EFFECT OF IMPURITIES ON SUPERCRITICAL CO₂ COMPATIBILITY

Bruce A. Pint*
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6156 USA
Email: pintba@ornl.gov

Kinga A. Unocic
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6156 USA

James R. Keiser
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6156 USA

ABSTRACT

Impurities may affect structural alloy compatibility in both indirect- and direct-fired supercritical CO₂ (sCO₂) cycles for high efficiency power generation with peak temperatures above 700°C. Using a new multi-pump gas control system, experiments with controlled impurity additions were compared to baseline results in research- or industrial-grade CO₂ at 750°C/300 bar. Low level impurities, 50 ppm O₂ and 50 ppm H₂O, were not found to affect mass change or reaction products after 2,500 h exposures. However, in RG sCO₂+1%O₂+0.25%H₂O, higher reaction rates were observed for both Ni- and Fe-based alloys, but especially Fe-based alloys were strongly affected by these high impurity levels. Analytical TEM was used to characterize the reaction products on alloy 625.

INTRODUCTION

Supercritical CO₂ (sCO₂) could be used as a working fluid for a variety of power generation applications because of its unique properties and relatively low critical point (31°C/74 bar) compared to water [1-4]. Subcritical CO₂ (43 bar) was used in the UK advanced gas cooled reactors (AGR), however, additives such as CH₄, were used to keep the O₂ partial pressure low to minimize graphite oxidation in the reactor core, which increased the C activity [5,6]. Thus, the AGR conditions are very different than those expected for sCO₂. While a range of peak temperatures is being considered for the various sCO₂ applications, CSP and fossil energy desire efficiencies over 50% and require >700°C for indirect-fired or closed cycles [7]. Direct-fired cycles also are targeting similar temperatures [4]. Most studies have shown relatively good compatibility for Ni-based structural alloys needed for >700°C applications in autoclaves using relatively high-purity CO₂ [8-17]. However, the role of impurities in sCO₂ compatibility has not been resolved, either for the low impurity levels in indirect-fired cycles or the higher residual O₂ and H₂O from combustion in the direct-fired cycles [4]. (In addition, S and Cl could be present if coal-derived synthesis gas were combusted.) For example, O₂ additions have shown slightly negative effects [12,14] or little effect [15]. A recent publication provided an initial indication that pressure affects the role of impurities at 750°C/300 bar [17]. This paper provides additional characterization from that study and compares the results to a second experiment where low levels of O₂ and H₂O were intentionally added to simulate the highest impurity levels that might be found in IG CO₂. The structural alloys investigated included two advanced austenitic steels, an alumina-forming Ni-based superalloy (typically used for turbomachinery) and both SS and PS [18,19] Ni-based alloys identified by AUSC [20] for applications above 700°C. These impurity levels at 30 MPa increased the specimen mass change, particularly for the Fe-based alloys.

PROCEDURE

The alloys compared in this study and their measured compositions are shown in Table 1. Coupons (~12 x 20 x 1.5mm) were polished to a 600 grit finish and cleaned in acetone and methanol prior to exposure. All exposures used 500-h cycles at 750°C. Baseline exposures in laboratory air (~50% relative humidity) were conducted in a box furnace with heating for ~4 h and furnace cooling in air. For the 300 bar exposures, the experiments were conducted in an alloy 282 autoclave (~266 mm x 83 mm inner diameter) described previously [10,13]. Specimens were held on an alloy 282 sample rack and slowly heated to temperature over several hours (~2°C/min) in sCO₂, held at temperature ±2°C and then cooled in sCO₂ to room temperature by lowering the furnace and using a cooling fan on the autoclave. In all cases, the fluid flow rate was ~2 ml/min. Experiments were conducted in RG (4.1±0.7 ppm H₂O, <5 ppm O₂) and IG (18.8±16.9 ppm H₂O, <50 ppm O₂) CO₂ [17]. Two autoclaves were modified to use three pumps to deliver sCO₂.

* corresponding author(s)
Table 1: Chemical composition of the alloys measured by ICP and combustion analyses in mass% [17].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alloy</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>Ni</th>
<th>Cr</th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 SS</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>3.4W,3Cu,1.5Co,0.5Mn,0.5Nb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310HN</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>0.3Co,0.4Nb,1.2Mn,0.3Si,0.3N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>625</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>8.8Mo,3.5Nb,0.2Ti,0.2Mn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>12.3W,1.4Mo,0.5Mn,0.4Si</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>617B</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11.9Co,8.2Mo,0.4Ti,0.04Mn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>282 (#1)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>10.6Co,8.6Mo,0.04Sn,2.2Ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>282 (#2)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>10.5Co,8.3Mo,0.05Si,2.1Ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>740</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>20.6Co,1.5Nb,1.4Si,0.3Mn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>9.8Co,10W,0.7Mo,3.1Ta,1.4Hf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CO$_2$-O$_2$ and H$_2$O [17]. Based on the gas flow rate, the O$_2$ level was calculated as 1.0±0.2% and the H$_2$O content as 0.25±0.05% for the high impurity experiment. For the low impurity experiment, 50ppm O$_2$ and 50 ppm H$_2$O were targeted.

For all experiments, specimen mass change was measured using a Mettler Toledo model XP205 balance with an accuracy of ±0.04 mg or 0.01 mg/cm$^2$. After exposure, samples were copper plated before being sectioned and mounted for light microscopy. Both oxide thickness and internal oxidation were measured using image analysis software with ~20-30 measurements taken for each specimen. Prior publications reported characterization using SEM and GDOES. Recent results using STEM/EDS are reported. The TEM specimens were prepared via the in situ FIB lift-out method on a Hitachi model NB5000 FIB-SEM. A W layer was deposited to protect the gas interface of the scale. The STEM imaging was carried out using a FEI model Talos F200X STEM with integrated EDS with four silicon drift detectors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows mass change at 750°C/300 bar for the low impurity experiment with 50 ppm O$_2$ and 50 ppm H$_2$O additions to RG sCO$_2$ compared to a similar exposure in IG sCO$_2$. The mass change from 3-4 specimens in impure sCO$_2$ is shown using box and whisker plots where the whiskers show the minimum and maximum values. The lines connect the median values for each alloy. For clarity, only the dashed lines connecting the median values for 7-10 specimens in IG sCO$_2$ are shown. In most cases, only minor differences between the two environments were observed. The exception was the Fe-based alloy 25, which showed a higher initial mass gain in IG sCO$_2$. However, the subsequent rate of mass gain was very similar in the two environments. As observed previously [10,13,16,17], the mass gains were highest for the alloy 282 specimens because of the high level of Ti in this alloy (Table 1) which contains a high Y$^3$ fraction [18]. Previous work has shown that Ti accelerates the growth of the Cr$_2$O$_3$ scale [21,22]. Likewise, the mass gain for the 740 specimens was higher than that observed for alloy 625, which contains very little Ti, similar to alloy 25.

Figure 2 compares polished cross-sections of these alloys in the two environments. Consistent with the mass change data, little difference was observed in the reaction products between the two environments. Also consistent with the mass change data, the thinnest scales were observed for alloys 25 and 625 with very little internal oxidation. In contrast, the PS alloys showed thicker scales and similar internal oxidation in both environments. Previous TEM studies have shown both Ti and Al internally oxidized in 282 with Ti enriched in the scale at both the gas and metal interfaces [23].

Figure 1: Specimen mass gain data for 500-h cycles at 750°C in 300 bar IG (dashed lines) and RG sCO$_2$ with 50ppm O$_2$ and 50ppm H$_2$O (solid lines). Box and whisker plots show data for 3-4 specimens exposed.

Figure 2: Light microscopy of polished cross-sections of specimens exposed for 2,500 h at 750°C/300 bar in IG sCO$_2$ and RG sCO$_2$ with 50 ppm O$_2$ and 50 ppm H$_2$O additions.
Similar to Figure 1, Figure 3 shows the mass change data at 750°C/300 bar for IG sCO$_2$ (dashed lines) and RG sCO$_2$ with 1%O$_2$ and 0.25%H$_2$O (solid lines and boxes) [17]. The mass gains were consistently higher for all of the materials but, particularly for the Fe-based alloys 25 and 310HN, there was a much larger increase and the drop in mass for 310HN suggested scale spallation. As all of the exposures were conducted for at least 2,500 h, Figure 4 tries to compare all of the mass change data for the four 300 bar exposures at 2,500 h [17]. As a baseline, the values are compared to a similar exposure in laboratory air. For many of the Ni-based alloys, the mass changes were very similar in all five environments. For the high impurity case, the largest mass gains were noted for the Fe-based alloys and for the alumina-forming superalloy 247.

Figure 4: Median specimen mass gain values after 2,500 h exposures at 750°C in four different 300 bar environments compared to laboratory air exposures.

Figure 5 compares the reaction products in RG sCO$_2$ and sCO$_2$ with 1%O$_2$ and 0.25%H$_2$O after 5,000 h exposures. Characterization for alloys 247 and 25 after 2,500 h was studied in more detail and reported earlier [17]. Consistent with the mass change data, the oxide was thicker for all of the specimens with the addition of impurities. However, the major change for the 310HN specimen required a different magnification. SEM analysis of this specimen is in progress. For the Ni-based alloys, despite the increase, the oxide scales were still relatively thin. Figure 6 attempts to compare the scale thicknesses for each of the alloys after 5,000 h exposures in RG sCO$_2$ and RG sCO$_2$+1%O$_2$+0.25%H$_2$O. Similar to the mass change data, the results for alloys 25, 310HN and 247 are more significant.

Figure 5: Light microscopy of polished cross-sections of specimens exposed for 5,000 h at 750°C/300 bar in RG sCO$_2$ and RG sCO$_2$+1%O$_2$+0.25%H$_2$O.

Figure 6: Box and whisker plots of the oxide scale thicknesses formed after 5,000 h at 750°C at 300 bar in RG sCO$_2$ (open boxes) and RG sCO$_2$+1%O$_2$+0.25%H$_2$O (shaded boxes).
Because of the thin reaction products formed on most of the alloys in these environments at 750°C, conventional characterization can be challenging. Therefore, analytical TEM was used to characterize the reaction products after exposure to the environments with intentional impurity additions. To build upon prior TEM work [23,24], alloy 625 was chosen for this analysis. The scale formed on alloy 282 was found to be extremely complicated and difficult to interpret because of the incorporation of Ti and Al into the reaction product [23]. Figure 7 shows an example of the scale formed after 1,000 h at 750°C in RG sCO$_2$ with 50 ppm additions of O$_2$ and H$_2$O. Similar to previous observations for alloy 625 after 1,000 h in IG sCO$_2$, the Cr$_2$O$_3$ scale contained a mixture of large and small grains [23]. Much larger Cr$_2$O$_3$ grains formed in laboratory air after a similar exposure. Also similar to previous observations, large Mo- and Nb-rich precipitates were observed at the metal-scale interface. These precipitates are typical for the oxidation of alloy 625 where Mo and Nb are rejected from the reaction front as Cr is selectively oxidized [25]. Figure 8 shows EDS maps of the same area as shown in Figure 7. Primarily a Cr-rich oxide scale was formed. The Mo- and Nb-rich precipitates are prominent in this particular location, Figures 8c and 8d. The void at the metal-oxide interface also has been widely observed after sCO$_2$ exposures [26]. The low level of impurities added to this experiment appears to have had very little effect on the reaction products which is consistent with the mass change in Figure 1 and the light microscopy of the thin reaction product in Figure 2.

In contrast, Figure 9 shows a similar BF-STEM image of the scale formed on an alloy 625 specimen after 1,000 h at 750°C in RG sCO$_2$+1%O$_2$+0.25%H$_2$O. The magnification is not the same in Figures 7 and 9. The average oxide thickness in the FIB TEM sections have increased from 0.8±0.06 µm with low impurity additions to 3.7±0.4 µm with high impurity levels. The EDS maps in Figure 10 indicate that the scale is enriched in Cr. However, the layer of Mo- and Nb-rich precipitates in Figure 7 appears to have been incorporated into the scale and in some Figure 7: BF-STEM cross-sectional image of the scale formed on alloy 625 after 1,000 h at 750°C in 300 bar RG sCO$_2$ with 50 ppm additions of O$_2$ and H$_2$O.

Figure 8: EDS elemental maps associated with the image in Figure 7 of the scale formed on alloy 625 after 1,000 h at 750°C in RG sCO$_2$ with 50 ppm additions of O$_2$ and H$_2$O, (a) O, (b) Cr, (c) Mo and (d) Nb.

Figure 9: BF-STEM cross-sectional image of the scale formed on alloy 625 after 1,000 h at 750°C in 300 bar RG sCO$_2$ with additions of 1% O$_2$ and 0.25% H$_2$O.
cases consumed by the reaction front. In addition, the outer part of the scale appears to be enriched in Ni and Fe. When a thicker scale is reported, it is not surprising to see oxidation of the base metal, often with the formation of an outer spinel-type MCr$_2$O$_4$ oxide layer. However, in this case the increased scale thickness is primarily due to a thicker Cr-rich layer with the Fe- and Ni-enriched layer being a relatively minor contribution. Because alloy 625 only contains only 4% Fe (Table 1), it is somewhat surprising to see Fe in the scale of a Ni-based alloy. It cannot be ruled out that the Fe may be from cross-contamination of the adjacent Fe-based alloy specimens in the autoclave experiment. Additional work is needed to rule out such a mechanism. No similar Fe enrichment was observed for the specimen shown in Figure 7 or after exposure in IG sCO$_2$ [23,24].

The strong effect of high levels of impurities at 750°C/300 bar on the Fe-based alloys suggests that similar studies should be conducted on Fe-based alloys at lower temperatures where they may be used to lower costs of the sCO$_2$ hardware. It is already clear that CO$_2$ restricts the use of steels to a larger degree than steam environments [27]. For example, while CSEF Grade 91 steel (Fe-9Cr-1Mo) is restricted to ~580°C in steam due to scale exfoliation issues [28], it is restricted to ~450°C due to internal carburization issues. Similar restrictions for steels might be further changed with the addition of impurities. For low impurity levels, the 50 ppm additions of O$_2$ and H$_2$O were selected to reflect the upper bound of impurities in IG CO$_2$. The minor effects of 50 ppm O$_2$ and H$_2$O additions suggests that these levels of impurities do not increase the oxidation rate at 750°C. This observation is consistent with the similar behavior of structural alloys in RG and IG sCO$_2$. Figure 4, despite the possibly higher levels of O$_2$ and H$_2$O in the latter. It could be speculated that the higher transient mass gain of the alloy 25 specimens in Figure 1 could be due to the higher impurity levels in IG sCO$_2$ but a similar increase was not observed when the O$_2$ and H$_2$O were intentionally added.

Considerable work remains to understand the mechanism by which these high impurity levels affect the reaction in sCO$_2$ and especially to isolate the roles of O$_2$ and H$_2$O. With the new experimental capability, it will now be possible to explore a wider range of impurity levels and determine the critical O$_2$ and H$_2$O levels where accelerated reaction rates are observed.

**SUMMARY**

For both direct- and indirect-fired supercritical CO$_2$ (sCO$_2$) cycles, impurities may be a concern. For indirect applications, comparison 500-h cyclic exposures were conducted at 750°C and 300 bar with RG and IG sCO$_2$ and the results were compared to RG sCO$_2$ with intentional additions of 50 ppm O$_2$ and 50 ppm H$_2$O. For both commercial Fe- and Ni-based structural alloys, mass changes and reaction products were unchanged with the impurity additions consistent with observed similarities between RG and IG sCO$_2$ experiments.

For higher impurity levels associated with direct-fired cycles, all of the alloys were somewhat affected by exposure to sCO$_2$+1%O$_2$+0.25%H$_2$O at 750°C/300 bar. The most significant effects were documented for the Fe-based alloys and the alumina-forming superalloy 247 after 5,000 h exposures. TEM characterization of the scales formed on 625 showed a much thicker Cr-rich oxide formed with the high impurity levels.

These results for high impurity levels are so different than prior results in ambient pressures that it is concluded that screening Fe-based alloys at a range of temperatures (400-700°C) is warranted to determine how impurities may affect sCO$_2$ compatibility at relevant pressures.

**NOMENCLATURE**

AUSC - U.S. Advanced Ultra-supercritical Steam Consortium
BF – bright field
CSEF – creep strength enhanced ferritic
CSP – concentrating solar power
EDS – energy dispersive x-ray spectrometer
GDOES – glow discharge optical emission spectrometer
FEI – electron microscope company
FIB – focused ion beam
ICP – inductively coupled plasma
IG – industrial grade

Figure 10: EDS elemental maps associated with the image in Figure 9 of the scale formed on alloy 625 after 1,000 h at 750°C in RG sCO$_2$+1%O$_2$+0.25%H$_2$O, (a) O, (b) Cr, (c) Mo, (d) Nb, (e) Ni and (f) Fe.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank M. Howell, M. Stephens, T. M. Lowe, R. G. Brese and T. Jordan for assistance with the experimental work. Material was provided by Haynes International, Special Metals, Sandvik and Capstone Turbine, Corp. S. S. Raiman and R. Pillai provided helpful comments on the manuscript. This research was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Fossil Energy, Crosscutting Technology Program and the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Solar Energy Technology Program: SuNLaMP award number DE-EE0001556.

REFERENCES
