High Temperature Aerogels in the Al₂O₃-SiO₂ System

Al₂O₃-SiO₂ aerogels are of interest as constituents of thermal insulation systems for use at high temperatures. Al₂O₃ and mullite aerogels are expected to crystallize at higher temperatures than their SiO₂ counterparts, hence avoiding the shrinkages that accompany the formation of lower temperature SiO₂ phases and preserving pore structures into higher temperature regimes. The objective of this work is to determine the influence of processing parameters on shrinkage, gel structure (including surface area, pore size and distribution) and pyrolysis behavior.
HIGH TEMPERATURE AEROGELS IN THE 
\( \text{Al}_2\text{O}_3\)-\( \text{SiO}_2 \) SYSTEM

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Objective:
• To explore the use of high temperature aerogels in the development of lightweight, insulating materials for application temperatures > 1000 C.
  – To develop an understanding of the interrelationships among stoichiometry, processing parameters, morphology and thermal behavior to achieve the temperature goal.

3Al$_2$O$_3$-2SiO$_2$ (3Al:1Si) aerogel maintains fractal structure following brief exposure at 1050C.
Al₂O₃-SiO₂ Phase Diagram-- Target compositions shown by arrows.

Glenn Research Center at Lewis Field
Synthesis approach:

$$\text{AlCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{RO-Si-OR} + (\text{water, alcohol, propylene oxide}) \rightarrow \text{hydrogel} \xrightarrow{\text{supercritical CO}} \text{aerogel}$$

$$R = \text{CH}_3 \text{ or CH}_2\text{CH}_3$$

Variables:

- Al/Si ratio
- water/ M
- alcohol/ M
- solids loading
- hydrolysis time
- chilling/addition of reactants

Determine influence of processing parameters on shrinkage, gel structure (surface area, pore size and pore distribution, density and pyrolysis behavior.)
In early experiments, samples chilled directly in dry ice prior to addition of propylene oxide to slow gellation; pore structure varied with chilling time.

- Reducing ethanol reduces shrinkage, but requires tighter process control.
3Al:1Si--gels. Chilled on dry ice, top, and in dry ice/water bath, bottom.

- Change in chill method improves process control, with slight increase in average pore diameter and slight decrease in surface area.
- Pore size is governed primarily by stoichiometry, with smallest average pore diameter at 3Al:1Si composition.
Pore size distribution varies with composition.
Shrinkage control is important to integrating aerogels with structure

- Shrinkage expressed as percent linear change in diameter of cylindrical gel, and includes shrinkages on both aging of hydrogel and in supercritical drying.
- Shrinkage at minimum for 3Al:1Si composition.
- Maximum shrinkage observed in $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ aerogel at high ethanol level.
- At each composition, shrinkage increases with increased ethanol concentration.
- Physical density is lowest at 3Al:1Si composition.
- Density increases slightly with hydrolysis time, decreases with ethanol concentration, and increases sharply with solids loading.
- Porosity ranges from 90-96 percent.
- Porosity varies with hydrolysis time and solids loading.
- Only small difference in pore size distribution observed in 3Al:1Si composition at extremes of porosity range.
Pore size distribution as determined by N$_2$ desorption

- 3Al:1Si shows little variation in pore size distribution with ethanol concentration at low solids loading.
- Distribution narrows and population of 15-18 nm pores increases with solids loading. *(Please note scale for comparison with next slide).*
• Longer hydrolysis time increases number of small pores (note change in scale from previous slide).
• 8Al:1Si, high solids sample exhibits “strut-like” morphology.
3Al:1Si, 0.5 EtOH, low solids, 5min hydrolysis. BET=641 m²/g

3Al:1Si, 0.5 EtOH, high solids, 60 min hydrolysis. BET=796 m²/g

3Al:1Si, 0.5 EtOH, low solids, 60 min hydrolysis. BET=514 m²/g

3Al:1Si, 0.5 EtOH, high solids, added water, 60 min hydrolysis. BET=685 m²/g (Water/functional group ratio in 205B matches MG200)
FTIR Spectroscopy is characterized by overlapping Si-O-Si, Al-O-Al and Al-O-Si bands which vary in intensity with composition. (Low solids gels shown).

- Peak at 1060 cm\(^{-1}\) (Al-O-Si) and shoulder at 1080 cm\(^{-1}\) decreases with Al
- Peak at 900 cm\(^{-1}\) (Al-O stretch) increases as Al increases
- Peak at 730 cm\(^{-1}\) more prominent (O-Al-O bend) with decreasing Al, as 600 cm\(^{-1}\) (Al-O-Si decreases
FTIR Spectroscopy of high solids samples shows Al-O stretch at 900 and 630 cm\(^{-1}\) in all Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) and 8Al:1Si gels to be more prominent than in low solids samples, having less Al-O-Si bonding.

8Al:1Si sample exhibited large pores and strut-like morphology.
ICP analysis indicates Al:Si ratio to be slightly higher than formulated ratio, but does not account for differences in FTIR spectra.
FTIR Spectroscopy suggests formation of Al-O-Si in network increases with hydrolysis time:
   Al-O-Si bands: 1060-1050 cm\(^{-1}\)\[1\], 700 cm\(^{-1}\) and 600 cm\(^{-1}\)[2]

- \(^{27}\)Al and \(^{29}\)Si NMR planned to confirm interpretation

Differential thermal analysis (DTA) in He shows characteristic crystallization peak at 1005 C for 3Al:1Si gels at short hydrolysis times; peak shifts to >1300 C with longer hydrolysis. In 8Al:1 Si gels, crystallization peak occurs at 1305 C with low solids, increasing to 1320 C at higher solids loading.
However, at high solids loading the 3Al:1Si gel, with longer hydrolysis time, exhibits crystallization peaks at 1000 and 1240-1245 C.
X-ray diffraction analysis of samples following heating to 1400 C in He.
3Al:1Si, low solids, heated to 1400°C in He

8Al:1Si, high solids, heated to 1400°C in He

8Al:1Si high solids sample heated to 1400°C (above) differs in morphology from low solids 3Al:1Si and 8Al:1Si samples (left), and appears to have lower density structure.

8Al:1Si, low solids, heated to 1400°C in He
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Aluminosilicates with Al:Si ratios of 3:1 and 8:1 produce aerogels with no excess SiO$_2$ phase, which crystallize to mullite plus Al$_2$O$_3$ phases.
- Shrinkage and density are minimized at a 3Al:1Si composition. This composition also produces the finest pore size microstructure.
- Increasing solids loading increases density, but also increases the population of small pores. Adding water in proportion to increase in solids loading increases pore size.
- Aluminosilicate network structure is affected by hydrolysis time and solids loading.
- Aerogels have been formed which crystallize at temperatures above 1300 C. A full understanding of changes above 1000 C, and of the maximum temperature attainable before the aerogel pore structure is lost, requires additional study.
- Unique, strut-like microstructures have been produced at an 8Al:1Si composition, high solids loading, and with a slight process variation, that crystallize at 1320 C to a mixture of mullite and primarily monoclinic Al$_2$O$_3$, while maintaining a porous morphology. This composition is undergoing further investigation.
- The aluminosilicate aerogels offer a more attractive mix of properties than their all Al$_2$O$_3$ counterparts, which undergo high shrinkages, exhibit large pores, and crystallize at 1225-1255 C.
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