Evaluating Dimethyldiethoxysilane for use in Polyurethane Crosslinked Silica Aerogels

Jason P. Randall¹, Mary Ann B. Meador², and Sadhan C. Jana¹

¹ University of Akron, Akron, OH, 44325
² NASA Glenn Research Center, 21000 Brookpark Rd., Cleveland, OH, 44135

Silica aerogels are highly porous materials which exhibit exceptionally low density and thermal conductivity. Their “pearl necklace” nanostructure, however, is inherently weak; most silica aerogels are brittle and fragile. The strength of aerogels can be improved by employing an additional crosslinking step using isocyanates. In this work, dimethyldiethoxysilane (DMDES) is evaluated for use in the silane backbone of polyurethane crosslinked aerogels. Approximately half of the resulting aerogels exhibited a core/shell morphology of hard crosslinked aerogel surrounding a softer, uncrosslinked center. Solid state NMR and scanning electron microscopy results indicate the DMDES incorporated itself as a conformal coating around the outside of the secondary silica particles, in much the same manner as isocyanate crosslinking. Response surface curves were generated from compression data, indicating levels of reinforcement comparable to that in previous literature, despite the core/shell morphology.
Evaluating Dimethyldiethoxysilane for use in Polyurethane Crosslinked Silica Aerogels

Jason P. Randall¹, Mary Ann B. Meador², and Sadhan C. Jana¹

1. University of Akron, Akron, OH, 44325  2. NASA Glenn Research Center, 21000 Brookpark Rd., Cleveland, OH, 44135

Objective

This work seeks to examine the use of dimethyldiethoxysilane (DMDES) in the silane backbone in polyurethane crosslinked aerogels, specifically if it can be used to create more flexible aerogels. The effects of DMDES on the microstructure and physical properties of crosslinked aerogels are elucidated.

Rationale

- Silica aerogels possess low thermal conductivity and low density, making them highly desirable for thermal insulating applications.

- However, the “pearl necklace” nanostructure of native silica aerogels is inherently weak, requiring about 31 kPa stress to completely shatter it. This can be improved by employing an additional crosslinking step involving isocyanates, which increases interfacial area between particles without destroying the porosity.

- Crosslinking in this manner has been shown to increase strength by up to a factor of 300, with only about a factor of 2-3 increase in density, but tend to yield very brittle aerogels.

Materials

- Tetramethoxysilane (TMOS)
- 3-aminopropyltriethoxysilane (APTES)
- Dimethyl disiloxane (DMDES)

Polyurethane Components

- Polytetramethylene glycol (PTMG)
- Methylene diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI)
- Tetramethoxysilane (TMOS)
- 3-aminopropyltriethoxysilane (APTES)
- Silica aerogels possess low thermal conductivity and low density, making them highly desirable for thermal insulation applications.

Results and Discussion

- Core-shell morphology was observed in about half the samples, mostly at low DMDES concentration.

- Solid-state NMR experiments revealed no polymer crosslinking took place in the core of core/shell samples.

- Density modeling indicated silane concentration is largest factor.

- Increasing DMDES lowered density, likely due to the DMDES coating inhibiting polymer access to APTES.

Conclusions

- DMDES incorporates itself as a coating on the surface of the secondary particles, much like in isocyanate crosslinking.

- Increasing DMDES decreased strength, likely due to the DMDES coating inhibiting polymer uptake.

- Crosslinking in this manner has been shown to increase strength by up to a factor of 300, with only about a factor of 2-3 increase in density, but tend to yield very brittle aerogels.

- What if the underlying silica framework was partially composed of silanes which form linear chains instead of networks?

References

3. www.synlube.com/images/sojourner.jpg

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Linda McCorkle for the SEM micrographs. The authors would also like to thank Bayer Corporation for supplying the MDI, and the NASA Graduate Research Fellowship Program for funding.