Additive Manufacturing and Characterization of Polylactic Acid (PLA) Composites Containing Metal Reinforcements

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Additive Manufacturing

• 3D printing
  – 3D CAD files are sliced
  – Filament is heated and extruded
3D Printing Materials

• Main 3D printer filaments
  – PLA
  – ABS

• Composite materials
  – Contain metal powders
  – Various fibers
Polylactic Acid (PLA)

• **Benefits**
  – Environmentally friendly
  – Does not release toxic fumes/safe for people

• **Disadvantages**
  – Does not last as long as other plastics.
  – Not as tough as ABS, based on fracture toughness testing
Applications of Polylactic Acid

• Films
  – Food packaging
  – Plastic bags

• Fibers
  – Upholstery
  – Disposable garments

• Biomedical applications
Objectives

Determine the properties of the new PLA composite materials

- Microscopy
- Tribology
- Tensile Strength
- Fracture Toughness
- Thermogravimetric analysis
- Differential Scanning Calorimetry

Compare the properties of the PLA with the PLA composites

- Are the PLA composites an improvement on the plain PLA materials?
- In what ways are these PLA composite materials an improvement?
Materials Used in Present Study

- PLA (Polylactic acid)
- Bronze fill PLA
- Copper fill PLA
- Magnetic Iron PLA
- Stainless Steel PLA
3-D Printed Materials

- The test samples were printed at several different layer heights seen below:
  - Tensile bars - 0.1 mm, 0.2 mm, 0.3 mm, 0.4 mm
  - Wear test samples - 0.1 mm, 0.2 mm, 0.3 mm, 0.4 mm
  - Fracture toughness bars - 0.1 mm, 0.3 mm
  - Microscopy samples - 0.1 mm, 0.3 mm

- Three samples per condition

ASTM D638

ASTM D5045
Macrostructure

- **Print resolution**
  - Prints of different layer heights exhibit different structures. Different mechanical properties?
Density

- **Metal Composite PLA vs. Pure PLA**
  - The metal filled materials had much higher densities than the pure PLA; correlate to metal mass content.
# Thermogravimetric Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Filament</th>
<th>Metal Weight Percentage</th>
<th>Metal Volume Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronzefill PLA</td>
<td>80.35%</td>
<td>36.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copperfill PLA</td>
<td>80.57%</td>
<td>36.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stainless Steel PLA</td>
<td>58.87%</td>
<td>18.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnetic Iron PLA</td>
<td>48.33%</td>
<td>11.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thermogravimetric Analysis

TGA Tungsten N2

Loss of PLA

Oxidation weight gain

TGA GMASS Tungsten air
Microstructure

- Spheroidal Cu and bronze particles
- Deformed stainless and iron particles; poor dispersion!
Tensile Data

- PLA shows no layer height effect:
Tensile Data

• PLA shows the greatest strength:

![Graph showing tensile data for PLA, Metal, Composite Systems for layer height of 0.3mm.]

- Stress (MPa) vs. Axial Strain (in/in)

- PLA
- Stainless (18%)
- Magnetic Iron (11%)
- Copper and Brass (36%)

• As the concentration of metal in the filament increases, the strength decreases.
Tensile Data

- Metal filled PLA show an effect of layer height:
  - Lower strength and strain to failure.
Young’s Modulus

- Young’s modulus follows the V% of metal - porosity.
- Still stiffer than premium ABS.
- Poisson’s ratio was ~0.33.
Fracture Toughness

- Generally, the fracture toughness follows the V% of metal.
- PLA has greater toughness than ABS, but metal additions can lower significantly (50% for Cu).
Fracture Surfaces

• Do we have pictures?
Tribology

- Friction Coefficient of metal filled PLA:

  - The metal composite materials generally exhibit a higher coefficient of friction than pure PLA.
  - Higher layer height exhibits lower friction.

Related talk to be given on wear etc.
Conclusions

- PLA exhibits the greatest strength, with no dependence on layer height.
- Metal filled PLA is stiffer but weaker than unfilled; Good strain to failure is usually exhibited.
- SS filled PLA exhibits lower strain to failure – irregular powder and higher % fill. Bonding? Distribution? Surface finish? Fractography!
- As the metal volume percentage increases, the porosity increases, and lower strength is exhibited.
- Young’s Modulus generally increase as the V% of metal increases.
- Fracture toughness decreases as metal content increases.
- Higher coefficient of friction is exhibited by metal filled PLA’s.
- Metal powder act as a weak interface thereby lowering strength and toughness.
Future Work

• Continuing to process tests, and analyze these metal filled PLA materials.

• Characterization of new filaments.