Thermodynamic Analysis of Chemical Stability of Ceramic Materials in Hydrogen-Containing Atmospheres at High Temperatures

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The chemical stability of several ceramic materials in hydrogen-containing environments has been analyzed from thermodynamic considerations. Equilibrium calculations were made as a function of temperature, moisture content, and total system pressure. The following ceramic materials were considered in this study: SiC, Si3N4, SiO2, Al2O3, mullite, ZrO2, Y2O3, CaO, MgO, BeO, TiB2, TiC, HfC, and ZrC. On the basis of purely thermodynamic arguments, upper temperature limits are suggested for each material for long-term use in H2-containing atmospheres.

Ceramic Materials Considered

The following ceramic materials were considered in this study: SiC, Si3N4, SiO2, Al2O3, mullite, ZrO2, Y2O3, CaO, MgO, BeO, TiB2, TiC, HfC, and ZrC. Among these ceramic materials, SiC, Si3N4, Al2O3, mullite, ZrO2, and BeO are potential monolithic materials or matrix materials for potential composite systems. The ceramic materials TiB2, ZrB2, TiC, HfC, and ZrC might have potential as fiber materials in different ceramic-matrix composites. The oxides Y2O3, CaO, and MgO were considered because they are used to stabilize ZrO2. Also, MgO and Y2O3 are frequently added as sintering aids to Si3N4. The oxide SiO2 is formed on SiC and Si3N4 in oxidizing environments and offers protection against further oxidation.

Method of Calculation and Thermodynamic Data

All of the equilibrium calculations were performed with the computer program SOLGASMIX-PV that was originally developed by Eriksson et al. (ref. 1) and later modified by Besmann (ref. 5). This computer program is based on the principle of minimization of the Gibbs free energy of the system. The thermodynamic data for all relevant species except Si2ON2, β-Si3N4, Hf(g), Zr(g), Y(g), and YO(g) were obtained from standard sources such as the JANAF Thermochemical Tables (ref. 6) and the compilations by Barin and Knacke (ref. 7). The thermodynamic data for Si2ON2 and β-Si3N4 were taken from the work of Hendry (ref. 8); the data for Hf(g), Zr(g), and Y(g) were taken from compilations by Hultgren (ref. 9); and that for YO(g) from the work of Ruzinov (ref. 10).
Stability of SiC

Stability in Pure H₂

Thermodynamic calculations show that SiC would decompose to Si in pure hydrogen. The equilibrium partial pressures for the major gaseous product species (i.e., CH₄, SiH₄, and SiH) as a function of temperature are shown in figure 1. There are other gaseous products; however, their equilibrium partial pressures are orders of magnitude lower than those of the species shown in figure 1. The gaseous species CH₄ is the predominant reaction product at all temperatures. The primary mode of reaction between SiC and H₂ can therefore be written as follows:

\[
\text{SiC} + 2\text{H}_2 \rightarrow \text{Si} + \text{CH}_4
\]  

(1)

The effect of total system pressure on the equilibrium partial pressures of SiH, SiH₄, and CH₄ at 1673 K is shown in figure 2. The partial pressures of these gaseous species increase with an increase in total pressure, suggesting that the extent of reaction between SiC and H₂ would increase with increases in total system pressure.

Stability in H₂ + H₂O Mixtures at 1-atm Total Pressure

Figure 3 shows the solid products and the equilibrium partial pressures of major product gases as a function of moisture content for temperatures ranging from 1173 to 1673 K. The results shown at 1673 K are similar to those obtained by Kim (ref. 4). Four distinct stability regimes are evident from this figure and are described here. (Stability regime IV is not shown at 1673 K.)

Regime I.—Regime I corresponds to low moisture contents in the atmosphere. Solid Si and SiC are the stable solids in this regime. The gaseous products CH₄, SiH₄, SiH, CO, and SiO are predominant. The partial pressures of CH₄, SiH, and SiH₄ remain constant, whereas the partial pressures of SiO and CO increase with increasing moisture content. The relative stability of SiH with respect to SiH₄ decreases with a decrease in temperature, and at temperatures below 1473 K, the partial pressure of SiH is considerably lower than that of SiH₄. Partial pressures of SiH are therefore not shown in the stability diagrams for temperatures at or below 1473 K.

Because Si is the only solid product formed in this regime and because the partial pressure of CH₄ is considerably higher than those of other gaseous species, the primary mode of degradation in this regime is likely to be the reaction of SiC with H₂ to form Si and CH₄ by reaction (1). This process is similar to that which takes place in pure hydrogen.

Regime II.—At higher temperatures (i.e., in the temperature range 1373 to 1673 K), SiC is the only solid that is stable in regime II. The predominant gaseous species in this regime are SiO, CO, and CH₄. The stability of CO relative to that of CH₄ increases either with increasing temperature or with increasing moisture content in the atmosphere. For example, at 1673 K, SiO and CO are the predominant gaseous species for higher moisture levels, whereas SiO and CH₄ are predominant for lower moisture levels. At 1473 K, SiO and CH₄ are the major gaseous products for all moisture levels corresponding to regime II.

Because SiC is the only stable solid phase in this regime, active oxidation of SiC is the primary mode of degradation here. The width of this active oxidation domain decreases with temperature.

At temperatures below 1273 K, the solid species stable in regime II are SiC, Si, and SiO₂. The partial pressures of all major gaseous products remain constant in this regime. The ratio of SiO₂ to Si increases with an increase in the moisture content. The stability domain widens with a decrease in temperature. The solid species Si plus SiO₂ exist in equilibrium with SiC at lower temperatures because SiO(g) becomes less stable with decreasing temperature.

Regime III.—The stable solid species in regime III are SiC and SiO₂. Formation of a SiO₂ layer on SiC is likely to provide protection against further oxidation; therefore this regime may be called the domain of passive oxidation.

![Figure 1](image1.png)  
Figure 1.—Equilibrium partial pressures of reaction product gases as a function of temperature for reaction of SiC with pure H₂ at a total pressure of 1 atm.

![Figure 2](image2.png)  
Figure 2.—Effect of total pressure on partial pressures of reaction product gases for reaction of SiC with pure hydrogen at 1673 K.
Figure 3.—Stability of SiC in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres for 1-atm total pressure.

(a) Temperature, 1673 K.
(b) Temperature, 1573 K.
(c) Temperature, 1473 K.
(d) Temperature, 1373 K.
(e) Temperature, 1273 K.
(f) Temperature, 1173 K.
**Regime IV.**—Regime IV is present at higher moisture levels in the atmosphere. The stable solid species at equilibrium in this regime are SiC, C, and SiO₂.

**Effect of Total Pressure on Stability of SiC in H₂ + H₂O Atmospheres**

Figure 4 shows the effect of total pressure on the stability of SiC in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres at 1673 K. The general features of the stability regimes are the same as those at 1-atm total pressure. However, the width of regime II, the domain of active oxidation, decreases with increasing total pressure, and the region of active oxidation completely disappears above a certain total pressure (~ 15 atm). Instead, both Si and SiO₂ are formed at high pressures in equilibrium with SiC in regime II. Increasing the total pressure thus has the same effect as decreasing the temperature at 1-atm total pressure.

**Moisture Level Required for SiO₂ Formation on SiC**

Because a layer of SiO₂ on a SiC surface is likely to provide protection against further oxidation, it becomes important to know the critical moisture level required for its formation on the SiC surface. This is shown in figure 5. The moisture levels shown in this figure correspond to the transition from regime II to III. Although SiO₂ is formed in stability regime II at lower temperatures, it is formed along with Si and therefore it is doubtful whether a continuous layer of SiO₂ can be developed in this regime.

As shown in figure 5, the moisture level required for SiO₂ formation at 1-atm total pressure decreases with decreasing temperature up to 1373 K and then increases with a further decrease in temperature. Increases in total system pressure have two effects on the moisture-required-for-SiO₂-formation-versus-temperature curve: (1) the inflection in the moisture-versus-temperature curve is shifted toward the right (i.e., toward higher temperatures) with an increase in total system pressure, and (2) the curve is shifted downward (i.e., toward higher moisture levels) with an increase in total system pressure. Thus, the effect of total pressure on the stability of SiC is a function of the temperature. For example, the moisture level required at 1373 K for SiO₂ formation on the SiC surface increases with increasing total system pressure. On the other hand, the moisture level required at 1673 K for SiO₂ formation on the SiC surface decreases with increasing total pressure in the range 1 to 20 atm, and then increases with a further increase in total pressure.

**Stability of Si₃N₄**

**Reaction of Si₃N₄ With Pure Hydrogen**

Equilibrium calculations show that the reaction of Si₃N₄ with pure H₂ would lead to the formation of pure Si along with the generation of N₂, NH₃, SiH, and SiH₄ as gaseous products. Although there are other gaseous products, these four are the major product species.

The partial pressures of N₂, NH₃, SiH, and SiH₄ as a function of temperature are shown in figure 6. At temperatures above ~ 1500 K, the equilibrium partial pressure of N₂ is an order of magnitude greater than those of SiH₄ and SiH. Therefore, N₂ would be the predominant gaseous product species at these temperatures. On the other hand, at temperatures below 1373 K, both N₂ and SiH₄ are the predominant product species in the gas phase. Also, the partial pressures of NH₃ become significant at lower temperatures.

Large partial pressures of N₂, relative to those of H-containing gaseous species at higher temperatures, suggest that decomposition of Si₃N₄ to Si and N₂ by the reaction

\[ \text{Si}_3\text{N}_4 = 3\text{Si} + 2\text{N}_2 \] 

is the primary mode of degradation at higher temperatures. If decomposition of Si₃N₄ is the primary reaction at higher temperatures, H₂ is not expected to play any role at these temperatures. Similar decomposition behavior can also be expected if Si₃N₄ is heated in an inert atmosphere such as Ar. Indeed, as shown in figure 7, the partial pressures of N₂ over Si₃N₄ in an inert atmosphere are exactly the same as those obtained for Si₃N₄ in pure H₂ for temperatures above 1373 K but lower for temperatures below 1373 K. At lower temperatures, the presence of H₂ clearly increases the decomposition of Si₃N₄. As shown in figure 6, the partial pressures of N₂ and SiH₄ are of the same order of magnitude at lower temperatures. Greater decomposition of Si₃N₄ at these temperatures must thus be due to the reaction of Si₃N₄ with H₂, resulting in the formation of SiH₄. (Removal of Si in the form of SiH₄ will release the nitrogen component of Si₃N₄.)

**Stability of Si₃N₄ in H₂ + H₂O Atmospheres at 1-atm Total Pressure**

The stability regimes at 1673 and 1573 are shown in figure 8(a) and (b). The characteristics of the stability diagrams at these temperatures are similar, and three distinct stability regimes are evident from these diagrams. These three stability regimes are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

**Regime I.**—Regime I corresponds to low moisture levels, and Si₃N₄ plus Si are the stable solid phases in this regime. Nitrogen is the predominant product gas in this regime. The partial pressure of N₂ is the same as the decomposition N₂ pressure over Si₃N₄, which is the equilibrium partial pressure of N₂ if Si₃N₄ is heated in an inert atmosphere. This suggests that the decomposition of Si₃N₄ to Si and N₂ is the primary mode of reaction in this regime. Hydrogen and moisture in the atmosphere clearly do not have any significant effect on the overall reaction in this regime.

**Regime II.**—Regime II corresponds to intermediate moisture contents. The stable solid phases in regime II are Si and
Figure 4.—Stability of SiC in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres at 1673 K as a function of total pressure.

(a) Total pressure, 5 atm.
(b) Total pressure, 10 atm.
(c) Total pressure, 15 atm.
(d) Total pressure, 20 atm.
(e) Total pressure, 25 atm.
Si₂ON₂ along with Si₃N₄. The partial pressures of N₂, NH₃, SiH, SiH₄, and SiO remain constant in this regime. The amount of Si₂ON₂ in the solid phase increases with increasing moisture content. The partial pressure of N₂ is the same as the decomposition N₂ pressure for Si₃N₄. This suggests that the decomposition of Si₃N₄ to Si and N₂ is also the primary mode of reaction in this regime.

**Regime III.**—Regime III corresponds to higher moisture contents. The equilibrium solid phases in this regime are Si₂ON₂ and Si₃N₄. Although Si₂ON₂ is the solid product that is in equilibrium with Si₃N₄, an examination of the stability of Si₂ON₂ in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres (fig. 9) shows that Si₂ON₂ would convert to SiO₂ at moisture contents corresponding to this regime. The oxide scale on Si₃N₄ in regime III would thus consist of an outer layer of SiO₂ and an inner layer of Si₂ON₂ next to the Si₃N₄ surface.

The stability diagrams at 1473 and 1373 K, shown in figure 8(c) and (d), also indicate three distinct regimes. The general features for stability regimes I and III are similar to those at 1673 and 1573 K, whereas stability regime II is distinctly different from that at higher temperatures. Note that Si₃N₄ is the only solid that is stable in regime II at 1473 K. This is in contrast to the behavior at 1673 and 1573 K, where both Si and Si₂ON₂ are in equilibrium with Si₃N₄ in stability regime II. The gaseous species SiO and N₂ are the predominant ones in regime II at 1473 and 1373 K. Because Si₃N₄ is the only solid that is stable in regime II at 1473 K, active oxidation of Si₃N₄, resulting in the formation of SiO(g) and N₂(g), would be the primary degradation mode in this regime. Stability regime II (i.e., the domain of active oxidation) widens with decreases in temperature.

Only two stability regimes are evident in the stability diagram at 1273 K (fig. 8(e)). In stability regime I, which corresponds to very low moisture levels, Si₃N₄ is the only stable solid. Active oxidation of Si₃N₄ would thus be the predominant degradation mode in this regime. Note that the features corresponding to regime I at higher temperatures (i.e., decomposition of Si₃N₄ to Si and N₂) are completely absent at this temperature. Although figure 8(e) shows stability regimes for moisture contents greater than 0.1 ppm, calculations for much lower moisture contents, such as 0.00001 ppm, did not show any regime where Si is formed. In regime II, SiO₂ is the stable oxide on Si₃N₄. Again, this is in contrast to the features at higher temperatures where Si₂ON₂ is the stable oxide in contact with Si₃N₄.

**Effect of Total Pressure on Stability of Si₃N₄ in H₂ + H₂O Atmospheres**

Figures 10 to 12 show the effect of total system pressure on the stability of Si₃N₄ in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres at three temperatures: 1673, 1573, and 1473 K. Although the general features of the stability diagram at 1673 K do not change with total system pressure, the phase boundaries are shifted toward the right (i.e., toward lower moisture contents).
Figure 8.—Stability of Si$_3$N$_4$ in H$_2$ + H$_2$O atmospheres for 1-atm total pressure.

(a) Temperature, 1673 K.
(b) Temperature, 1573 K.
(c) Temperature, 1473 K.
(d) Temperature, 1373 K.
(e) Temperature, 1273 K.
The effect of total system pressure on the stability of Si$_3$N$_4$ is rather more dramatic at lower temperatures. For example, consider the effect of total pressure on the stability of Si$_3$N$_4$ in H$_2$ + H$_2$O atmospheres at 1573 K (fig. 11). The general features of the stability diagram are similar for 1- and 10-atm total pressures, and the three stability regimes for both these pressures are Si$_3$N$_4$ + Si for low moisture contents, Si$_3$N$_4$ + Si + Si$_2$ON$_2$ for intermediate moisture contents, and Si$_3$N$_4$ + Si$_2$ON$_2$ for high moisture contents. Note that stability regime II is considerably narrower at 10-atm total pressure than at 1-atm total pressure. As the total pressure is increased to 15 atm, three phases (Si, Si$_2$ON$_2$, and Si$_3$N$_4$) are no longer present in regime II. Instead, Si$_3$N$_4$ is the only stable phase in this regime. The stable solid phases in regimes I and III are similar to those for lower total pressures. As the total pressure is increased to 30 atm, only two regimes are evident in the stability diagram. The only stable solid phase for lower moisture contents is Si$_3$N$_4$; and the stable solid phases at high moisture contents are Si$_3$N$_4$ and Si$_2$ON$_2$. The
stability regime in which Si and Si₃N₄ are the stable phases is completely absent at 30-atm total pressure.

At 1473 K (fig. 12), there are two stability regimes for 10-atm total pressure. The stable solid phase for lower moisture contents is Si₃N₄, and the stable solid phases for higher moisture levels are Si₃N₄ and Si₂ON₂. The regime corresponding to lower moisture contents for 1-atm total pressure (i.e., the regime in which Si₃N₄ and Si are the two stable solid phases) is no longer present at 10 atm.

Increasing the total system pressure clearly has the same effect as decreasing the temperature at 1-atm total pressure. The stability domain corresponding to active oxidation of Si₃N₄ (i.e., the regime in which Si₃N₄ is the only solid phase) is present only at lower temperatures for 1-atm total pressure. However, active oxidation of Si₃N₄ is possible at higher temperatures if the total system pressure is increased. The predominant gaseous species in the regime corresponding to active oxidation of Si₃N₄ for higher total system pressures are N₂, SiH₄, and SiO, and the relative stability of SiH₄ with respect to SiO increases with increasing total pressure. This is in contrast to the situation for 1-atm total pressure in which the predominant gaseous species in the regime corresponding to the active oxidation of Si₃N₄ are SiO and N₂. The stability of SiH₄ thus increases with an increase in total system pressure.

Moisture Level Required for SiO₂ Formation on Si₃N₄

Figure 13 shows the moisture level required for SiO₂ formation as a function of temperature and total system pressure. The amount of moisture in the hydrogen atmosphere required for SiO₂ formation increases with increasing temperature and decreases with increasing total system pressure. About 5000 ppm moisture (0.5 percent) is required for SiO₂ formation at 1673 K and for a total pressure of 1 atm, whereas only 2 ppm moisture is sufficient for SiO₂ formation at 1273 K. In a practical sense, because the so-called “dry hydrogen” always contains a few parts per million of moisture, SiO₂ can be formed on Si₃N₄ at low temperatures (1273 and 1173 K) even in dry hydrogen.
Stability of SiO₂

Stability in Pure Hydrogen

Equilibrium calculations show that SiO is the primary product gas from SiO₂ at high temperatures, whereas SiH₄ is the primary product gas at lower temperatures. The equilibrium partial pressures of SiO and SiH₄ as a function of temperature for 1-atm total pressure are shown in figure 14. For temperatures above ~1273 K, SiO₂ will be reduced by H₂, resulting in the formation of SiO(g) by the reaction

\[ \text{SiO}_2 + \text{H}_2 = \text{SiO} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \]  

(3)

Although the formation of SiH₄ is favored at lower temperatures (i.e., at temperatures lower than 1100 K), the equilibrium partial pressure of SiH₄ at these temperatures is quite low (<10⁻⁷ atm), and SiO₂ is therefore likely to be relatively stable in pure H₂ at these temperatures.

The equilibrium partial pressures for SiO and SiH₄ for the SiO₂-H₂ system as a function of total system pressure are shown in figure 15. The relative stability of SiH₄ increases with increasing total system pressure. At 1673 and 1573 K, SiO is still the predominant gaseous species at higher total system pressures. However, for temperatures below 1373 K, SiH₄ becomes the predominant gaseous species at higher total system pressures.

Stability in H₂ + H₂O at 1-atm Total Pressure

Calculations show that SiO(g) is the predominant gaseous species in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres at higher temperatures (temperatures greater than 1200 K). The magnitude of the equilibrium partial pressure of SiO for a given temperature and moisture content would thus determine the relative stability of SiO₂ in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres. For the equilibrium calculations made with the SOLGASMIX program, the initial...
Figure 15.—Effect of total pressure on the partial pressures of reaction product gases (SiO and SiH₄) for reaction of SiO₂ with pure hydrogen atmosphere.

(a) Temperature, 1673 K.  (c) Temperature, 1473 K.
(b) Temperature, 1573 K.  (d) Temperature, 1373 K.
(e) Temperature, 1273 K.  (f) Temperature, 1173 K.
amounts of all the reactants are fixed, and the equilibrium partial pressures of $\text{SiO}_2(g)$ calculated with this computer program will therefore be somewhat different from those for an open system in which there is continuous replenishment of the reactant gases, $\text{H}_2$ and $\text{H}_2\text{O}$. Because it has already been determined that $\text{SiO}_2(g)$ is the predominant gaseous species for the reaction of $\text{SiO}_2$ in $\text{H}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ atmospheres, the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2$ in an open system can be calculated from the equilibria for reaction (3).

From the equilibria for reaction (3), the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2$ can be expressed as

$$\log(p_{\text{SiO}_2})_{eq} = \log(K_3) + \log \left( \frac{p_{\text{H}_2}}{p_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}} \right)$$

where $(p_{\text{SiO}_2})_{eq}$ is the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2(g)$; $p_{\text{H}_2}$ and $p_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}$ are the partial pressures of $\text{H}_2$ and moisture, respectively; and $K_3$ is the equilibrium constant for reaction (3).

Figure 16 shows the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2(g)$ as a function of moisture content in the atmosphere for five temperatures. The equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2$ decreases with increasing moisture content and increases with increasing temperature. Figure 16 can offer some guidelines regarding the protective effectiveness of a $\text{SiO}_2$ scale formed on $\text{SiC}$ and $\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4$ in $\text{H}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ atmospheres. For example, although $\text{SiO}_2$ can be formed on both $\text{SiC}$ and $\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4$ at 1673 K at moisture levels greater than about 1 percent, the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2(g)$ over the $\text{SiO}_2$ surface is on the order of $10^{-5}$ atm, which is quite high. Thus, even though a $\text{SiO}_2$ layer would be formed at 1 percent $\text{H}_2\text{O}$, the rate of oxidation in such an atmosphere would be higher because of the formation of $\text{SiO}_2(g)$.

**Effect of Total Pressure in $\text{H}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$**

Figures 17 and 18 show the effect of total pressure on the equilibrium partial pressures of $\text{SiO}$ and $\text{SiH}_4$ for the reaction of $\text{SiO}_2$ with $\text{H}_2$ at two moisture levels, 10 and 100 ppm. The total system pressure does not have any significant effect on the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiO}_2$. On the other hand, the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{SiH}_4$ increases with increasing total pressure. For higher moisture levels in the atmosphere (>100 ppm or so), $\text{SiO}$ would still be the predominant gaseous product species at higher total pressures for temperatures in the range 1273 to 1673 K. However, for lower moisture levels (10 ppm or so), $\text{SiH}_4$ would be important at lower temperatures for higher system pressures.

**Stability of $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$**

**Stability in Pure $\text{H}_2$**

Equilibrium calculations show that $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ is the only condensed phase in equilibrium with $\text{H}_2$; no liquid $\text{Al}$ is formed as a result of the reaction of $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ with pure $\text{H}_2$. The gaseous species $\text{Al}(g)$ and $\text{Al}_2\text{O}(g)$ are the predominant reaction products. Figure 19 shows the equilibrium partial pressures of $\text{Al}(g)$ and $\text{Al}_2\text{O}(g)$ for $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$-$\text{H}_2$ equilibria as a function of temperature for 1-atm total pressure. The equilibrium partial pressures for $\text{Al}_2\text{O}(g)$ are an order of magnitude lower than that of $\text{Al}(g)$. Thus, $\text{Al}(g)$ is expected to be the primary reaction product for the $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$-$\text{H}_2$ system.

**Stability in $\text{H}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ Atmospheres**

Figure 20 shows the equilibrium partial pressures of various product gases for the reaction of $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ in $\text{H}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ atmospheres at 1673 and 1873 K for 1-atm total pressure. Alumina is the only stable condensed species and $\text{Al}(g)$ is the predominant gaseous reaction product. For low moisture contents (2 to 3 ppm at 1673 K and up to about 10 ppm at 1873 K), the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{Al}(g)$ is the same as that for reaction with pure $\text{H}_2$. For moisture contents greater than 10 ppm, the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{Al}(g)$ decreases with increasing moisture content and is extremely low at high moisture levels. For a given moisture level, the equilibrium partial pressure of $\text{Al}(g)$ increases with increasing temperature, as shown in figure 21.

**Effect of Total System Pressure**

The equilibrium partial pressures of $\text{Al}(g)$ and $\text{Al}_2\text{O}(g)$ as a function of total system pressure at 1873 K are shown in figure 22 for three moisture levels: 0 (pure $\text{H}_2$), 100, and 1000 ppm. For pure $\text{H}_2$, the partial pressures of both the gases increase slightly with increasing total system pressure. On the other hand, total system pressure has no effect on the partial pressures of these two gases in moisture-containing atmospheres. The system pressure thus has negligible effect on the stability of $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ in $\text{H}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ environments.
Figure 17.—Effect of total pressure on the partial pressures of SiO(g) and SiH₄(g) for reaction of SiO₂ with H₂ + 10 ppm H₂O.
Figure 18.—Effect of total pressure on the partial pressures of SiO and SiH₄ for reaction of SiO₂ with H₂ + 100 ppm H₂O.

(a) Temperature, 1673 K.  
(b) Temperature, 1573 K.  
(c) Temperature, 1473 K.  
(d) Temperature, 1373 K.  
(e) Temperature, 1273 K.
Stability of Mullite

The chemical stability of mullite (3Al₂O₃ · 2SiO₂) in hydrogen-containing environments would depend upon the stability of its constituent oxides, Al₂O₃ and SiO₂. Because the equilibrium partial pressures of the gaseous products for the reaction of Al₂O₃ in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres are considerably lower than those for the reaction of SiO₂ in the same atmosphere, the reaction of the SiO₂ constituent of mullite would be of major concern in determining its stability in H₂ + H₂O environments.

The reaction of the SiO₂ constituent of mullite with H₂ + H₂O atmospheres would be a function of the activity of SiO₂. The activity of SiO₂ in mullite in equilibrium with SiO₂
is unity, and the stability of mullite in equilibrium with SiO$_2$ would therefore be the same as that for pure SiO$_2$. The activity of SiO$_2$ in mullite that is in equilibrium with Al$_2$O$_3$ can be determined from the equilibria for the reaction

$$3\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3 + 2\text{SiO}_2 = 3\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot 2\text{SiO}_2(\text{mullite}) \quad (5)$$

The activity of mullite is unity and the activity of Al$_2$O$_3$ would also be unity for mullite in equilibrium with Al$_2$O$_3$. The equilibrium constant for reaction (5) can thus be written as follows:

$$k_s = \frac{1}{(a_{\text{SiO}_2})^2} \quad (6)$$

The calculated values for SiO$_2$ activities for mullite-Al$_2$O$_3$ equilibria are given in table I. The equilibrium partial pressures of SiO(g) for the reaction of SiO$_2$ at reduced activities with H$_2$ + H$_2$O atmospheres can be calculated from the equilibria for reaction (3), that is, from the expression

$$\log(p_{\text{SiO}}) = \log(K_3) + \log\left(\frac{p_{\text{H}_2}}{p_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}}ight) + \log\left(a_{\text{SiO}_2}\right) \quad (7)$$

The calculated values for equilibrium SiO partial pressures as a function of moisture content and temperature are shown in figure 23 for 1-atm total pressure. The effect of the total system pressure on the stability of mullite in H$_2$ + H$_2$O environments would be similar to that for SiO$_2$.

**TABLE I.—ACTIVITY OF SiO$_2$ FOR MULLITE-AL$_2$O$_3$ EQUILIBRIA**

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<th>Temperature, K</th>
<th>Activity of SiO$_2$</th>
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</table>

**Stability of ZrO$_2$**

Calculations show that ZrO$_2$ and Zr(s) would be the stable solid phases in a pure H$_2$ atmosphere. The major gaseous product species for the reaction of ZrO$_2$ with pure H$_2$ are ZrO, ZrH, and Zr(g). The equilibrium partial pressures of these species as a function of temperature for the ZrO$_2$–H$_2$ equilibria are shown in figure 24. The equilibrium partial pressure of ZrO is orders of magnitude higher than that of the other two gaseous species. Therefore, ZrO(g) would be the predominant gaseous product for the reaction of ZrO$_2$ with pure H$_2$.

The equilibrium partial pressures at 1873 K of the major gaseous product species for the reaction of ZrO$_2$ with moisture-containing environments are shown in figure 25. The compound ZrO$_2$ is the only stable solid phase in moisture-containing atmospheres. Among the gaseous products, ZrO(g) is predominant for all moisture levels. Figure 26 shows the partial pressure of ZrO(g) as a function of temperature and moisture content for the reaction of ZrO$_2$ with H$_2$ + H$_2$O environments at 1-atm total pressure. The partial pressure of ZrO decreases with an increasing moisture content and increases with increasing temperature.

The total system pressure has no significant effect on the stability of ZrO$_2$ in H$_2$ + H$_2$O environments.

**Stability of Y$_2$O$_3$**

The major gaseous products for the reaction of Y$_2$O$_3$ in H$_2$-containing atmospheres are Y(g) and YO(g). The equilibrium partial pressures for these two species as a function...
The total system pressure has no significant effect on the stability of Y₂O₃ in H₂ + H₂O environments.

**Stability of CaO**

Calculations show that Ca(g) is the primary reaction product for CaO in H₂ + H₂O atmospheres. The reaction can be written as

$$\text{CaO} + \text{H}_2 = \text{Ca(g)} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \quad (8)$$

The equilibrium partial pressure of Ca(g) can be calculated from the expression

$$\log(p_{\text{Ca}}) = \log(K_\text{e}) + \log \left( \frac{P_{\text{H}_2}}{P_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}} \right) \quad (9)$$

The calculated equilibrium partial pressures of Ca(g) as a function of moisture content and temperature are shown in figure 28 for 1-atm total pressure. The equilibrium partial pressure of Ca(g) increases with increasing temperature and decreases with increasing moisture content. The total system pressure has no significant effect on the equilibrium partial pressure of Ca.

**Stability of MgO**

Calculations show that Mg(g) is the predominant reaction product for MgO in H₂ + H₂O environments. The relevant reaction is

$$\text{MgO} + \text{H}_2 = \text{Mg(g)} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \quad (10)$$

The equilibrium partial pressure of Mg(g) can be calculated from the expression

$$\log(p_{\text{Mg}}) = \log(K_{10}) + \log \left( \frac{P_{\text{H}_2}}{P_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}} \right) \quad (11)$$

The equilibrium partial pressures of Mg(g) as a function of moisture content and temperature are shown in figure 29 for 1-atm total pressure. The partial pressure of Mg increases with increasing temperature and decreases with increasing moisture content. The total system pressure has no significant effect on the stability of MgO in H₂ + H₂O environments.

**Stability of BeO**

The gaseous reaction products in either H₂ or H₂ + H₂O atmospheres are BeOH(g) and Be(g). The equilibrium partial...
Figure 27.—Equilibrium partial pressures of $Y(g)$ and $YO(g)$ as a function of temperature and moisture content for reaction of $Y_2O_3$ with $H_2/H_2O$ environments for 1 atm total pressure.

(a) 1 atm $H_2$.
(b) $H_2 + 10$ ppm moisture.
(c) $H_2 + 100$ ppm $H_2O$.
(d) 0.1% moisture.

Figure 28.—Partial pressure of $Ca(g)$ as a function of moisture content and temperature for reaction of $CaO$ with $H_2 + H_2O$ atmospheres for a total pressure of 1 atm.

Figure 29.—Partial pressure of $Mg(g)$ as a function of moisture content and temperature for reaction of $MgO$ with $H_2 + H_2O$ atmospheres for a total pressure of 1 atm.
pressure of BeOH(g) is a few orders of magnitude higher than that of Be(g), as shown in figure 30. It is interesting to note that the equilibrium partial pressure of BeOH(g) does not change with moisture content for the range of moisture levels considered in this study, specifically in the range 1 ppm to 50 percent. The equilibrium partial pressure of BeOH(g) increases with increasing temperature, as shown in figure 31. An increase in the total system pressure increases the equilibrium partial pressure of BeOH(g), as shown in figure 32.

Stability of TiB₂

Stability in Pure H₂

The only stable solid phase in pure H₂ is TiB₂. The gaseous reaction products are BH(g) and Ti(g), the partial pressures of which, as a function of temperature, are shown in figure 33. The equilibrium partial pressures of these two gaseous species are marginally affected by the total system pressure as shown in figure 34.

Stability in H₂ + H₂O Atmospheres

Figure 35 shows the stability of TiB₂ in H₂ + H₂O environments at 2173 and 1673 K. At 2173 K, TiB₂ is the only stable solid phase for low moisture contents (<100 ppm); TiB₂ and TiO are the stable solid phases for moisture contents greater than 100 ppm. Three stability regimes are evident at 1673 K. These are (1) TiB₂ + TiO for moisture levels from 1 ppm to 0.25 percent, (2) TiB₂ + TiO₂ for moisture levels from 0.25 to 0.56 percent, and (3) TiB₂ + TiO₂ + B₂O₃ for moisture levels greater than 0.56 percent.

Formation of B₂O₃(1) is clearly detrimental to the oxidation resistance of TiB₂ in moisture-containing environments and is not desirable. Figure 36 gives the moisture level required for B₂O₃(1) formation as a function of temperature for 1-atm total pressure. The shaded portion of the figure denotes the region where B₂O₃(1) can be formed. The amount of moisture required for B₂O₃(1) formation increases with increasing temperature. At low temperatures such as 1173 K, the B₂O₃(1) can thus be formed at only 20-ppm moisture; the corresponding moisture level required at 1873 K is on the order of 6 percent.

The vapor pressure of B₂O₃(1) is quite high at high temperatures as shown in figure 37. For example, the equilibrium vapor pressure of B₂O₃ at 1673 K is on the order of 10⁻³ atm, which is quite high. In a dynamic environment, it is thus likely that B₂O₃(1) would instantly evaporate at this temperature, allowing a protective oxide layer to be developed. However, this may not be the case at lower temperatures, where the vapor pressure of B₂O₃(1) is low. This suggests that at lower temperatures TiB₂ may not be suitable for use in moisture-containing environments.
Figure 33.—Equilibrium partial pressures of BH(g) and Ti(g) as a function of temperature for reaction of TiB₂ with pure H₂ for a total pressure of 1 atm.

Figure 34.—Effect of total system pressure on the equilibrium partial pressure of BH(g) and Ti(g) for reaction of TiB₂ with pure H₂ at 1873 K.

The total system pressure has marginal effect on the moisture levels required for B₂O₃ formation in the TiB₂-H₂-H₂O system, as shown in figure 38.

Stability of TiC, ZrC, and HfC

At lower temperatures, the reaction of MC (M = Ti, Zr, or Hf) with H₂ results in the formation of M and CH₄ by the reaction

\[
MC + 2H₂ = M + CH₄
\]  

(12)

However, at higher temperatures, the gaseous M species becomes important and the reaction of MC with H₂ occurs via

\[
MC + 2H₂ = M(g) + CH₄
\]  

(13)

Thus, MC and M are the stable condensed phases at lower temperatures, whereas MC is the only stable condensed phase at higher temperatures. The temperatures corresponding to the
transition from two stable condensed phases (MC + M) to one condensed phase (MC) are ~1573 K for TiC, ~2073 K for ZrC, and ~1873 K for HfC.

The total pressures of the product gases as a function of temperature for three MC–H2 systems are shown in figure 39. The inflection points in the pressure-versus-temperature curves correspond to the temperature above which MC is the only stable condensed species. The total pressure of the product gases is the sum of the partial pressures of CH4(g) and M(g).

An increase in the total system pressure raises the temperature corresponding to the transition from two stable condensed phases (MC + M) to one condensed phase (MC). For example, at 10-atm total pressure, the transition temperature for the TiC–H2 equilibria is ~1973 K, as compared with 1573 K for 1-atm total pressure. The transition temperature for the ZrC–H2 equilibria similarly increases from ~2073 to ~2873 K as the total system pressure is increased from 1 to 10 atm.

The oxides formed on TiC, ZrC, and HfC in moisture-containing environments are TiO, ZrO2, and HfO2, respectively. The stability of these three carbides in moisture-containing environments would thus depend on the protectiveness of these oxides.

**Upper Temperature Limit for Different Ceramic Materials**

One of the important objectives of thermodynamic calculations is to estimate an upper temperature limit for effective use of the ceramic materials in a given environment. Gaseous products are formed from the reaction of ceramic materials in a hydrogen-containing environment; the lower the equilibrium partial pressures for the reaction products, the longer will be the life of the component. Of course, kinetic factors must be considered in determining the long-term stability of a given material. However, in the absence of kinetic information, some guidelines on the upper temperature limit for a given material can be obtained if a maximum limit is defined for the total pressure of the reaction product gases above which the material may not be suitable for long-term use. It is probably reasonable to assume that the total pressure of reaction product gases less than 10−6 atm (1 ppm) would pose no long-term serious problems with respect to the degradation of a structural material. On the basis of this assumption, the upper temperature limits for different ceramic materials in H2 and H2 + H2O environments are shown in figures 40 and 41.

The upper temperature limit for SiC in pure H2 is not shown because the equilibrium partial pressure of CH4 for reaction (1) is greater than 10−6 atm at all temperatures. In view of the fact that both SiC and Si3N4 depend on a SiO2 scale for protection against oxidation, the upper temperature limits for these two materials in H2 + H2O environments correspond to the stability of SiO2. The stability of TiC,
TiB₂, HfC, and ZrC in H₂ + H₂O environments would depend on the protectiveness of oxides such as TiO, TiO₂, HfO₂, and ZrO₂. Because the oxides TiO₂, ZrO₂, and HfO₂ do not provide adequate protection during the oxidation of Ti, Zr, and Hf (ref. 11), the ability of these oxides to provide oxidation protection for the carbides and borides is rather questionable. No upper temperature limits are therefore defined for TiC, TiB₂, HfC, and ZrC in H₂ + H₂O environments.

The upper temperature limits for different ceramic materials in pure H₂ decrease in the following order: HfC, ZrC, ZrO₂ and Y₂O₃, TiC, TiB₂, BeO, Al₂O₃, CaO, Si₃N₄, mullite, and MgO. The compounds HfC, ZrC, TiC, and TiB₂, although highly stable in pure H₂, may not be suitable for moisture-containing environments.

The upper temperature limit for two common ceramic structural materials, SiC and Si₃N₄, is only on the order of 1400 K for moderate moisture contents of about 100 ppm. The corresponding limit increases to about 1673 K for 10 percent moisture in the atmosphere.

Alumina can be used up to about 1640 K in pure H₂ and can be used at higher temperatures in moisture-containing environments. Zirconia is stable both in pure H₂ and H₂ + H₂O atmospheres at very high temperatures. However, if CaO or MgO is used to stabilize ZrO₂, the upper use temperature for ZrO₂ is considerably lowered. Thus, yttria-stabilized ZrO₂ should be preferred in H₂-containing environments.

### Concluding Remarks

The stability of several ceramic materials in H₂ and H₂ + H₂O environments has been examined from thermochemical considerations, and the upper temperature limits have been defined for each ceramic material.

In conclusion, yttria-stabilized zirconia and alumina are the two ceramic materials that appear to be promising for long-term use in hydrogen-containing atmospheres at high temperatures (> 1673 K). The ceramic materials considered in this study are the ones currently being considered as possible structural materials either as monolithic materials or as constituents in ceramic-matrix composites. It is likely that there are other ceramic materials, especially the stable oxides such as La₂O₃ and Sc₂O₃, that would also be stable in hydrogen-containing environments at elevated temperatures.
References

**Thermodynamic Analysis of Chemical Stability of Ceramic Materials in Hydrogen-Containing Atmospheres at High Temperatures**

**Abstract**

The chemical stability of several ceramic materials in hydrogen-containing environments has been analyzed with thermodynamic considerations in mind. Equilibrium calculations were made as a function of temperature, moisture content, and total system pressure. The following ceramic materials were considered in this study: SiC, Si₃N₄, SiO₂, Al₂O₃, mullite, ZrO₂, Y₂O₃, CaO, MgO, BeO, TiB₂, TiC, HfC, and ZrC. On the basis of purely thermodynamic arguments, upper temperature limits are suggested for each material for long-term use in H₂-containing atmospheres.