

# High-Temperature Degradation of Reinforced Phenolic Insulator

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**ABSTRACT:** The thermal degradation of graphite and glass-reinforced phenolic insulators have been studied at high temperature by using thermogravimetry analysis (TGA) and Differential Scanning Calorimetry (DSC) analysis. TGA was carried out in a stream of pure nitrogen over temperature range ambient to 900°C and DSC analysis to 500°C. A heating rate of 10°C/min was used for the determination of degradation temperature and heating rates of 5, 10, 20, 30, and 50°C/min were used for the estimation of degradation temperature ( $T_{\max}$ ) of the insulator at high temperature service and calculation of activation. Activation energy of phenolic resin was calculated as 356 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup> using the Ozawa method.  $T_{\max}$  was determined as 661°C for 20% conversion. The specific heat capacity of graphite phenolic was found as 970 J kg<sup>-1</sup> K<sup>-1</sup> at 100°C. The half-life of the phenolic resin was determined to be approximately 116.2 s at 3500°C. The thermal analysis has been conducted using transient heat conduction and the in-depth temperature distribution was evaluated along the rocket nozzle. The better insulator thickness, including the safety factor for graphite and E-glass-reinforced phenolics, were calculated as 3 and 2 mm, respectively. © 1998 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. *J Appl Polym Sci* **67**: 1877–1883, 1998

**Key words:** degradation; graphite-reinforced phenolic; glass-reinforced phenolic

## INTRODUCTION

The technologies used in the design and development of solid rocket nozzles have been substantially improved over the last decade. The advances in these technologies have made it possible to develop nozzles capable of surviving the more severe operating environments generated by current high-performance motors. The evolving technologies are based primarily on the advanced in fiber-reinforced phenolics. Carbon, graphite, silica cloth phenolics, and carbon-carbon are generally used in the nozzle design. With the advent of space flight and ballistic missiles, phenolic resins have been used successfully in the ablative heat

shields, which protect the vehicle. Since thermal degradation of the polymeric material is part of the process ablation, a knowledge of the degradation behavior of the resin over a wide range of the temperatures will be a valuable aid in the overall understanding of the complex processes that occur during ablation. In a number of previous reports,<sup>1-4</sup> the oxidation chemistry, thermal degradation of phenol-formaldehyde polycondensates have been described in some detail. In the present investigation, graphite, E-glass, and Kevlar fibers were reinforced to the base phenolic resin with 70/30 fiber-to-resin weight ratio in all case. The degradation temperature for the new insulators has been obtained by using thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) and differential scanning calorimetry (DSC). The lifetime prediction and conversion percentage of phenolic for rocket operating temperatures have been determined. Thermal

**Table I TGA of Reinforced Phenolic Resin from Ambient to 900°C**

Material	I (25–250°C)		II (450–900°C)		Residue (%)	Composition Element
	$T_d$ (°C)	Wt Loss (%)	$T_{max}$ (°C)	Wt Loss (%)		
Phenolic resin	167	30.46	544	21.16	45.65	Carbon
Cured	249	2.85	544	21.78	69.45	
Graphite-reinforced	169	8.55	552	17.22	71.22	Carbon
Cured	237	1.03	553	21.98	72.29	
E-glass-reinforced	168	4.59	567	11.26	81.89	Carbon
Cured	236	0.25	556	10.43	87.93	Silicon
Kevlar-reinforced	174	15.46	609	30.10	51.32	
Cured	228	3.81	602	19.57	74.15	Carbon

$T_d$  (°C) represents the decomposition temp;  $T_{max}$  (°C), the maximum decomposition temperature.

analysis has been conducted using transient heat conduction, and the in-depth temperature distribution was evaluated along the nozzle.

DuPont Kevlar fibers were added as reinforcements to the base material.

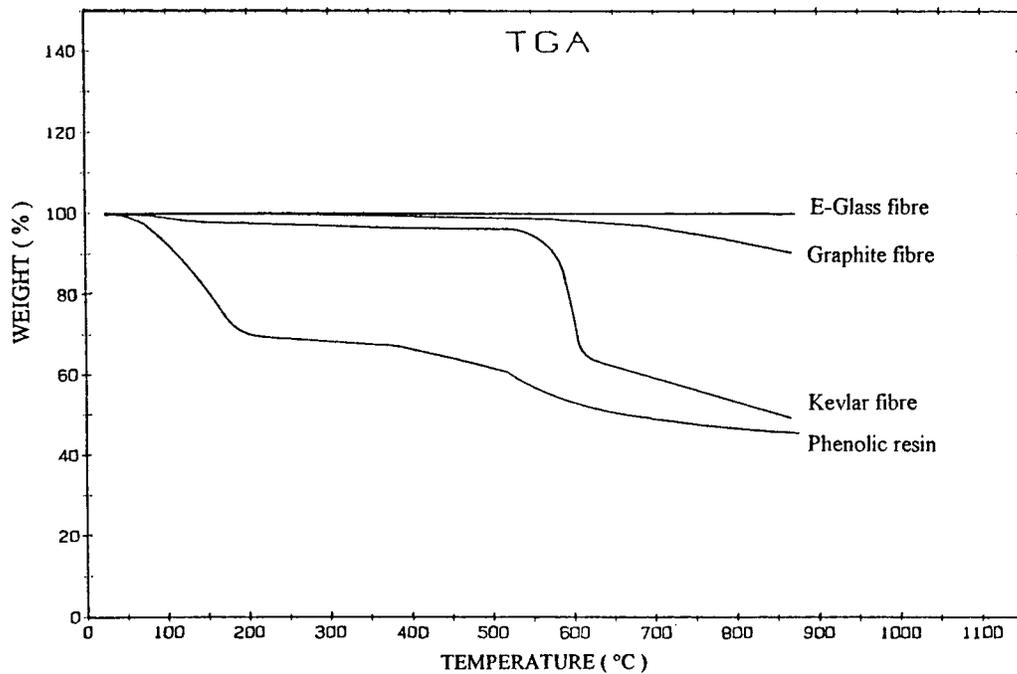
## EXPERIMENTAL

### Materials

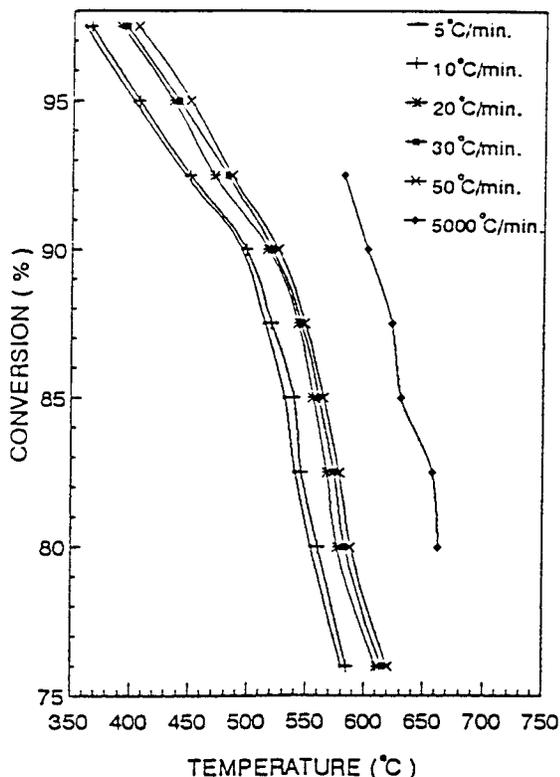
MIL (grade A) phenolic resin was used as a base material. Hercules graphite, E-type glass, and

### Preparation of Samples

Fiber-reinforced phenolic resin were prepared by winding of graphite, E-glass, and Kevlar fibers as a felt, onto a 300 × 300 mm frame. The fiber and resin ratio was adjusted to 70/30 wt %, respectively. After molding and pressing, the sam-



**Figure 1** Thermal behavior of each component in reinforced phenolics.



**Figure 2** Conversion curves of phenolic resin at different heating rates.

ples were B-staged at 73°C for 3 h, then cured at 171 ± 3°C.

**Apparatus and Procedure**

TGA and DSC analysis were carried out using DuPont 1090 and 910 instruments, respectively. Thermal curves relating to nitrogen atmospheres were recorded over the temperature range ambient to 900°C for TGA and ambient to 500°C for

DSC analysis. Heating rates were 5, 10, 20, 30, and 50°C/min. Nitrogen gas flow was maintained constant at 50 mL min<sup>-1</sup>, and sample masses were about 15 mg. Activation energy was calculated from TGA and DTG curves by using the Ozawa method.<sup>5</sup> Since the insulator is exposed to high heat flux, thermal conductivity, thermal diffusivity, max degradation temperature, and ablative resistance are important parameters for predicting the insulator performance. The thermal conductivity of composites was measured in a Kemtherm QTM-D3 model apparatus. Specific heat capacity (*C<sub>p</sub>*) and degradation enthalpy ( $\Delta H$ ) of the samples were calculated from the derived DSC data.

Thermal diffusivity ( $\alpha$ ) was calculated from

$$\alpha = k / \rho \cdot C_p \tag{1}$$

where *k* is the thermal conductivity,  $\rho$  is the density, and *C<sub>p</sub>* is the specific heat of the samples.<sup>6</sup> The half-life of the insulator was predicted from the kinetic parameters from

$$dw/dt = k(w_0 - w)^n \tag{2}$$

where *dw/dt* is rate of degradation, *k* is the rate constant, *w<sub>0</sub>* is the initial weight, *w* is the decomposed amount at time *t*, and *n* is the order of reaction.<sup>7</sup>

Thermal analysis and the in-depth temperature distribution data were interpreted using the results of transient heat conduction analysis. Heat transfer analysis of nozzle was done using a computer program.

**Table II Specific Heat Capacity and Thermal Diffusivity of Reinforced Phenolics**

Material	Specific Heat Capacity of Reinforced Phenolic Materials/ <i>C<sub>p</sub></i> (J kg <sup>-1</sup> K <sup>-1</sup> )			Thermal Diffusivity $\alpha$ (E-4, cm <sup>2</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> ) 100°C
	25°C	200°C	300°C	
Phenolic resin	1712	2390	2495	7.6
Kevlar phenolic	1115	1142	1120	18.6
E-glass phenolic	986	970	1110	8.1
Graphite phenolic	970	990	600	27.0

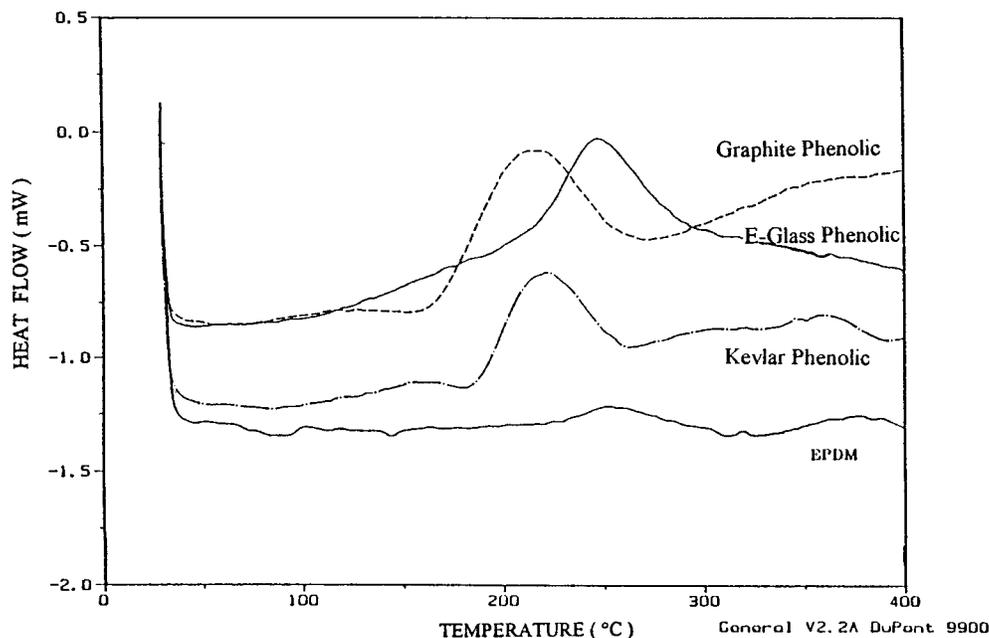


Figure 3 DSC analysis of reinforced phenolics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Thermogravimetric Analysis of Phenolic Base Insulator

The thermogravimetric method of polymer analysis provides an accurate record of the change in sample weight as a function of linearly increasing temperature. TGA data were analyzed for two temperature regions given in Table I.

Thermal behavior of each component and composites have been analyzed from ambient to 900°C in this study. The degradation of the raw phenolic resin commences at 544°C with 21.8% mass loss. Graphite and E-glass fibers show no mass loss up to 900°C. However, Kevlar fiber gives 47% mass loss at 596.5°C (Fig. 1).

For composite insulators, namely, graphite, E-glass, and Kevlar phenolics, the major degradation temperatures and percentage of mass loss are at 553.2, 555.6, and 602.3°C and 21.98, 10.43, and 19.57%, respectively (Table I). A range of heating rates were applied in TGA, and it is apparent that the max degradation temperature ( $T_{\max}$ ) is dependent on the heating rate. High heating rates increase the degradation temperature. The dependence of  $T_{\max}$  on heating rate can be represented for phenolic resin at 20% conversion as

$$\log H = -22.14 + 2.77 \times 10^{-2} T_{\max}$$

where  $H$  is heating rate and  $T_{\max}$  is the maximum decomposition temperature. Assuming the heating rate for the insulator used in a rocket operating environment is between 5000 and 6000 deg min<sup>-1</sup>,  $T_{\max}$  calculated using eq. (1) for phenolic resin is found to be 661°C. Conversion curves of phenolic resin with 5, 10, 20, 30, 50, and 5000 deg min<sup>-1</sup> heating rates are shown in Figure 2.

Activation energy of phenolic resin was calculated from TGA data using the Ozawa method<sup>5</sup> as 356 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>.

Table III Half-Life of the Phenolics as a Function of Temperature

Temperature (°C)	Phenolic Resin <sup>a</sup> [ $t_{1/2}$ (s)]
1000	118.8
1500	117.7
2000	117.1
2500	116.7
3000	116.5
3500	116.2

<sup>a</sup> The half-life of phenolic resin was found to be 116.2 s at 3500°C.

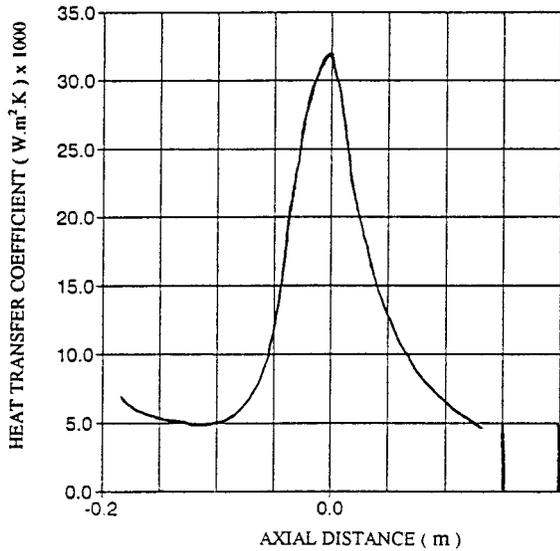


Figure 4  $H_D$  values along the nozzle.

DSC Analysis

Endothermic and exothermic degradation reaction peaks relating to degradation in nitrogen, specific heat capacity ( $C_p$ ), and major degradation enthalpy ( $\Delta H$ ) values were determined. Endothermic peaks are noted at 164, 230, and 370°C, and exothermic peaks are noted at 180°C. Degradation enthalpy ( $\Delta H$ ) is 15 J g<sup>-1</sup> at 207°C and 301 J g<sup>-1</sup> at 540°C for the phenolic resin. The specific heat capacity ( $C_p$ ) and thermal diffusivity ( $\alpha$ ) values of the phenolic composites at different temperatures were calculated using ASTM E 968-87 and are listed in Table II.

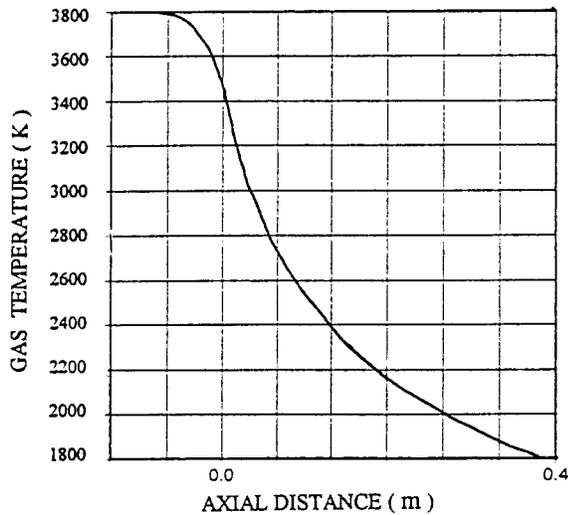


Figure 5  $T_D$  values along the nozzle.

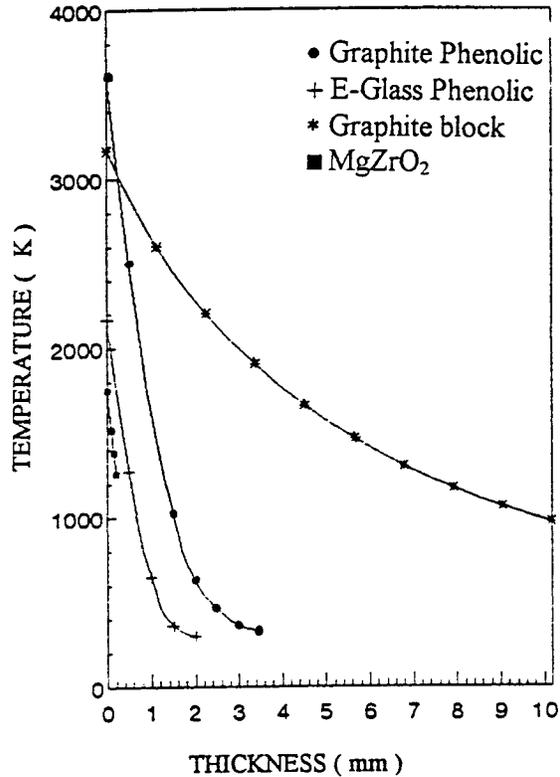


Figure 6 The in-depth temperature distribution of nozzle materials.

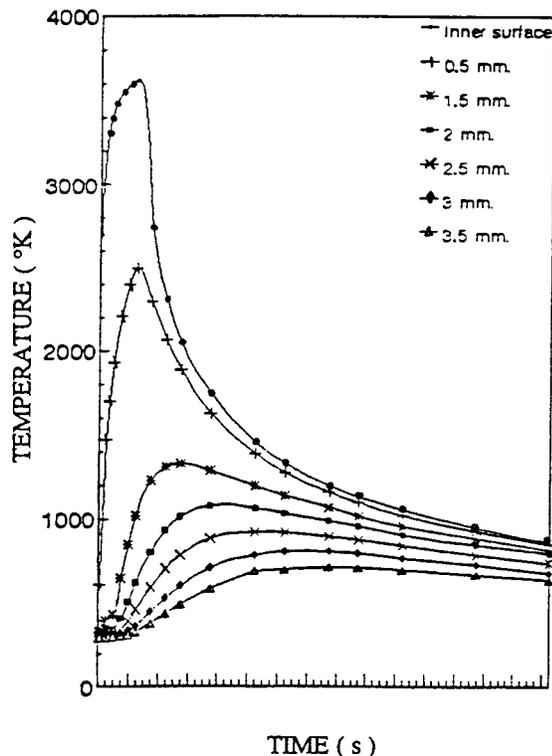
DSC thermographs of graphite, E-glass, and Kevlar phenolics are given in Figure 3.

Lifetime Prediction

On combustion of the propellant at the time of rocket flight, large amounts of low molecular gas products are produced, generating very high temperatures and pressure. Therefore, lifetime prediction is important in order to know insulator stability during operation. The lifetime of the insulator is the time required to complete the decomposition of the insulator when the propellant burns between 2500–4000 K. The lifetime is generally expressed as the half-life of material to be degraded.<sup>7</sup> The half-life of the insulator was predicted from the following equations.

$$dw/dt = k(w_0 - w)^n \tag{3}$$

where  $dw/dt$  is the rate of degradation,  $k$  is the rate constant,  $w_0$  is the initial weight,  $w$  is the decomposed amount at time  $t$ , and  $n$  is the order



**Figure 7** The in-depth temperature distribution of graphite phenolic.

of reaction. The half-life of Phenolic resin can be given as follows:

$$t_{1/2} = \ln 2/k, \quad \text{for } n = 1 \quad (4)$$

and

$$t_{1/2} = (2^{n-1} - 1)/k(n - 1)w^{n-1}, \quad \text{for } n \neq 1 \quad (5)$$

The rate constant is calculated at  $T_{\max}$  using eq. (3), and the half-life is calculated by applying eq. (4) in the temperature range 1000–4000°C. The results are given in Table III.

### Thermal Analysis

Thermal analysis was conducted along the nozzle, and the in-depth temperature distribution was evaluated over 1 min. During this time interval, it was assumed that there was no heat loss to the surroundings, the transient heat conduction was taking place, and heat radiation was neglected at the nozzle. The thermal analysis consists of a number of steps. The process begins with the free

stream calculations. These calculations use the propellant formulation, heats of formation, and the motor chamber conditions and produce the velocity, pressure, and temperature profiles along the nozzle.<sup>8,9</sup> All of the computer calculations develop information that serves as input data to the in-depth temperature predictions. Graphite and E-glass phenolic were applied to the entrance and the exit cone of the nozzle. The temperature of the combustion gases was determined as 3750 K corresponding to the ideal gas formulation. Nozzle was assumed to expose to the combustion gases. The 8-node finite element method was used for thermal analysis along the nozzle model geometry. The convective heat transfer coefficient of the hot gases at throat,  $h_D$ , was found as 31.7 kW m<sup>-2</sup> K<sup>-1</sup>, which included the safety factor, and the nozzle throat temperature,  $T_D$ , was determined as 3450 K. The variation of  $h_D$  and  $T_D$  along the nozzle are given in Figures 4 and 5.

Graphite phenolic, graphite insert, and E-type glass phenolic were applied to the entrance, throat, and exit cone of the nozzle. The in-depth temperature distribution of the nozzle materials is given in Figure 6, and the in-depth temperature distribution of graphite phenolic is given in Figure 7.

### CONCLUSION

High-temperature degradation of graphite and E-type glass-reinforced phenolic materials (70/30 wt %) have been investigated, and thermal properties have been estimated. The specific heat capacity of graphite phenolic was found as 970 J kg<sup>-1</sup> K<sup>-1</sup> at 100°C. The activation energy of phenolic resin was calculated from the TGA data using the Ozawa method was found to be 356 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>, and the maximum degradation temperature for 20% conversion was found to be 661°C, assuming the heating rate between 5000 and 6000 deg min<sup>-1</sup>. The half-life of phenolic resin was determined about 116.2 s at 3500°C. The convective heat transfer coefficient of the hot gases,  $h_D$ , was found as 31.7 kW m<sup>-2</sup> K<sup>-1</sup> at the nozzle throat, and the in-depth temperature distribution was evaluated along the nozzle. Hence, these data indicate that graphite phenolic with 3 mm thickness and E-glass phenolic with 2 mm thickness are in the reliable and safe side during operating of the rocket motor.

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