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**Radionuclide co-precipitation**

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Stockholm

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## RADIONUCLIDE CO-PRECIPITATION

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## SUMMARY

The thermodynamic and kinetic behaviour of the minor components of the spent fuel matrix has been theoretically and experimentally investigated. Two different situations have been studied: Part I, the near field scenario, where the release and migration of the minor components is dependent on the solubility behaviour of  $\text{UO}_2(\text{s})$ ; Part II, the far field, where the solubility and transport of the radionuclides is related to the major geochemical processes occurring.

KEYWORDS: Co-precipitation/co-dissolution, spent nuclear fuel, radionuclide solubility.

## PART I: RADIONUCLIDE CO-PRECIPITATION IN THE NEAR FIELD

1

### Introduction

A first estimate of the release and transport of radionuclides from spent nuclear fuel in contact with groundwater is generally made by using thermodynamic models. The collection and critical evaluation of the necessary thermodynamic data requires much work. Solubility limits are often used as radionuclide source terms in the general security analysis and most of the solubility data used in these exercises relates to pure solid phases.

Spent nuclear fuel can be considered as a multicomponent solid solution of varying homogeneity, depending on the considered radionuclide. It is now well established that the release of uranium, the major component of  $UO_2$  spent fuel, is solubility limited [1]. It is reasonable to expect that the dissolution of the minor components will be influenced by the release and dissolution of uranium. Consequently, the thermodynamic and kinetic behaviour of these components cannot be modelled only by using the data for the pure individual phases.

The solubility behaviour of  $UO_2(s)$  depends on the redox potential of the aqueous medium in contact with the fuel. Hence, two different situations should be studied. In the first case a preliminary solubilization of the spent nuclear fuel caused by oxidation in the near field, (e.g. due to radiolysis), is followed by a re-precipitation in the far field when reducing conditions are restored. In the second case, co-dissolution of the minor component radionuclides may occur in relation to the dissolution of  $UO_2$  under reducing conditions. In both cases, the solubility of these radionuclides will be affected by the behaviour of  $UO_2$ . The system is no longer dependent only on the thermodynamic and kinetic properties of the various individual phases for the different radionuclides, but on the distribution of the components in the solid phase, e.g. the formation of solid solutions.

The attachment of a certain metal ion to a host solid phase may occur in several forms, from adsorption of the ion at the surface of the solid to true ideal solid solutions, where the foreign

metal ion is regularly placed in the host lattice. There is a sequential transition from surface co-precipitation to ideal solid solution formation through these three processes:

- a) Surface co-precipitation
- b) Lattice diffusion
- c) Solid solution

At room temperature, diffusion in a solid matrix is generally very slow and the first process, surface co-precipitation, is the one expected to occur. In this case, there is no major structural arrangement and the radionuclide distribution equilibria is established between the solid surface and the solution. However, the initial source ( $\text{UO}_2$  spent fuel), may be considered as an ideal solid solution for most of its components.

All these phenomena can be included under the term co-precipitation. Co-precipitation has been defined as "the contamination of a precipitate by substances that are normally soluble under the conditions of the precipitation [2]". This concept is limited since there are some cases which cannot be explained by this definition. Therefore, Gordon [3] redefined co-precipitation as "the precipitation of a compound in conjunction with one or more components". We will use the concept co-precipitation in this sense. Four types of co-precipitation have been characterized:

- a) Isomorphous mixed crystal formation
- b) Anomalous mixed crystal formation
- c) Adsorption
- d) Occlusion

where the first two cases are different degrees of solid solutions [3].

The constituents of isomorphous mixed crystals have similar chemical and crystallographic properties. In the case of anomalous mixed crystal formation, the characteristics are the same as in the former case, but their formation cannot be explained on the same basis. Adsorption can be considered to some extent, as anomalous mixed crystal formation at the surface of the precipitate. The term occlusion is usually applied for the case where adsorbed species on crystal planes are subsequently covered with other crystal layers.

Co-precipitation is a well known chemical phenomenon. It has been extensively applied in analytical chemistry for the separation of trace elements [3,4]. Also in radioanalytical applications, particularly in enrichment processes [5,6], and for mixed oxide fuel production [7,8,9]. In the field of geochemistry, there are many processes which should be explained by means of co-precipitation, for instance the anomalous behaviour of the Sr-Ca carbonate system [10], or the  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  system in calcite [11].

In a previous work [12] we have studied the co-precipitation behaviour of the  $\text{La}(\text{OH})_3\text{-UO}_2$  system at room temperature. In this communication we present some recent results on the thermodynamics of co-precipitation at room temperature of some radionuclides. The effect of hydrothermal aging on the co-precipitation/co-dissolution distribution is also studied, by using  $\text{Th}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{La}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  as radionuclide analogues.

## 2 Choice of Analogues

The investigation of the basic processes related to radionuclide co-dissolution/co-precipitation, requires well controlled experimental conditions. The study of the actual radionuclides has experimental difficulties due to their radioactive nature. Because of this, proper analogues have to be chosen. One of the aims of this research program has been to investigate the dependence of the degree of co-precipitation/co-dissolution with the charge of the radionuclide ion. Consequently  $\text{Th}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{La}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  have been selected as analogue ions for this purpose.

The co-precipitation and co-dissolution phenomena are controlled by many different variables: temperature, the concentration of the minor components, the rate of the process, the ionic radius and the ionic charge [3]. The two main factors are the ionic charge and size, since the formation of isomorphous mixed crystals is dependent on similarities in both the chemical properties and the size of the substituting ions. The probability that co-precipitation/co-dissolution occurs is larger when these parameters are similar for both the host and the minor component. In Table I-1 we have summarized the ionic radii for various ions of interest.

Table I-1. Effective ionic radii [13] of some ions of interest.

Ion	Å	Coordination number
$\text{U}^{6+}$	1.00	8
$\text{U}^{4+}$	1.14	8
$\text{Th}^{4+}$	1.19	8
$\text{Pu}^{4+}$	1.10	8
$\text{Pu}^{3+}$	1.14	6
$\text{Ln}^{3+}$	1.00-1.21	6
$\text{Ra}^{2+}$	1.62	8
$\text{Ba}^{2+}$	1.56	8



In the case of  $\text{Pu}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Th}^{4+}$  an isomorphous substitution of  $\text{U}^{4+}$  in the  $\text{UO}_2$  lattice is obviously possible since both charge and size are very similar.

For  $\text{Pu}^{3+}$  and the lanthanide ions (here symbolized by  $\text{Ln}^{3+}$ ) the ionic radii are in a range of values which indicates the possibility of isomorphous substitution of  $\text{U}^{4+}$ , although this would imply a readjustment of the charge. We found it would be interesting to test to which extent a larger ion like  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  (analogue to  $\text{Ra}^{2+}$ ), would behave in the co-precipitation system.

### 3 Thermodynamics of Radionuclide Co-precipitation

The equilibrium distribution of the components A, B of a solid solution between the solid and the aqueous phases can be described in two different ways.

If equilibrium is attained between the bulk of the solid solution and the aqueous phase the system follows the Berthelot-Nernst homogeneous distribution law [14]. This can be expressed as:

$$\frac{[\text{A}]_{(\text{aq})}}{[\text{B}]_{(\text{aq})}} = D \frac{[\text{A}]_{(\text{s})}}{[\text{B}]_{(\text{s})}} \quad (1)$$

When equilibrium is only reached between the surface of the solid and the aqueous solution, the distribution of the components between the solid and the aqueous phases follows the Doerner-Hoskins logarithmic law [15]. This is formulated as:

$$\log \frac{[\text{A}]_{(\text{aq})}}{[\text{B}]_{(\text{aq})}} = k \log \frac{[\text{A}]_{(\text{s})}}{[\text{B}]_{(\text{s})}} \quad (2)$$

The co-precipitation equilibria in the system  $\text{La(III)/U(IV)}$ . [12] and  $\text{Ba(II)/U(IV)}$  have been studied under well controlled conditions at  $25^\circ\text{C}$ . The experimental details have been previously described [12].

From these experimental data we conclude that the distribution of the different ions involved between the aqueous phase and the solid solution follows the logarithmic law. From these data it is possible to calculate conditional solubility products [12] of  $\text{La(OH)}_3(\text{s})$  and  $\text{Ba(OH)}_2(\text{s})$ , in the presence of  $\text{UO}_2(\text{s})$ . From a few data obtained [16], in the  $\text{Pu(III)/U(IV)}$  system, we have also estimated a conditional solubility product for  $\text{Pu(OH)}_3(\text{s})$  in the presence of  $\text{UO}_2(\text{s})$ . In Table I-2 we make a comparison between these conditional solubility products and the values for the individual phases.

Table I-2. A comparison between conditional ( $K_{so}^*$ ) and individual solubility products for the equilibria:

$$M^{n+} + n H_2O \rightleftharpoons M(OH)_n(s) + n H^+$$

$M^{n+}$	$\log K_{so}^*$	$\log K_{so}$
Pu <sup>3+</sup>	- 2.4	-19.3
La <sup>3+</sup>	-12.5	-20.5
Ba <sup>2+</sup>	- 9.1	-24.4

From these data it is possible to conclude that:

- The solubility of the minor components is strongly reduced by the presence of UO<sub>2</sub>(s).
- At low temperature the co-precipitation equilibrium obeys the Doerner-Hoskins distribution law. This indicates that equilibrium is only attained between the surface of the solid and the aqueous phase.

#### 4 The Effect of Aging on Co-precipitation

Because of the long-term predictions necessary for the safety and performance assessment of nuclear waste repositories, it is important to consider the effect of aging of the co-precipitate on the distribution equilibria.

In order to study this, a solution initially containing

$$\begin{aligned} [U(VI)] &= 1.00 \cdot 10^{-2} \text{ mol dm}^{-3} \\ [Th(IV)] &= 1.00 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ mol dm}^{-3} \\ [La(III)] &= 5.00 \cdot 10^{-5} \text{ mol dm}^{-3} \\ [Ba(II)] &= 5.00 \cdot 10^{-5} \text{ mol dm}^{-3} \end{aligned}$$

in 0.5 mol dm<sup>-3</sup> NaClO<sub>4</sub> was reduced with H<sub>2</sub>/Pd(g) at pH = 3 by using the same experimental approach as previously described [12]. A black precipitate was formed which was characterized by X-ray powder diffraction (XPD), (see Figure I-1). The broad lines observed, showed the presence of a microcrystalline solid. This solid was kept in contact with the mother solution for six months, at T = 110 to 120°C under N<sub>2</sub> (g) atmosphere. After this time the solution and the solid phase were analyzed. In Table I-3 we summarize the percentages of the different components both in the aqueous and the solid phases.

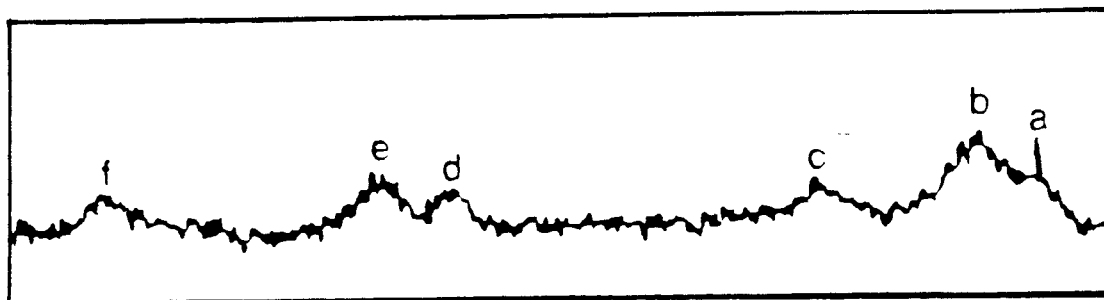


Figure I-1. XPD pattern of the solid used in our experiments where the theoretical assigned distances [19], are in ( $\text{\AA}$ ):

- a: 3.234 ( $\text{ThO}_2$ )
- b: 3.157 ( $\text{U,ThO}_2$ )
- c: 2.73 ( $\text{U,ThO}_2$ )
- d: 1.98 ( $\text{ThO}_2$ )
- e: 1.93 ( $\text{UO}_2$ )
- f: 1.65 ( $\text{U,ThO}_2$ )

Table I-3. Relative composition of the aqueous phase and the co-precipitate after aging.

Metal ion	% in solution	% in solid
U(IV)	98.0	97.5
Th(IV)	1.0	1.7
La(III)	0.5	0.4
Ba(II)	0.5	0.4

The results in Table I-3, indicate a congruent co-precipitation of La(III) and Ba(II) and an enrichment of Th(IV) in the solid.

## 5 Kinetics of Co-dissolution

A portion of this solid phase was put in contact with a  $0.5 \text{ mol dm}^{-3}$   $\text{NaClO}_4$  solution at  $\text{pH} = 4.5$  under  $\text{N}_2(\text{g})$  atmosphere. The time dependence and the equilibrium distribution between the solid and the aqueous phase were studied. Several samples were taken at different times, and we analyzed the uranium, lanthanum, thorium and barium contents in the initial solid and in the liquid samples by induced coupled plasma spectrophotometry, (IC). These analysis were performed by using a Perkin Elmer ICP/5500 spectrophotometer.

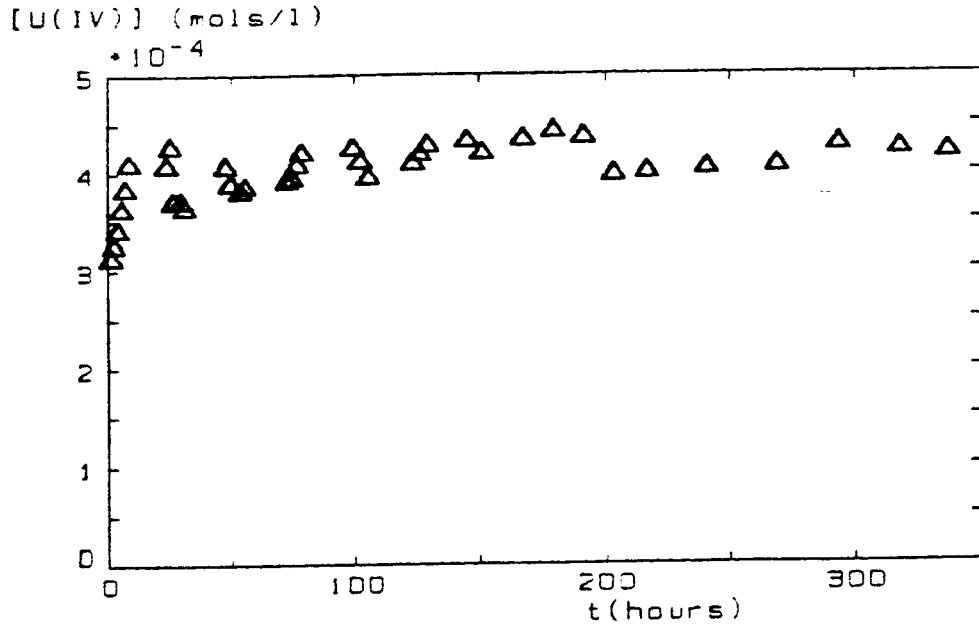


Figure I-2a. Values of uranium concentration vs time.

The results are summarized in Figure I-2. The plot of [U(IV)] vs. contact time, (Figure I-2a) shows that steady state concentrations are reached after 50 hours. The average steady state concentrations of U(IV), is of the same magnitude as the expected [U(IV)] in equilibrium with amorphous  $\text{UO}_2(\text{s})$  ( $3.0 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ mol dm}^{-3}$ ), [17].

The plots of the normalized concentrations of the minor components with respect to the uranium concentration in solution vs. time (Figure I-2b-c-d), indicate that the release of these minor components from the solid matrix is totally controlled by the uranium dissolution, e.g., congruent release. This behaviour is largely time independent (see Figure I-2b-d). Finally, a calculation of the distribution factors  $D$  according to the Berthelot-Nernst distribution law (Eq. 1):

$$\frac{[M]_{(s)}}{[U(IV)]_{(s)}} = D \frac{[M]_{(aq)}}{[U(IV)]_{(aq)}} \quad (3)$$

gives  $D_{\text{Th}^{4+}} = D_{\text{La}^{3+}} = 1$ , while  $D_{\text{Ba}^{2+}} = 2$ . This strongly suggests that hydrothermal aging of the co-precipitate has caused the initial logarithmic distribution to shift to a normal type of distribution.

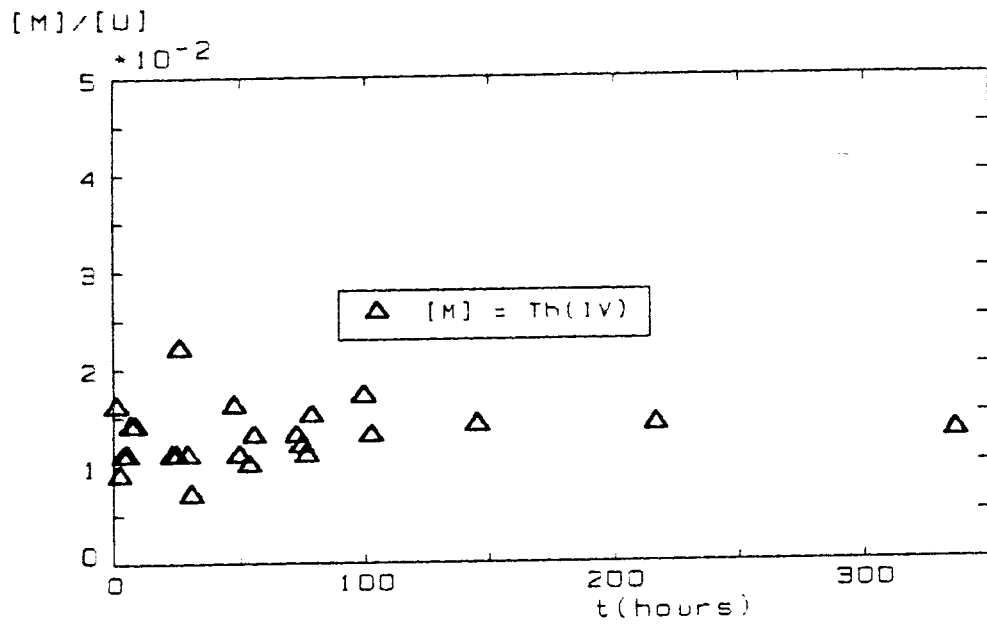


Figure I-2b. Plot of the normalized concentration of [Th(IV)] vs [U(IV)].

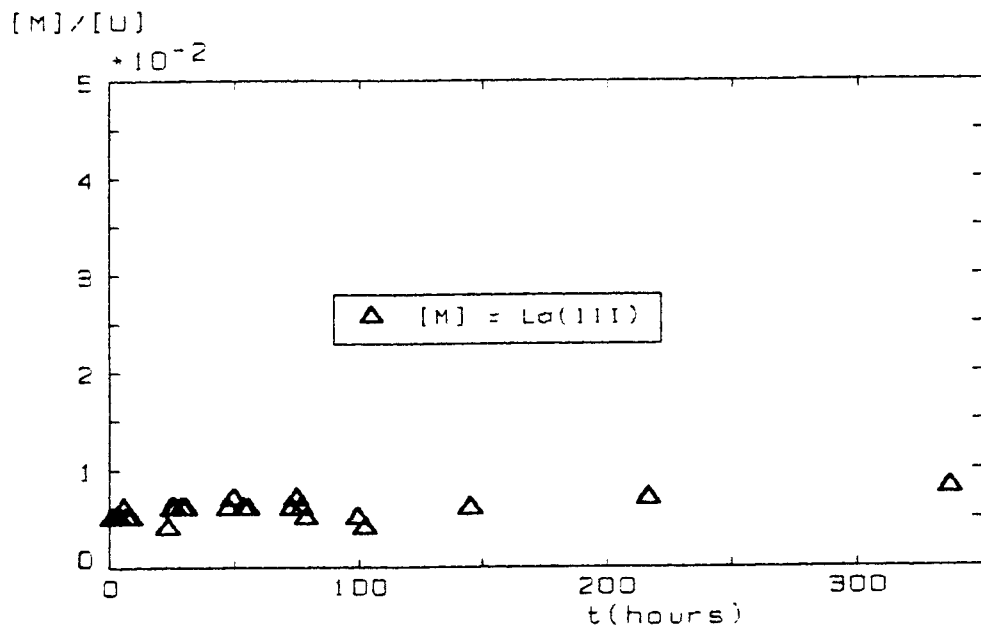


Figure I-2c. Plot of the normalized concentration of [La(III)] vs [U(IV)].

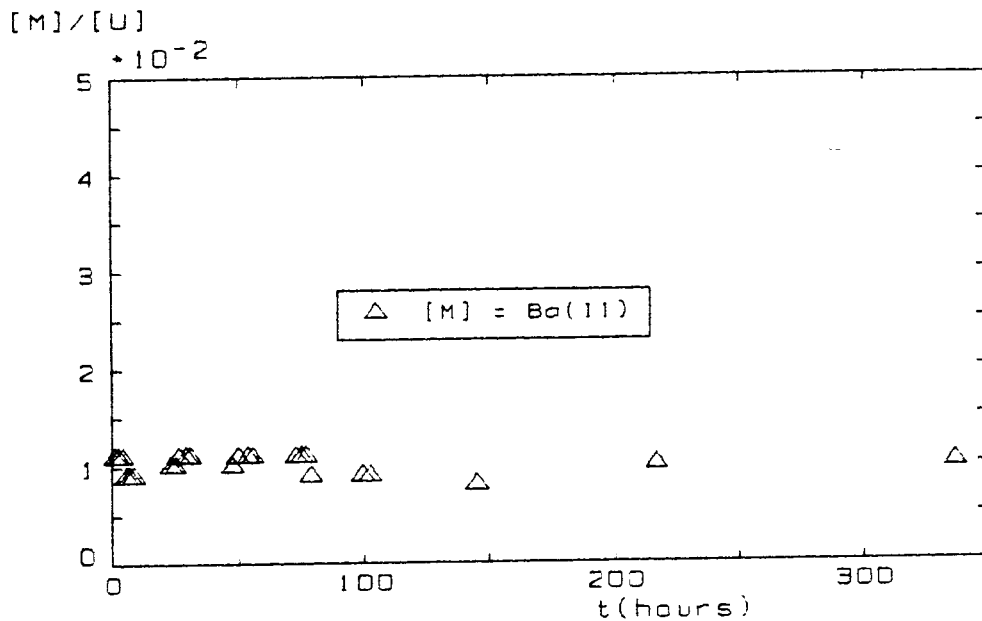


Figure I-2d. Plot of the normalized concentration of [Ba(II)] vs [U(IV)].

## 6

### Conclusions

In this work we have attempted a general study of the solubility behaviour of the minor components of the nuclear waste matrix in relation to the major component  $\text{UO}_2$ .

As we have shown in this and previous studies [12,16], the solubility of the minor components cannot be only predicted on basis of the individual solid phases. Co-precipitation occurs, and at low temperatures the distribution of the components between the solid and the aqueous phases follows the logarithmic distribution law. Hydrothermal aging causes the co-precipitation system to shift from the logarithmic (Doerner-Hoskins) to a normal (Berthelot-Nernst) distribution. This is in agreement with previous observations in other co-precipitation systems [3].

At the same time, we have also shown that the dissolution of the minor components from a  $\text{U(Th,La,Ba)O}_2$  solid solution is kinetically and thermodynamically controlled by the behaviour of the major component, uranium dioxide.

In this work we have only studied the co-precipitation/co-dissolution systems in connection with a near field situation, where uranium can be the major component in case of oxidation and container failure. In the far field, the co-precipitation/co-dissolution systems have to be related to the major geochemical processes occurring in granitic groundwaters. Possible systems

affecting the "individual solubility" of radionuclides are the precipitation/dissolution of calcite, Fe(III)-hydroxide, MnO<sub>2</sub> and feldspars modification [18]. Future work will be focused to an understanding of these processes.

## 7 Acknowledgements

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## PART II: RADIONUCLIDE CO-PRECIPITATION IN THE FAR FIELD

### 1 Introduction

As we have already pointed out in the previous section, the co-precipitation/co-dissolution behaviour of the radionuclides in the far-field will be related to the major hydrogeochemical changes in the groundwater.

According to Eriksson [1] and Stumm and Morgan [2], the major geochemical changes occurring as water percolates from the surface towards deep areas can be schematized by Figure II-1.

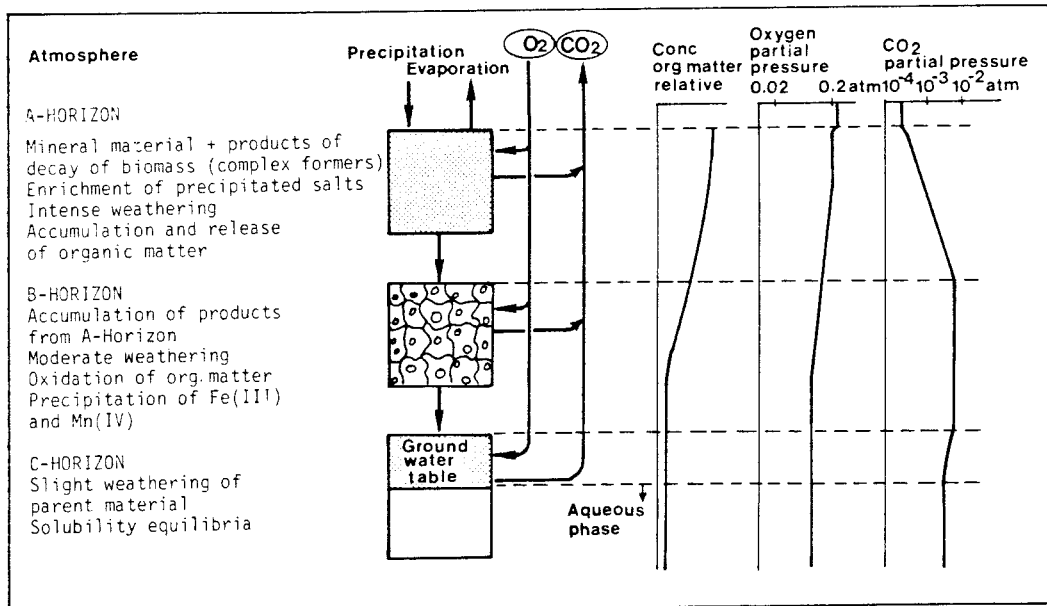


Figure II-1. Acquisition of solutes during infiltration.

It is now well established [3] that groundwater flows preferentially through fissures. It is logical to expect that the major chemical processes will occur in these fissures and at the interface with the fracture filling minerals. Independently of the flow pattern, the geochemical changes will be related to the weathering of the bedrock. Hence, it is necessary to identify which are the possible fracture filling minerals and weathering products in granitic bedrock and the geochemical processes related with them. Muller [4] has made a compilation of the different types of minerals present in granite. In Table II-1, we show the fracture-filling and secondary minerals for granite.

During the SKB site characterization program, investigations of low temperature fracture fillings have been performed [5a-b]. Calcite, iron-oxides and clay minerals have been found to correspond to the latest geological event. It has also been observed that calcite is found in areas of recharge and discharge [3]. The dissolution-precipitation reactions of calcite and iron-oxides are known to proceed fast, even at low temperatures. The mean life of a calcite surface (monolayer) in seawater has been experimentally demonstrated to be one day [6,7]. Consequently, calcite and iron-oxides mobilization will play an important role in the geochemical cycle of radionuclides in the granite environment. There is a great deal of information about co-precipitation systems related to calcite dissolution-precipitation. Much less has been done respect to iron hydroxides. In the case of goethite and limonite much emphasis has been put in studying the adsorption properties of different ions on the iron hydroxide surface.

J. Morse [8] has done an excellent overview on the surface chemistry of calcium carbonate minerals. According to his work and the experimental findings of different investigators it is possible to find that there is a related sequence from adsorption to co-precipitation through surface precipitation. Adsorption and surface precipitation require the existence of a contiguous solid phase. However, in most of the cases the mechanisms of these three, processes are closely related.

Hence, in our literature survey we have devoted our attention not only to radionuclide co-precipitation with calcite and iron hydroxide, but also to the investigations of radionuclide adsorption on these solid phases where emphasis has been put in the surface coordination aspects.

## 2

### Radionuclide Co-precipitation with Calcite

As pointed out by Pingitore [9] the incorporation of trace elements in calcite has an extensive impact in several areas of environmental chemistry and geochemistry. The experimental information collected in these areas can be summarized as follows.

Table II-1. Minerals found in granites.

Mineral Group	Species	Type	Specific Formula
<b>Sulphides</b>	Pyrite	Fract. fill.	FeS <sub>2</sub>
	Pyrrhotite	Fract. fill.	FeS(pyrr), Fe <sub>7</sub> S <sub>8</sub>
<b>Oxides</b>	Pyrolusite	Second. min.	MnO <sub>2</sub>
<b>Hydroxides</b>	Goethite	Second. min.	FeOOH
	Diaspore	Second. min.	AlOOH
	Bohemite	Second. min.	AlOOH
	Gibbsite	Second. min.	Al(OH) <sub>3</sub>
	Limonite	Second. min. Fract. fill.	FeOOH · nH <sub>2</sub> O
<b>Halides</b>	Fluorite	Second. min.	CaF <sub>2</sub>
<b>Carbonates</b>	Calcite	Fract. fill.	CaCO <sub>3</sub>
<b>Sulphates</b>	Alunite	Second. min.	KAl <sub>3</sub> (SO <sub>4</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> (OH) <sub>6</sub>
	Jarosite	Second. min.	KFe <sub>3</sub> (SO <sub>4</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> (OH) <sub>6</sub>
	Anhydrite	Second. min.	CaSO <sub>4</sub>
	Gypsum	Second. min. Fract. fill.	CaSO <sub>4</sub> · 2H <sub>2</sub> O
<b>Sorosilicates</b>	Zoisite	Fract. fill.	Ca <sub>2</sub> Al <sub>3</sub> (SiO <sub>4</sub> ) <sub>3</sub> OH
	Clinzoisite	Fract. fill.	Ca <sub>2</sub> Al <sub>3</sub> (SiO <sub>4</sub> ) <sub>3</sub> OH
	Epidote	Second. min. Fract. fill.	Ca <sub>2</sub> FeAl <sub>2</sub> (SiO <sub>4</sub> ) <sub>3</sub> OH
	Piemontite	Fract. fill.	Ca <sub>2</sub> (Al,Mn,Fe) <sub>3</sub> (SiO <sub>4</sub> ) <sub>3</sub> OH
<b>Phyllosilicates</b>	Kaolinite	Second. min. Fract. fill.	Al <sub>2</sub> Si <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> (OH) <sub>4</sub>
	Smectite	Second. min.	CaAl <sub>14</sub> Si <sub>22</sub> O <sub>60</sub> (OH) <sub>12</sub>
	Clinchlore	Second. min. Fract. fill.	Mg <sub>40</sub> Al <sub>16</sub> Si <sub>24</sub> O <sub>80</sub> (OH) <sub>64</sub>
	Illite	Second. min.	K <sub>2</sub> Al <sub>10</sub> Si <sub>14</sub> O <sub>40</sub> (OH) <sub>80</sub>
	Sericite	Second. min.	KAl <sub>2</sub> (AlSi <sub>3</sub> O <sub>10</sub> )(OH,F) <sub>2</sub>
<b>Tectosilicates</b>	Chalcedony	Fract. fill.	SiO <sub>2</sub> (chal)
	Opal	Fract. fill.	SiO <sub>2</sub> · 0.5H <sub>2</sub> O(am)



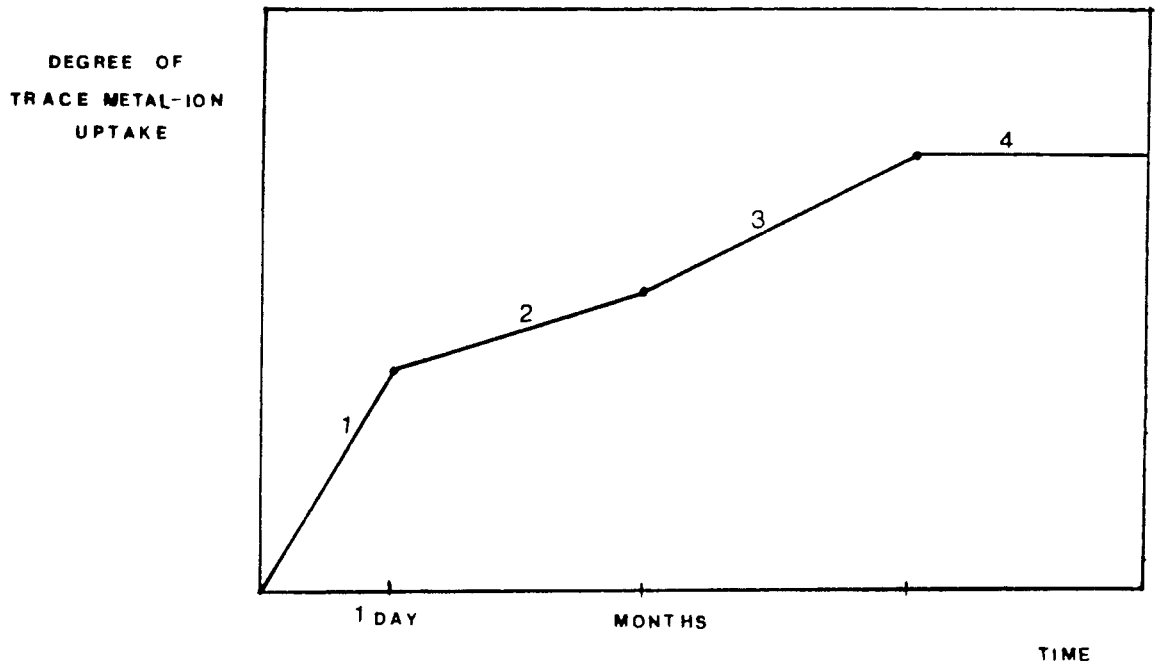


Figure II-3. Schematic time-dependence of radionuclide uptake by calcite. (1) Langmuir type adsorption = surface complexation; (2) Freundlich type adsorption = surface precipitation; (3) Co-Precipitation; (4) Equilibrium.

According to this model the kinetics of radionuclide uptake by calcite could be visualized as in Figure II-3.

### 3

#### Radionuclide Co-precipitation with Iron-Oxides

There is practically no information available about co-precipitation of trace metals with iron-hydroxides/oxides. Much experimental and theoretical work has been devoted to the study of the metal adsorption on goethite-hematite surfaces. Nevertheless, Benjamin and Leckie [22], studied in a very comprehensive work the adsorption of trace metals (Cd, Cu, Zn and Pb) on amorphous goethite. They observed that at low adsorption density the data could be described by a Langmuir isotherm. At larger adsorption density, the metal uptake fitted to a Freundlich behaviour (see Figure II-3). During their kinetic experiments they also observed that the initial adsorption was fast, followed by a much slower uptake. This last step was related by the authors to a possible solid-state diffusion. This behaviour is perfectly in concordance with the previously proposed kinetic model for trace metal uptake by calcite.

The adsorption of actinides on different ferric oxy/hydroxides has been extensively studied. There is quantitative information for  $\text{UO}_2^{2+}$  [23],  $\text{Pu}^{4+}$  and  $\text{PuO}_2^+$  [24] and  $\text{Np(V)}$  [25]. In all these studies

the triple layer model (TLM) [26,27,28] for surface site bonding has been applied and intrinsic surface binding constants for different actinide species have been obtained.

#### 4 Conclusions

This study on the large literature available on trace metal uptake by calcite and iron indicates that:

- Trace metal and radionuclide uptake by naturally occurring minerals is extensive. The solubility of trace metals in natural waters cannot be only modelled from their individual thermodynamic properties. Also the redox properties of radionuclides are drastically affected by their interaction with naturally occurring solid surfaces [20].
- There is a sequential transition, ADSORPTION → SURFACE PRECIPITATION → CO-PRECIPITATION. This has been demonstrated by spectroscopic methods in the case of calcite and adsorption data indicate a similar behaviour for iron hydro/oxides.
- There is a need for theoretical and experimental development in order to include and quantify the water-particle interface processes in the general radionuclide speciation model. Empirical scavenging parameters like  $K_d$  are of very limited validity. Intrinsic surface binding constants are by definition non-conditional and consequently the only ones applicable to the modelling of radionuclide mobility in groundwater environments. This approach has been successfully tested by Balistrieri, Murray and coworkers [29] in order to model trace metal speciation in sea water.

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