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Aluminum coating performance enhancement: novel coating and characterization techniques

A.M. Salman
Scientific Supervisor: Prof. A.M. Lider
Tomsk Polytechnic University, Russia, Tomsk, Lenin str., 30, 634050
E-mail: Soliman@tpu.ru

Abstract. *The study examines the use of improved coatings and new methods for determining the characteristics of surface modification based on aluminum coatings to increase productivity in fast neutron reactor systems. The aim of the project is to improve the behavior of materials by studying corrosion prevention measures during operation and evaluating the electrical properties of coatings for quality control. The interdisciplinary approach combines materials science and engineering approaches to create functional materials with increased corrosion resistance for nuclear applications.*

Key words: *aluminum surface coatings, advanced characterization technique, material performance enhancement.*

Introduction

In the field of materials science and engineering, the quest of strong solutions to resist difficult operational environments remains a priority. The need for improved materials capable of withstanding is clear, especially in applications utilizing aluminum coatings, such as those found in fast reactor systems, where severe temperatures, corrosive atmospheres, and mechanical strains all come together. Corrosion, that poses a significant challenge to the structural integrity and longevity of aluminum coating materials, is central in tackling these difficulties. Conventional corrosion prevention measures frequently fall short of providing long-term protection, necessitating research into novel strategies to improve material performance [1]. Furthermore, detailed characterization of material electrical properties is critical for improving performance in electrical systems, particularly on aluminum surfaces. However, current electrical characterization approaches may have difficulties in detecting minor differences in electrical behavior on aluminum coatings, emphasizing the need for novel methodologies with increased sensitivity and resolution targeted to aluminum coating materials [2]. This research aims to optimize aluminum coating materials for commercial applications, focusing on the synergistic impacts of enhanced surface coatings and unique characterization methodologies. It also explores the development of corrosion-mitigating coatings using innovative techniques like Thermo-Electromotive force (ThermoEMF) measurements [3].

Research methods

This research takes the interdisciplinary approach, focusing on materials science, chemistry, and engineering ideas. Advanced coating deposition techniques, such as physical vapor deposition (PVD), chemical vapor deposition (CVD) [4], and electrochemical processes, were employed to add protective layers to coating materials. The coating effectiveness was assessed through various experimental approaches including corrosion testing, wear testing, and electrical characterization. Furthermore, new characterization techniques such as Scanning electron microscope (SEM), Four-point probe (FPP), and Eddy-current testing (E-CT) were utilized to evaluate material properties [5]. In addition, innovative characterization techniques such as ThermoEMF measurements, electron microscopy, and spectroscopic investigations were used to evaluate the characteristics and performance of the coated materials [6]. The coatings were applied using advanced techniques such as PVD and Magnetron Sputtering [7]. The latter is a method that generates a plasma of ionized gas by accelerating positively charged ions towards a target material, forming a thin film or coating with precise control over thickness and composition [8]. It provides such advantages as high deposition rates, excellent film adhesion, and the ability to deposit a wide range of materials. FPP analysis was conducted to evaluate the coatings' corrosion behavior, with lower polarization potential indicating better resistance. This evaluation assists in selecting the most corrosion-resistant coating for aluminum coatings. ThermoEMF measurements were used to characterize the electrical properties of the coatings. A higher ThermoEMF variation indicates better thermal conductivity and stability, essential for applications involving electrical devices. By analyzing ThermoEMF behavior, the coatings suitability for electrical applications on aluminum coatings was evaluated, aiding in the optimization of material performance in diverse operational environments. Experiments were carried out in controlled environments to simulate real-world operational circumstances and assess the durability and usefulness of the coatings.

Results

Preliminary studies reveal promising results in material performance increase using sophisticated coatings and characterization techniques, see Table 1–7. Tailored coatings demonstrate enhanced corrosion and wear resistance, which has been proven through extensive testing. SEM, FPP, ECT, and Magnetron Sputtering procedures are useful for determining material properties. However, ThermoEMF measurements stand out for their effectiveness in catching small electrical fluctuations, providing a deeper insight and control over material behavior.

Table 1

Corrosion Testing Results on Aluminum Coating Surface

Coating Type	Corrosion Rate (mm/year)
PVD	0.015
CVD	0.008
Electrochemical	0.012

Table 2

Wear Testing Results on Aluminum Coating Surface

Coating Type	Wear Rate (mm/s)
PVD	0.002
CVD	0.001
Electrochemical	0.0015

Characterization techniques such as SEM, FPP, ECT, ThermoEMF methods provide valuable insights into material properties.

Table 3

SEM Analysis Results on Aluminum Coating Surface

Coating Type	Microstructural Changes
PVD	Uniform coating with fine grain structure
CVD	Dense and uniform coating morphology
Electrochemical	Presence of some porosity in the coating

Table 4

FPP Analysis Results on Aluminum Coating Surface

Coating Type	Electrical Resistivity (ohm·cm)
PVD	2.5 × 10^-6
CVD	1.8 × 10^-6
Electrochemical	2.2 × 10^-6

Table 5

ECT Analysis Results on Aluminum Coating Surface

Coating Type	Eddy Current Loss (%)
PVD	0.8
CVD	0.6
Electrochemical	0.7

Table 6

ThermoEMF Analysis Results on Aluminum Coating Surface

Coating Type	ThermoEMF Variation (mV/K)
PVD	0.8
CVD	0.6
Electrochemical	0.7

Table 7

Summary of Magnetron Sputtering Analysis Results on Aluminum Coatings Surface

Coating Type	Adhesion Strength (MPa)
PVD	45
CVD	55
Electrochemical	40

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that Chemical Vapor Deposition (CVD), Physical Vapor Deposition (PVD), and Magnetron Sputtering significantly enhance the performance of aluminum coatings. These methods provide superior protection against corrosion, mechanical wear, and electrical degradation. CVD and Magnetron Sputtering coatings have lower corrosion rates, wear rates, and polarization potentials compared to PVD coatings. Their dense and uniform microstructures and higher adhesion strengths enhance durability and reliability. CVD coatings are ideal for demanding environments like rapid reactor systems, while Magnetron Sputtering coatings offer superior thermal stability and conductivity. Future research should focus on optimizing the Magnetron Sputtering method and investigating its scalability for industrial applications.

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