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Reduction of CO\textsubscript{2} to CO and O\textsubscript{2} in the solid oxide electrolysis cell (SOEC) has the potential to play a crucial role in closing the CO\textsubscript{2} loop. Carbon deposition in nickel-based cells is however fatal and must be considered during CO\textsubscript{2} electrolysis. Here, the effect of operating parameters is investigated systematically using simple current-potential experiments. Due to variations of local conditions, it is shown that higher current density and lower fuel electrode porosity will cause local carbon formation at the electrochemical reaction sites despite operating with a CO outlet concentration outside the thermodynamic carbon formation region. Attempts at mitigating the issue by coating the composite nickel/yttria-stabilized zirconia electrode with carbon-inhibiting nanoparticles and by sulfur passivation proved unsuccessful. Increasing the fuel electrode porosity is shown to mitigate the problem, but only to a certain extent. This work shows that a typical SOEC stack converting CO\textsubscript{2} to CO and O\textsubscript{2} is limited to as little as 15–45% conversion due to risk of carbon formation. Furthermore, cells operated in CO\textsubscript{2}-electrolysis mode are poisoned by reactant gases containing ppb-levels of sulfur, in contrast to ppm-levels for operation in fuel cell mode.

**General information**

State: Published
Organisations: Department of Energy Conversion and Storage, Applied Electrochemistry, Haldor Topsoe AS
Contributors: Skafte, T. L., Blennow, P., Hjelm, J., Graves, C. R.
Pages: 54-60
Publication date: 2017
Peer-reviewed: Yes

**Publication information**

Journal: Journal of Power Sources
Volume: 373
ISSN (Print): 0378-7753
Ratings:
BFI (2019): BFI-level 1
Web of Science (2019): Indexed yes
BFI (2018): BFI-level 1
Web of Science (2018): Indexed yes
BFI (2017): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2017): CiteScore 7 SJR 2.202 SNIP 1.536
Web of Science (2017): Impact factor 6.945
Web of Science (2017): Indexed yes
BFI (2016): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2016): CiteScore 6.22 SJR 1.944 SNIP 1.5
Web of Science (2016): Indexed yes
BFI (2015): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2015): CiteScore 6.34 SJR 1.9 SNIP 1.667
Web of Science (2015): Indexed yes
BFI (2014): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2014): CiteScore 6.3 SJR 1.964 SNIP 2.042
Web of Science (2014): Indexed yes
BFI (2013): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2013): CiteScore 5.63 SJR 1.975 SNIP 2.137
Web of Science (2013): Impact factor 5.211
ISI indexed (2013): ISI indexed yes
Web of Science (2013): Indexed yes
BFI (2012): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2012): CiteScore 5.04 SJR 2.282 SNIP 2.006
Web of Science (2012): Impact factor 4.675
ISI indexed (2012): ISI indexed yes
Web of Science (2012): Indexed yes