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**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF METHODS  
FOR DETERMINING SULFUR AND FORMS OF SULFUR  
IN COAL AND COAL-RELATED MATERIALS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Over 400 published papers, presentations at scientific meetings, and reports relating to the determination of sulfur and sulfur forms in coal and coal-related materials have been accumulated, classified, and an evaluation made of their content.

## **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF METHODS FOR DETERMINING SULFUR AND FORMS OF SULFUR IN COAL AND COAL-RELATED MATERIALS**

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### **SUMMARY**

#### **Introduction**

Effective, practical, standard methods have been developed, validated, and are widely used for determining the total sulfur content and the major forms of sulfur in coal. Despite the existence of these standard methods, a great deal of effort is being devoted to the development of new procedures for determining sulfur and forms of sulfur in coal and coal-related materials. A total of over 400 papers describing new or modified procedures for determining sulfur in coal have been located in the literature; including twenty-five such papers published in 1991 alone.

In part, the research on new methods for determining sulfur forms in coal is directed towards simplifying or reducing the cost of existing methods. Much of the research is also aimed at developing procedures applicable to a wider range of coals and coal-like materials. Another area of intense research the development of procedures to yield more information about the nature of sulfur in coal; of particular interest is the forms of organic sulfur in coal.

#### **Objectives of the Present Work**

The primary goal of the present work was to compile a bibliography of all existing procedures currently used or applicable for the determination of sulfur or the forms of sulfur in coal and coal-related materials. A second goal of this work was to classify those methods in a usable manner. And, a final objective was to perform a preliminary evaluation of the applicability of the methods.

#### **Bibliography of Methods**

In compiling the bibliography of methods, an effort was made to include all procedures which were intended to be used in determining sulfur or forms of sulfur in coal or coal-related materials. In addition, other papers were included which appeared



to have applicability to such analyses, but were not intended for that purpose. One example of the latter type of papers are methods proposed for chemically cleaning coal that appear to selectively remove only certain forms of sulfur from coal. Such methods might be modified for use in determining forms of sulfur in coal. Also included were methods for determining forms of sulfur in streams similar to those that might arise from the processing of coal, but have not been applied to coal-derived materials. Examples of these include several papers describing methods for determining inorganic sulfur containing compounds in aqueous solutions.

Over a thousand published papers dealing with some facet of sulfur in coal or other matrices were considered for inclusion in this bibliography, and over 400 were selected as being applicable to analysis.

### **Classification of Methods**

Two different approaches were used in classifying methods for determination of sulfur. Methods were classified primarily based upon the technique or instrumentation used. For example, all x-ray-based methods were placed in a separate classification. This choice of a method of classification was based upon the expectation that users will only apply those analytical methods that they possess the equipment and expertise to perform. In addition, some methods were classified based upon the forms of sulfur to which they were applicable. For example, methods for determining elemental sulfur were placed in a separate classification.

A summary of the classification of the methods is given in Table 1. As can be seen, wet chemical, x-ray, and combustion and pyrolysis methods dominate the listings. Within this table, papers were also classified by their dates of publication to give some indication of the current interest the procedure described. As might be expected, development of x-ray methods is still an area of active research. But, it is interesting to note that a great deal of effort is also currently being devoted to more the more classical wet chemical and combustion areas of analysis.

**Table 1. Summary of Methods for the Determination of Sulfur and Forms of Sulfur in Coal and Coal Related Materials**

<u>Type of Method</u>	<u>Number of Citations</u>			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>1991-1992</u>	<u>1986-1990</u>	<u>1981-1985</u>
Wet Chemical	80	4	9	10
X-Ray Procedures	132	13	47	42
Mossbauer Spectroscopy	17	1	3	3
Tracer Techniques	7	0	3	4
ICP and Atomic Absorption	3	0	2	1
Infrared, Raman and NMR	9	0	2	6
Secondary Ion MS	3	0	2	1
Chromatographic Methods	25	2	7	11
Combustion and Pyrolysis	64	4	16	14
Thermal Analysis	10	0	1	9
Electrochemical	5	0	4	1
Elemental Sulfur	16	0	7	3
Reduced Sulfur Compounds	20	0	2	4
Standards	7	0	4	3
Reviews and Commentaries	26	0	6	7

### **Evaluation of Methods**

The primary tool for evaluation of analytical methods was the data and descriptions contained in the published papers themselves. An effort was made to summarize the authors' descriptions of methods and results. Based upon our own experience, an effort was made to provide additional insight into the applicability of methods. In almost all cases, the papers evaluated describe methods developed to solve specific problems or demonstrate capabilities, and in almost all cases, at least some success was achieved.

One area of research that does invite comparisons among methods is the determination of the forms of organic sulfur in coal. At the present, there are at least five different approaches being pursued. Of these approaches, the examination of the x-ray

absorption fine structure appears to provide the greatest amount of information, but this technique requires the use of a high-intensity x-ray source that can only be provided by a synchrotron. The procedures based upon step-wise oxidation with perchloric acid require the least expensive equipment and do differentiate among different organic sulfur forms, but the use of highly-trained is required during any work with perchloric acid. Methods based upon programmed reduction of sulfur forms to hydrogen sulfide appear to provide the least information about the forms of organic sulfur in coal. Recent work with flash pyrolysis methods shows considerable promise as a usable technique for differentiating among organic sulfur forms in coal. Overall, the so-called CAPTO (controlled atmosphere programmed temperature oxidation) may represent the best compromise in that it appears to provide usable data on organic sulfur forms in coal, is usable by trained analysts, and makes use of equipment that is accessible.

With all analytical methods good standards are required. Developing standards for determining the forms of organic sulfur in coal appears to be a significant unmet challenge.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **SULFUR AND SULFUR FORMS BY WET CHEMICAL METHODS**

### **Modified ASTM and British Standard Procedures**

ASTM and British Standard Methods for the determination of total, pyritic, sulfatic, and organic sulfur in coal were designed to be used on normal, untreated coals. Most modifications of these methods have been proposed in order that the standard methods can be applied to abnormal coals, treated coals, and coal-like materials (2,4-6,8,12,13,16-20,22). Other modifications have been proposed for reducing the time or labor involved in performing the determinations (3,14,21). Alterations in the turbidimetric procedures for the analysis of sulfate have also been proposed (1,7,10,11). Chakrabarty has discussed the problems associated with applying standard methods to some low-sulfur coals (9). Kuhn (15) proposed to convert isolated sulfur to sulfide using lithium aluminum hydride as a reductant. The sulfide is then determined by precipitation of cadmium sulfide.

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#### Titrimetric Procedures

Several researchers have proposed titrimetric alternatives to the turbidimetric determination of sulfate arising from coal and related products (1-5,7-10,12,13,15). Of these, none appear to offer significant advantages over the titrimetric procedures first proposed by Fritz and co-workers in the mid 1950's (2,3). The original methods yield accurate and reproducible results when performed by a skilled analyst. The procedure proposed by Makhija (7) may have some utility if applied to the consecutive determination of several inorganic sulfur species, but is most applicable to waste streams rather than coal itself. Similarly the oxidative titration procedures by Krishna, Pillai, and Tiwari (6,11,16), are more suited to the determination of inorganic sulfur species in streams arising from the processing of coal rather than to the determination of sulfur species in coal itself. Skoog has proposed a titrimetric procedure for the determination of elemental sulfur (14) which could have utility in instances when a coal sample contained abnormally high concentrations of elemental sulfur.

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#### Wet Oxidation

All papers in this group describe wet digestion procedures to solubilize sulfur in coal as a prelude to its subsequent determination. With one exception, these procedures appear to be more complex and have no advantages over digestion with perchloric acid (discussed in a following section). This exception is the procedure by Finkleman (3) in which pyrite is oxidized with hydrogen peroxide. The rise in pH during the oxidation provides a rapid, semi-quantitative estimate of the pyrite content of the coal, and quantitative data can be obtained, at the expense of increased time, by determining sulfate in the digestate.

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#### Nitric Acid Extraction

Organic sulfur is determined in the ASTM procedure by the difference between the value for total sulfur and values for pyritic and sulfatic sulfur. The value obtained for organic sulfur is, thus, subject to the cumulative effect of any errors or uncertainties in the determination of total sulfur, pyritic sulfur, and sulfatic sulfur. Edwards (1) and Shimp (7) have reported that at least some pyrite remains in coal after nitric acid extraction. Given (3) reported that using particle sizes slightly larger or smaller than recommended by ASTM procedures has no significant effect on extraction of pyrite with nitric acid. Riley has proposed determining total sulfur in the residue after the extraction of pyrites as a direct measure of the organic sulfur content of coal (4-6). This procedure may have some applications for use in checking the results of ASTM determinations on unusual coal samples, but it appears to be subject to the same uncertainties as the ASTM procedures and introduces new uncertainties. If the ASTM extractions for sulfatic and pyritic sulfur are efficient and no organic sulfur is removed from the coal during the nitric acid extraction, then the results obtained by difference and by performing a total sulfur analysis on the residue should be identical. However, if some sulfatic or pyritic sulfur remains in the coal, organic sulfur values obtained by difference and by performing a total sulfur analysis on the residue will both be too high. On the other hand, if the nitric acid extraction removes

some of the organic sulfur from the coal, the ASTM procedure should provide a more accurate value than is obtained by performing a total sulfur determination on the residue. Friedman (2) has reported that in general the values obtained by difference and by performing total sulfur analyses on residues are comparable.

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#### Perchloric Acid Digestion

In 1932, G. Fredrick Smith first reported that the total sulfur content of coal could be determined by converting all sulfur in coal to sulfate by digestion in perchloric acid followed by the subsequent determination of the solubilized sulfate (7). Digestion

with perchloric acid is still the most effective means for dissolving organic matter as a prelude to trace metal determinations, sulfur determinations, or to other determination in which sample dissolution is required. The effectiveness of perchloric acid digestions arises because hot concentrated perchloric acid is an extremely powerful oxidant. However, cold dilute perchloric acid is at best a very weak oxidant, and the oxidative properties of perchloric acid are directly related to its concentration and temperature. Markuszewski (1-3) and McGowan (4-6) have proposed using the selective oxidizing power of perchloric acid to determine the forms of sulfur in a single sample of coal. Basically they first leach coal with perchloric acid at a low temperature to remove sulfatic sulfur, then at a higher temperature to remove pyritic sulfur, and finally at an even higher temperature to remove organic sulfur. This procedure appears very effective, but appears more complex than the ASTM procedures, and special precautions are required during the use of perchloric acid. Despite these limitations, the perchloric acid digestion procedure does appear very useful as an alternative for coals that cannot be analyzed by ASTM procedures, and other work indicates that the method can be extended to differentiate among different forms of organic sulfur in coal (2).

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#### Other Methods

A variety of different chemical treatments have been applied to sulfur groups in coal. The method by Willard (20) for determining sulfate in chromic acid and in chromium plating baths is of interest because this method, which was developed in 1929, serves as the basis for those still used. Burns (2) has proposed an interesting procedure for the determination of sulfate based upon extraction of the ion pair formed between sulfate and a quaternary ammonium salt into an organic solvent. Ignasiak has proposed a classical wet chemical procedure for determining different organic structures in coal (4). Gadyatskii separated minerals from coal by high temperature extraction using acenaphthalene as the solvent and the determined organic sulfur forms in the residue by chemical procedures (5). Ozdemir extracted coal with isooctane and then determined organosulfur compounds in the extracts by fractionation (14). Several researchers have also studied reactions with methyl iodide (3,6-10,13,15,18). Postowsky demonstrated that thioether groups in coal could be determined based upon their reaction with methyl iodide (15). Kavcic treated coal with acetone followed by methyl iodide to show that sulfur is predominantly in the form of ring structures (10).

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## X-RAY PROCEDURES

### X-RAY Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS)/Electron Spectroscopy for Chemical Analysis (ESCA)

XPS or ESCA provides elemental identification and oxidation/functional group information for all elements except hydrogen and helium (2,9,22). It is a surface analysis technique which reaches only the first 3-4 nm of the sample surface (12,22). The method is based upon ejecting a core electron from a sample with soft, near monochromatic, x-rays. The kinetic energy of the ejected electrons is determined, and from this the binding energy of the electron. Because each element has characteristic binding energies, individual elements can be determined. In addition, shifts in binding energies can be used to distinguish among different chemical environments for a given element. XPS is not generally considered as a quantitative technique (7), but reproducibilities as good as 10% have been attained in some cases (2). Quantitative determinations are hampered by variations in surface topography, crystallinity, and matrix effects. However, relative concentrations of different forms of the same element can be determined with accuracy because the effects are the same for all functional groups. For sulfur, the 2p peaks are examined. The binding energies of organic and pyritic sulfur are both about 163-164 electron volts whereas that of oxidized sulfur species, such as sulfate, are about 168-172 electron volts. Elemental sulfur has a binding energy about 1 electron volt different from that of pyritic sulfur, and the presence of elemental sulfur is theoretically detectable based upon broadening of the pyritic sulfur peak or by using peak deconvolution techniques.

XPS is most useful for determining changes in the forms of sulfur on the surface of coal during treatments. XPS has been used to look at changes in surface concentrations of sulfur during milling and physical cleaning (25). Other studies have involved elucidating the agreement between concentrations of sulfur at the surface obtained by XPS and bulk concentrations obtained by other techniques (3,4,8,15,21). Mixed results on the degree of correlation between surface and bulk concentrations were observed. XPS has also been used to study changes in sulfur form during oxidation (5,6,8,19,24), including chemical oxidation (1). One paper has discussed the use of XPS to semiquantitatively examine pyrite concentration and particle size as a function of particle size (5). Particular attention has been given to identifying different forms of sulfur in coal, including organic sulfur functionalities (10,13,14,16-18,23). Another application of XPS to sulfur in coal is the study of changes in sulfur forms during leaching of coal with hydrochloric and nitric acids (11).

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#### **Electron Microprobe, SEM-EDX and Automated Image Analysis Techniques**

Sulfur form analyses by these techniques is primarily by analysis of the S  $K_A$  x-ray emission. There have been different approaches taken with regard to instrumentation, detectors and sample geometry.

Much of the initial work was performed using electron beam microprobes with wavelength-dispersive x-ray spectrometers (1,4,7,17,18,30,35). This instrumentation

was designed for quantitative x-ray analysis of metallurgical and geological samples with a view to beam stability and optimized count rates. These systems worked fairly well on coal samples and much valuable information was obtained. Harris and co-workers (7) showed the consistent differences in sulfur content between macerals (exinite>vitrinite>inertinite as a rule). Harris, Raymond and Gooley developed a reasonably fast protocol and a petroleum coke standard for sulfur (6). Their later work (17) involved analyzing 15 grains of vitrinite alone for a very fast measure of sulfur content.

With the advent of energy-dispersive x-ray analyzers and quantitative analysis software for those analyzers, it became possible to extend sulfur analysis to scanning electron microscopes (SEMs) (2,3,5,15,20,21,22), and transmission and scanning transmission electron microscopes (TEMs and STEMs)(9-11,31-34). Energy-dispersive analyzers were needed since they afford a much higher count rate for the same beam current, and these latter microscopes operate at orders of magnitude less current than do microprobes.

Straszheim and co-workers were among the first to demonstrate this technique on an SEM. Their work involved estimating the variation in sulfur content among particles and within particles. The technique was also applied to samples of chemically and biologically processed coals. In some cases, a decrease in organic sulfur content was observed. In a number of cases, however, no statistically significant change in sulfur content was observed even though ASTM sulfur forms analyses (applied out of context because ASTM procedures have not been tested for such samples) did indicate a change. Maijgren et al. have also applied the technique to chemically processed coals (14). Kaegi (13) used essentially the same technique to study organic sulfur and chlorine in Illinois basin coals.

Wert and co-workers produced many notable papers dealing with the analysis of organic sulfur using a TEM. Sample preparation is more difficult for a TEM because the sample must be thin in order to allow a large fraction of the electrons to pass through the sample. However, use of thin samples does lead to an increase in spatial resolution. Wert and co-workers used the increased resolution to advantage in studying the sulfur gradient near pyrite inclusions. They found little or no

evidence of a sulfur gradient in raw coals. However, they did document the incorporation of sulfur from pyrite as organic sulfur upon heating samples above the pyrite decomposition temperature (450°C).

The above techniques focused on the direct analysis of organic sulfur. There have been some efforts directed towards analysis of all relevant sulfur forms. Straszheim and co-workers (23-29) have used image analysis to determine the sulfatic and pyritic sulfur contents from the area of pyrite and sulfate minerals in a polished section of coal in an embedding media. Solomon et al. (19) at Advanced Fuel Research have employed a novel approach to the simultaneous rapid analysis on all sulfur forms. They used a pellet formed from ground coal alone, i.e., no binder. They scanned areas of a size that would contain varying amounts of pyritic sulfur. Plots of sulfur vs. iron concentrations for all regions analyzed provided a measure of iron-sulfur stoichiometry from the slope of the fitted line, and the intercept at 0% iron indicated the organic sulfur content.

Moza et al. developed a technique which located particles and collected x-ray data for representative areas covering the entire particle (16). Thus, an overall chemical analysis was obtained. However, the subject of these investigations was ash chemistry, not sulfur analysis. Hurley and White (12) used x-ray fluorescence to determine the forms of sulfur in coal. They used the shape of the S  $K_{\beta}$  line to determine total sulfur content and to assign sulfur to pyritic and organic forms. This method was reasonably fast, but of course did not permit any spatial resolution of sulfur because it used an incident x-ray beam rather than a finely focused electron beam.

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### X-Ray Diffraction

X-ray diffraction (XRD) provides a means for identifying and in some cases quantifying crystalline materials such as pyrite in coal. Pollack (3) demonstrated the feasibility of determining pyrite in coal by analyzing mixtures of pyrite and activated carbon. Paris (2) determined total sulfur in coal by XRF and pyrite by XRD. As early as 1973, Schehl (4) computerized an XRD system for determining pyrite in coal. Other workers (1,5-7) have explored the effects of experimental variables on XRD determinations.

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### X-Ray Fluorescence

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) methods for the determination of sulfur in coal are based upon the irradiation of samples with high-intensity x-rays to cause the fluorescence of x-ray photons characteristic of elements. The intensity of the line at 5.373 Angstroms is a measure of the total sulfur content of a sample. A variation of XRF is proton-induced x-ray emission (PIXIE), in which the coal sample is bombarded with protons to produce the characteristic x-rays.

XRF is a rapid, relatively inexpensive, technique applicable to sulfur concentrations ranging from part per million to percent concentrations. Several investigators have reported on its applicability to coal and coal-related materials (1,2,5,6,12,13,16-20,22). XRF methods are subject to matrix effects which must be compensated for in order to obtain reliable data. Much of the work reported in the literature discusses ways to overcome those effects. Weber (21) oxidized and fused coal into a borax bead containing lead oxide which was used as an internal standard. Page (14) attempted to determine pyrite based on an XRF determination of iron. Paris (15) determined total sulfur by XRF and pyritic sulfur by XRD. Kimura (10-11) corrected results based on the concentration of other elements. Bhan (3) supplemented PIXIE results with those obtained by Mossbauer. Frigge (7) reported improved results after

grinding coal to a very fine particle size. Botto (4) dissolved coal completely and determined sulfur by XRF in the resulting solution. Furuya (8) employed a double crystal, high resolution XRF technique to distinguish among different oxidation states of sulfur in finely ground coal. Hurley (9) used soft x-rays and made measurements of the background, the top of the peak, and the sides of the peak to determine the total sulfur content of coal and obtain estimates of the concentration of forms of sulfur.

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#### Gamma Ray Spectroscopy

A technique analogous to XRF uses a radioactive sources such as  $^{238}\text{Pu}$ ,  $^{252}\text{Cf}$ ,  $^{241}\text{Am}$ , rather than x-ray tubes. Neutrons or prompt gamma rays emitted from the source cause elements in samples to emit gamma rays having characteristic wavelengths. Most of the work in this area involves the development of instrumentation and procedures suitable for on-line sulfur determinations (1,3-6-8,16,18) or demonstrations of the capabilities of such instruments (2,9-15,17,19).

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#### XAFS: XANES, EXAFS

Several research groups have developed and used an instrumental method to investigate the molecular structure of organic sulfur in coal and to quantify the functional forms of organic sulfur. In early work, Hurley and White (See X-ray fluorescence reference 9) showed the dependence of the sulfur  $K_{\beta}$  peak position on the form of sulfur and attempted to quantify pyritic, sulfatic, and organic sulfur. X-ray absorption fine structure (XAFS) spectroscopy determines the electronic structure and atomic environment of an element by examination of the fine structure of an x-ray absorption edge.

The region within about 20 to 50 electron volts of the absorption edge is called the x-ray absorption near-edge spectra (XANES). Structure in this area is derived primarily from photoelectron transitions to vacant levels and low-energy scattering resonance. The XANES spectra is, thus, quite sensitive to the detailed nature of the bonding of the sulfur atom and can be used to identify different compounds or

types of binding. The extended x-ray absorption fine structure or EXAFS is the oscillatory structure that begins at 30-50 electron volts above the edge and extends to about 500 to 1000 electron volts. These oscillations arise from interference between the outgoing and backscattered photoelectron wave functions. Fourier transform analyses of these yields a radial structure function from which interatomic distances and coordination numbers for the atomic neighbors of the sulfur atom can be determined.

Essentially all work using these phenomena for analyses has been performed by Gorbaty and co-workers (2-8,17,18) and Huffman and co-workers (9-14,19-21). Gorbaty developed a differential treatment of the XANES spectra and have shown that the amplitude of certain features in the third derivative are proportional to the relative amounts of sulfidic and thiophenic sulfur. Huffman adopted a least-squares approach to fit the XANES spectra directly with a series of s-p transition peaks, resonance scattering peaks, and functions representing the transition of photoelectrons to the continuum. They claim that the least-squares analysis method is capable of determining all major functional forms of sulfur.

Although each sulfur form has a characteristic peak in the XAFS spectrum, some structures overlap to such an extent that they are not presently resolvable. In addition, significant correction factors are needed to convert from raw intensities to weight fraction measurements. Despite these limitations, the results of these techniques appear quite impressive, but because high-intensity synchrotron x-ray source is required, it is unlikely that these procedures will be widely used.

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### **MOSSBAUER SPECTROSCOPY**

The Mossbauer effect involves the recoilless resonant emission and absorption of gamma rays by certain nuclei. Potassium and iron are the only nuclei commonly present in coal that exhibit the Mossbauer effect. The potassium spectra are difficult to obtain and reveal little data of interest. Thus, in its application to coal, Mossbauer spectroscopy provides a means for determining the presence of iron pyrite (1,3-5,7,9-11,13-17) as well as other iron containing compounds such as sulfates, oxides, hydroxides, and clays (6-8,12). At the present, however, the data obtained for forms of sulfur are generally less reliable than those from ASTM procedures. This has led to attempts to combine Mossbauer with other techniques (2,6).

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### RADIOACTIVE AND STABLE TRACER TECHNIQUES

The use of radioactive tracers in analysis basically involves determining a naturally occurring or introduced element based upon its emissions and assuming that non-radioactive isotopes of the same element behave in the same manner. Downey and Kelley (2,4) have applied isotope dilution techniques to the determination of sulfur. Varfolomeev spiked coal with organosulfur compounds containing  $S^{35}$  and followed their fate during coking (6). The use of stable isotopes relies on the observation that in some coals, pyritic and organic sulfur have different abundances of naturally occurring isotopes of sulfur. By determining the ratios of these isotopes in sulfate or elemental sulfur in the coal, the mechanism for the formation of these compounds can be determined. Buchanan (1), Hackley (3), Liu (5), and Westgate (7) determined the source of elemental sulfur extracted from coal based upon the relative concentrations of stable isotopes of sulfur.

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### ICP AND ATOMIC ABSORPTION

Inductively couple plasma/atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP/AES) is capable of simultaneously determining many elements in a single sample. However, it is less applicable to sulfur than to metallic elements. Caroli was able to determine sulfur in coal extracts and digestates by ICP/AES (1). McCurdy determined sulfur directly in coal by ICP/AES by grinding the coal to less than 6 microns and directly nebulizing the slurry into the plasma.

Atomic absorption spectroscopy is not directly applicable to sulfur. Hocking (2) isolated all major sulfur forms in coal and oil shale by extracting the sulfate with 10% perchloric acid, converting pyrite to  $H_2S$  with lithium aluminum hydride followed by its oxidation to sulfate with hydrogen peroxide, and oxidizing organic sulfur to sulfate by the "liquid fire" reaction. The isolated sulfates were then converted to barium sulfate, decomposed to barium carbonate, dissolved in HCl and the barium determined by atomic absorption. Surprisingly, despite the complexity of the method, relatively accurate results were reported.

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## INFRARED, RAMAN, AND NMR SPECTROSCOPIES

### Infrared and Raman Spectroscopies

Infrared spectroscopy is widely used to characterize mineral species and chemical functionalities in coal, but has too low of detection limits to determine sulfur functionalities in typical coals. Baruah (1) has claimed to observe iron-sulfur bonds in coal, but alternative explanations for the absorbances he uses are possible. Non-dispersive infrared detectors (3-5) are widely used in instrumental methods for determining SO<sub>2</sub> in gases evolved during coal decomposition. It appears the Raman spectroscopy has not been applied directly to the characterization of sulfur groups in coal but has been applied (2) to the determination of sulfur anions of the types that can be isolated from coal.

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### Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy

Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy is generally applicable to liquid samples and to functionalities present at relatively high concentrations. Thus, sulfur-33 NMR has been applied almost exclusively to the characterization of liquid fuels. Evans (1) used  $S^{33}$  NMR in conjunction with  $O^{17}$  NMR to characterize sulfinyl, sulfonyl, sulfonic acid, and other groups in coal liquids. Ngassoum (3) applied  $S^{33}$  and  $C^{13}$  NMR to characterize sulfur containing groups in petroleum. Rafii (4) used a derivitization technique using  $Sn^{119}$  to characterize sulfur compounds in petroleum.

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### SECONDARY ION MASS SPECTROMETRY

Secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS) generally involves bombarding the surface of a sample with negative oxygen ions causing surface material to be sputtered off. That material is then analyzed using a conventional mass spectrometer. In conjunction with microprobe analysis, fairly narrow beams can be directed towards the surface yielding a profile of elemental composition vs. location. During the sputtering process, surface layers are removed, and thus depth profiling is possible. This appears to be a very powerful technique, but has only been applied sparingly to coal.

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## CHROMATOGRAPHIC METHODS

### Gas Chromatography

Gas chromatography is applicable only to compounds or derivatives of compounds that are volatile. The use of gas chromatography for the determination of sulfur-containing compounds is enhanced greatly by the existence of the sulfur-specific flame photometric detector (2). Because it is limited to volatile compounds, gas chromatography is applied to the determination of volatile organic compounds isolated from coal by extraction, degradation, or other procedures or to the determination of volatile compounds in liquid or gaseous coal products. Chen, Timpe and White (2,11-14) have determined sulfur-containing compounds extracted from coal. Eglington and Ibarra have attempted to correlate the pyrolysis products of coal with its sulfur-containing constituents. Eisenberg, Kong, Nishioka, and Willey (4,7-9,15) have used gas chromatography to characterize sulfur-containing compounds in coal-derived liquid fuels. Hippo and Palmer (5,10) have oxidized coal and used identifications of sulfur-containing products of the oxidation to characterize the sulfur-containing groups originally present in coal macerals.

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### **Liquid and Ion Chromatography**

Liquid chromatography is applicable to non-volatile or thermally labile compounds that cannot be separated by gas chromatography. Nishioka (9) has used a variation of liquid chromatography, known as ligand-exchange, to selectively isolate sulfur-containing heterocyclic compounds from coal liquids. Miller (6) has used another form of liquid chromatography, known as electrophoresis, to the separation of pyrite. Ion chromatography (IC) is applicable for the rapid determination of anions in aqueous solutions. Coal can be leached with aqueous solvents, and ion chromatography then used to determine soluble anions. Or, coal can be decomposed and the total chlorine, nitrogen, sulfur, and phosphorus content of the coal determined in an aqueous solution of the decomposition products. Hona and Matusiewicz (4,5) report good results for the determination of sulfate in coal and ash leachates. Gent, Nadkarni, and Rigin (3,7,8) have reported good results for total sulfur in coal based upon ion chromatographic determination of sulfate in solutions arising from the decomposition of coal. Chriswell and Uddin (1,10) have used ion chromatography to determine sulfur species in streams arising from the chemical cleaning of coal.

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## **DETERMINATION OF SULFUR BY METHODS BASED UPON COMBUSTION AND PYROLYSIS**

### **Oxygen Flask Combustion**

Combustion in an oxygen flask (Schoeniger flask) provides a very rapid and convenient method for complete conversion of sulfur in coal samples to sulfate. In this method a sample of coal is folded in a filter paper, that paper is retained in a platinum grid attached to the stopper of the flask, a small volume of dilute (approximately 15%) hydrogen peroxide is placed in the flask, the flask is filled with oxygen, the filter paper is ignited, the stopper is inserted, the flask is inverted, and the sample burns in the oxygen atmosphere for a few seconds. Sulfur in the coal is converted into  $\text{SO}_2$ , dissolves in the peroxide and is oxidized to sulfate, and is then rinsed from the flask with distilled water. The sulfate is then determined by conventional procedures.

Ahmed (2) estimated the sulfur content based upon the pH of the solution arising from the combustion of coal in an oxygen flask. In other work, Ahmed added excess barium perchlorate to solutions and back-titrated the free barium with sulfuric acid (1,3,4). Ion chromatographic, gravimetric, turbidimetric, and other procedures are also applicable to determining sulfate in solutions arising from oxygen-bomb degradations of coal (5-7). When ion chromatography is used to determine sulfate, the fluoride, chloride, nitrate, nitrite, phosphate, and other anions are determined simultaneously. In the unreported work performed at the Ames Laboratory, an attempt was made to determine sulfur in chemically cleaned coal samples using oxygen flask combustion followed by ion chromatography. The results of those attempts were unsatisfactory because the level of sulfur in the filter paper was very high relative to the very low levels of sulfur in the treated coal.

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#### High-Temperature Combustion Techniques

A large number of high-temperature combustion methods have been described for determining the total sulfur content of coal. The methods are basically similar and differ only in the type of furnace used for combustion and the technique used for determining the evolved sulfur. In a typical procedure, coal is burned in a tube furnace under an oxygen atmosphere, with or without a catalyst, at temperature of 1000°C to 1500°C and the amount of sulfur dioxide evolved is determined. Several procedures have been used for determining the sulfur dioxide evolved or for determining the sulfate resulting from oxidation of the evolved sulfur dioxide. Acid-base titration (corrected for chlorine), iodimetric titrations, non-dispersive infrared analysis, and precipitation titrations using barium chloride as the titrant are the most common methods. Regardless of the exact combustion conditions or the method of analysis for the evolved sulfur dioxide, results invariably compare very favorably with those obtained by the ASTM eschka fusion method. LECO and Fisher (described below) sell automated instruments employing high-temperature combustion for total sulfur.

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#### Using LECO or Fisher Analyzers

Fisher Scientific and LECO both offer instruments usable for the determination of total sulfur in coal. In both cases coal is burned in an oxygen atmosphere, usually with a vanadium pentoxide catalyst, and the sulfur dioxide evolved is then determined. LECO instruments have employed both an iodometric and a non-dispersive infrared detector for the determination of sulfur dioxide. The Fisher instrument employs an iodometric titration in which the titrant is generated electrochemically. These automated instruments provide results faster, those results are generally more reproducible, and these techniques are less expensive than other ASTM procedures. However, any component of the coal sample that could alter the  $\text{SO}_2/\text{SO}_3$  ratio could lead to erroneous results in instruments using

the IR detector. And, the iodometric titration results could be affected by components in the coal that form reducing agents upon combustion. High levels of chlorine are believed to have adverse effects.

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#### CAPTO Method

The controlled atmosphere programmed temperature oxidation (CAPTO) method is still in the development phase, but the results published thus far show that the method provides an excellent means for determining major sulfur forms in coal and also differentiates among some forms of organic sulfur. In this method, coal is mixed with an inert substance and subjected to a programmed temperature oxidation. The sulfur dioxide, water, and carbon dioxide evolved are measured separately as a function of time by Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy to give a thermogram. Distinct peaks proportional to the sulfate, pyrite, and at least two forms of organic sulfur appear in these thermograms. Analyses apparently take several hours to perform and the FTIR detector used is expensive. The time involved and the cost of the instrumentation could lead to high-cost determinations. Current work involves reducing the cost per analysis significantly by performing eight oxidations simultaneously using a single, shared detector.

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#### **Pyrolytic Methods for Determining Sulfur in Coal**

Pyrolytic methods for determining sulfur moieties in coal are basically simple. Coal is heated in an inert atmosphere, the amounts and types of sulfur-containing volatile compounds are determined, and data on the amounts and types of volatile compounds are related to the types of sulfur originally present in the coal. However, the pyrolysis temperature, the rate of heating, the amount of coal, the volume of inert gas, the materials from which the pyrolysis reactors are constructed, and the methods for analysing the products all affect the determined components in the volatile compounds evolved. Thus, this simple procedure, has a multitude of variations. Recent work by Calkin and co-workers (3, 13, 14) is especially significant in establishing flash pyrolysis at temperatures ranging from 750°C to 960°C as a technique for the determination of three different forms of organic sulfur in coal. In some of the earliest work, Masciantonio (12) showed in 1966 that during pyrolysis at 625°C for 2 hours, evolution of sulfur-containing volatiles from model compounds was related to the structure of those model compounds. Aitken (1) studied the decomposition of thianthrene at 550°C and dibenzothiophene at temperatures ranging from 550°C to 950°C. Damst'e (6) pyrolysed samples at 610°C for 10 seconds and related the types of organic compounds released from kerogen, asphaltenes and coal to the parent sulfur-containing moieties. Ibarra (9,10) has studied the low-temperature pyrolysis of low-rank Spanish coals. Brown reviewed the pyrolytic methods available as of 1980 (2). Chou, Cleyle, and Lambert (4,5,11) have studied transformations of pyrite during pyrolysis.

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#### Reduction of Sulfur to H<sub>2</sub>S

The step-wise reduction of different forms of sulfur to hydrogen sulfide provides a basis for determining forms of sulfur in coal. Attar (1-7) and Majchrowicz (9-11) have done the most extensive work on a procedure for determining the forms of organic sulfur in coal based upon step-wise reduction to hydrogen sulfide. Mason, Purnell, and Wnekowski (12,15,16) have also reported correlations between hydrogen sulfide evolution and forms of sulfur. As applied by Attar, several peaks attributed to different forms of organic sulfur are produced, but all organic sulfur is not reduced to hydrogen sulfide. An independent (ASTM) analysis for total organic sulfur is performed and the difference between the total organic sulfur and the evolved forms is reported as complex thiophenes. These so-called complex thiophenes often constitute a major fraction of all the organic sulfur in a sample. Because total organic sulfur is determined by difference in the ASTM procedure, and complex thiophenes are determined by difference using the value for total organic sulfur, there is a considerable uncertainty in the values provided by this method for much of the organic sulfur in coal. Peeples (13,14) has proposed an interesting procedure for determining certain forms of organic sulfur in coal. Hyperthermophilic archaebacteria degrade only certain forms of organic sulfur in coal and release hydrogen sulfide. The amount of hydrogen sulfide evolved is, thus, proportional to the concentration of specific forms of organic sulfur in coal.

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### THERMAL ANALYSIS

Thermoanalytical techniques have also been used to examine pyrite in coal. Differential thermal analysis, which shows exothermic and endothermic occurrences as a sample is heated, has been used to identify pyrite in coal or coal ash (5,6), but has not been used for quantitative analyses. A similar technique, known as differential scanning calorimetry, has been used to quantify the pyrite content of coal by measuring oxidation exotherms as the sample is heated in an oxidizing atmosphere (7). However, additional work is required to assess the accuracy and precision of that approach. Other researchers attempted to use evolved gas analysis to monitor sulfur dioxide evolved from coal samples heated in an oxidizing atmosphere in a thermal analyzer (1). The sulfur dioxide evolution profiles could not adequately distinguish between pyritic and organic sulfur, although the application of peak deconvolution techniques may prove beneficial. In other work, the pyrite content of coal has been determined using a thermoanalytical technique known as thermomagnetometry (1-3,6,7,10). In that procedure, pyrite is determined in less than one hour by measuring the weight change induced with a magnet on  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  in coal ash while being reduced to  $\text{Fe}^0$  in a hydrogen atmosphere in a thermal analysis system. This technique assumes that all of the  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  in the coal ash was derived from pyrite. If siderite (iron carbonate) is present in significant quantities in the coal, a correction must be made for the iron associated with that mineral (10).

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### DETERMINATION OF ELEMENTAL SULFUR

Elemental sulfur is reported as organic sulfur when standard ASTM procedures are used for determining forms of sulfur in coal. Because the amount of elemental sulfur in most coals is very low, the inaccuracies in organic sulfur values are generally negligible. Oxidation of pyrite likely leads to the formation of elemental sulfur in coal (4,6), and Cassagrande (3) has reported that elemental sulfur can be incorporated into coal as organic sulfur. Recently, interest in elemental sulfur in coal has intensified because of the development of a coal cleaning process in which a significant amount of organic sulfur is removed from coal by extraction with perchloroethylene and recovered as elemental sulfur (2,11,13,16).

Most methods for determining elemental sulfur in coal involve its extraction with a solvent followed by its determination by gas chromatography. Richard (14) extracted elemental sulfur from coal as well as ash particles and soil samples using cyclohexane as the solvent followed by determination by gas chromatography using an electron capture detector. Richard found levels of sulfur in coal ranging from 150 to 1000 parts per million, in ash from 9 to 200 parts per million, and in water from a pond at a coal washing plant at 38 parts per million. Richard also determined elemental sulfur in water samples exposed to coal by absorption on Amberlite XAD-2 resin, elution with cyclohexane, and determination in the solvent by gas chromatography using an electron capture detector. Duran (9) determined elemental sulfur in coal by a similar procedure. He found concentrations ranging from 300 to 1550 parts per million in aged coals and concentrations below his detection limit of 5 parts per million in pristine coals. Beyer (1) determined low levels of elemental sulfur in coal which had been subjected to biological cleaning. Several researchers have reported procedures for the direct determination of elemental sulfur in soils and sediments (5,8). Chen (5) extracted marine sediments with hexane, benzene, toluene, petroleum ether, or an aniline-benzene mixture. Picogram levels of elemental sulfur were then determined in the extract by gas chromatography. Helm (12) also extracted sulfur from sediments with hexane and determined it in the extract by gas chromatography.

Although gas chromatography is used most widely for determination of elemental sulfur, other procedures have been proposed. Feigl (10) proposed a spot test, and Skoog (15) a titrimetric procedure. Chriswell (7) isolated elemental sulfur from coal-derived humic acids by a capillary-action extraction procedures using a fiberglass wick. The essentially pure sulfur isolated on the wick was determined using a Fisher analyzer.

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#### DETERMINATION OF SULFIDES, SULFITES, AND OTHER REDUCED SULFUR COMPOUNDS

In a typical coal, pyrite, organic sulfur compounds, sulfate, and elemental sulfur likely account for well over 99% of all the sulfur. However, other sulfur-containing compounds can arise during the processing of coal. A large number of procedures are applicable to determining other sulfur forms in coal or in streams resulting from coal processing. Methods developed for the determination of sulfide include spectrofluorometry (2); iodometric titration (3,4,10,11,18); chemiluminescence (5); silver titrations (9); polarography (13); and by gas purging (14). Sulfite has been determined colorimetrically (6); by polarography (8,13); and by chemiluminescence (19). Thiosulfate may be determined by iodometric titration (2,3,11,18). Bald (1) has proposed to use halopyridinium salts for the titration of thiols, and Horner (7) the determination of thioethers by oxidation with hypochlorite. Ikeda (9) has developed an argenimetric titration for polysulfides.

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#### **STANDARDS FOR USE IN COAL ANALYSES**

In the United States, the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) formerly the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) is the primary source of certified standards for use in evaluating methods for determining sulfur in coal. Gills (2) reported on the procedures used by the NIST to certify standard reference materials. Griepink (3) has reported on the certification of six coals by the European

Community. Beyond these certified standards, other workers have described procedures and materials for use as standards for specific determinations. Castle and others (1) described procedures for synthesizing compounds which could be used as standards during the determination of compounds isolated from coal. Irgum (4) addressed the problem of the instability of sulfite standards by proposing a stable surrogate standard. Luck (6) prepared and analyzed synthetic pyrite, which could be used as a standard. Moore (7) demonstrated that inorganic sulfate was usable as a standard sulfur for certain determinations.

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