**New Proton Exchange Membranes for Direct Methanol Fuel Cells**

NAE, James E. McGrath, Ph.D.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State Unive
Contracts and Grants Admin
340 Burruss Hall, Mail Code 0170
Blacksburg, VA 24061 -

U.S. Army Research Office
P.O. Box 12211
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2211

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The abstract is below since many authors do not follow the 200 word limit.

direct methanol fuel cells, proton exchange membranes, sulfonated poly(arylene ether sulfone), methanol permeability, methanol crossover, electrode attachment, partial

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**Security Classification on this page:** UNCLASSIFIED

**Security Classification of Abstract:** UNCLASSIFIED
ABSTRACT
This three-year research program studied wholly aromatic, optionally fluorinated copolymers with the goal of establishing fundamental data about the complex relationships between PEM chemical structure, morphology, transport properties, and the performance of the DMFC fuel cell membranes. Accomplishments included the generation of lower permeability, high-power density PEM systems. Under ARO funding, we were also successful in scaling the ion containing comonomer in a single step (at the kilogram quantity or higher) as well as demonstrating viable routes for the synthesis of the desired copolymers. This funding also contributed to developing materials for the electrode catalyst layers that show competitive advantages over Nafion. MEAs were prepared, which were characterized by voltage current curves (primarily at LANL) and 300 hours stability at 80 degrees C was demonstrated.

List of papers submitted or published that acknowledge ARO support during this reporting period. List the papers, including journal references, in the following categories:

(a) Papers published in peer-reviewed journals (N/A for none)
Number of Papers published in peer-reviewed journals: 14.00

(b) Papers published in non-peer-reviewed journals or in conference proceedings (N/A for none)

Harrison, William L.; Wang, Feng; O'Connor, Kerry; Arnett, Natalie Y.; Kim, Yu Seung; McGrath, J. E. Sulfonated poly(arylene ether sulfones) containing hexafluoroisopropylidene unit: Influence of sulfonic acid position on stability and other properties. Polymer Preprints (American Chemical Society, Division of Polymer Chemistry) (2003), 44(1), 849.


H. Ghassemi, G. Ndip, and J.E. McGrath. New Multiblock Copolymers of Sulfonylated Poly(4'-Phenyl-2,5-Benzophenone) and Poly(arylene ether sulfone) for Proton Exchange Membranes, Polymer Preprints 2003, 44 (1), 814.


Y.S. Kim, Limin Dong, Michael Hickner, Bryan Pivovar, and James E. McGrath. Methanol Permeation of Sulfonylated Poly(arylene ether sulfone) Block Copolymers, Polymer Preprints 2003, 44 (1), 1254.

Cho, Chang Gi; Kim, Yuseung; Hill, Melinda; McGrath, James E. Synthesis and characterization of poly(arylene ether sulfone) copolymers with sulfonimide side groups. Polymer Preprints (American Chemical Society, Division of Polymer Chemistry) (2003), 44(2), 649-650.

Hossein Ghassemi, William Harrison, Tom A. Zawodzinski, Jr., and James E. McGrath. New Multiblock Copolymers Containing Hydrophilic-Hydrophobic Segments For Proton Exchange Membrane, Polymer Preprints (American Chemical Society, Division of Polymer Chemistry) (2004), 45(1),68-69.


Number of Papers published in non peer-reviewed journals: 17.00

(c) Papers presented at meetings, but not published in conference proceedings (N/A for none)
Advances in Polycondensation 2004, September 2004, Roanoke, VA.

Number of Papers not Published: 3.00

(d) Manuscripts

Number of Manuscripts: 0.00

Number of Inventions:

Graduate Students
Melinda Hill, 1.0 (2 years)
Michael Hickner, 1.0 (1 year)
Number of Graduate Students supported: 2.00
Total number of FTE graduate students: 3.00

Names of Post Doctorates

Number of Post Docs supported: 0.00
Total number of FTE Post Doctorates: 0.00

List of faculty supported by the grant that are National Academy Members
James E. McGrath

Names of Faculty Supported
James E. McGrath
Number of Faculty: 0.00

Names of Under Graduate students supported
Number of under graduate students: 0.00

Names of Personnel receiving masters degrees
Number of Masters Awarded: 0.00

Names of personnel receiving PHDs
Michael Hickner, Ph.D. Awarded December 2003, Current employer: Sandia National Laboratory, New Mexico
Melinda Hill, Ph.D. anticipated May 2006
Number of PHDs awarded: 1.00

Names of other research staff

Sub Contractors (DD882)

Inventions (DD882)
Objectives

The scientific progress and accomplishment for this 3-year award was based upon our overall motivation for this project is to study wholly aromatic, optionally fluorinated copolymers to fundamentally understand the relationship between the PEM chemical structure, morphology, transport properties, and the performance of the DMFC fuel cell membranes.

Thus, we studied wholly aromatic optionally fluorinated random or statistical copolymers to fundamentally understand the relationship between PEM chemical structure and morphology, transport properties and the performance of fuel cell membranes. To do this we generated copolymers that vary in their ion content, acidity and chain stiffness. We investigated a number of membrane properties, such as proton conductivity, methanol permeability, water transport, transition behavior and we are beginning to investigate organic-inorganic hybrids. The membrane properties define the thin film characteristics required. However, the fuel cell performance is a strong function of the electrode fabrication and attachment efficiencies. Much of this work has been summarized in a comprehensive review just published by the PI and his colleagues. (Ref: M.A. Hickner, H. Ghassemi, Y.S. Kim, B. Einsla and J.E. McGrath, “Alternative Polymer Systems for Proton Exchange Membranes,” Chemical Reviews (2004), 104(10), 4587-4611.

As discussed in prior progress reports, the polyarylene ether sulfones have been the principal area of interest for a variety of reasons, including monomer availability, thermal, hydrolytic and oxidative stability, and the ability to form tough, ductile films. We have particularly developed a system which is based on hydrophilic-hydrophobic interactions as outlined in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Sulfonated Poly(Arylene Ether Sulfone)s (BPSH)](image)

**Acronym: BPSH-xx-Mx**
- Bi Phenyl Sulfone: H Form (BPSH)
- xx= molar fraction of disulfonic acid unit, e.g., 30, 40, etc.
- Mx: Acidification method, e.g., M1, etc.

**Acidification Treatment**
- Method 1: 1.5M H₂SO₄, 30°C, 24hrs, then deionized H₂O, 30°C, 24hrs.
- Method 2: 0.5M H₂SO₄, boil, 2hrs, then boiled deionized H₂O, 2hrs.

Figure 1. Sulfonated Poly(Arylene Ether Sulfone)s (BPSH)
The acronym BPSH has been developed to describe the multiphase copolymers that are derived from biphenyl sulfones in the acid form, where the xx rates to the mole fraction of the ion conducting hydrophilic moieties that are introduced. Thus, we will discuss in terms of BPSH 30-, 35-, 40, etc. During the past year a great deal of effort has been made to point out the differences between the pure hydrocarbon-based systems, and the partially fluorinated systems based upon fluorinated Bisphenol A. The overall reaction scheme to produce the copolymers is shown in Figure 2.

![Reaction Scheme](image)

Figure 2. Synthesis of disulfonated poly(arylene ether sulfone) copolymers

The permeability of these materials, coupled with their drag capabilities are shown in Figure 3. Here the comparison between the 30, 35 and 40% copolymers with Nafion 117 is made. As one notes, the thin film conductivity decreases at room temperature as one decreases the concentration of ion conductors, as expected. However, very desirably, the methanol permeability in electro-osmotic drag also decreased quite significantly, allowing for improvements of more than 4 in the basic reduction of permeability to methanol and/or electro-osmotic drag in water. This is very important because the global or overall water uptake actually appears to be significantly higher.
As we have pointed out in a publication in *Macromolecules*, this is because the nature of the water is different in the aromatic sulfonic acid moieties, relative to Nafion. (Ref.: Y.S. Kim, L. Dong, M. Hickner, T.E. Glass, and J.E. McGrath, “State of Water of Disulfonated Poly(arylene ether sulfone) Copolymers and a Perfluoro Sulfonic Acid Copolymer (Nafion) and Its Effect on Physical and Electrochemical Properties,” *Macromolecules*, 36(17), 6281-6285 (2003). There is a higher component of strongly hydrogen-bonded and loosely hydrogen bonded systems and a lower component of “free water.” Thus, one can begin to develop models for how the transport system can be modeled and this is being pursued. The improved DMFC results can be correlated with the lower methanol permeability.


Methanol permeability of directly copolymerized 4,4’-biphenol based disulfonated poly(arylene ether sulfone) copolymers (BPSH) was investigated with reference to utility as a proton exchange membrane (PEM) for direct methanol fuel cells (DMFC). Water uptake and dynamic mechanical analysis were coupled with previous observations that the PEM can have two functional morphological regimes, which depend on the degree of disulfonation (copolymers composition), acidification method, and hydrothermal treatment. The two regimes are observed by AFM to represent: (1) a “closed” structure where the hydrophilic copolymer chain segments essentially aggregate as isolated domains or (2) an “open” structure where the domain connectivity of the hydrophilic phase of the copolymers is achieved. It was demonstrated that methanol permeability (25°C) of the copolymers abruptly increased at copolymer compositions and processing conditions that influenced the membrane morphology to change from a closed to a much more open structure. The activation energy in the closed structure regime, ~20 kJ/mol-K,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>ion exchange capacity (meq/g)</th>
<th>water uptake (wt %)</th>
<th>conductivity (S/cm)</th>
<th>methanol permeability (cm²/s)</th>
<th>electro-osmotic drag coef. (N H₂O/H⁺)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nafion 117</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>16.7*10⁻⁷</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPSH-40</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>8.1*10⁻⁷</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPSH-35</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>5.6*10⁻⁷</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPSH-30</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>3.6*10⁻⁷</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30°C in liquid water
was about 35% higher than that in the open regime, ~15 kJ/mol-K. The BPSH copolymers had higher selectivity than Nafion because of their remarkably lower methanol permeability, suggesting these materials hold promise for improved DMFC performance. Selectivity (e.g., proton conductivity/permeability) increased with the degree of disulfonation in closed structures, but decreased in the open structure regime. It is suggested that the optimum concentration of proton conducting groups for DMFC should be observed at or near the percolation threshold.

Indeed, performance comparison studies have been conducted by Drs. Y.S. Kim and B. Pivovar at Los Alamos National Labs on BPSH-30 in comparison with Nafion 112, which is a similar thickness, and even Nafion 1110, which is much thicker. The results, which are provided Figure 4, courtesy of our LANL colleagues, indicates significant improvement in both fuel efficiency and power density.

Nitrile containing copolymers have also been identified as excellent candidates for direct methanol fuel cells for proton exchange membranes. This is particularly true if the bisphenol is partly or completely derived from the hexafluorinated starting 6F bisphenol. Some of the results have recently been published and are summarized below (Ref: M.J. Summer, W.L. Harrison, R.M. Weyers, Y.S. Kim, J.E. McGrath, J.S. Riffle, A. Brink, M.H. Brink, “Novel Proton Conducting Sulfonated Poly(arylene ether) Copolymers Containing Aromatic Nitriles,” J. Membr. Sci., 239(2), (2004), 199-211).

Figure 4. Performance Comparison – Cell Temperature
High mol. wt. nitrile-functional, (hexafluoroisopropylidene)diphenol-based poly(arylene ether) copolymers with pendent sulfonic acid groups were prepared by step copolymerization of 4,4'-(hexafluoroisopropylidene)diphenol, 2,6-dichlorobenzonitrile, and 3,3'-disulfonate-4,4'-dichlorodiphenylsulfone. Copolymers containing as much as 55 mol% disulfonated units were cast from DMF solutions to form tough ductile films. The films were converted from the salt to the acid forms with dilute sulfuric acid followed by deionized water. Dynamic TGA demonstrated that the well dried, acidified, nitrile-containing copolymers had no wt. loss up to 300°C in air. A systematically varied compositional series showed increased glass transition temperatures, protonic conductivities, and hydrophilicities as a function of disulfonation. Films containing ≥ 20 mol% of the disulfonated repeat units had Tg's of 220°C and higher. At approximately equivalent ion exchange capacities (IEC), e.g. 1-1.6 meq g⁻¹, the protonic conductivities of these films were comparable to other disulfonated poly(arylene ether sulfone) copolymers investigated. The benzonitrile-containing disulfonated copolymers also had reduced moisture absorption (10-15 wt.%) compared to other disulfonated poly(arylene ether sulfone) copolymers with equivalent IECs. The copolymer with 35 mol% of the disulfonated comonomer had a protonic conductivity of >0.10 S cm⁻¹ at 110°C and 100% relative humidity. The protonic conductivities of the benzonitrile-containing copolymers decreased as expected as relative humidity was lowered. Atomic force microscopy in the tapping mode demonstrated that the acidified copolymer with 35 mol% disulfonated units was nanophase separated into an essentially co-continuous morphology of hydrophobic and hydrophilic domains. Further efforts are ongoing to translate these promising results into membrane electrode assemblies for proton exchange membrane fuel cell devices.

Initial life test results on the 6FCN35 were developed, again by Dr. Y.S. Kim at LANL, by preparing MEAs and measuring current density as a function of time at 80°C. The performance data expressed in terms of losses after 700 hours of aging, show that the nitrile sample is at least comparable to the Nafion control. This is also illustrated by the stability of the high frequency resistance (HFR) values over a 500 hour test period, as shown in Figure 5.
Figure 5. Life Test Result of 6FCN-35 MEA

80°C, 0.5 M MEOH feed, 0.5 V cell potential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Nafion</th>
<th>BPSH-35</th>
<th>6FCN-35</th>
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<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>32</td>
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</table>

700 h Unrecoverable Losses (mA/cm²)