

Next Generation Anodes for Lithium-ion Batteries: Thermodynamic Understanding and Abuse Performance (Sandia National Laboratories)

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Background

As we develop new materials to increase performance of lithium ion batteries for electric vehicles, the impact of potential safety and reliability issues become increasingly important. In addition to electrochemical performance increases (capacity, energy, cycle life, etc.), there are a variety of materials advancements that can be made to improve lithium-ion battery safety. Issues including energetic thermal runaway, electrolyte decomposition and flammability, anode SEI stability, and cell-level abuse tolerance behavior. Introduction of a next generation materials, such as silicon based anode, requires a full understanding of the abuse response and degradation mechanisms for these anodes. This work aims to understand the breakdown of these materials during abuse conditions in order to develop an inherently safe power source for our next generation electric vehicles.

The effect of materials level changes (electrolytes, additives, silicon particle size, silicon loading, etc.) to cell level abuse response and runaway reactions will be determined using several techniques. Experimentation will start with base material evaluations in coin cells and overall runaway energy will be evaluated using techniques such as differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), thermogravimetric analysis (TGA), and accelerating rate calorimetry (ARC). The goal is to understand the effect of materials parameters on the runaway reactions, which can then be correlated to the response seen on larger cells (18650). Experiments conducted showed that there was significant response from these electrodes. Efforts to minimize risk during testing were taken by development of a smaller capacity cylindrical design in order to quantify materials decision and how they manifest during abuse response.

Results

This work continues the efforts from last year, which aim to understand the fundamental reactions and quantify response from silicon based anodes under abusive conditions. This included evaluation of anodes containing between 0 and 15 wt% silicon from a variety of sources. Investigations were completed on coin cell and 1.25 Ah 18650 form factors. Several experiments showed a high level of gas generation and overall runaway for cells containing silicon electrodes. To further understand the response of these materials, this work focused on understanding the effect of several factors impacting runaway response and gas generation including solvent selection, electrode processing, silicon content, and the effect of water. Previous efforts to evaluate these parameters in 18650 cell form factors

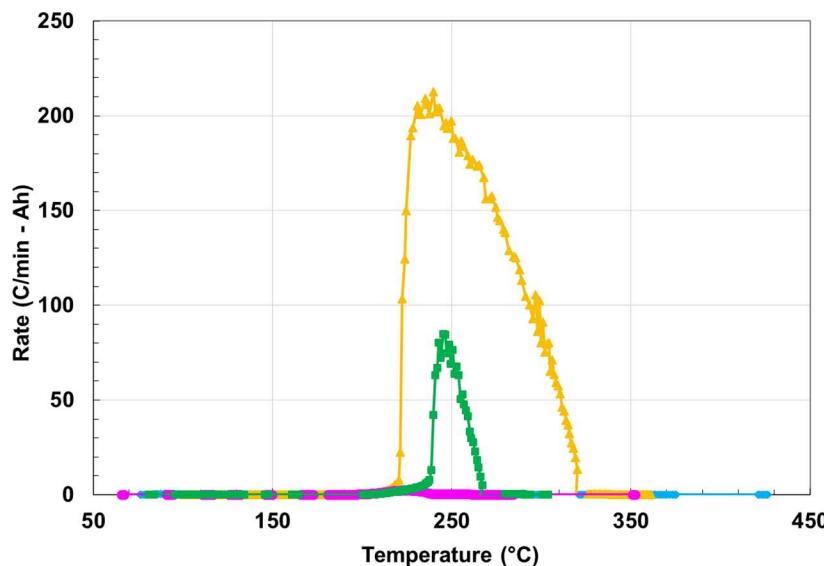


Figure 1 - Accelerating rate calorimetry (ARC) response for 18650 cells with 15 wt% silicon. Response is shown for two separate samples, shown in green and yellow. Heating rate is not normalized to active material content, so peak heating rates and overall runaway enthalpy is shown for qualitative purposes only.

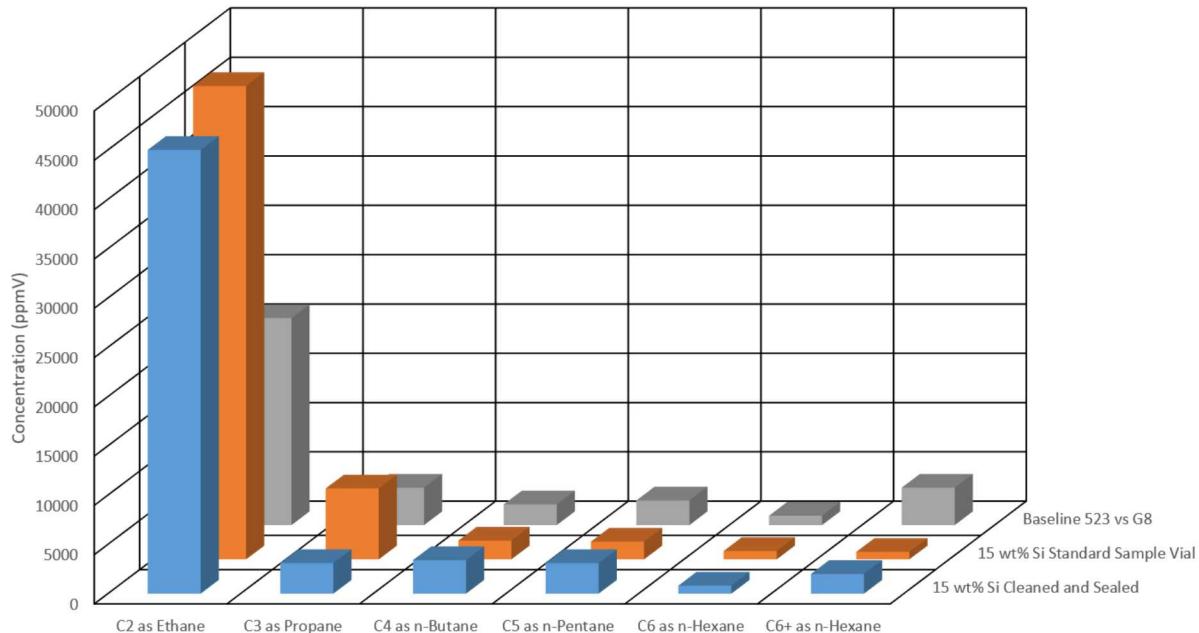


Figure 2 – Gas sampling data that compares hydrocarbon generation during runaway.

using accelerating rate calorimetry (ARC) proved difficult due to the gas generation and temperatures involved during runaway. In order to try and quantify these effect, 18650 cells were made with electrodes cut to a much smaller overall cell capacity of roughly 600 mAh nominal capacity. Figure 1 shows the ARC response for 18650 cells with 15 wt% silicon. Results are shown for two different silicon ARC evaluations (green and yellow). This behavior shows the incredibly inconsistent responses observed using cells with silicon anodes. Heat generation, gas generation, and overall response is not easy to predict.

Figure 2 shows a subset of data from the analysis done on gas samples that were taken during ARC testing. This was done to try and evaluate species evolved during runaway. Similar to previous reports, the baseline graphite cells (grey) show less short chain hydrocarbon generation. Silicon containing materials show increased ethane generated during runaway. This indicates a higher degree of reactivity for cells containing the silicon based anodes.

Conclusions

This work demonstrates that there is an impact on safety response with nanoscale silicon materials compared to graphite based anodes. Additionally, there appears to be a fundamental difference in abuse response based on more than just silicon content, particle size, and state of charge for the electrodes. Control of surface reactivity is essential to both control response homogeneity (for quantification) and understand the mechanisms during abuse conditions with silicon anodes.

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