

### Some notes on diffusion of radionuclides through compacted clays

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May 1989

### **SVENSK KÄRNBRÄNSLEHANTERING AB** SWEDISH NUCLEAR FUEL AND WASTE MANAGEMENT CO

BOX 5864 S-102 48 STOCKHOLM TEL 08-665 28 00 TELEX 13108-SKB SOME NOTES ON DIFFUSION OF RADIONUCLIDES THROUGH COMPACTED CLAYS

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May 1989

This report concerns a study which was conducted for SKB. The conclusions and viewpoints presented in the report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily coincide with those of the client.

Information on SKB technical reports from
1977-1978 (TR 121), 1979 (TR 79-28), 1980 (TR 80-26),
1981 (TR 81-17), 1982 (TR 82-28), 1983 (TR 83-77),
1984 (TR 85-01), 1985 (TR 85-20), 1986 (TR 86-31),
1987 (TR 87-33) and 1988 (TR 88-32) is available
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Some notes on diffusion of radionuclides

through compacted clays.

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#### Abstract.

The apparent diffusivities of some simple cations i.e.  $\mathrm{Sr}^{2+}$ ,  $\mathrm{Cs}^+$  in water saturated bentonite indicates that diffusion takes place both in the pore solution and within the solvation sheath of the exchangeable cations. Data from some earlier diffusion experiments have been re-evaluated and the results suggest that diffusion within the solvation sheath of the exchangeable cations is the dominating mechanism for  $\mathrm{Sr}^{2+}$  and  $\mathrm{Cs}^+$ .

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#### 1. Introduction.

To make possible the assessment of long term storage of high level nuclear wastes in underground repositories understanding of the migration mechanisms in porous water containing materials is of great importance.

A clay backfill is generally assumed to create a first barrier to the transport of radionuclides when the canisters fail and diffusion through compacted water saturated bentonite clays has been the subject of several studies (1-12).

The experimental techniques used and the results obtained have earlier been discussed in some detail by Eriksen and Jacobsson (13). Methods of measuring diffusion properties of porous media have also recently been discussed by Lever (14). The transport of solutes is of great importance for many soil processes and the diffusion of ions and uncharged solutes through soil and clays have recently been comprehensively reviewed by Nye (15).

Applying Fick's first law  $F = -D \cdot \delta c/\delta x$ , where F is the flux, D the diffusion coefficient and  $\delta c/\delta x$  the concentration gradient, to a complex medium such as water saturated bentonite may be regarded as giving an operational definition of the diffusion coefficient. To explain the results obtained at varying experimental conditions a thorough understanding of the clay/water system is, therefore, required. Some of the models used to describe the diffusion in compacted bentonite will be discussed below.

#### 2. Components of diffusion coefficients.

In the overall movement of solutes through a water containing porous medium both solid and water play a part. If the diffusion is assumed to take place in the pore water only the flux per unit area of of the porous medium is linked to the concentration gradient in the pore water by the intrinsic diffusion coefficient for the pore water D<sub>ip</sub>

$$\mathbf{F} = -\mathbf{D}_{ip} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{C}_{p} \qquad /1/$$

If it is assumed that the solute is sorbed on the surface of the porous medium by a sorption reaction that is instantaneous and reversible the diffusion in one dimension is described by the equation

$$\theta \cdot \delta C_p / \delta t = D_{ip} \cdot \delta^2 C_{p/\delta x}^2 - \delta C_s / \delta t$$
 /2/

where  $C_p$  is the concentration of solute in pore water,  $C_s$  is the concentration of sorbed solute and  $\theta$  is the volume fraction of the pore water.

The quantity of solute sorbed is frequently measured per unit mass of porous medium and the ratio of the concentration of solute bound to the solid phase relative to the concentration in solution is given by the distribution coefficient  $K_d$ . Based on the assumptions given above the concentration of sorbed solute is related to the solute concentration in the pore water by the density of the porous medium and the distribution coefficient.

$$C_{s} = (K_{d} \cdot \rho) C_{p} \qquad /3/$$

and equation /2/ can be rewritten as

$$\alpha \cdot \delta C_p / \delta t = D_{ip} \cdot \delta^2 C_p / \delta x^2$$
 /4/

where  $\alpha = \theta + K_{d} \cdot \rho$  is the capacity factor of the porous medium. The total quantity of solute per unit volume of the porous medium is thus  $\alpha \cdot C_{p}$  and the total flux per unit area is  $D_{ip} \cdot \delta C_{p} / \delta x$ 

The apparent diffusivity is a measure of the distance that the solute has diffused and the appropriate diffusion coefficient is

$$D_a = D_{ip} / \alpha$$
 /5/

For weakly or non sorbing solutes

$$D_a = D_{ip} / \theta = D_p / \theta / 6 / \theta$$

where  ${\tt D}_{\rm p}$  is the pore-water diffusion coefficient.

The experimental data on cation diffusion in compacted clays can not be easily accommodated by this pore diffusion model and several researchers (16,17) have recently argued for the inclusion of an additional surface flux  $F_s$  that arises from the diffusion of the solute sorbed on the surface of the porous solid.

The total flux is in this case given by

$$\mathbf{F} = -\mathbf{D}_{ip} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{C}_{p} - \mathbf{D}_{s} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{C}_{s}$$
 /7/

where  $D_s$  is the surface diffusion coefficient and equations 4 and 5 are modified to read

$$\alpha \cdot \delta C_{p} / \delta t = D_{i} \cdot \delta^{2} C_{p} / \delta x^{2}$$
 /8/

where  $D_i = D_{ip} + K_d \cdot \rho \cdot D_s$  is the total intrinsic diffusion coefficient and

$$D_a = (D_{ip} + K_d \cdot \rho \cdot D_s) / \alpha \qquad /9/$$

#### 3. Clay- water interaction.

The clay used in many of the studies cited is the American Colloid Co type Mx-80 granulated Na bentonite, containing about 75% montmorillonite.

The mechanism of hydration and the structure of smectiteadsorbed water have recently been reviewed (18-19). It seems clear that the first stage in water adsorption involves solvation of the exchangeable cations (mainly in the interlamellar positions), the degree of solvation depending on the ability of the cations to solvate themselves. The ordered arrangement thus obtained for the first 1-3 first layers of water in contact with the surface remains unaltered even on addition of further water. As the water content is increased water is adsorbed on external surfaces and in micropores and the behaviour of the hydrated cations becomes gradually more similar to that of cations in aqueous solution. At a given water content the water adsorbed by smectites can thus be found in two different states. A general relationship between bulk density and content of internal water in percent of the total water volume in smectite clay is given in a recent paper by Pusch (20).

#### 4. Experimental techniques.

Several different techniques have been used for measuring diffusion properties of porous media. In this section we give a short description of some tracer techniques used to study diffusion in highly compacted bentonites.

#### 4.1 Through diffusion.

A compacted water saturated bentonite is sandwiched between two reservoirs (Fig 1).

The tracer is added to one of the reservoirs and the temporal change in the tracer concentration in the other reservoir monitored. The total amount of tracer  $Q(t) = C_2(t)V_2$ , accumulated in the initially tracer free reservoir is given by

$$Q/A \cdot 1 \cdot C_1 = D_i t/l^2 - \alpha/6 - (2\alpha/\pi) \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (-1)^n/n^2 \exp -D_i n^2 \pi^2 t/l^2$$
 /10/



Fig 1

With increasing t the exponential term rapidly decreases leaving the asymptotic solution

$$C_2 = (AC_1/V_2 l) (D_j t - \alpha l^2/6)$$
 /11/

where  $D_i$  is the intrinsic diffusion coefficient,  $C_1$  the inlet concentration,  $C_2$  the concentration in the outlet reservoir with volume  $V_2$ , A the cross-sectional area of the clay sample, 1 the sample thickness and  $\alpha$  the capacity factor.

The asymptotic solution thus gives a straight line with slope  $D_i(AC_1/V_2)$  and an intercept on the t-axis at  $t_e = \alpha l^2/6D_i$ . The capacity factor can be obtained from the intercept of the extrapolated asymptote with the  $C_2$ -axis. i.e. $C_2(0) = (AC_1 l/6V_2)^{\cdot \alpha}$ .

4.2 Back to back experiments.

A water saturated compacted clay sample is pressed in contact with a corresponding clay sample containing the tracer.



If the tracer is applied to a thin layer and the total amount of tracer is M then the tracer concentration at a distance x from the initial source at time t is

```
C(t) = [M/2A(P_at)^{1/2}] \exp(-x^2/4D_at) /12/
```



Fig 3

If one half is uniformly loaded with the tracer i.e extended initial distribution the tracer distribution is given by the equation

$$C/C_{o} = \frac{1}{2} \operatorname{erf}[\frac{1-x}{h}}{\frac{2}{h}} \cdot \frac{D_{a}t}{1/2}]$$
  
+1/2  $\operatorname{erf}[\frac{1+x}{h}}{\frac{2}{h}} - \frac{1}{2}$  /13/

where  $C_0$  is the initial tracer concentration in the loaded sample of thickness h and l the overall thickness of the clay samples.

In both cases only the apparent diffusion coefficient can be calculated directly from the diffusion data and the capacity factor must be determined in separate sorption experiments.

#### 4.3 Material.

The clay used in the experiments was the American Colloid Co type MX-80 granulated Na bentonite. The bentonite was dried at 105<sup>o</sup>C, compacted and thereafter water saturated. The experimental conditions are given in table 1.

#### Table 1.

Properties of diffusing medium.

Dry density	Bulk density	Vw <sup>/V</sup> w <sup>+V</sup> s	Water ratio
g·cm <sup>-3</sup>	g.cm_3	¥	8
1.8	2.12	32	17.7

#### 5.1 Anion diffusion.

The experiments were carried out using the through diffusion technique and the experimental results are given in table 2.

#### Table 2.

Anion	diffusion	in	compacted	Mx-80.	(Bulk	density	2.12	g.cm_2)
Ion	$D_{a} 10^{12}$		D <sub>i</sub> 10 <sup>14</sup>	۵		v <sub>w</sub> /v <sub>w</sub> +v <sub>s</sub>	α/(	$v_w/v_w+v_s$ )
	$m^2 \cdot sec^{-1}$		$m^2 \cdot sec^{-1}$					

C1-	92	31	0.0034	0.32	0.011
I-	35	21	0.0060	0.32	0.019
HS-	4.8	1.14	0.0024	0.32	0.008
AQS <sup>-*</sup>	8.2	0.23	0.0003	0.32	0.001
LS <sup>-\$</sup>	5.6	0.075	0.00013	0.32	0.0004

\* AQS = Antraquinone sulfonate

\$ LS = Lignosulfonate (Mw 30 000)

Assuming no sorption the relation between the pore diffusion coefficient  $D_p$  and the free water diffusion coefficient  $D_w$  can be written  $D_p = f \cdot D_w$  where f is an impedance factor. In the case of uncharged solutes the impedance factor takes account primarily of tortuosity ( $\tau^2$ ) and constrictivity ( $\delta$ ) and can be written  $f = \delta/\tau^2$ . In the case of anion diffusion the impedance factor also allows for Donnan exclusion.

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Taking the free water diffusion coefficient of  $Cl^-$  to be 2.03<sup> $\cdot$ 10<sup>-9</sup> m<sup>2</sup>s<sup>-1</sup> the impedance factor is 0.045, indicating marked constrictivity and/or tortuosity. The capacity factor is also very low compared to the volumetric water ratio. It is thus very clear that very little, if any, interlamellar anion diffusion takes place. If the anion "diffusion porosity" is assumed to represent the external pore-water (as described by Pusch) the Cl<sup>-</sup>, I<sup>-</sup> and HS<sup>-</sup> data indicate that with the exception of a few percent, the water is present as interlamellar water.</sup>

#### 5.2 Cation diffusion.

Diffusion coefficients for  $Sr^{2+}$  and  $Cs^{+}$  are given in table 3.

#### Table 3.

 $Sr^{2+}$  and  $Cs^+$  diffusion in compacted Na- bentonite. (Bulk density 2.1 g·cm<sup>-3</sup>).

Ion	Ref	$D_a \cdot 10^{12}$ $m^2 \cdot s^{-1}$	$V_w/V_w+V_s$	<sup>K</sup> d cm <sup>3</sup> ·g <sup>-1</sup>	D <sub>w</sub> ·10 <sup>9</sup> m <sup>2</sup> ·s <sup>-1</sup>
Sr <sup>2+</sup>	6	15+/-2	0.32	604	0.78
	5.9	1.5-12		2900	
Cs <sup>+</sup>	6	2.5+/-0.5	0.32	645	2.11
	9	1.4-2		1400	
	10	5.0			

According to the pore diffusion model, assuming no diffusion of sorbed exchangeable ions, the apparent diffusivity is described by  $D_a = D_{ip}/\alpha$  where  $\alpha = \theta + K_d \cdot \rho$ .

The impedance factor  $f = \delta/\tau^2$  is not known, but as we have not used oriented samples it is not likely to be higher than 0.5. Based on the free water diffusivities and  $K_{d}$  values given in table 3, the upper limits for D<sub>a</sub> are calculated to be  $0.34 \cdot 10^{-12}$  and  $0.9 \cdot 10^{-12}$  cm<sup>2</sup>·s<sup>-1</sup> for Sr<sup>2+</sup>and Cs<sup>+</sup> respectively, i.e lower than the experimentally measured apparent diffusivities. The experimental data can thus not be accommodated by the pore diffusion model. In a study on  $Sr^{2+}$ ,  $Cs^+$  and  $Co^+$  diffusion in compacted bentonite Murinen and co-workers varied the the Kd values by changing the ionic strength of the solutions used for water saturation of the bentonite. The electrolyte used was NaCl and the highest concentration was 0.6 mol·dm<sup>-3</sup>. By fitting the data to a model with surface diffusion included they calculated  $\theta$  D<sub>p</sub> and D<sub>s</sub>. The surface diffusion was found to account for 70-90 percent of the total transport in their experiments.

The idea of separating the cation migration in clays into two components i.e. the flux through the pore solution alone and the flux of exchangeable cations on the solid is not a new one. The overall cation transport in suspensions with low clay content (21, 22) as well as on water saturated clay films (23) have been explained by a model based on the assumption of diffusion taking place both in a solution phase and in the adsorbed state. The application of this concept does, however, require knowledge of the volume fraction occupied by the pore

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solution. It ought to be emphasized that the water associated with the sorbed exchangeable ions is not to be included. Mott (24) measured the diffusion coefficients of Na<sup>+</sup> and  $Sr^{2+}$ in oriented homoionic bentonite flakes with varying water content. He found the diffusion in dry clay to be very slow  $(D_a < 10^{-15} m^2 s^{-1})$  and to increase with several orders of magnitude on addition of 0.15-0.3 g water/g dry clay. This water content corresponds to 1-3 molecule layers of water. A detailed study on diffusion of the exchangeable cations Na<sup>+</sup>,  $Rb^+$ ,  $Cs^+$  and  $Ca^{2+}$  in montmorillonite containing 0-0.25 g water/ g dry clay was carried out by Calvet (24). He found the mobility of  $Na^+$  to be much reduced on addition of  $Ca^{2+}$  to a homoionic clay and that the effect was enhanced at low water content. According to Calvet this effect is due to the higher water affinity of  $Ca^{2+}$  as compared to  $Na^+$ , i.e competition for water in the slightly hydrated clay.

In the highly compacted bentonite ( $\rho = 2.12 \text{ g} \cdot \text{cm}^3$ ) used in our experiments the water content corresponds to 2-3 molecule layers of water. Most of this water is associated with the exchangeable cations and is thereby situated in interlamellar positions. Pusch (20) estimates that 75-85 percent of the water is present as "internal" water at the bulk density used in our experiment.

If it is assumed that the impedance factor for the cation transport in the pore solution (i.e interlamellar water not included) is the same as for the anions  $Cl^-$  and  $I^-$  and that the interlamellar water is totally associated with the exchangeable cations the diffusion coefficients in pore solution and in the solvated cation phase can be calculated. The results are tabulated in table 4.

#### Table 4.

Calculated diffusion coefficients for pore solution and solvated-cation phase.

Ion  $D_a \cdot 10^{12}$  f  $D_w \cdot 10^9$   $D_{ip} \cdot 10^{11}$   $D_s \cdot 10^{12}$   $m^2 s^{-1}$   $m^2 s^{-1}$   $m^2 s^{-1}$   $m^2 s^{-1}$   $sr^{2+}$  15 0.045 0.78 3.5 15<sup>a</sup> 12-13.5<sup>b</sup>  $Cs^+$  2.5 0.045 2.1 9.5 2.1<sup>a</sup> 0.5-1.3<sup>b</sup>

a : based on pore solution porosity of 0.0045

b : based on pore solution porosity of 15-25% of total water volume fraction (according to Pusch, ref 20).

The diffusion coefficients, calculated in this way, are somewhat higher, but of the same order of magnitude as those obtained by Murinen el al (17).

Some objections can be raised against the use of solutions with varying concentrations of electrolytes and complexing agents to vary the  $K_d$ -value in diffusion experiments. At low water ratios a redistribution of the water on the clay surface probably takes place which, according to the work of Calvet (25), may influence the diffusivity of the exchangeable ions.

All the experimental data indicate that diffusion within the solvation sheath of the exchangeable ions is a dominating transport process in highly compacted bentonite with low water content.

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- Chemical Engineering, Stockholm <sup>2</sup> Studsvik Nuclear, Nyköping
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#### Prediction of hydraulic conductivity and conductive fracture frequency by multivariate analysis of data from the Klipperås study site

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- Part 4: Groundwater flow conditions in a low angle fracture zone at Finnsjön, Sweden E. Gustafsson and P. Andersson. Swedish Geological Company, Uppsala, Sweden
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#### TR 89-20

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#### Rock quality designation of the hydraulic properties in the near field of a final repository for spent nuclear fuel

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#### TR 89-22

# Diffusion of Am, Pu, U, Np, Cs, I and Tc in compacted sand-bentonite mixture

Department of Nuclear Chemistry, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden August 1989

#### TR 89-23

#### Deep ground water microbiology in Swedish granitic rock and it's relevance for radionuclide migration from a Swedish high level nuclear waste repository

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