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Annual Progress Report  
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Environment-Induced Degradation and Crack-Growth Studies of Candidate Target Materials

TRP Task-4

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Introduction

As indicated in the original proposal, the primary objective of this task was to evaluate the effect of hydrogen on environment-assisted cracking of candidate target structural materials for applications in spallation-neutron-target (SNT) systems such as accelerator production of tritium (APT) and accelerator transmutation of waste (ATW). The materials selected for evaluation and characterization were martensitic stainless steels including Alloy EP 823, HT-9, and Type 422 stainless steel. The susceptibility to stress corrosion cracking (SCC) of these materials were evaluated in neutral and acidic aqueous environments using smooth and notched tensile specimens under constant-load (CL) and slow-strain-rate (SSR) conditions. Further, the localized corrosion (pitting and crevice) behavior of these alloys was evaluated by electrochemical polarization technique. The extent and morphology of cracking and localized corrosion of the tested specimens were determined by optical microscopy and scanning electron microscopy (SEM).

The experimental program proposed in this task was refocused to evaluate the effect of molten lead-bismuth-eutectic (LBE) on the corrosion behavior of similar target structural materials in the presence of oxygen. Since the Materials Performance Laboratory (MPL) at UNLV could not accommodate this type of testing, the LBE loop at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is currently being used to contain the stressed test specimens to evaluate the SCC and localized corrosion (pitting and crevice) behavior of all three candidate alloys in the molten LBE environment. Since the magnitude of the applied load/stress during these tests could not monitored or controlled (as in conventional SCC experiments) in the LBE environment, the test specimens were self-loaded. Two types of specimen configurations, namely C-ring and U-bend, were used to perform these experiments. The results of SCC testing being conducted at LANL are not yet available. The stress of principal interest in both types of specimen is the circumferential stress. SCC tests using these types of self-loaded specimens have also been conducted at MPL in aqueous environments having neutral and acidic pH values at ambient and elevated temperatures.

Personnel

The current project participants are listed below.

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Accomplishments

- Ambient temperature mechanical properties of Alloys EP-823, HT-9 and Type 422 Stainless Steel (SS) have been evaluated by a calibrated MTS equipment using smooth and notched tensile specimens.

- SCC testing using calibrated proof rings and smooth and notched uniaxial tensile specimens of all three martensitic alloys has been completed in both neutral and acidic aqueous solutions under CL conditions at ambient temperature and 90°C. The results of CL SCC testing indicate that neither Alloy EP-823 nor Type 422 SS showed failure in the neutral environment at applied stresses approaching 90 and 95 percent of the material’s YS value at ambient temperature and 90°C. However, CL SCC testing of Alloy HT-9 in the 90°C neutral solution showed failure at applied stress corresponding to the 95 percent of its YS value. Data also indicate that failures were observed in all three materials when tested in the 90°C acidic environment at applied stresses corresponding to the 95 percent of the materials’ YS values. Further, Alloy HT-9 and Type 422 SS exhibited failure in a similar environment at an applied stress equivalent to 90 and 85 percent of their YS values but did not show any failure at applied stress equivalent to 80 percent of their YS value suggesting their threshold stress (σ\text{th}) value in the vicinity of 80 percent of their measured ambient temperature YS values when tested in the 90°C acidic environment. The applied stress versus TTF for all three alloys is shown in Figure 1 showing their σ\text{th} values. The presence of a notch in the tensile specimen reduced their σ\text{th} values to much lower levels due to smaller cross-sectional area at the root of the notch. The σ\text{th} values for the notched specimens were in the vicinity of 45, 30 and 25 percent of their YS values for Alloys EP-823, HT-9, and Type 422 SS, respectively.

- SCC testing using the SSR technique has also been completed in both aqueous environments at ambient temperature, 60 and 90°C involving smooth and notched tensile specimens of all three martensitic alloys. A typical stress versus strain curve is shown in Figure 2, showing the effect of temperature. The results of SSR testing of Alloy EP-823 are illustrated in Figure 3, elucidating the effects of temperature, solution pH and specimen geometry (smooth versus notched gage section) on percent elongation (%El), percent reduction in area (%RA), time-to-failure (TTF) and failure stress (σ_f). These data indicate that, for the smooth specimen, the ductility parameters, TTF and σ_f were significantly reduced in the 90°C acidic solution, showing a synergistic influence of pH and temperature on the cracking susceptibility of this alloy. The presence of notch in the test specimen further reduced the TTF and the extent of ductility in terms of %El and %RA. However, the magnitude of σ_f in this material was increased to some extent in the presence of a notch primarily due to a smaller area at the root of the notch. Similar
effects of temperature, pH, and specimen geometry on cracking susceptibility were observed with Alloy HT-9 and Type 422 SS.

- The susceptibility of all three alloys to pitting and crevice corrosion in both neutral and acidic aqueous solutions has been determined by performing cyclic potentiodynamic polarization (CPP) experiments using EG&G Model 273A Potentiostats. A three-electrode polarization technique was used. At the onset, the corrosion potential ($E_{corr}$) was measured with respect to a silver/silver chloride (Ag/AgCl) electrode, followed by forward and reverse potential scans at the ASTM-specified rate of 0.17 mV/sec. The magnitudes of the critical pitting potential ($E_{pit}$) and the protection potential ($E_{prot}$), if any, were determined from the CPP diagram. The results indicate that $E_{corr}$ and $E_{pit}$ became more active (negative) with increasing temperature and reduced pH of the test solution, as expected, as shown in Figures 4 for Alloy EP-823 and Type 422 SS, respectively. A similar behavior was observed with Alloy HT-9.

- The results of SCC testing using the C-ring specimens of Alloy HT-9, loaded at 95 and 98 percent of its YS value, showed cracks at their apex when tested in the acidic solution at 50 and 100°C. However, somewhat reduced cracking tendency was observed in Alloy EP-823 under identical testing conditions. No identifiable cracks were observed with the U-bend specimens of either alloy in similar environments. Some degradation marks, indicative of cracking, were noticed along the specimen surface.

- Extensive efforts have been made to analyze the fracture modes in all broken specimens. Based on these fractographic evaluations, it appears that the primary failure mode at the gage section of specimens tested in the neutral environment at both test temperatures was ductile showing dimpled microstructures, as shown in Figure 5A. On the contrary, the specimens tested in the acidic environment showed intergranular and/or transgranular brittle failures at both test temperatures (Figures 5B, 5C and 5D). However, the extent of cracking was more severe at the elevated temperature. The metallographic evaluation of the secondary cracks along the gage section of the broken specimen by optical microscopy revealed branching of cracks, as illustrated in Figure 6.

**Status of Funds**

Expenditures incurred during the third year were within the target amount allocated.

**Highlights**

- Seven full-length papers were presented and published in the symposium proceedings. One article has been accepted for publication in a technical journal.
- Eleven abstracts were accepted and presented in numerous conferences.
- Research findings were presented at two international research laboratories.
- Ramprashad Prabhakaran received three scholarships to attend and present papers at international conferences: US DOE scholarship (IYNC 2004, Toronto), ASME scholarship (ICONE12 2004, Arlington) and ORAU scholarship (SNS-JINS-NICEST 2003, Oak Ridge).
- Mohammad Kamal Hossain received outstanding paper award in the ANS Student Conference 2003, Berkeley, CA.
Publications

- “Cracking of Target Structural Material in Different Environments,” ANS Student Conference 2004, April 1-3, 2004, Madison, WI.
- “Stress Corrosion Cracking of Type 422 Stainless Steel,” ANS Student Conference, April 2-5, 2003, Berkeley, CA.
- “Effects of Environmental Variables and Stress Concentration on Target Materials,” ANS Student Conference, April 2-5, Berkeley, CA.
- “Stress Corrosion Cracking of Target Materials,” ANS Student Conference, April 2-5,
Berkeley, CA.

- “Stress Corrosion Cracking of Martensitic Stainless Steel for Transmutation Applications,” 10th IHLRWM Conference, March 30-April 3, 2003 Las Vegas, NV.
- “Stress Corrosion Cracking of Type 422 Stainless Steel for Applications in Spallation-Neutron-Target Systems,” SNS-JINS-NICEST, March 12, 2003, Oak Ridge, TN.

![Figure 1: Applied Stress versus Time-To-Failure](image1)

![Figure 2: Typical Stress versus Strain Curve](image2)
Figure 3: Effects of pH, Temperature and Notch on %RA, %EL, $\sigma_f$ and TTF for Alloy EP-823
Figure 4: CPP Data

5A. Alloy EP-823 tested in 90°C Neutral Environment (Ductile Failure)

5B. Alloy HT-9 tested in 90°C Acidic Environment (Intergranular Failure)
5C. Type 422 SS tested in 30°C Acidic Environment (Intergranular/Transgranular Failure)  
5D. Type 422 SS tested in 90°C Acidic Environment (Transgranular Failure)

Figure 5: SEM Micrographs of Cracked Specimens

5A. Alloy EP-823 (40X, as polished)  
5B. Type 422 SS (40X, as polished)

Figure 6: Optical Micrographs in 90°C Acidic Environment Showing Branched Secondary Cracks