

Pyroelectric LiNbO₃ Crystals Emit Self-Focusing Electron Beam

Pyroelectric crystals—crystals that become electrically charged on heating or cooling—emit self-focusing, spatially stable electron beams with energies of up to 170 keV when heated in the 100–200°C range and cooled to room temperature. According to researchers J.D. Brownridge of the State University of New York—Binghamton and S.M. Shafroth of the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, electron beams with focal lengths of 17–22 mm were achieved by varying the thickness of the crystal. Brownridge said that this finding, which was reported in the November 12 issue of *Applied Physics Letters*, “allows us to replace—in some cases—the radioactive sources that are now used to excite elements in x-ray fluorescence spectrometers.”

While pyroelectricity is a well-known phenomenon used to produce sensitive devices for infrared detection and photonics, the emission of a focused electron beam had been overlooked until now. This is probably because at atmospheric pressure, the negatively polarized surface produced by the heating/cooling sequence is quickly neutralized by bombardment with positive ions present in the atmosphere. By maintaining pressures as low as 0.5 mTorr during the process, the surface charge can be maintained for hours, permitting the electron-beam phenomenon to be observed. Surface electrical-field lines are slightly inclined toward the axis of the crystal, which accounts for the focusing phenomenon.

Samples were prepared by cutting the LiNbO₃ crystal perpendicular to its three-fold rotationally symmetric z axis. By resistively heating the +z base of the crystal, the opposite -z base becomes positively charged; upon cooling, the -z base switches to a negatively charged state. When a cylindrical sample 5 mm in diameter and 5 mm thick was heated to 115°C in a <10 mTorr nitrogen atmosphere, a spatially stable, focused electron beam was observed on a ZnS screen placed 17 mm away when the sample reached room temperature. By repeating the experiment with pressures ranging from 0.5 mTorr to 8 mTorr, the investigators found that the electron beam became brighter and more diffuse with increasing pressure; at 8 mTorr, the electron beam “blew up,” and its intensity dropped to zero.

A cylindrical sample of the crystal 4 mm in diameter and 10 mm thick produced an electron beam with a focal length of 22 mm and a spot size of 1 mm. A surface-barrier electron detector installed in place of the ZnS screen measured electron energies as

high as 170 keV at room temperature for a sample that had been heated to 160°C. The beam energy decreased nearly exponentially with time after reaching room temperature, but was still emitting 20-keV electrons after 5 h.

Brownridge and Shafroth said that several x-ray fluorescence spectrometers using pyroelectric crystals as electron sources are already in operation in their research group. As a radiation safety officer at Binghamton, Brownridge particularly likes the safety of these crystals over standard radioactive sources. “If a student took out one of these crystals and accidentally put it in his pocket,” he said, “it would not be a problem.”

TIM PALUCKA

STM Enables Study of CO Oxidation Mechanisms on a Metal Surface

While studying the mechanism of CO oxidation on a Ag(110) surface, Professor W. Ho and graduate student J.R. Hahn from the University of California—Irvine determined the presence of a previously proposed O–CO–O intermediate species in the production of CO₂. The formation of CO₂ by the catalytic oxidation of CO at metal surfaces is important as a model for heterogeneous catalysis. According to Ho, the researchers were able to obtain their results by combining imaging, manipulation, and spectroscopic capabilities: They monitored the interaction of CO molecules with O atoms by scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) and vibrational analysis of CO by inelastic electron tunneling spectroscopy with the STM (STM-IETS). Ho said that this combination “allowed for direct visualization of reaction pathways at the single-molecule level.”

As reported in the October 15 issue of *Physical Review Letters*, the researchers used a home-built variable-temperature STM to carry out the measurements. The Ag(110) substrate was cleaned by Ne-ion sputtering and annealed at 693 K. The STM tip was prepared from polycrystalline tungsten wire and cleaned by Ne-ion sputtering. The O₂ molecules (<0.01 monolayer) were adsorbed at 45 K by a capillary doser to ensure molecular chemisorption. The CO molecules (<0.001 monolayer) were adsorbed at 13 K. The O atoms were generated by dissociating O₂ molecules with tunneling electrons from the STM tip. All experiments were carried out at 13 K.

According to their report, the O–CO–O intermediate complex was formed by bringing a CO molecule in close proximity to a pair of nearest-neighbor O atoms. The complex was formed whether this transfer was accomplished by lateral movement of adsorbed CO across the surface or by a

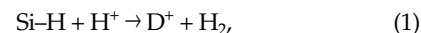
direct transfer of a CO molecule from the STM tip above the surface, they said. An electron pulse over the CO in this complex resulted in the production and desorption of a CO₂ molecule. STM-IETS data shows an increase in the vibrational energy of the CO molecule in the intermediate relative to adsorbed free CO. This data, they said, in conjunction with theoretical calculations, indicates that the interaction of the O atom with the CO molecule results in a weakening of the O–Ag bond and the formation of an O–CO bond. The spatial distribution of the CO vibrational intensity in the complex provides a direct view of its structure.

The formation of an intermediate complex was not observed if the CO was brought in close proximity to O atoms that were farther apart than nearest neighbors. In such cases, the researchers said, CO₂ production could only be induced if the CO was released from the STM tip above an O atom. No reaction was observed when the STM tip with an adsorbed CO molecule was simply brought in contact with the adsorbed O atoms. The production of CO₂ was not observed between CO and molecular O₂.

GREG KHITROV

Theoretical Calculations Predict that H⁺ Causes Direct Depassivation of Si–H Bonds

One question facing the microelectronics industry deals with the control of the surface/interface properties of silicon. In particular, the study of Si–SiO₂ interfaces and how the introduction of a proton increases the quality of such interfaces is important. H is essential to passivate dangling bonds in order to produce high quality interfaces. A computational study was recently reported on this topic by researchers at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. and Oak Ridge National Laboratory. In the October 15 edition of *Physical Review Letters*, these researchers introduced results demonstrating the interaction of protons with a (001) Si–SiO₂ interface. The researchers found that the depassivation of dangling Si bonds was due not to the dynamics of Si electrons and space charge regions, but instead to the ability of H⁺ to easily diffuse throughout the interfacial plane and that important depassivation of Si–H bonds occurs by the reaction



where D is a dangling bond. After this process, the positively charged dangling bonds freely interact with Si electrons. The researchers used calculations based upon density-functional theory (DFT), local-density approximations for exchange correla-