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## Communications

### Toward New Candidates for Hydrogen Storage: High-Surface-Area Carbon Aerogels

Houria Kabbour,<sup>†</sup> Theodore F. Baumann,<sup>\*,‡</sup>  
Joe H. Satcher, Jr.,<sup>‡</sup> Angelique Saulnier,<sup>†</sup> and  
Channing C. Ahn<sup>\*,†</sup>

*Division of Engineering and Applied Science, California Institute of Technology, 1200 East California Boulevard, Pasadena, California 91125, and Chemistry and Materials Science Directorate, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, California 94550*

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A basic understanding of hydrogen sorption behavior of materials will be critical to the transportation sector needs of high gravimetric and volumetric density. An important criterion for effective physisorption is a high surface area that exposes a large number of sorption sites to adatom or admolecule interaction.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these sites need to have potential wells that are sufficiently deeper than  $kT$  if physisorbents are to operate at engineering temperatures. The dependence of gravimetric density on surface area can be appreciated from studies of activated carbons that show that the amount of surface excess hydrogen adsorbed at 77 K varies linearly with surface area at pressures of  $\sim 35$  bar.<sup>2–4</sup> We can generally expect a gravimetric density of 1% for every 500 m<sup>2</sup>/g of surface area in activated carbons.<sup>3</sup>

Carbon aerogels (CAs) represent another class of carbons that can serve as effective physisorbents. CAs are mesoporous materials with a range of properties, such as controllable mass densities, continuous porosities, and high surface areas.<sup>5,6</sup> These properties are derived from the aerogel microstructure, a network of interconnected primary particles with characteristic diameters between 3 and 25 nm. Unlike activated carbons, CAs can be prepared in a variety of forms, including monoliths with a high degree of conformability. The hydrogen sorption properties of CAs, however, have not been studied previously. Our understanding of the surface area dependence of sorption behavior in activated carbons has motivated us to prepare a range of high-surface-area carbon aerogels in order to understand how sorption behavior in these materials scales with surface area. In this communication, we present 77 K isotherm data and sorption enthalpies for activated CAs (ACAs) with BET surface areas up to 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g as well as metal-doped CAs. The BET surface area of 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g is the highest value that we are aware of for a CA.

The CA materials used in this study, both the undoped and metal-doped materials, were prepared as previously described.<sup>5–7</sup> In general, these materials were synthesized through the sol–gel polymerization of resorcinol with formaldehyde in aqueous solution to produce organic gels that are supercritically dried and subsequently pyrolyzed in an inert atmosphere. The undoped CAs were then activated with CO<sub>2</sub> at 950 °C.<sup>8</sup> Full synthetic details and structural characterization of the ACAs will be presented elsewhere.

<sup>†</sup> California Institute of Technology.

<sup>‡</sup> Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

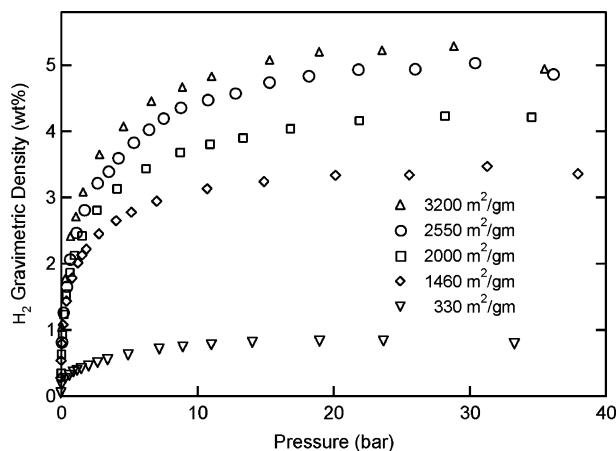
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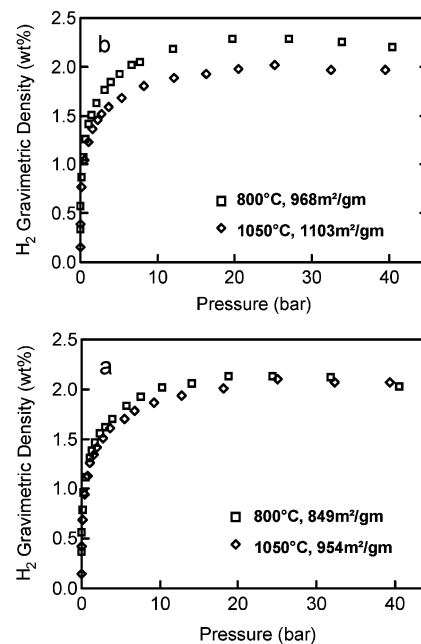
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**Figure 1.** Adsorption isotherms at 77 K for the undoped ACAs. The organic aerogel with a surface area of 330 m<sup>2</sup>/g was not carbonized.

Hydrogen adsorption/desorption excess sorption measurements were performed with a volumetric Sieverts apparatus.<sup>9</sup> The 77 K adsorption isotherm traces from a low-surface-area (330 m<sup>2</sup>/g) organic aerogel prior to carbonization and from ACA samples with higher surface areas (1460 to 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g) are shown in Figure 1. For clarity, only adsorption isotherm traces are shown. In all instances, the adsorption and desorption data were identical and no hysteresis could be observed. The sample with the surface area of 330 m<sup>2</sup>/g adsorbs 0.8 wt % at 20 bar, whereas the 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g sample adsorbs 5.3 wt % hydrogen at 30 bar pressure. The ACAs with surface areas of 1460, 2000, and 2550 m<sup>2</sup>/g show maximum values taken from the surface excess adsorption isotherms that are intermediate to these values, as expected. Of interest is the fact that an ACA can be prepared with a surface area of 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g, greater than the surface area of a single graphene sheet (2630 m<sup>2</sup>/g, if both graphene surfaces are taken into account) and comparable to high-surface-area activated carbons. Presumably, edge terminations make up a substantial fraction of the surface area of the ACAs, as is the case for activated carbons.

We have also studied the sorption dependence of nickel and cobalt incorporation into the carbon aerogel framework (Figure 2). Our previous work has shown the metal nanoparticle content in these CAs to be ~9–10 wt % using elemental analysis. Nanoparticles are distributed homogeneously in the CA network, and the accessible surface area of these nanoparticles is related to the carbonization temperature.<sup>7</sup> For example, when carbonization is performed at 1050 °C, the metal nanoparticles are typically encased in graphitic carbon, whereas at 800 °C, this effect is less pronounced and, as a result, the metal nanoparticles still possess accessible surface area. The adsorption isotherms at 77 K for the Co-modified CAs carbonized at 800 and 1050 °C are similar, with saturation values of ~2.1 wt % for each sample. The effect of carbonization temperature on sorption behavior for the Ni-modified CAs is more pronounced, with the material carbonized at 800 °C showing ~10% enhancement in the saturation value (2.3 vs 2.0 wt %) over the material carbonized at 1050 °C despite having a lower BET



**Figure 2.** Comparison of the adsorption isotherms at 77 K for the (a) Co- and (b) Ni-modified CAs that have been carbonized at 800 or 1050 °C.

surface area (970 m<sup>2</sup>/g vs 1100 m<sup>2</sup>/g). Moreover, the value of the sorption capacity is decreased by the nickel mass contribution. Thus, the increase would be higher only if the carbon mass was taken in account. The observed enhancement may be attributable to H<sub>2</sub> interaction with accessible Ni particles, consistent with behavior previously described as metal-assisted cold-storage<sup>10</sup> or “spillover”, and is the dissociation of molecular hydrogen at the surface of the metal followed by migration and adsorption on the carbon surface.<sup>11</sup> Recently, this technique has been used to enhance hydrogen storage in nanostructured carbons.<sup>12</sup> We cannot, however, discount the possibility that the metal dopants influence the textural properties of the CA during carbonization. For instance, the Ni may be altering the CA structure during pyrolysis, making available pores that are not adequately measured by N<sub>2</sub> BET measurements but are accessible to H<sub>2</sub>.

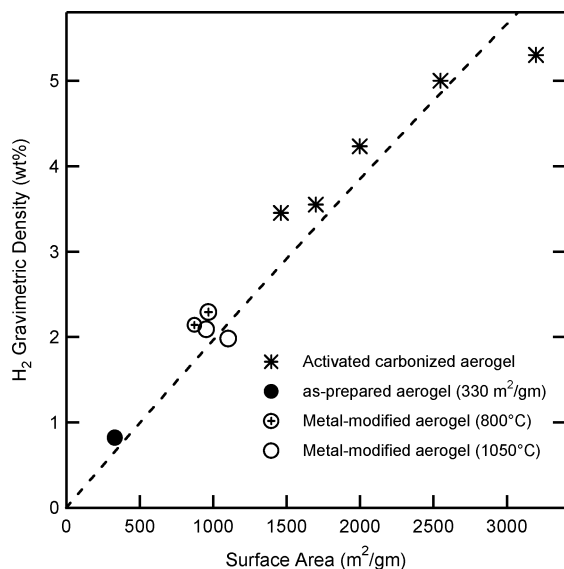
Previous studies have noted the linear dependence of hydrogen sorption at 77 K and 35 bar pressure versus surface area in activated carbons.<sup>2,3</sup> When the sorption amount is expressed in mass % (mg of hydrogen)/(g of aerogel), the sorption dependence scales as 1% hydrogen sorbed for every 500 m<sup>2</sup>/g of surface area. In Figure 3, we plot the maximum amount of hydrogen sorbed in the surface excess isotherm trace versus the BET surface area. We note that this approach varies somewhat from the original analyses of Chahine, as the maximum surface excess quantity of sorbed hydrogen can occur at pressures other than 35 bar. In our aerogels, the maximum occurs typically at ~30 bar for higher-surface-area materials. We also note that we express the maximum value in wt %, which yields a slightly lower quantity than values expressed in milligrams of sorbed hydrogen per gram

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**Figure 3.** Excess gravimetric density (H<sub>2</sub> wt %) saturation value at 77 K as a function of BET surface area. The line is 1 mass % sorption per 500 m<sup>2</sup>/g, converted to wt %.

of sorbent. At 77 K, hydrogen surface excess sorption of CAs scales with BET surface area up to 2550 m<sup>2</sup>/g, yielding up to 5 wt % gravimetric density. The surface area dependence for the aerogel with a surface area of 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g is somewhat weaker, with a gravimetric density of 5.3 wt %. The absolute value of 5.3 wt % is comparable to the highest value we have measured in an activated carbon;<sup>13</sup> however, aspects of the structure of the aerogel with a surface area of 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g might promote H<sub>2</sub>-H<sub>2</sub> gas interactions that would weaken the surface area dependence. We are presently investigating this behavior.

Whereas adiabatic calorimetry provides the most direct measure of thermodynamic behavior during hydrogen uptake, we can rely on other approaches to evaluate sorption enthalpies. The easiest means is to evaluate the differential enthalpy of adsorption at zero coverage from the isotherm, as defined by an analysis of the Henry's law region (low pressure, linear regime slope). This approach has the benefit of gauging hydrogen-surface interactions while minimizing interactions between adsorbed hydrogen molecules. To this end, high-resolution isotherm measurements at low pressure

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**Table 1. Differential Enthalpy of Adsorption at Zero Coverage and Saturation Values at 77 K for Activated and Metal-Doped CAs**

CA material	$\Delta H$ (kJ/mol)	H <sub>2</sub> (wt %)
ACA (1460 m <sup>2</sup> /g)	6.7	3.5
ACA (1700 m <sup>2</sup> /g)	6.5	3.6
ACA (2000 m <sup>2</sup> /g)	6.4	4.2
ACA (2550 m <sup>2</sup> /g)	6.4	5.0
ACA (3200 m <sup>2</sup> /g)	6.2	5.3
Co-CA-800 °C (1050 °C)	7.5 (7.2)	2.1 (2.1)
Ni-CA-800 °C (1050 °C)	7.0 (7.1)	2.3 (2.0)

(in the range 0–2.5 bar) have been performed. The analysis of Cole<sup>14,15</sup> enables us to use a region of the isotherm beyond the linear portion to obtain the relevant enthalpies, as summarized in Table 1.

In this communication, we have presented hydrogen sorption properties of ACAs with surface areas up to 3200 m<sup>2</sup>/g. As with values reported in the literature for activated carbons, we find a linear dependence of H<sub>2</sub> surface excess maximum values with the surface area. In addition, we note an increase in the H<sub>2</sub> excess gravimetric density for a CA that has been doped with Ni nanoparticles. The differential enthalpy of adsorption at zero coverage for the metal-modified materials was measured to be >7 kJ/mol, slightly higher than for unmodified aerogels. Further work will be necessary to decouple effects of carbonization temperature from that of the metal dopants in establishing the mechanism of enhanced sorption in metal-modified aerogels. Given the flexibility of CA synthesis, and the ability to control surface area, pore volume, and substituent/dopant levels, CAs offer engineering viability for hydrogen sorption applications where both gravimetric and volumetric density are important parameters.

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