



Leaching of UNGG graphite Study of ^{36}Cl behaviour

J. Comte, L. Petit, S. Schumacher

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FROM RESEARCH TO INDUSTRY



LEACHING OF UNGG GRAPHITE :

STUDY OF ^{36}Cl BEHAVIOUR

J. COMTE¹,

L. PETIT²,

S. SCHUMACHER, L. PETIT³

SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT XXXIX

2ND TO 6TH NOVEMBER 2015

1- Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique et aux énergies alternatives (C.E.A.) –
CEA/DEN/CAD/DEC/SA3C/LARC Laboratoire d'Analyses Radiochimiques et Chimiques (L.A.R.C.)
CEA Cadarache bat 152 F-13108 Saint Paul lez Durance, France. Email : jerome.comte@cea.fr

2- Electricité De France (EDF) – R&D, Matériaux et Mécanique des Composants, EDF Lab Les
Renardières, 77818 Moret Sur Loing cedex, France Email : laurent-der.petit@edf.fr

3- Agence Nationale pour la gestion des Déchets RAdioactifs (ANDRA) - Direction de la Recherche
et Développement, Service Colis et Matériaux, ANDRA 1-7, rue Jean-Monnet - 92298 Châtenay-
Malabry cedex Email stephan.schumacher@andra.fr

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Nuclear graphite waste in France

- 9 UNGG reactors (graphite moderated, fueled with natural uranium, CO₂ cooled)
- 23000 t of irradiated graphite => 100 000 m³ of conditioned waste in cementitious packages
- Nuclear graphite are classified as “Long Life Waste – Low Level” (¹⁴C, ³⁶Cl ..)
- 81% of the graphite still in reactor waiting for dismantling

The disposal behavior of the radionuclides is one of the main issues when considering graphite waste long-term management scenarios

Disposal studies

A “leaching test” program in accordance with EDF, ANDRA and CEA was initiated in 2008

- Objective : **characterize ³⁶Cl source term** (leaching rate) on irradiated graphite.
³⁶Cl is the main radionuclide which can contribute to the long term radiological impact of graphite in disposal due to his long lifetime, high mobility and solubility
- Methodologies : CEA develop leaching procedure optimized for ³⁶Cl measurement (similar to AIEA standards) with those followed specifications:
 1. Sampling times are defined to focus on diffusion mechanism and water uptake
 2. Analytical methodology was optimized to measure the ³⁶Cl

IRRADIATED GRAPHITE ORIGIN OF CHLORINE 36

Origin of natural chlorine in nuclear graphite

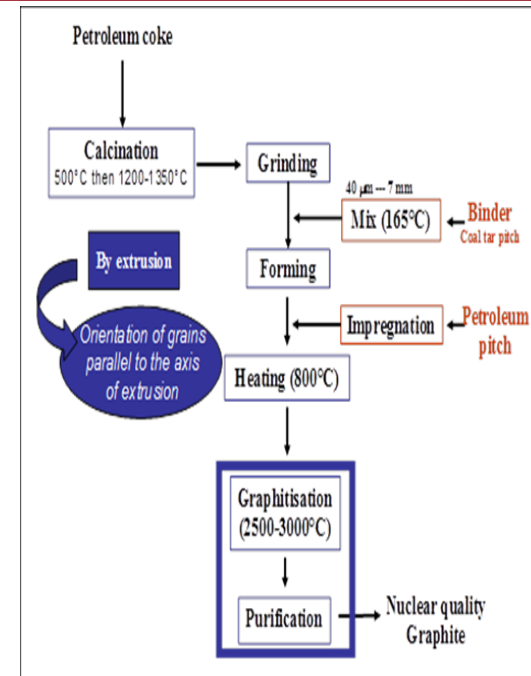
- As an **impurity in the basic materials** used for the manufacture (Coke, Coal tar pitch, cleaning agents(NaF , MgF_2 ..),...)
 - Brought by **air pollution** (end of the manufacture, during storage)
 - Present at low level in the coolant gas (Air, CO_2)
- Cl in nuclear graphite are around 5 to 40 ppm

Origin of ^{36}Cl (long live radionuclide 3.10^5y , β^-)

- Production
 - Direct activation of ^{35}Cl (77,5%) 44 barns
 - Direct activation of ^{39}K (93,25%) 0,004 barns
 - Indirect activation of ^{34}S (4,2%) 0,34 barns

=> $^{35}\text{Cl}(\text{n},\text{g})^{36}\text{Cl}$ is the predominant reaction for the formation of ^{36}Cl in irradiated graphite but with nuclear recoil ^{36}Cl location should be different from ^{35}Cl initial position (atoms are 'displaced', some maybe re-form covalent bonds =>different speciation of ^{36}Cl and ^{35}Cl)

=> ^{36}Cl activity in **French i-graphite is very low but with a huge variability** ($1\text{-}10^3\text{ Bq/g}$) and a specific analytical procedure must be used (with low detection limit)



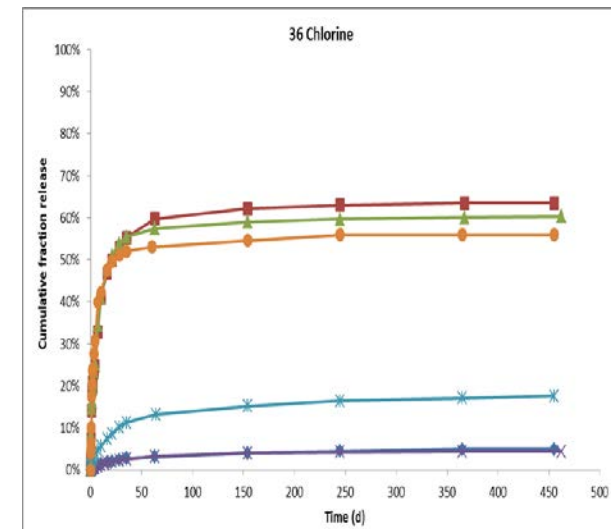
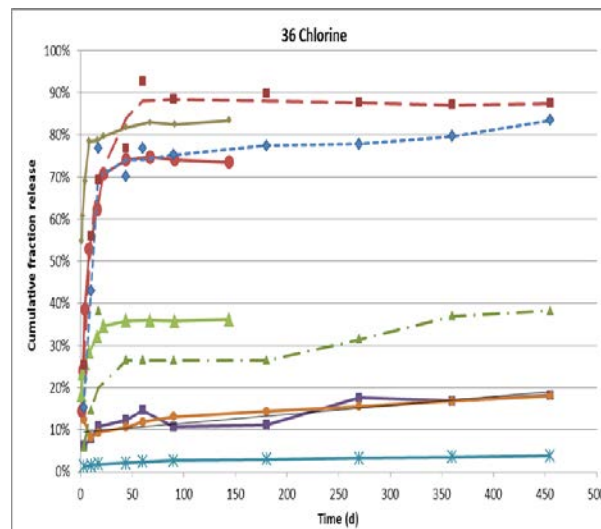
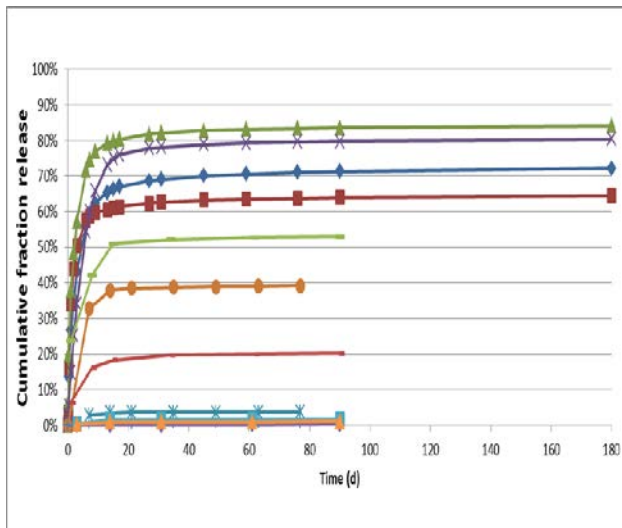
CHLORINE 36 LEACHING DATA

Overall leaching tests (^{36}Cl)

- High variability of the leaching rate (from few % to 90%)
- ^{36}Cl is release in liquid phase in two stages
 - With a very quick release kinetics (called “labile fraction”)
 - Slow release kinetics (called “non labile fraction”)
- No release in the contact gas phase (Air, N_2 , Ar)

Others common points

- Water uptake kinetics are fast in irradiated graphite samples (70 % of the open porosity is filled within a few days)



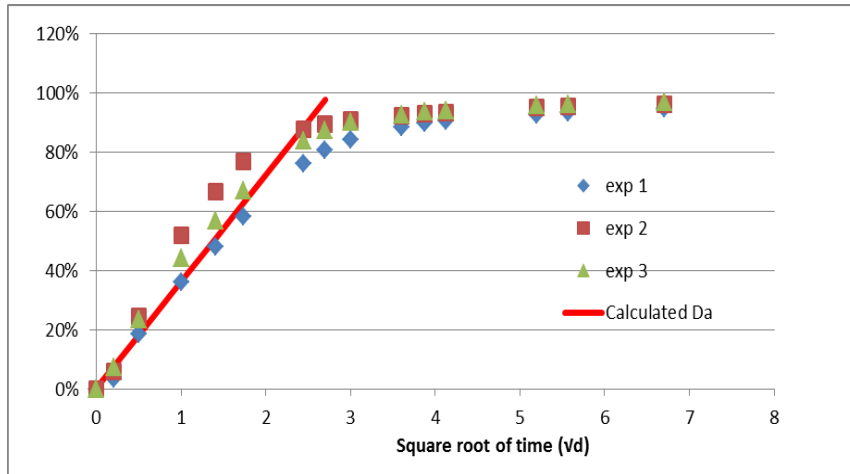
**Chlorine 36 cumulative fractional release as a function of time for irradiated graphite samples.
Tests performed with pure water or lime water under air or inert atmosphere**

Chlorine 36 labile fraction

- The release kinetics of labile ^{36}Cl can be described by a diffusion model of dissolved Chlorine (Cl^-) through the graphite porosity
- Chlorine 36 release is not limited by water up-take
- Low impact of leaching parameters (water chemistry, pH, temperature)

Comparison of ^{36}Cl release with a diffusion model

The overall release is normalized to 100% of ^{36}Cl labile fraction



Diffusion calculations are performed by adjusting the value of the diffusion coefficients to reproduce the experimental data of the leaching tests according to Equation

$$F = 2 \cdot \frac{S}{V} \sqrt{\frac{D_a \cdot t}{\pi}}$$

F: Leached fraction

S: Geometric area subject to leaching

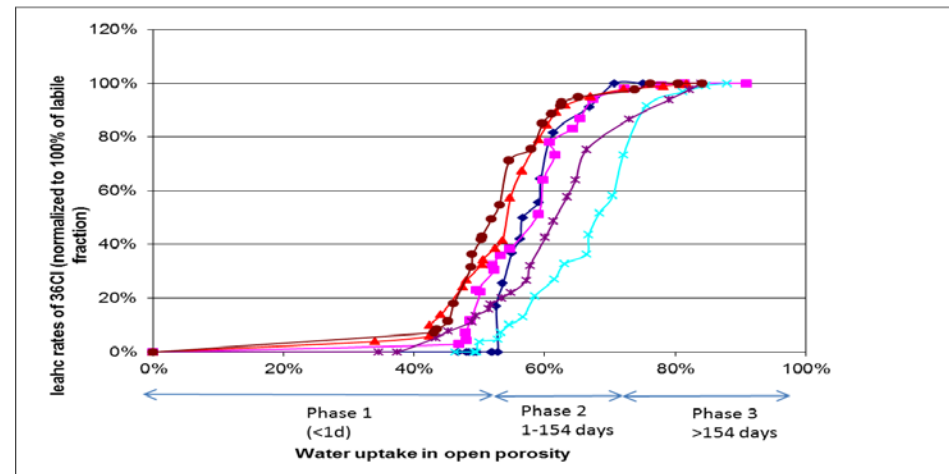
V: Geometric volume of sample

t: Time

D_a : Apparent diffusion coefficient

Correlation between ^{36}Cl labile fraction leach rate and water uptake in graphite open porosity

The overall release is normalized to 100% of ^{36}Cl labile fraction



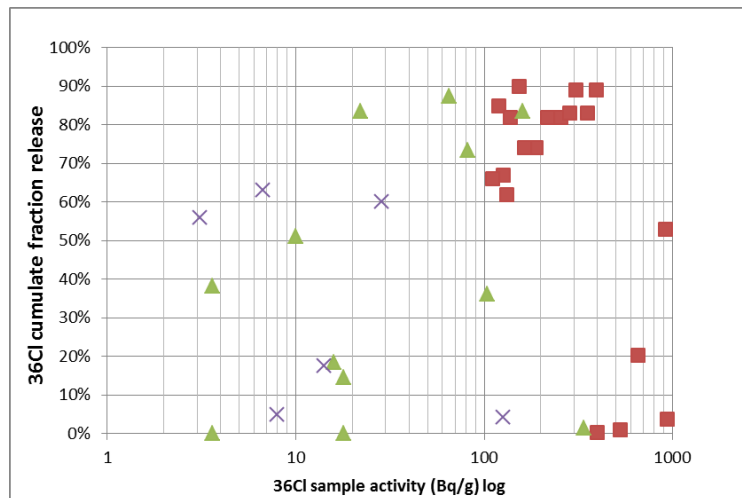
| Coke | Mean D_a ($\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$) | Mean D_e ($\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$) |
|--------------|--|--|
| « Spécial » | $3 \cdot 10^{-11}$ | $6 \cdot 10^{-12}$ |
| « Lockport » | $9 \cdot 10^{-12}$ | $2 \cdot 10^{-13}$ |
| « Lima » | $3 \cdot 10^{-12}$ | $6,5 \cdot 10^{-13}$ |

INTERPRETATION

High variability of release rates

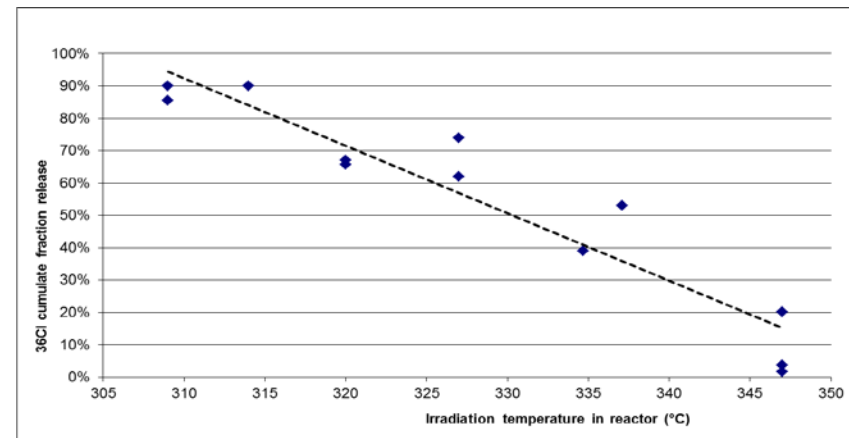
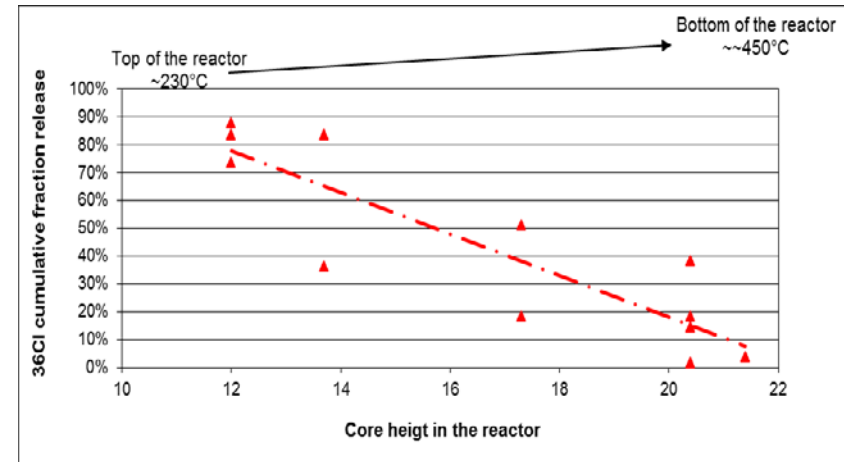
- Not correlated to the initial activity of graphite
- Correlation between the sample temperature and position during reactor operation and the quantity of **labile ^{36}Cl** (confirmed on 3 reactors)

Low leaching rate => Irradiated at high temperature
 High leaching rate => Irradiated at low temperature



Chlorine 36 leaching rates as a function of samples initial activity in $\text{Bq}\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$ (logarithmic scale)

Chlorine 36 cumulative fractional release as a function of core height and temperature



- Leaching tests demonstrate :
 - Two forms / localization of ^{36}Cl in irradiated graphite
 - One labile form, controlled by a diffusion process through graphite porosity
 - A second stage showing slow release kinetics (non-labile fraction)
 - ^{36}Cl leaching rate depends on i-graphite operating temperature
 - Low leaching rate => Irradiated at high temperature
 - High leaching rate => Irradiated at low temperature
- Perspectives of work
 - Study the correlation of the variability of leaching rate with graphite structural evolution
 - Influence of the coke/reactor /other graphite waste need to be clarified
 - Study the non labile fraction (speciation / localization)
- Perspectives for disposal
 - To get a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms which govern chlorine 36 release in order to increase confidence in the demonstration of long term safety
 - To assess long term chlorine 36 release rate to improve the source term model and therefore the safety assessment

Commissariat à l'énergie atomique et aux énergies alternatives
Centre de Cadarache | 13108 St Palu lez durance Cedex
T. +33 (0)4 42 50 42 25 |

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DEC
SA3C

Etablissement public à caractère industriel et commercial | RCS Paris B 775
685 019