced. This suggests that the amount of ^{16}O produced radiolytically from H_2O, must dominate the amount of ^{18}O in the sample.

In our experiments on pure H_2O, we see no infrared evidence of ^{16}O-atom production via the formation of molecular oxygen because the oxygen absorption band is very weak. Ozone is also not produced in any detectable quantity because the amount of O_2, the precursor needed for O_3 production, is too small. However, when $^{18}O_2$ is added to pure water, as described above, it acts as a trap for ^{16}O-atoms via the formation of ozone isotopologues that can be detected spectroscopically.

Using a band strength of 1.4 x 10^{17} cm molecule^{-1} (Smith et al. 1985) for the ν_3 feature of O_3, and assuming that it is the same for all isotopologues, we have calculated that there are 0.14% ^{16}O-atoms by number relative to H_2O (Table 2) at the highest dose of 9.8 eV/16-amu molecule. In pure water ice, without the presence of $^{18}O_2$ to trap ^{16}O-atoms as an ozone isotopologue, it could be argued that the highly reactive ^{16}O-atom may react with water or another water radiation fragment (such as H or OH) before ever encountering a second radiolytically produced ^{16}O-atom. The lifetime of a single ^{16}O-atom surrounded by H_2O in an ice lattice is unknown, but it may be stabilized via forming a complex with H_2O (Khriachtchev et al., 2000). However, if the ozone isotopologues produced in the present work were dissociated and the ^{16}O-atoms were to reform exclusively as $^{16}O_2$, then there would be 0.07% $^{16}O_2$ by number, relative to H_2O. This small amount of O_2 in pure water is far below the detection limits of our spectrometer, but using the O_3 tracer molecule we can detect ^{16}O-atoms that could otherwise form O_2.

We note that these abundance estimates are calculated at the highest radiation dose of 9.8 eV/16-amu molecule used in the present experiments. At this dose, ^{16}O-atom production does not appear to be at steady-state (Figure 3) i.e. the yield of O-atoms has not reached a point where the O-atom abundance doesn't change with increasing dose. However, determining whether the O-atom production is at steady-state is impossible in these experiments because we cannot measure all of the O-atoms. We can only observe the O-atoms that are present as an ozone isotopologue. Previous experiments from our laboratory (Cooper et al, 2008) have shown that in H_2O + $^{16}O_2$ ices that O_3 production reaches steady-state by ~5 eV/16-amu molecule.

It is common in radiation chemistry to present production rates as a yield, *G*, the number of molecules produced per 100 eV of energy absorbed. We have calculated an effective $G_{H+}(^{16}O)$ by plotting the number of ^{16}O-atoms measured in ozone isotopologues as a function of radiation dose (Figure 3). The slope of Figure 3 is 0.013, a value equal to $G_{H+}(^{16}O)$. Again however, this value represents a lower limit due to the O-atoms that cannot be directly measured in this experiment and is only an effective G-value as we are actually not measuring ^{16}O-atoms directly, but indirectly in the form of ozone isotopologues.

Estimates of the O_2 abundance on Ganymede range from 0.1 - 1.0% (Calvin et al. 1996) to 1.4 - 4.2% (Hand et al. 2006). While our percentage abundance is lower than these estimates, our value represents a lower limit estimate that is in good agreement with the planetary observations. In these laboratory experiments we cannot account for the ^{16}O-atoms that remain trapped in the ice and do not react, or the $^{16}O_2$ that is formed but is present at a level below our detection limits because of the extremely weak fundamental vibration, and also the $^{16}O_2$ formed that is sputtered or desorbed out of the sample. In addition, other trapping mechanisms such as clathrates (Hand et al. 2006) or simultaneous irradiation and deposition (Teolis et al. 2006), may increase the amount of O_2 trapped in an icy satellite.

In terms of modeling the radiation processes that produce O_2 in pure H_2O, we have found that O-atoms produced in these experiments, support the J(2006) model. While it does not by any means conclusively prove the model is correct, it does provide added support via the observation that O-atoms can be produced directly from H_2O molecules. The P(2006) model does not consider the production of such O-atoms in the formation of O_2. Further research is needed to produce a robust and accurate model for the formation of O_2 in irradiated, pure water ice, but we have shown here that O-atoms, produced directly from water may play a part. The actual mechanism will likely require a multi-instrument approach to detect all the intermediate species and reactions. In addition, further laboratory work needs to be performed to understand the trapping mechanism of O_2 on icy satellites.

Nevertheless, we have shown that O-atoms are produced directly from H_2O molecules in an H_2O ice. If these O-atoms recombine to form O_2 in similarly irradiated water ice, a lower abundance limit of 0.07% by number relative to water could result. This value agrees with the observed O_2 abundance on Ganymede (Calvin et al, 1996; Hand et al, 2006).

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Table 1: IR band positions (cm^{-1}) for the ν_3 vibration of ozone isotopologues in the gas-phase (Schriver et al. 1996) and in the present work in water ice.

	${}^{18}O^{18}O^{18}O$	${}^{18}O^{18}O^{16}O$	${}^{16}O^{18}O^{16}O$	${}^{18}O^{16}O^{18}O$	${}^{18}O^{16}O^{16}O$	${}^{16}O^{16}O^{16}O$
Gas-phase[a]	984.8	993.9	1008.5	1019.4	1028.1	1042.1
In ice (this work)	980	990	1003	-	1022	1035

Table 2. Percentage abundance of ozone isotopologues and the equivalent percentage abundance of ${}^{16}O$-atoms in irradiated $H_2{}^{16}O$ + ${}^{18}O_2$ ice at 80 K after a dose of 9.8 eV/16-amu molecule.

	Ozone Isotopologues			
	666	**668**	**686**	**886**
% abundance	0.024%	0.024%	0.006%	0.009%
% abundance of ${}^{16}O$-atoms	0.072%	0.048%	0.012%	0.009%
Total % abundance of ${}^{16}O$-atoms	0.14%			

Figure 1: The absorption bands of ozone isotopologues produced in an $H_2{}^{16}O$ + $^{18}O_2$ ice sample irradiated with 0.8 MeV protons.

Figure 2: The chemical pathway for the formation of each ozone isotopologue. This model assumes that ^{16}O only reacts with one end of an O_3 isotopologue and results in the loss of an O-atom from the opposite end.

Figure 3: The dose dependent ^{16}O-atom production (measured as an ozone isotopologue) at 80 K in an H_2O + $^{18}O_2$ ice sample irradiated with 0.8 MeV protons.

Figure 1

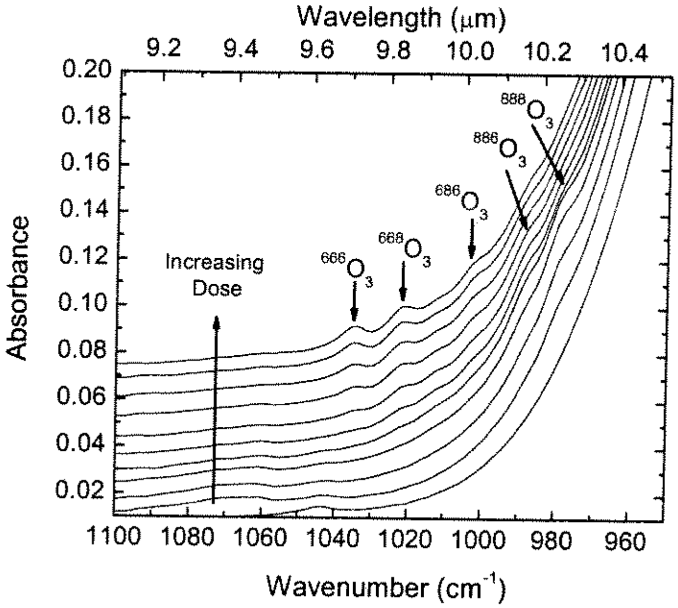
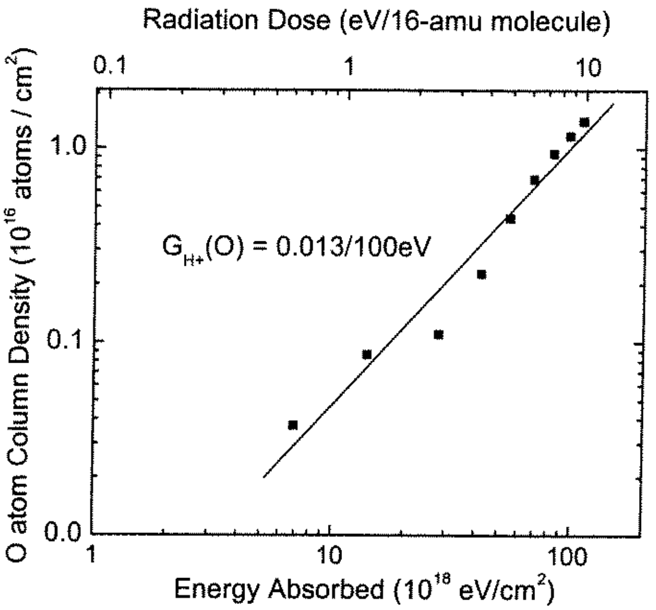

Wavelength (μm)
9.2
9.4
9.6
9.8
10.0
10.2
10.4
0.20
0.18
0.16
0.14
0.12
0.10
0.08
0.06
0.04
0.02
Absorbance
Increasing Dose
$^{666}O_3$
$^{668}O_3$
$^{686}O_3$
$^{886}O_3$
$^{888}O_3$
1100
1080
1060
1040
1020
1000
980
960
Wavenumber (cm^{-1})

Figure 2

$$\begin{array}{lcl}
 & {}^{18}O{}^{18}O{}^{18}O & \\
 & \downarrow & \\
{}^{18}O{}^{18}O+{}^{16}O\rightarrow & {}^{18}O{}^{18}O{}^{16}O & \\
 & \downarrow & \\
 & {}^{18}O{}^{16}O{}^{16}O\leftrightarrow & {}^{16}O{}^{18}O{}^{16}O \\
 & \downarrow & \\
 & {}^{16}O{}^{16}O{}^{16}O &
\end{array}$$

Figure 3


Radiation Dose (eV/16-amu molecule)
0.1
1
10
O atom Column Density (10^{16} atoms / cm^2)
1.0
0.1
0.0
$G_{H+}(O)$ = 0.013/100eV
1
10
100
Energy Absorbed (10^{18} eV/cm^2)