

NASA TECH BRIEF

John F. Kennedy Space Center



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Autoignition Test Cell With Flexible Atmosphere Control

The problem:

Autoignition (spontaneous combustion) temperatures are usually found by simply heating a material until it bursts into flames. Though moderately sophisticated devices are occasionally used in this test, most of them cannot control parameters other than temperature e.g., pressure and the composition of the surrounding atmosphere. Furthermore, standard apparatus do not provide for chemical sampling that is helpful in determining the combustion mechanism and by-products.

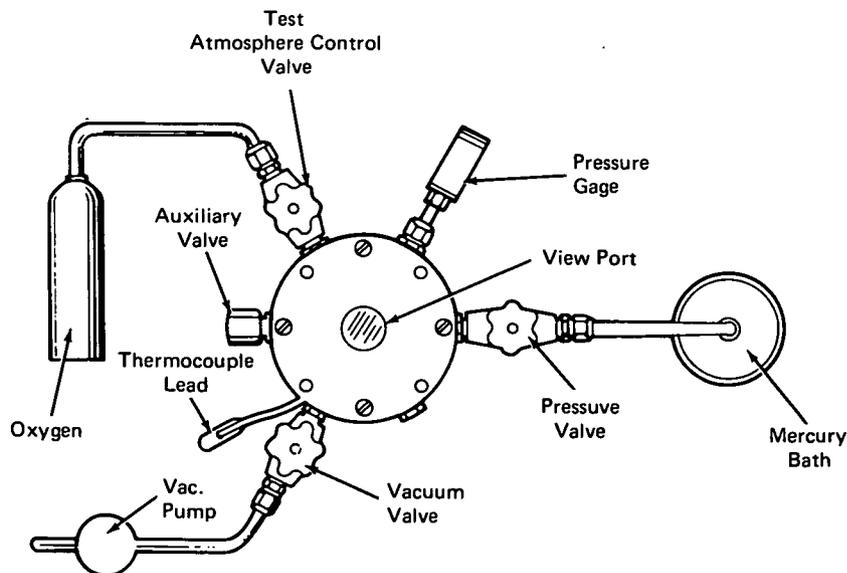
The solution:

A new autoignition test cell allows control of the test atmosphere and composition. This reusable device also permits periodic sampling of the decomposition products in the test atmosphere.

How it's done:

A top view of the test cell is shown in the figure. The test cell is a section of cylindrical pipe that is hermetically sealed on both ends, one of which has an observation window. A thermocoupled probe provides temperature readings. The pressure is regulated by a chamber-outlet bubbler-tube immersed in a mercury bath, the depth of the tube in the mercury determines the pressure in the chamber. A test gas source (oxygen in this application) is connected to the chamber, and a vacuum pump extraction system is used to remove atmosphere samples from the chamber.

To prepare the chamber for testing, the bottom chamber cover (not shown) is mounted in a holding fixture, the sample is placed in the bottom cover, and the chamber and top cover are attached. The thermocouple and pressure controlling bubbler are then placed in position.



Autoignition
Test Cell (Top View)

(continued overleaf)

Before the test, the cell is evacuated and pressurized with the test atmosphere. It is then heated by immersion in constant temperature baths. As the pressure increases with temperature, gases escape through the bubbler-tube in mercury. During the test, gas samples may be taken through a rubber septum by a hypodermic syringe.

Notes:

1. With minor modifications, this cell could be used to determine the melting points and reactivities of a wide variety of substances.
2. Requests for further information may be directed to:
Technology Utilization Officer
Kennedy Space Center
Code AD-PAT
Kennedy Space Center, Florida 32899
Reference: TSP73-10113

Patent status:

This invention has been patented by NASA (U.S. Patent No. 3,578,756). Inquiries concerning nonexclusive or exclusive license for its commercial development should be directed to:

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Source: Drew Evans and
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Kennedy Space Center and
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under contract to
Kennedy Space Center
(KSC-10198)