Autocatalytic Decomposition of Cumene Hydroperoxide at Low Temperature Conditions

Chin-Chuan Chen, Chi-Min Shu and Chan-An Yeh
Process Safety and Disaster Prevention Laboratory,
Department of Environmental and Safety Engineering,
National Yunlin University of Science and Technology,
Touliu, Yunlin, Taiwan 640, R.O.C.

Shu-Ching Chen
Distributed Multimedia Information System Laboratory, School of Computer Science,
Florida International University, Miami, FL 33199, U.S.A.

Mei-Ling Shyu
Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Miami,
Coral Gables, FL 33124-0640, U.S.A.

Abstract

Cumene Hydroperoxide (CHP) has been used in the production of Dicumyl Hydroperoxide (DCPO) and phenol. In Taiwan, several severe fire or explosion incidents have occurred due to its thermal instability or reactivity.

In this research, the exothermic decomposition of CHP in Cumene was characterized by isothermal microcalorimeter, TAM (thermal activity monitor), because isothermal testing offers the advantage of thermal equilibrium within the reactant, which can generate more precise kinetics, such as heat of decomposition, heat flow and time of reaction.

In this study, there was a novel finding from the thermogram that CHP processed an autocatalytic phenomenon during decomposition between 75°C to 90°C, which was compared with the open literature that uses less sensitive calorimeters, showing a reaction onset temperature of 100°C for 80 wt% CHP. In conclusion, attention should be given to low temperature conditions, which may invoke slow process thermal accumulation. Therefore, the operators of chemical plants should cautiously notice the phenomenon.

Keywords: Cumene Hydroperoxide, Autocatalytic Decomposition, Thermal Runaway, Thermal Activity Monitor.

Introduction

Fires or explosions caused by the thermal runaway of organic peroxides have been important issues in the past two decades in Taiwan (Ho et al., 1998). Calorimetry and the related methodology for preventing reactive hazards of organic peroxides have been widely developed (Duh, 1997, 1998). DIERS technology has also been useful for safe venting of runaway reactions caused by organic peroxides in the early stages of a runaway reaction (Leung and Fisher, 1998). In a homogeneous two-phase flow case, vent sizing directly depends on the self-heat rate, which is influenced by the reaction mechanism during decomposition of the peroxides. The correct choice of a credible worst-case scenario is essential in applying DIERS methodology for sizing an emergency vent. Thermal decomposition, external fires in tank yards, and reactive incompatibility in addition to other scenarios should be considered as the design bases for preventing runaway reactions or for sizing emergency relief.

Cumene hydroperoxide (CHP) is used as an initiator in the acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene (ABS) polymerization process, for producing phenol or dicumyl hydroperoxide (DCPO). Runaway incidents can occur in oxidation reactors, vacuum condensation reactors, or storage tanks. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA 43B, 1986) classifies CHP as a class Ⅲ type

flammable. Duh *et al.* have studied the runaway hazard and decomposition kinetics for various process conditions (Ho et al., 1998; Duh et al., 1998). However, the reactive characteristics of CHP under storage or transport conditions have not yet been clearly identified.

Previous studies have shown that the onset temperature is 100℃ for 80 wt% CHP by DSC test (Duh et al., 1998) and 140℃ for 35 wt% CHP by VSP2 (Vent Sizing Package2) (Shu et al., 1999; Wang et al., 2001). Onset temperature is strongly influenced by the mass and heat–releasing power of the reactant and by the sensitivity of the various calorimeters. The onset temperature for a runaway reaction recognized and reported in the open literature is that at which the reaction was initially detected. In this study, a microcalorimeter was used to detect and record the exothermic activity of CHP under isothermal conditions in the temperature range from 75℃ to 90℃. Under such conditions, conventional calorimeters, such as the DSC, or adiabatic calorimeters, such as VSP2, do not detect the heat-release of CHP. Exothermic thermograms were recorded with the microcalorimeter in isothermal tests typically taking about 20 days. The heat of reaction, onset temperature, and autocatalytic behaviors were determined and compared to the results of previous studies.

Experimental Studies

Sample

An 80 wt% solution of CHP in cumene purchased directly from the supplier was measured to determine both density and concentration. The sample was then

stored at 4°C.

DSC (Differential Scanning Calorimetry)

Dynamic screening experiments were performed on a Mettler TA8000 system coupled with a DSC 821[e®] measuring cell that can withstand pressures to as high as 100 bar. Star[e®] software was used for acquiring thermograms and isothermal traces. The scanning rate for the temperature-programmed ramp was chosen to be 4 K·min[-1] to attain a better approach to thermal equilibrium.

TAM (Thermal Activity Monitor)

The heat conduction calorimeter (TAM, Thermometric AB, Jarfalla, Sweden) is designed to monitor a wide range of chemical and biological reactions. Reactions can be investigated between 12℃ and 90℃, the working temperature range of this calorimeter. Constant temperature is maintained within $\pm\ 2\times10^{-4}$ ℃, which allows heat flow in fractions of a micro Watt (μW) to be measured routinely. The 80 wt% CHP was dispensed into disposable calorimetric glass and stainless containers, capped and then placed in the measuring and reference chambers, respectively. Measurements were conducted isothermally in the temperature range from 75℃ to 90℃.

Results and Discussion

Thermal Analysis

Isothermal aging tests offer the advantage of thermal equilibrium within the reactant, which can generate more precise kinetics and simple interpretation.

These tests are applicable to complex reactions such as decomposition, oxidation, and polymerization. Plots of residual CHP concentration versus time are used to determine isothermal kinetics. All these experiments were performed between 75℃ to 90℃ using the microcalorimeter under isothermal conditions.

Calorimetric measurements of the slow reactions reported here have a time history from 10 days to 43 days for individual experiments. Thermograms of 80 wt% CHP that reacted in the TAM at five different temperatures were recorded and are shown in Figure 1. Table 1 lists the experimental data from the autocatalytic decomposition of 80 wt% CHP. The data show that the exothermic traces were independent of the mass effect and that the heat-releasing curves were almost equal in both the glass and steel test cells. Peak powers of these exothermic curves were from 0.5 to 2.0 mW, which is almost the noise level of the DSC and adiabatic calorimeter, and therefore could not be detected by using these apparatus. Heat of reaction was determined to be about 1,200±50 J/g (80 wt% CHP). Around 20% of the heat of reaction was not delivered in the low temperature isothermal tests as compared to the heat of decomposition of 1,500 J/g (80 wt% CHP) determined by DSC (Duh et al., 1997). Residual enthalpy can be detected by using temperature-programmed scanning in the DSC. The thermal analysis data were comparable to previous studies presented in Table 2.

Obviously, attention is drawn to the first peak. It also appeared to be a small shoulder in DSC temperature program scanning which occurred at about 80~90 ℃. DTBP (Di-tert-butyl peroxide), and DCPO also displayed the first small peak

in DSC experiments (Leung, 1994). However, no discrete small peaks were observed in adiabatic self-heat data.

CHP masses and experimental temperatures were varied and a cumene blank test was run to try to understand the source or the first peak. The pure cumene blank test did not exhibit the exothermic behaviors seen in the CHP decomposition experiments. Table 1 shows that the heat of reaction in the first peak is less than 1% of the overall heat of decomposition. Therefore, it is considered to have relatively little influence on the overall kinetics. Possible explanations for the first peak include:

(1) Recombination reaction of radicals decomposed from CHP.

(2) Oxidation reaction on CHP (Griffiths and Mullins, 1984).

(3) Vapor phase decomposition of CHP (Show and Pritchard, 1968).

Autocatalytic Behaviors

Autocatalytic reactions are considered to be hazardous because of unexpected initiation and sudden heat evolution even in an isothermal environment. Isothermal calorimeters can be utilized to investigate whether a reaction is autocatalytic or nth order kinetics. An autocatalytic effect is verified by a maximum rate of heat release at about 40~60% conversion of the reactant in the isothermal thermogram. Whereas, the maximum rate of heat release in an n-th order reaction would occur at 0% conversion. In addition, an induction period is associated with no apparent heat release prior to the initiation and

acceleration of the decomposition reaction. Figure 2. demonstrates the autocatalytic characteristics of CHP thermostated at 75℃ and defines the terminology that is useful for describing autocatalytic behaviors in an isothermal environment. Data summarized from thermal analysis compared to previous studies are presented in Table 2. Onset temperature of CHP decomposition was detected as low as 75℃ using the TAM; however, heat of decomposition was about 85% compared to that determined by DSC dynamic scanning. A possible explanation for the differences in apparent heat of reaction is that the CHP molecules at lower temperature possessed inherently lower kinetic energy for overcoming the reaction activating energy that could result in a different reaction branching ratio, less decomposition, and subsequently less heat of decomposition.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates the application of the isothermal microcalorimeter for investigating the autocatalytic exothermic decomposition of CHP. Identification of the autocatalytic decomposition of organic peroxides is crucial since these materials can generate catalysts that could lead to a delayed thermal runaway or explosion in an isothermal environment. Isothermal microcalorimetry is a promising approach for investigating other organic peroxides where the thermal decomposition mechanisms and kinetics could be unique. Data from autocatalytic thermograms can be used to assess the thermal

6

runaway or reactive hazards potential of organic peroxides and to determine useful parameters such as exothermic onset temperature, isothermal TMR_{ad} (compared to adiabatic time to maximum rate) detected by adiabatic calotimetry, and ΔT_{ad} (adiabatic temperature rise) evaluated from ΔH (heat of decomposition).

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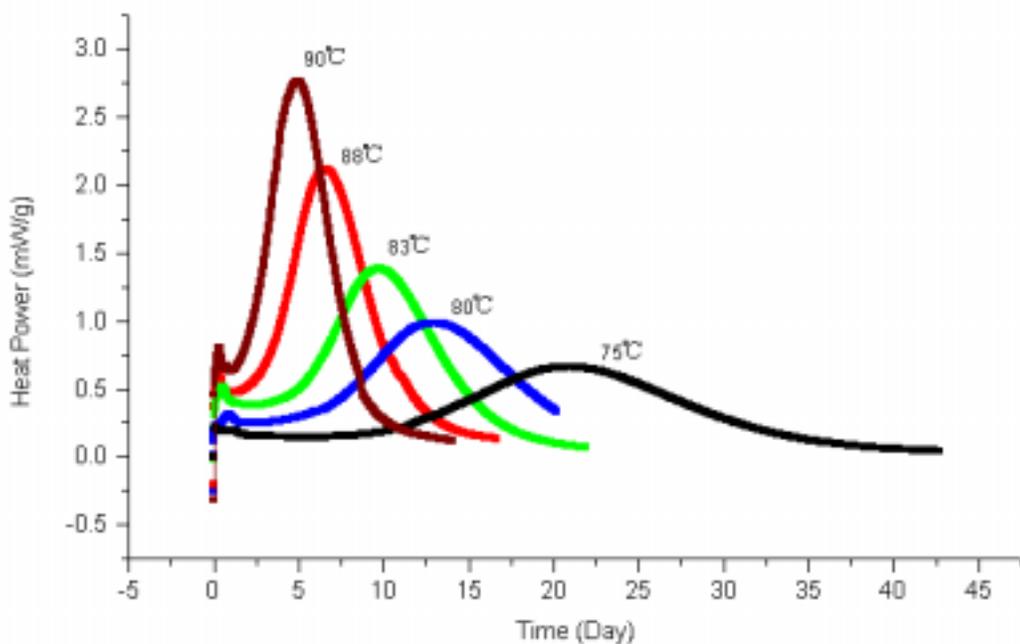
Figure 1. The heat power versus time for thermal decomposition of 80 wt%
CHP under various isothermal conditions.
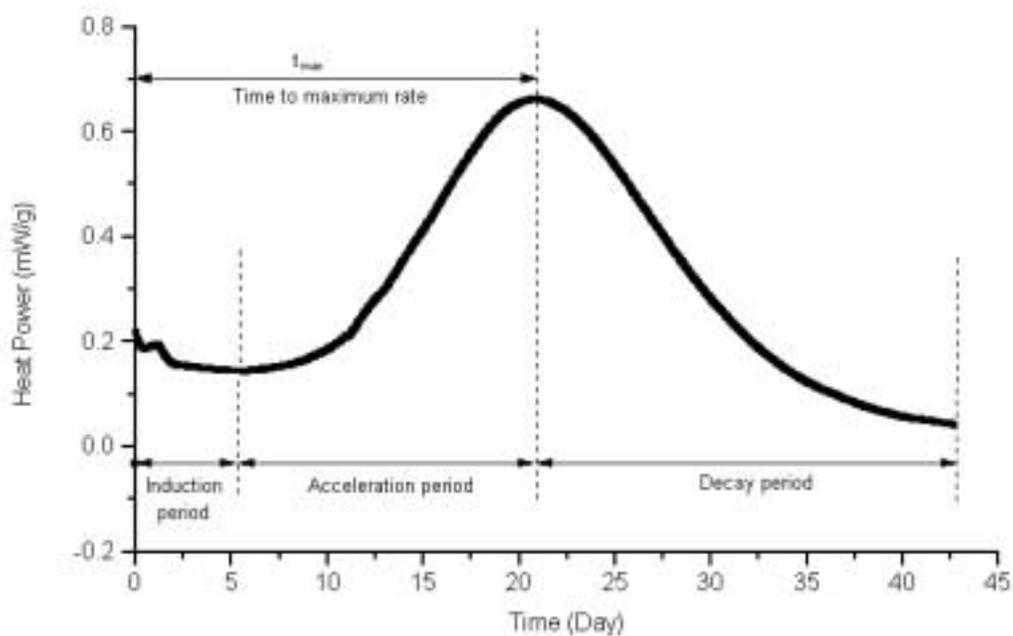
Figure 2. Autocatalytic behaviors of 80 wt% CHP thermostated at 75°C.

Table 1. Experimental Data of Autocatalytic Reaction on CHP Conducted by TAM

Sample	Temperature (℃)	Sample Mass (g)	Cell	Reaction Time (day)	Time to 1st Peak (hour)	ΔH of 1st Peak (J/g)	Time to 2nd Peak (day)	ΔH of 2nd Peak (J/g)
CHP 80 wt%	90	0.506	G[1]	14.1	7.55	2.61	4.9	1,248.45
	88	1.511	G	16.6	11.7	3.79	6.7	1,214.49
		1.008	G	15.0	11.2	4.32	6.5	1,181.65
		0.504	G	16.5	8.3	4.46	6.5	1,243.41
		0.501	S	15.2	8.0	9.18	6.6	1,217.43
	83	0.510	G	22.0	13.3	6.29	9.7	1,128.86
	80	1.020	G	20.0 (uncompleted)[2]	20.8	4.05	13.0	980.98
	75	0.505	G	42.7	27.6	5.28	20.9	1,082.50

Remarks:
(1) G: Glass Ampoule
    S: Stainless Steel Ampoule
(2) Power shortage due to the September 21, 1999 Taiwan earthquake.

Table 2. Thermal Analysis Data Detected by Various Calorimeters (Duh, 1997, 1998 and Shu, 1999)

Calorimeter	CHP Conc.	Onset Temp.(℃)	$\triangle H$ (J/g)	Kinetics
DSC	80 wt%	100	1,425	n-th order
DSC	35 wt%	135	607.3	n-th order
ARC	35 wt%	101.2	607.3	n-th order
VSP2	15 wt%	115.1	-	n-th order
TAM (this work)	80 wt%	75	1,200 ± 50	Autocatalytic