Simulations of terrestrial in-situ cosmogenic-nuclide production

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SECTION B: BEAM INTERACTIONS WITH MATERIALS AND ATOMS

Editors: H.H. Andersen & L.E. Rehn

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Published monthly

Printed in The Netherlands
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Targets of silicon and silicon dioxide were irradiated with spallation neutrons to simulate the production of long-lived radionuclides in the surface of the Earth. Gamma-ray spectroscopy was used to measure 7Be and 22Na, and accelerator mass spectrometry was used to measure 10Be, 14C, and 26Al. The measured ratios of these nuclides are compared with calculated ratios and with ratios from other simulations and agree well with ratios inferred from terrestrial samples.

1. Introduction

The interactions of galactic-cosmic-ray particles in the Earth's atmosphere produce a cascade of particles, some of which reach the Earth's surface and produce cosmogenic nuclides. Neutrons are the dominant producer of nuclides in the top meter of the Earth's surface, and muons become a major source of cosmogenic nuclides below a few meters. Long-lived cosmogenic radionuclides, such as 5730-year 14C, 0.3-Ma 26Al, and 0.7-Ma 26Al, and a few rare stable nuclides, such as 3He and 21Ne, made in-situ in certain materials can be used to study recent exposure histories [1]. The advances in the analyses of long-lived radionuclides using accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) have revolutionized the use of these radionuclides, especially for in-situ terrestrial applications. At present, the use of these cosmogenic nuclides to study histories of targets or of cosmic radiation is often limited by inadequately known production rates.

Some production rates and ratios have been inferred from measurements of terrestrial samples with known irradiation conditions (e.g., refs. [2–6]). There are some uncertainties in the exposure ages and irradiation conditions of these samples, and only a few radionuclides (e.g., 10Be and 26Al) have been measured. A wide range of production rates have also been theoretical inferred (e.g., refs. [7,8]). These and other calculations (e.g., refs. [9,10]) for production of these nuclides by nucleons and muons could be improved with laboratory measurements of production cross sections and relative production ratios.

Laboratory simulations of these processes have many limitations, such as not reproducing the complex mix of particles and their energies, but do provide a controlled irradiation of well-characterized samples. A series of irradiations at the Los Alamos Clinton P. Anderson Meson Physics Facility (LAMPF) have simulated the production of long-lived radionuclides in surface rocks. Here we report on synthetic quartz and silicon that were exposed to neutrons. Preliminary results with some details not presented here were reported earlier [11–13]. Irradiations with muons were also done [11,12] and will be reported separately.

2. Experimental

To simulate the production rates and ratios due to the nucleon component (primarily neutrons) of cosmic rays, an irradiation was conducted using spallation neutrons produced in the beam stop of the ~1-mA 800-MeV proton beam at LAMPF. The beam stop produces a large flux of secondary particles, especially neutrons. Most charged secondary particles are stopped by ionization energy losses near the beam stop. Neutrons travel until they undergo nuclear interactions. Samples were exposed to these particles in the Los Alamos Spallation Radiation Effects Facility.
Table 1

Measured radionuclide concentrations (10^{10} atoms/g) in irradiations with spallation neutrons near the LAMPF beam stop (numbers in parentheses are the uncertainties of the last digits of the measurement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>^7Be</th>
<th>^10Be</th>
<th>^14C</th>
<th>^22Na</th>
<th>^26Al</th>
<th>^28Al</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si</td>
<td>40.1 (0.4)</td>
<td>7.69 (0.46)</td>
<td>19.2 (4)</td>
<td>553 (5)</td>
<td>1320 (90)</td>
<td>1410 (110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SiO_2</td>
<td>162 (1)</td>
<td>93.0 (4.7)</td>
<td>303 (3)</td>
<td>256 (5)</td>
<td>722 (50)</td>
<td>660 (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>269 (2)</td>
<td>168 (9)</td>
<td>552 (6)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| a Measured in that sample only.  
| b From averages based on measurements of both Si-containing samples.  
| c Oxygen, as inferred from the Si and Si measurements. |
with stopping negative muons ($\mu^-$). The $^{10}\text{Be}/ ^7\text{Be}$ ratios vary widely (e.g., $\sim 23$ for the stopped $\mu^-$), even greater than the variations noted above for cross-section ratios at various proton energies. The $^{26}\text{Al}/ ^{10}\text{Be}$ ratios for stopped muons ($= 7.0$) and neutrons are similar.

Our ratios for $^{14}\text{C}/ ^{10}\text{Be}$ in Si, SiO$_2$, and oxygen are 2.50, 3.26, and 3.29, respectively. Using the proton cross sections of refs. [22,23,25] for $^{10}\text{Be}$ and of ref. [27] for $^{14}\text{C}$, we can compare our ratios for neutrons with proton-induced ratios. These ratios for protons reacting with Si and O increase with decreasing proton energy, with ratios near unity for $\sim 500$ MeV and $\sim 10$ for $\sim 50$–70 MeV protons, but scatter about our measured ratios.

Using the cross sections for $^{10}\text{Be}$ and $^{26}\text{Al}$ from ref. [26] and ref. [10], respectively, $^{26}\text{Al}/ ^{10}\text{Be}$ ratios were calculated for both the LAMPF irradiations and for natural irradiations. Although the exact spectral shapes for the energetic particles in these irradiations are not well known, we can get some ideas of relative trends and whether the cross sections are reasonably consistent with the measurements. Using the cross sections for $^{22}\text{Na}$ from Si in ref. [9], we calculated a $^{26}\text{Al}/ ^{22}\text{Na}$ ratio similar to the measured ratio. Our results and the cross sections for $^{10}\text{Be}$ production in ref. [26] suggest that the neutron-induced cross sections for $^7\text{Be}$ from oxygen are $\sim 0.7$ of those measured for protons. For $^{14}\text{C}$, we found that we needed to increase the assumed cross sections of ref. [9] for production of $^{14}\text{C}$ from oxygen by 10% and more at the lowest energies to get better agreement with the measured ratio.

Our cross sections for $^{10}\text{Be}$, $^{14}\text{C}$, and $^{26}\text{Al}$ gave good agreement between calculated production rates and activities measured in the Knyahinya meteorite [28]. To get production rates for terrestrial samples, we plan to use the Monte Carlo particle transport/production codes used by ref. [28] and our cross sections.

4. Conclusions

Spallation neutrons near the LAMPF beam stop were used to study the production of $^7\text{Be}$, $^{10}\text{Be}$, $^{14}\text{C}$, $^{22}\text{Na}$, and $^{26}\text{Al}$ in silicon and SiO$_2$. These irradiations gave $^{26}\text{Al}/ ^{10}\text{Be}$ ratios similar to those measured with documented natural samples, indicating that other ratios from our irradiations could be applied to natural samples. Production ratios varied with the target and with the energy and the nature of the incident particles, illustrating the complex nature of predicting such nuclear interactions and their ratios.

Several excitation functions for the production of these radionuclides were tested. Some sets of cross sections ($^{10}\text{Be}$, $^{22}\text{Na}$, and $^{26}\text{Al}$) were found to be good. Other cross-section sets for production by neutrons had to be modified ($^{14}\text{C}$) or were shown to be poor ($^7\text{Be}$). These good or modified cross sections are being used for calculations of cosmogenic-nuclide production rates in extraterrestrial materials and could be used for terrestrial applications.

While simulations at accelerators, such as those reported here, have limitations, they are useful in determining and checking relative production rates in terrestrial samples. The controlled nature of such irradiations is an advantage for many problems, such as determining production from elements that are hard to study directly in natural samples, such as sodium. They also can give production ratios for radioactive nuclides relative to stable nuclides, e.g. $^{26}\text{Al}/ ^{21}\text{Ne}$.

Acknowledgements

We thank D. Davidson for her assistance in the irradiations at the beam stop and G. Butler and the staff of the INC counting room for providing the facilities and spectral-unfolding codes for the gamma-ray spectroscopy. This work was mainly supported by NASA, NSF, the German Science Foundation (DFG), and by the Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics at Los Alamos. The work at Los Alamos was done under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy.

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