



FIRST Newsletter

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G6 LEONARDO: Fast and Reliable Oxygen and Hydrogen Determination in Copper

By Peter Papelewski, Product Line Manager - OES and CS/ONH Analysis, Bruker AXS GmbH, Karlsruhe, Germany

Introduction

Oxygen is used in smelting processes to remove unwanted elements such as sulfur or iron from copper ore in order to retrieve pure copper. A desire for “oxygen-free copper” (OFC, $O \leq 10$ ppm) makes the determination of oxygen an essential quality control criterion.

Because of its highly conductive character, Cu-ETP (Electrolytic Tough Pitch Copper) is the most widely used type of copper. It is known to have relatively high oxygen concentrations (up to ~ 600 ppm) and is, as such, together with hydrogen, more prone to be affected by the so-called “hydrogen sickness” or “hydrogen disease” of copper.

Hydrogen is the most prominent reason for the formation of voids and “bubbles” in solid metals and can thus create lattice defects altering the mechanical properties of the material. Hence, determining the amount of oxygen and hydrogen is

essential for process and quality control in copper production and refining.

The G6 LEONARDO provides a cost-effective, efficient and reliable means of determining oxygen and hydrogen in this material.



Measuring Principle

The determination of oxygen and hydrogen in solids is based on fusing the sample in a graphite crucible under a flow of inert gas: inert gas fusion (IGF). The G6 LEONARDO is equipped with a high-power electrode furnace, allowing sample temperatures of up to 3000 °C to decompose, even refractories. Under the applied conditions, oxygen in the sample reacts with the carbon of the graphite crucible to quantitatively form carbon monoxide (CO). Hydrogen in the sample is released as H_2 during melting.

CO is evaluated by advanced, non-dispersive infrared detectors, while hydrogen is determined using a thermal-conductivity detector. CO and H_2 are determined directly, absolutely unchanged, 1:1, and with the ideal detection technique by this Smart Molecule Sequence™. During a standard analytical cycle, the crucible is outgassed to remove contaminants. This is achieved by heating it to a temperature ~ 200 °C above the analysis temperature in an outgassing step prior to analysis, resulting in negligible blank values.

Typical sample masses for the determination of oxygen and hydrogen are 0.3 - 1.0 g, which can be analyzed without using additional fluxes. The shielded, rotating sample port of the G6 LEONARDO can transfer samples of different shapes like pieces, chips and granules into the crucible without jamming or usage of additional capsules. If powdered samples are analyzed, tin or nickel capsules are used, for which a blank must be determined.

Tin can be used as a flux to aid melt homogeneity and release of oxygen and hydrogen from the material.



FusionControl – Temperature Matters

The temperature applied to the sample is monitored by an integrated pyrometer (FusionControl) to prevent overheating and formation of undesirable byproducts. Virtual modes like the “power by temperature” mode ensure stable conditions throughout the analysis.

Sample Preparation

If not present in a suitable form, samples can be produced in pin or piece form by punching or cutting. Particularly for oxygen determination, existing surface alteration must be removed by etching, first with concentrated HCl for 3 min., and then with an acid mixture for 1 min:

acetic acid (99%), nitric acid (65%) and
phosphoric acid (85%), each in equal volumes

followed by rinsing with distilled water and acetone, three times each.

If the sample was freshly produced, a rinse in acetone and subsequent drying with warm air is sufficient.

Please refer to ASTM E 2575 for a detailed description of the standard practice for sampling and sample preparation of copper and copper alloys.

Method Parameters

The FUSION.ELEMENTS software introduces virtual control modes for the electrode furnace. This allows direct input of the temperature, although the control mode is power or current.

- Furnace Control: Power (virtual by temperature)
- Outgassing: 1800 °C, 45 s
- Analysis Delay: 1600 °C, 10 s
- Analysis: 1600 °C, isothermal
- Analysis Time: 100-120 s (N₂ carrier gas)

The resulting curve of temperature vs. time is graphically visualized in the FUSION.ELEMENTS software.

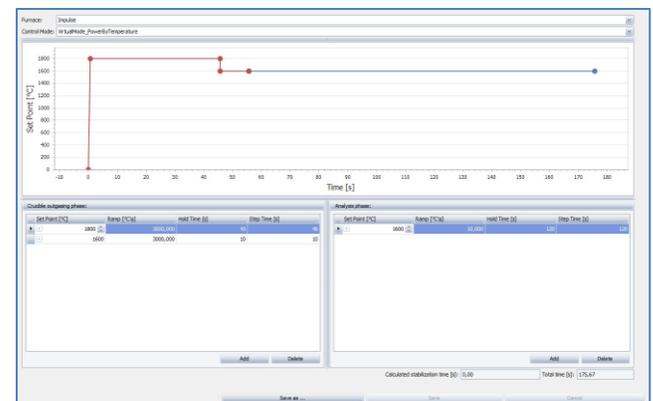


Fig. 1: Electrode furnace programming for OH in copper in FUSION.ELEMENTS. Red: outgassing and delay; blue: analysis time.

Calibration

The calibration of the analyzer is performed using NIST, EZRM or other suitable reference materials. Because of oxygen surface alteration, suitable calibration standards for oxygen are available in pin or ball form and often coated with gold (balls) or tin (pins). There are no certified reference materials (CRM) available for hydrogen in copper. However, for this purpose, steel standards can be used.

Procedure

I. Determination of the blank value

From the Calibration Wizard, run a minimum of 3 replicates of the blank value by placing a graphite crucible onto the lower electrode tip and analyze.

To establish a blank for the analysis of powdered samples using capsules, place a capsule (leave capsule open) into the sample port of the analyzer

before analyzing. Clean the upper and lower electrode between the replicates.

II. Measuring reference materials

1. In the calibration wizard, choose the appropriate method. Select CRMs for calibration from the list of standards. If not present, add them with designation, certified concentration and certified error.
2. Weigh ~1.0 g of a reference material, enter its exact mass in the software, and place the sample into the sample funnel.
3. Clean the upper and lower electrode, place a graphite crucible on the tip of the lower electrode and analyze.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 a minimum of three times for each reference material used.

Calibrate the method with the blank values recorded under I. and the results obtained with reference materials under II. (For more details refer to the user manual).

III. Sample measurement

1. In the Measurement Center, weigh an appropriate amount of the prepared sample, enter its exact mass in the software, and place the sample into the sample funnel.
2. Place a graphite crucible on the tip of the lower electrode and analyze.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 for sample analysis. Clean upper and lower electrode at regular intervals and exchange glass wool in the dust trap as needed.

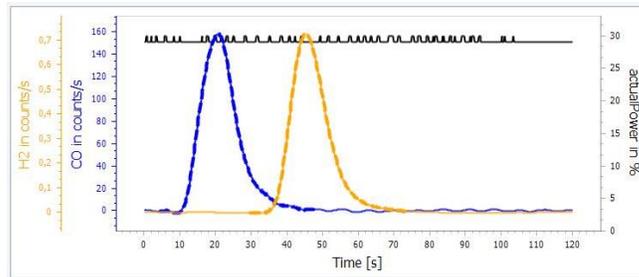


Fig. 2: Peak example OFC

Typical Results

The reproducibility of the G6 LEONARDO and the method outlined is demonstrated by a series of repetitive measurements of standards and production samples.

AR 147

certified values: O: 7 (±1) ppm
H: not certified

Mass / g	Oxygen / ppm	Hydrogen / ppm
0.5361	6.7	0.9
0.4750	6.5	0.9
0.4521	7.0	1.0
0.5586	6.4	0.9
0.5092	6.9	1.1
Mean ¹⁾	6.7	1.0
STD ¹⁾	0.3	0.1

¹⁾ Mean = arithmetic average; STD = absolute standard deviation (1σ)

AR 149

certified values: O: 0.0312 (± 0.0005) %
H: not certified

Mass / g	Oxygen / %	Hydrogen / ppm
0.3379	0.0314	0.7
0.2842	0.0313	0.4
0.3299	0.0309	0.4
0.3455	0.0315	0.7
0.3776	0.0310	0.4
Mean ¹⁾	0.0312	0.5
STD ¹⁾	0.0003	0.2

Cu-Rod (untreated production sample)

Mass / g	Oxygen / %	Hydrogen / ppm
0.5112	0.0250	3.9
1.0013	0.0256	3.3
0.8679	0.0251	4.0
0.9841	0.0254	3.6
0.6237	0.0246	3.2
Mean ¹⁾	0.0251	3.6
STD ¹⁾	0.0004	0.4

Summary

The G6 LEONARDO provides the required precision in a compact and easy to maintain form. Its SampleCare™ mechanism and the powerful but easy to use software allow robust and economic operation. This makes the G6 LEONARDO an ideal choice for the quality control of any metal production industry.