Selected aspects of materials behavior during severe nuclear accidents in nuclear reactors

Martin Steinbrück

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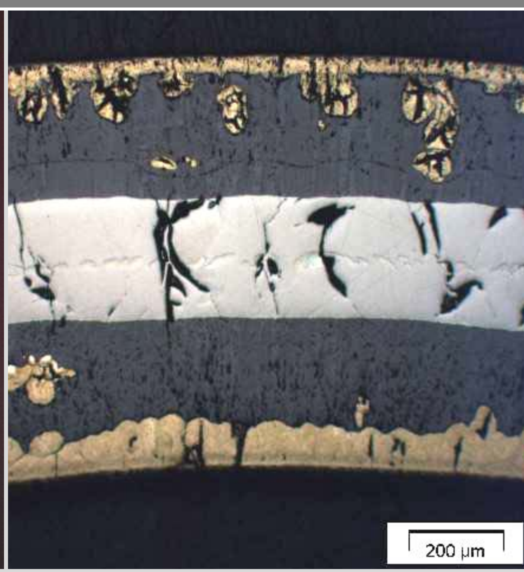
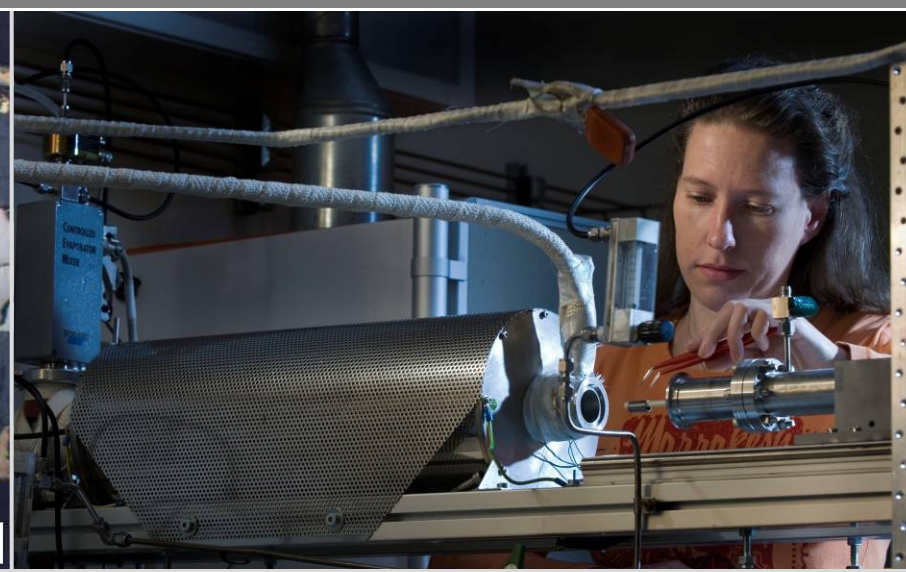
Institute for Applied Materials, IAM-AWP / Program NUKLEAR





Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Founded in 2009

= FZK research center (1956) + University Karlsruhe (1825)

= 9000 employees

= 23 000 students

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Outline

- Phenomenology of severe accidents in light water reactors (LWR)
- Summary of high-temperature oxidation of zirconium alloys in various atmospheres
- Behavior of boron oxide control rods during severe accidents
- Silver-indium-cadmium control rod failure during severe accidents

LWR severe accident scenario - I

- Loss of coolant causes steady heatup of the core due to
  - Residual decay heat
  - Reduced heat transfer to the remaining steam
- From ca. 1000°C oxidation of zirconium alloy cladding becomes significant leading to
  - Mechanical degradation of claddings and loss of barrier effect
  - Production of hydrogen
  - Release of heat
- From ca. 1250°C chemical interactions between the different core materials (stainless steel, Zr alloys, boron carbide …) lead to the local formation of melts significantly below the melting temperatures of the materials

LWR severe accident scenario - II

How to stop the accident early in the reactor pressure vessel (RPV):

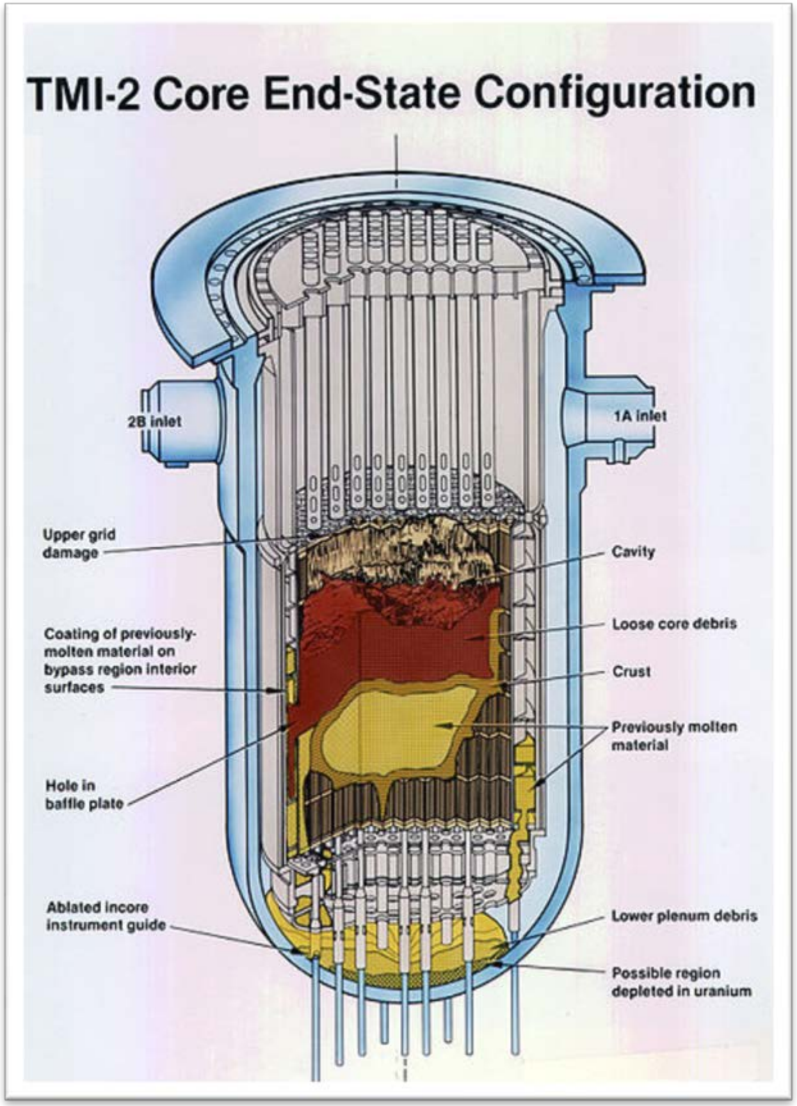
- Reflood and cooling as early as possible.

If successful:

- Significant gain of safety and prevention of high loads to RPV.

If not successful:

- Formation of melt pool in the core and relocation of melt/debris to the lower plenum (in-vessel, see TMI-2).
- Subsequently, failure of the RPV and release of corium melt into the containment (ex-vessel, see Chernobyl, Fukushima)



Core materials in Light Water Reactors

- UO_2(/PuO_2) fuel: 100-200 t
- Zry cladding + grid spacers: 20-40 t
- Zry canister (BWR): 40 t
- Various steels, Inconel: >500 t (including RPV)
- B_4C absorber (BWR, VVER, …): 0.3-2 t
- AgInCd absorber (PWR): 3-5 t

Environment

- **Water, steam**
- Air
- Nitrogen

} After failure of RPV/primary circuit

PWR fuel assembly

BWR control blade

High-temperature oxidation of zirconium alloys

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- In steam, oxygen, nitrogen, air, and various mixtures
- Zircaloy-2, Zircaloy-4, Duplex, M5®, Zirlo™, E110 and others
- 2-cm rod segments
- Temperature: 600-1600°C
- Hydrogen behavior

Composition of zirconium cladding alloys for nuclear fuel rods

Element	Zircaloy-4	D4	M5	E110	ZIRLO
Nb	-	-	**1**	**1**	**1**
Sn	**1.5**	**0.5**	0.01	**-**	**1**
Fe	0.2	**0.5**	0.05	0.008	0.11
Cr	0.1	0.2	0.015	0.002	< 0.01

Oxidation of zirconium alloys – chemical reactions

	ΔH_f at 1500 K
$Zr + 2H_2O \rightarrow ZrO_2 + 2H_2$	-585 kJ/mol
$Zr + O_2 \rightarrow ZrO_2$	-1083 kJ/mol
$Zr + 0.5N_2 \rightarrow ZrN$	-361 kJ/mol

- Release of hydrogen and heat
- Hydrogen either released to the environment or absorbed by Zr metal

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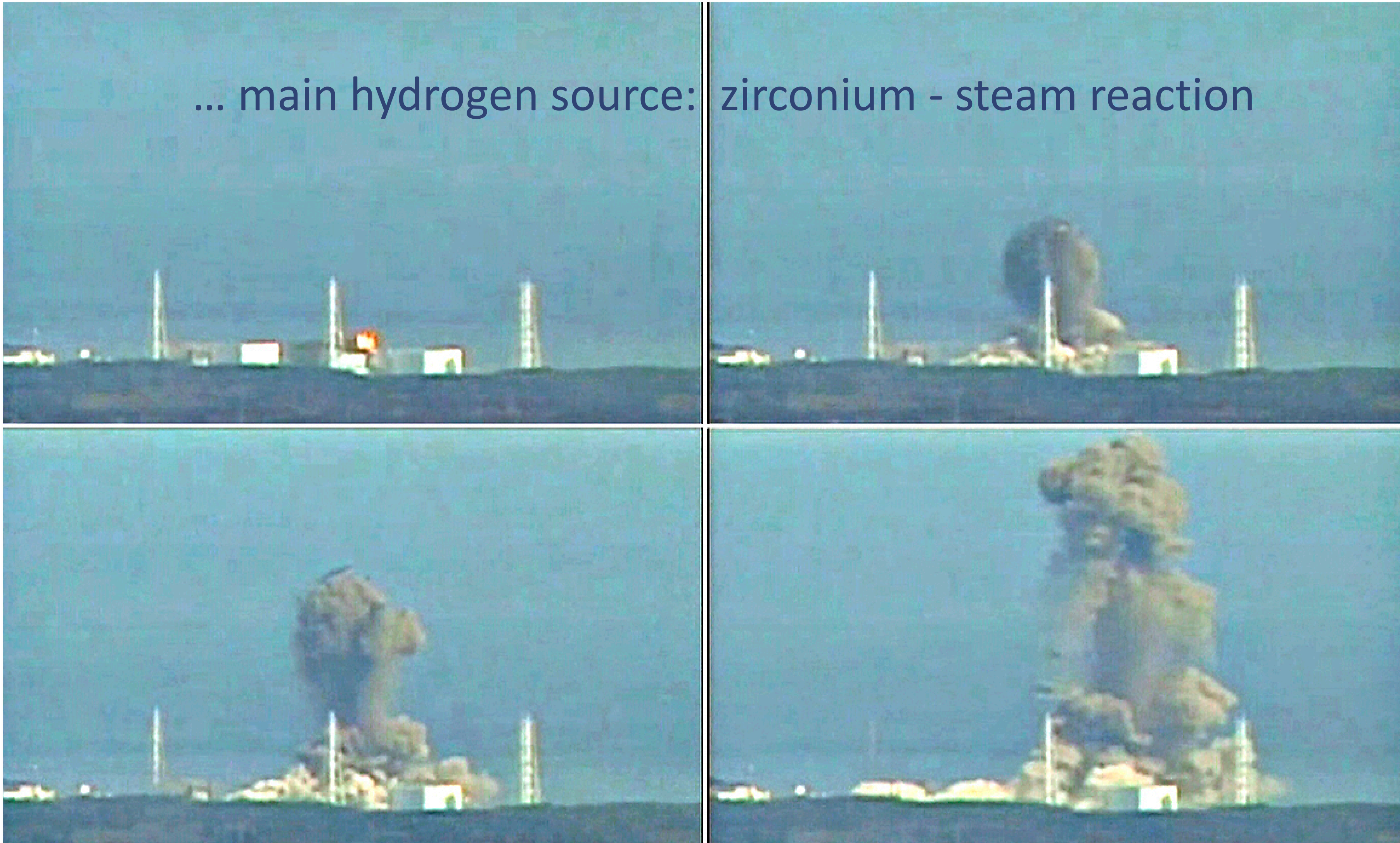
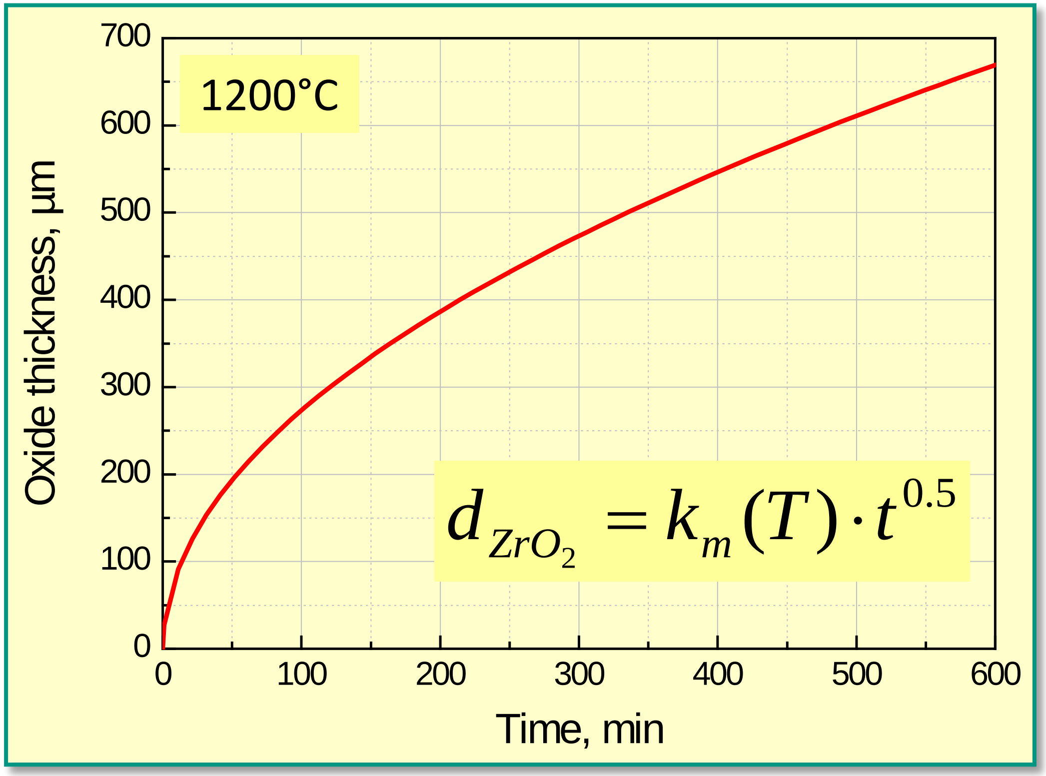
Hydrogen detonation in Fukushima Dai-ichi NPPs …



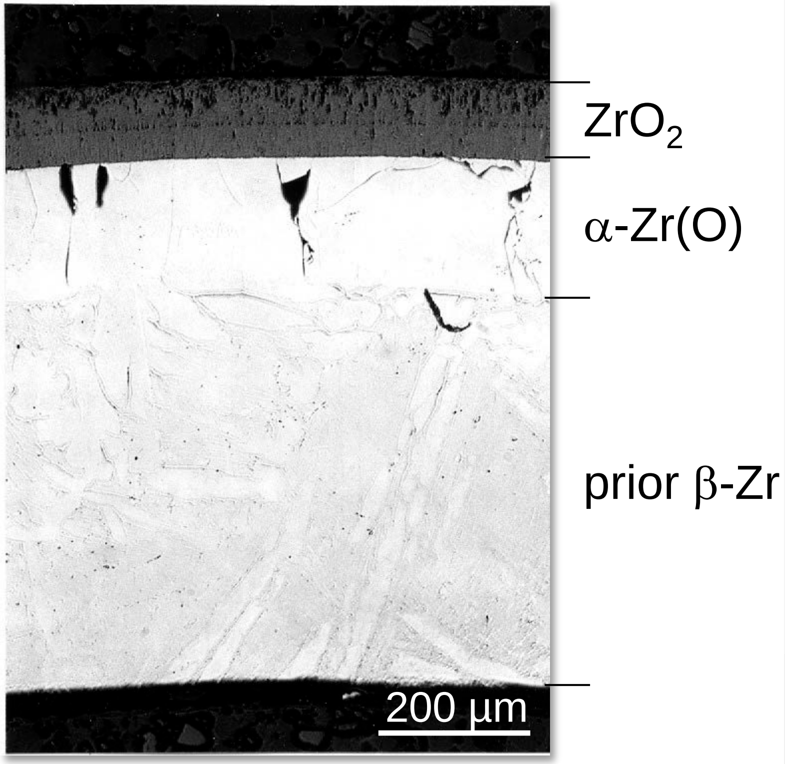
Oxidation in steam (oxygen)

- Most LOCA and SFD codes use parabolic oxidation correlations (determined by the diffusion of oxygen through growing oxide scale)



$$d_{ZrO_2} = k_m(T) \cdot t^{0.5}$$

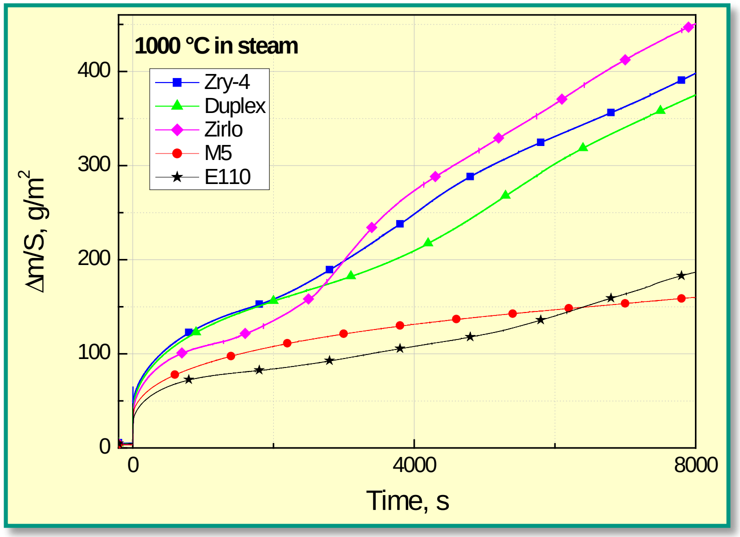
Calculated oxide thickness during oxidation of Zry at 1200°C in steam

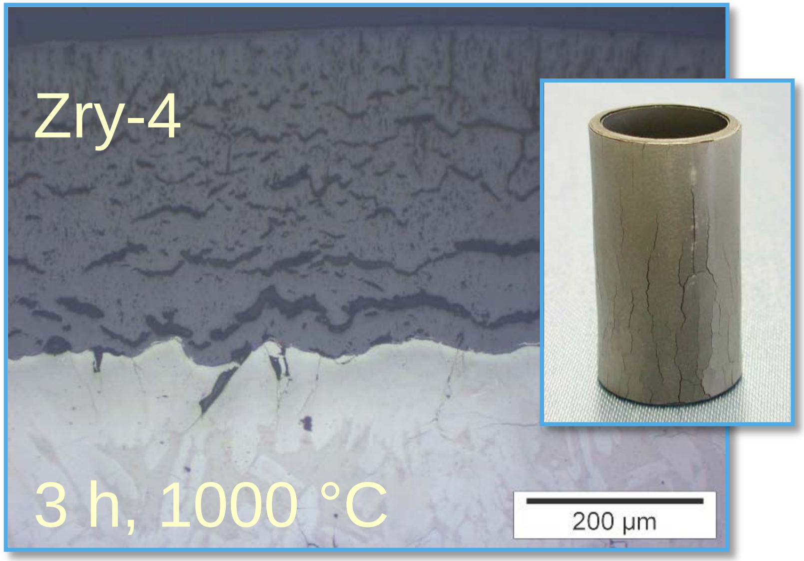


20 min at 1200°C in steam

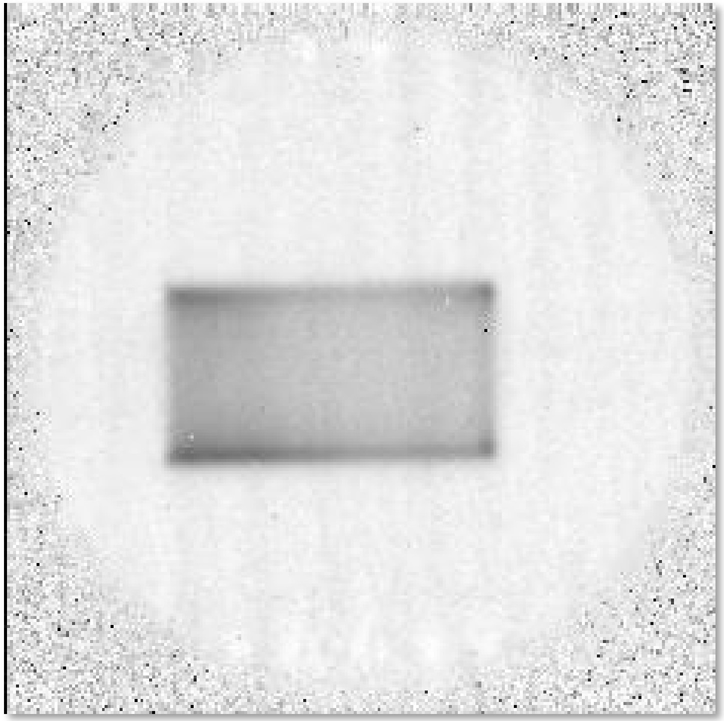
Breakaway oxidation

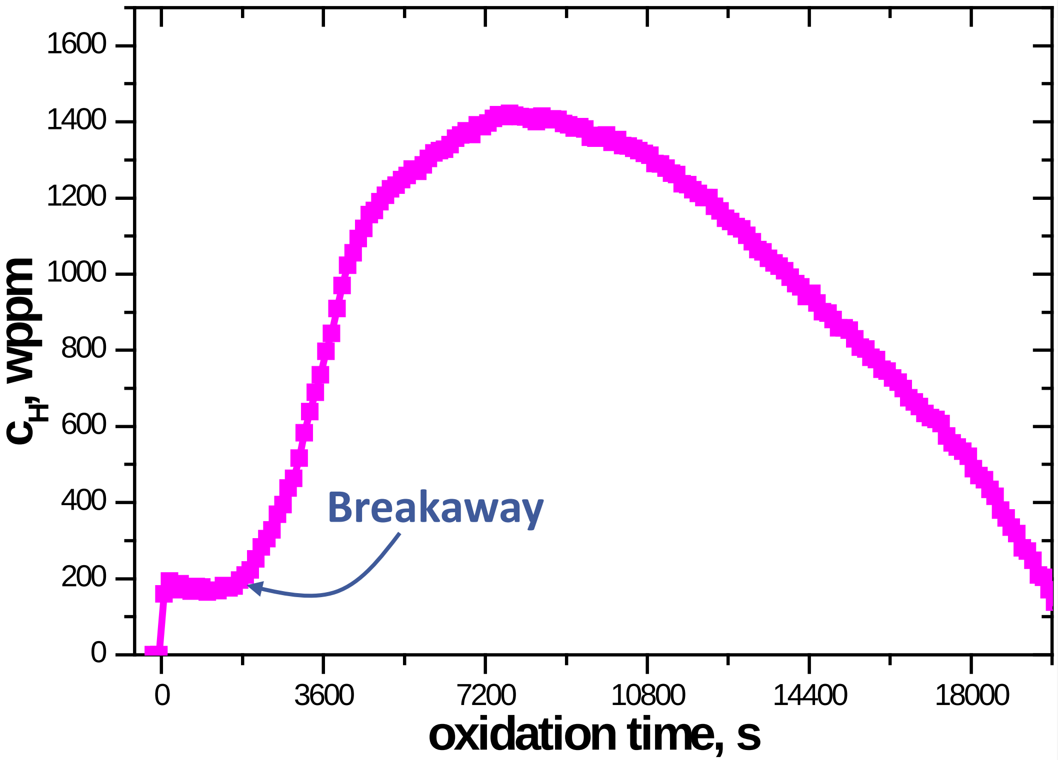
- Loss of protective properties of oxide scale due to its mechanical failure.
- Breakaway is caused by phase transformation from pseudo-stable tetragonal to monoclinic oxide and corresponding change in density up to ca. 1050°C.
- Critical times and oxide thicknesses for breakaway strongly depend on type of alloy and boundary conditions (ca. 30 min at 1000°C and 8 h at 600°C).
- During breakaway significant amounts of hydrogen can be absorbed (>40 at.%, 7000 wppm) due to local enrichment of H_2 in pores and cracks near the metal/oxide boundary ("hydrogen pump").





In-situ investigation of hydrogen uptake during oxidation of Zry in steam by neutron radiography





Zry-4, 1000°C
30 g/h steam, 30 l/h argon

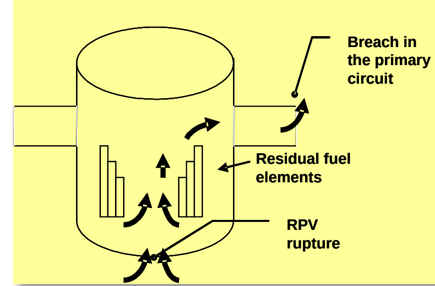
- Rapid initial hydrogen uptake
- Further strong hydrogen absorption after transition to breakaway

Oxidation in atmospheres containing nitrogen

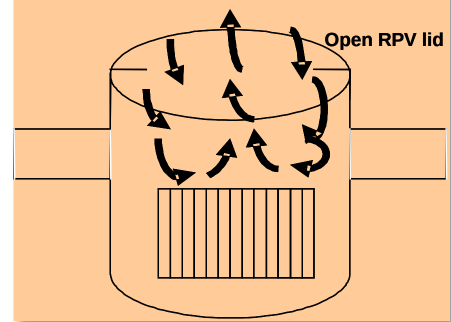
- Air ingress into reactor core, spent fuel pond, or transportation cask
- Nitrogen in BWR containments (inertization) and ECCS pressurizers
- Prototypically following steam oxidation and mixed with steam

- Consequences:
  - <u>Significant heat release</u> causing temperature runaway from lower temperatures than in steam
  - <u>Strong degradation of cladding</u> causing early loss of barrier effect
  - <u>High oxygen activity</u> influencing FP chemistry and transport

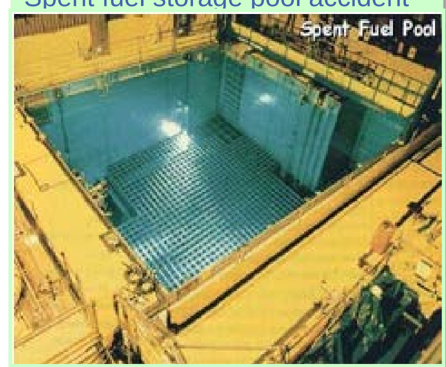
Late phase after RPV failure



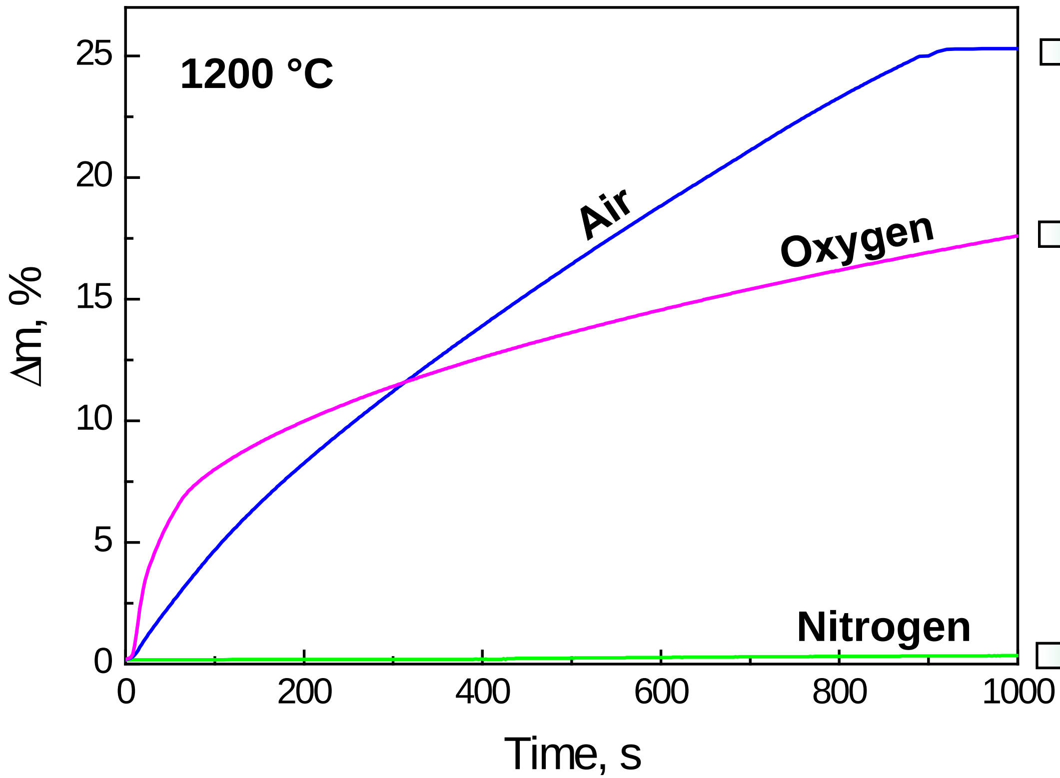
Mid loop operation



Spent fuel storage pool accident



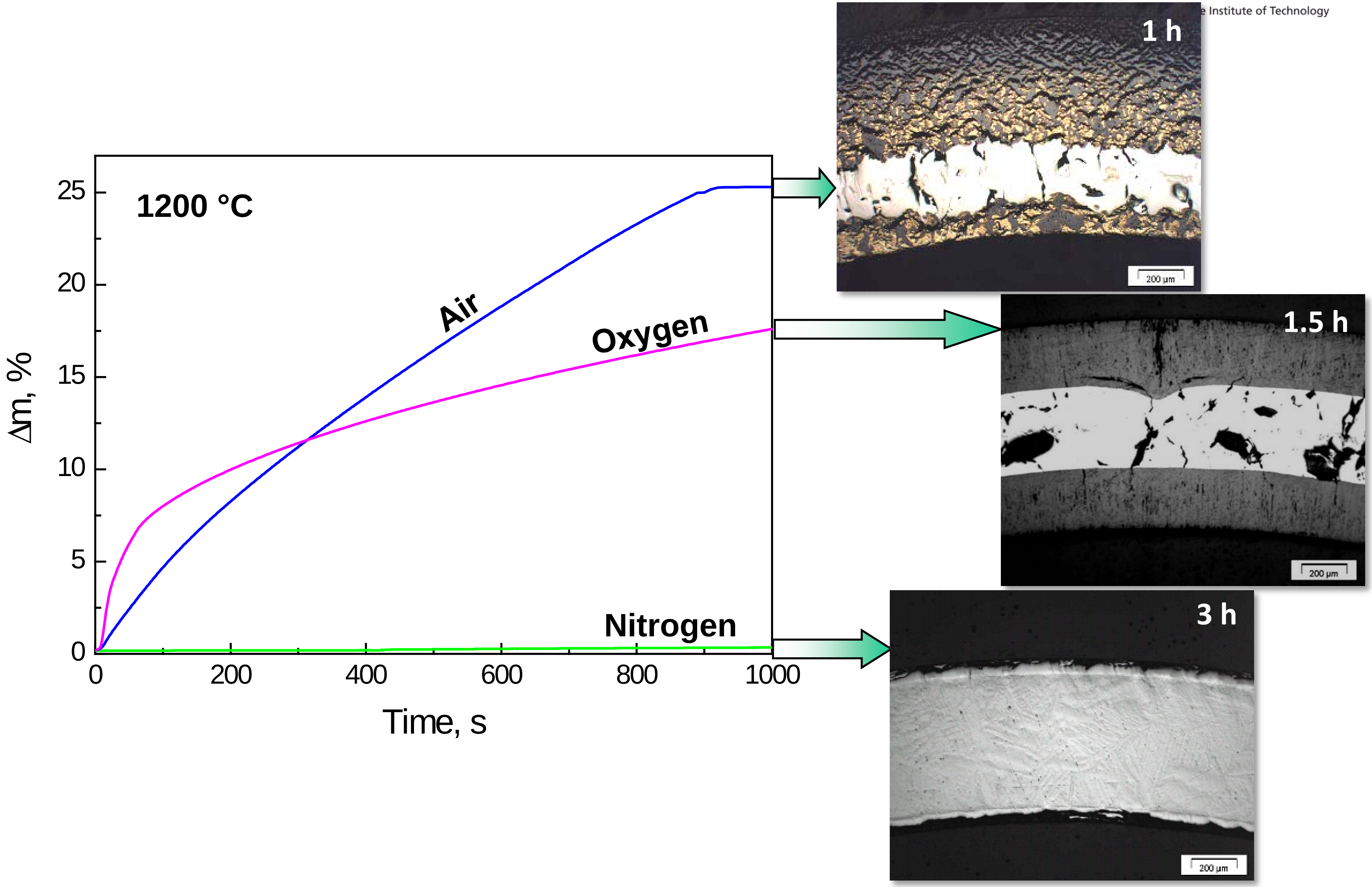
Oxidation of Zr alloys in N_2, O_2 and air



- ~ Linear oxidation kinetics
- Parabolic oxidation kinetics
- Parabolic reaction kinetics

Oxidation rate in air is much higher than in oxygen or steam

Oxidation of Zr alloys in N_2, O_2 and air



Consequences of air ingress for cladding

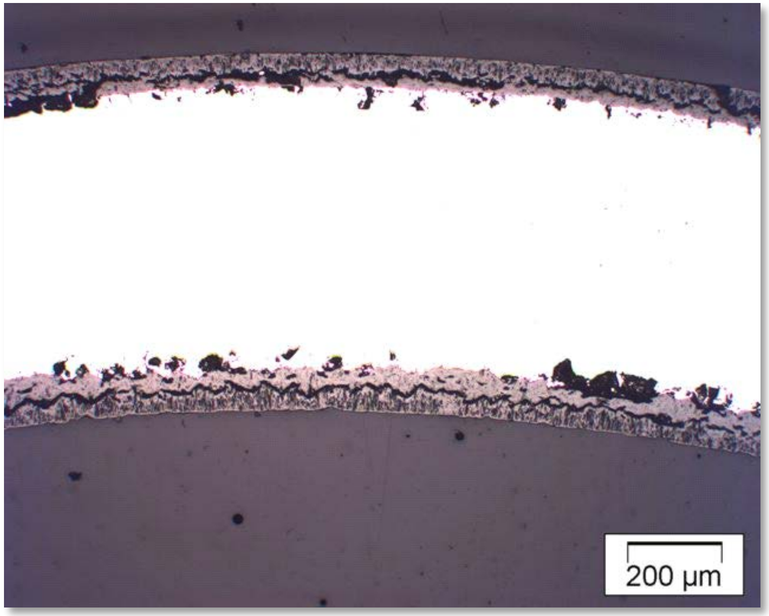
1 hour at 1200°C in steam

1 hour at 1200°C in air

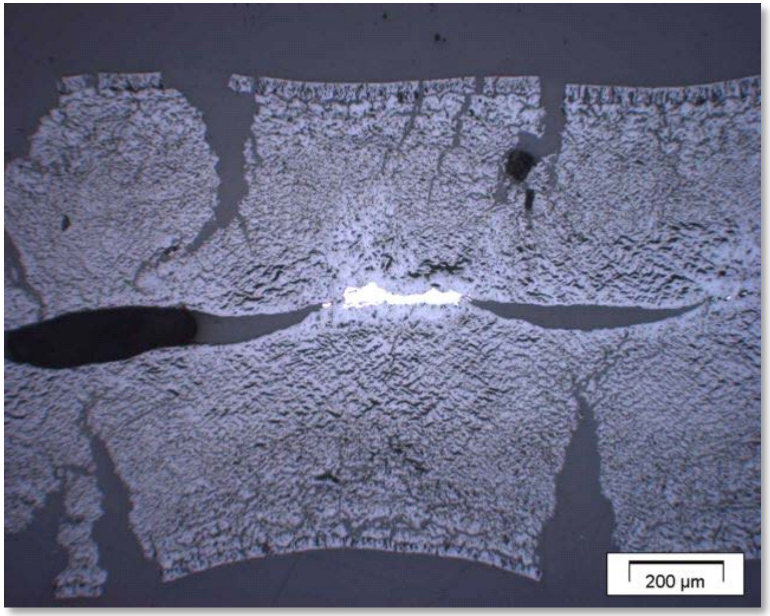
→ Loss of barrier effect of cladding

Oxidation in mixed atmospheres

1 hour at 1000 °C in steam



1 hour at 1000 °C in 50/50 steam/N_2

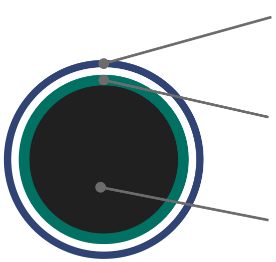


- Strong effect of nitrogen on oxidation and degradation
- Nitrogen acts like a catalyst (NOT like an inert gas)
- Enhanced hydrogen source term by oxidation in mixtures containing nitrogen

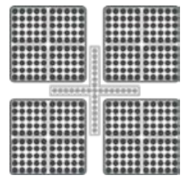
Absorber materials in LWRs

Boron carbide

- Used in boiling water reactors (BWR), VVERs, some pressurized water reactors (PWR)
- Control rods (PWR) or cross-shaped blades (BWR)
- Surrounded by stainless steel (cladding, blades) and Zry (guide tubes, canisters)



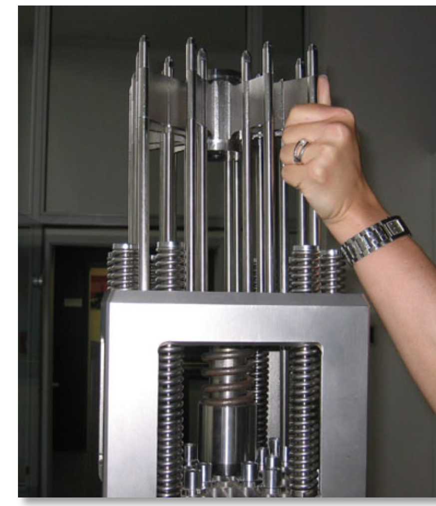
BWR control rod



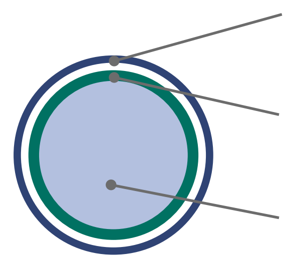
BWR control blade

AgInCd alloy

- Used in PWRs
- Surrounded by stainless steel cladding and Zry guide tubes
- Rods in Zry guide tubes combined in control rod assemblies



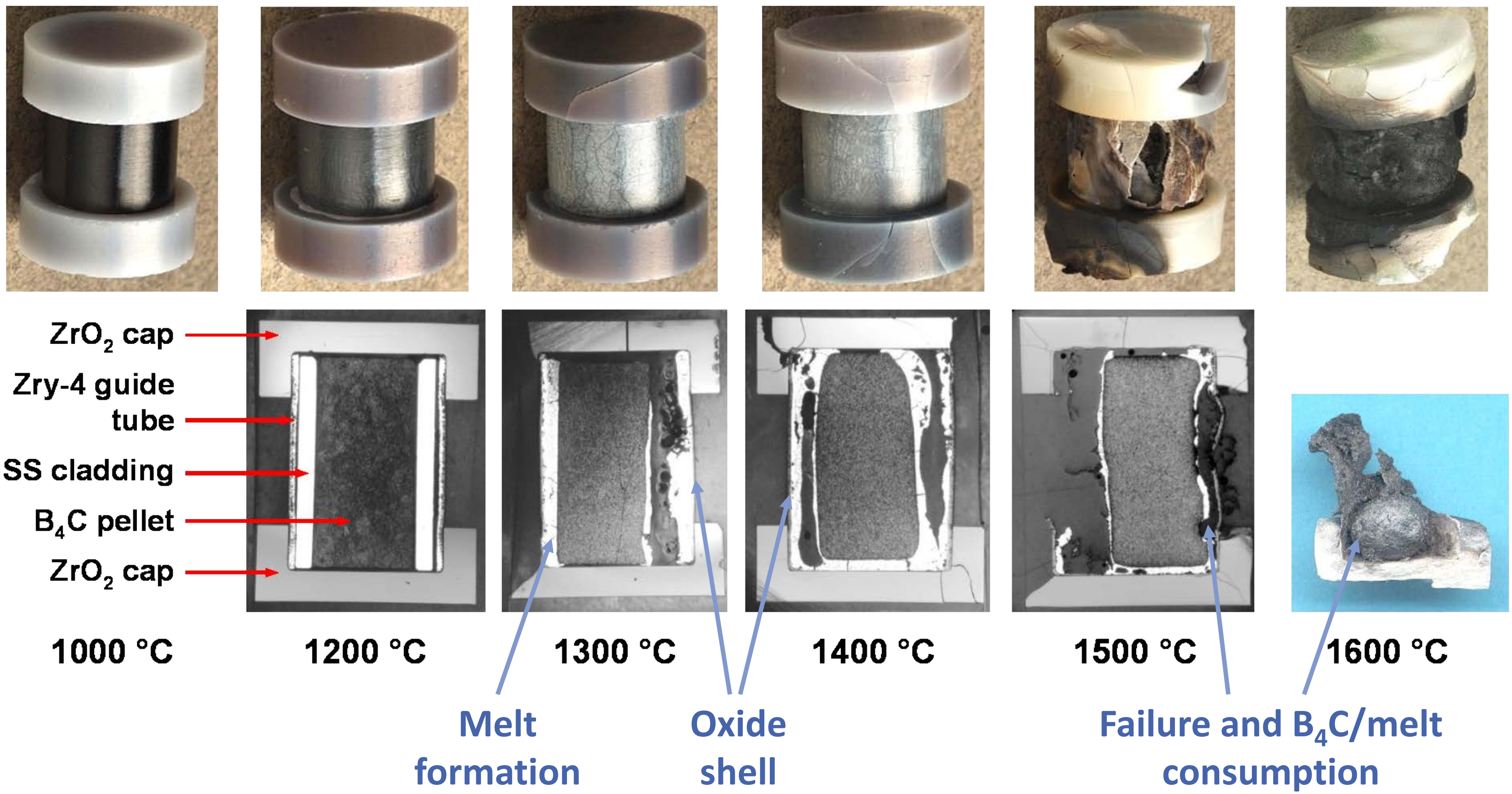
PWR control rod assembly



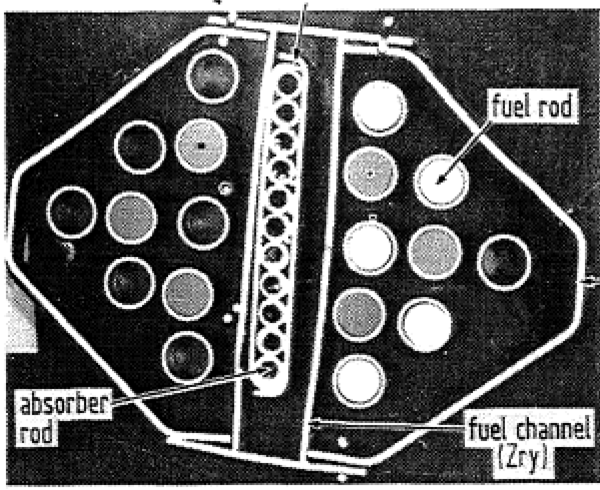
PWR control rod

Degradation of B_4C control rods (1-pellet)

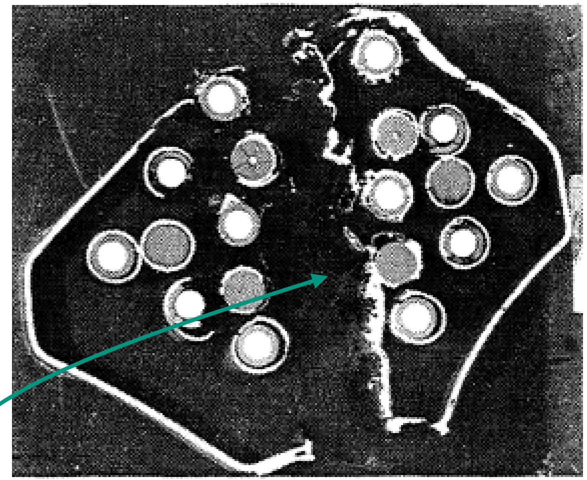
Post-test appearance and axial cross section of B_4C/SS/Zry specimens after 1 hour isothermal tests at temperatures between 1000 and 1600 °C



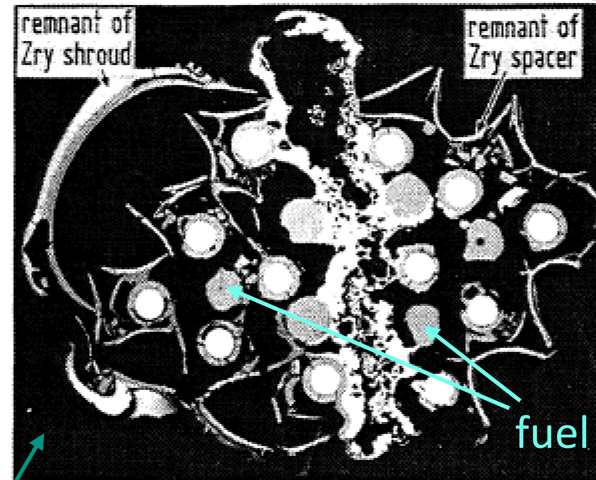
Degradation of B_4C control blade (BWR bundle test) CORA-16



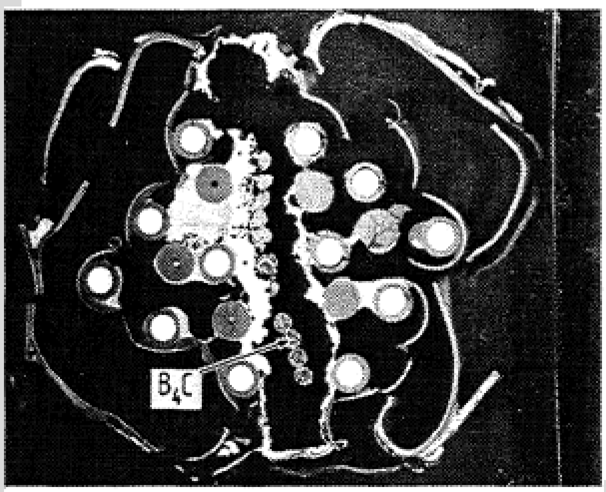
16-08 (1145mm), bottom view



-07 (963mm), top view

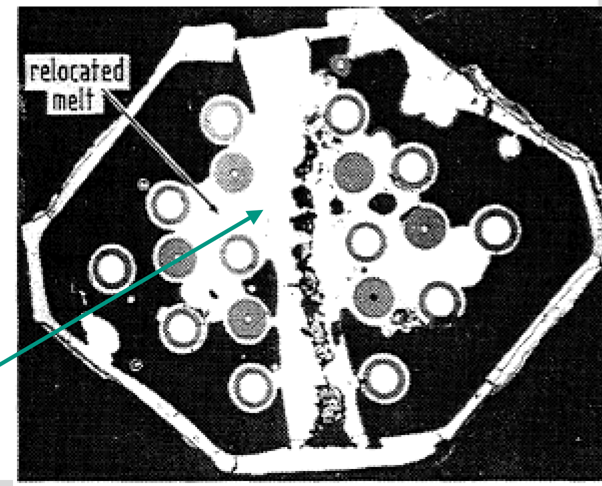


16-09 (525mm), top view
center grid spacer elevation



16-03 (310mm), top view

- Complete loss of absorber blade
- Dissolution of cladding and fuel
- Massive melt relocation (SS, Zry, UO_2)



16-01 (110mm), top view

Eutectic interaction of stainless steel with B_4C

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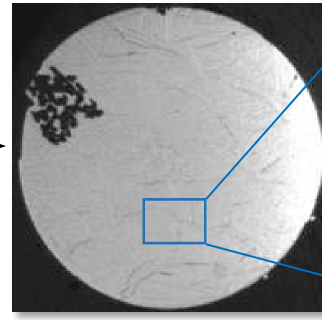
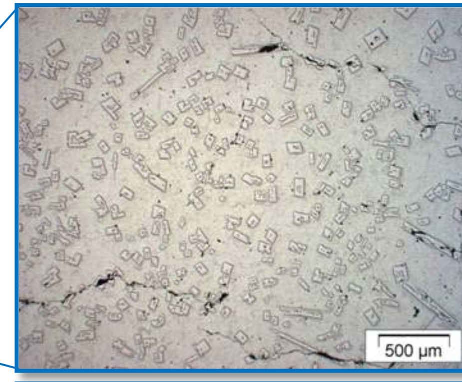
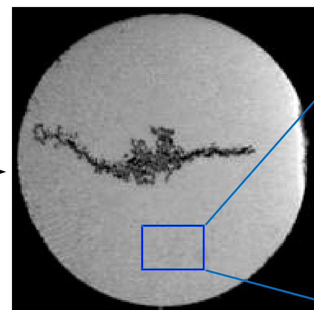
1 h at approx. 1250 °C


4 wt.% B_4C



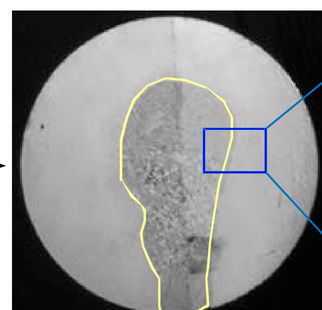


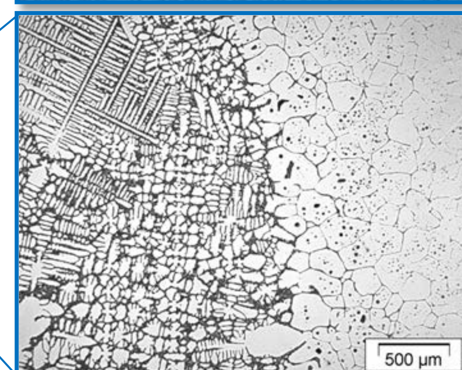

1 wt.% B_4C



Complete liquefaction of stainless steel

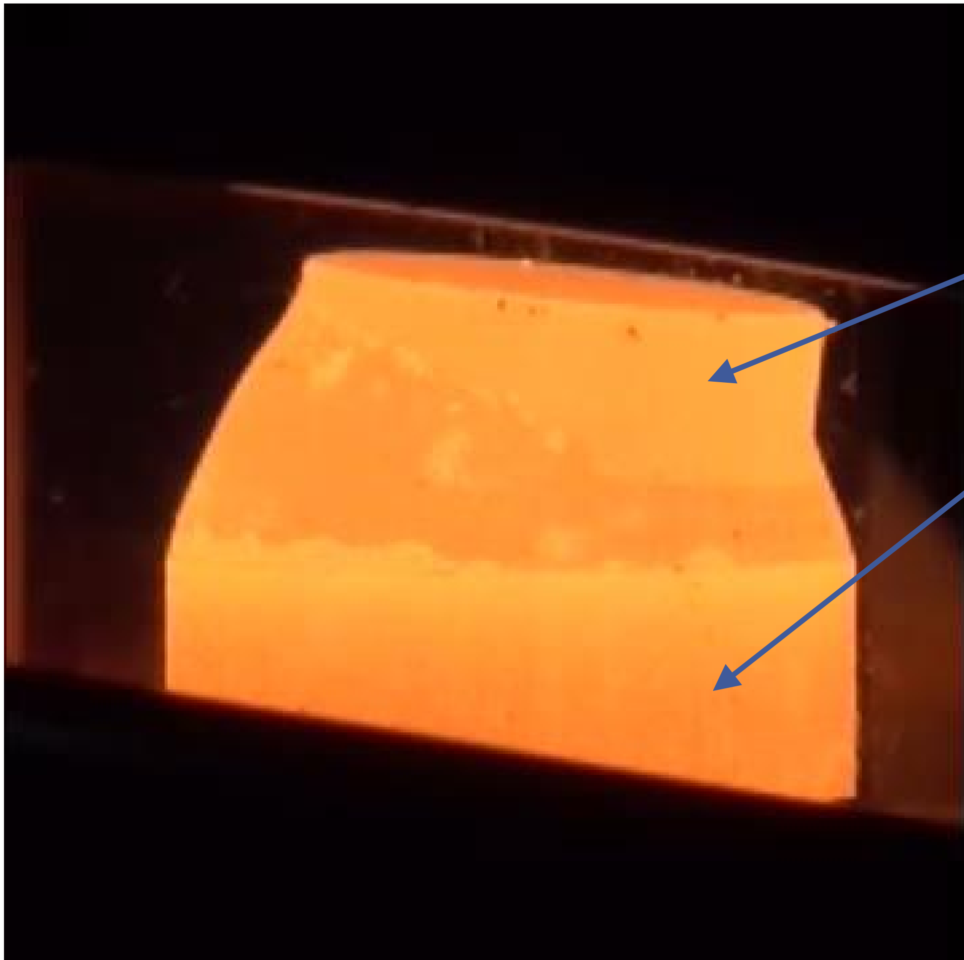

0.3 wt.% B_4C

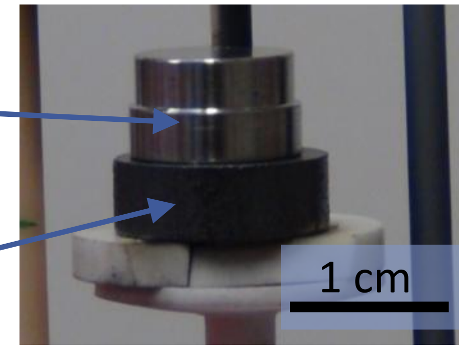




1/3 of SS liquefied

Eutectic interaction of stainless steel with B_4C





- **Rapid and complete melting of SS at 1250°C starting at B_4C/SS boundary**

Oxidation of boron carbide; main chemical reactions

$$B_4C + 8H_2O(g) \rightarrow 2B_2O_3(l) + CO_2(g) + 8H_2(g)$$ -760 kJ/mol

$$B_4C + 6H_2O(g) \rightarrow 2B_2O_3(l) + CH_4(g) + 4H_2(g)$$ -987 kJ/mol

$$B_2O_3 + H_2O(g) \rightarrow 2HBO_2(g)$$ +341 kJ/mol

- Release of hydrogen, various carbon-containing gases and heat
- Formation of a superficial boron oxide layer and its vaporization

Oxidation kinetics of B_4C in steam

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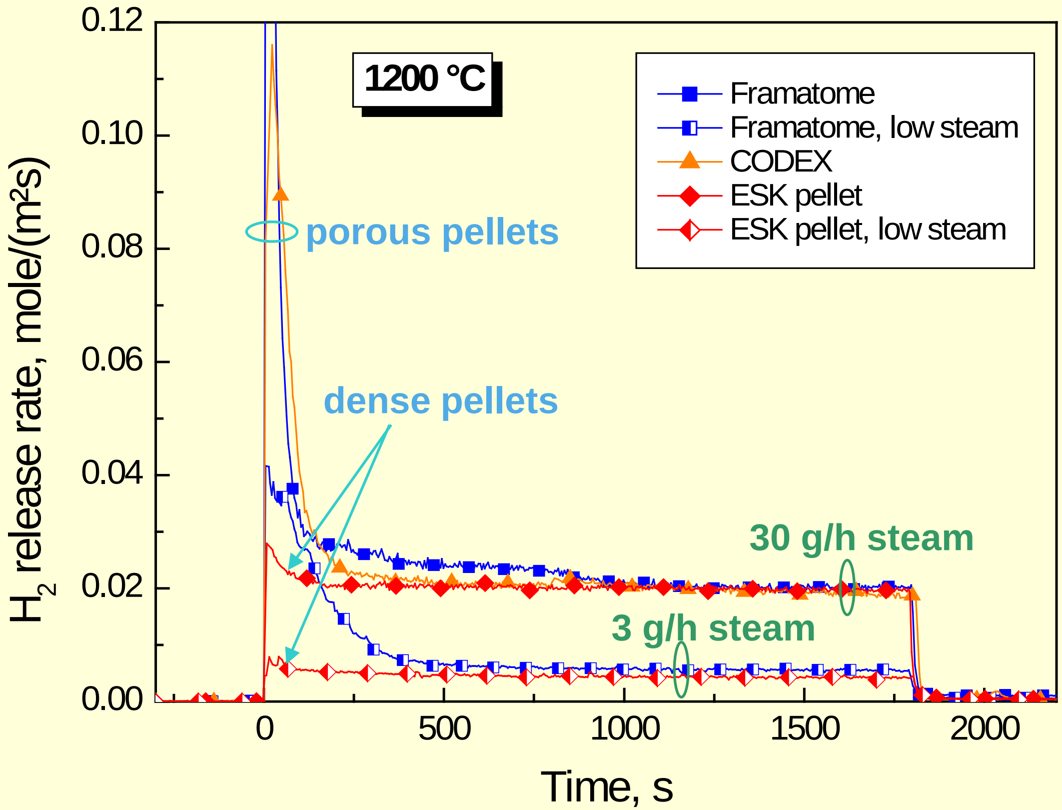

- Strongly dependant on B_4C structure and thermo hydraulic boundary conditions like pressure and flow rate

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Oxidation of B_4C absorber melts

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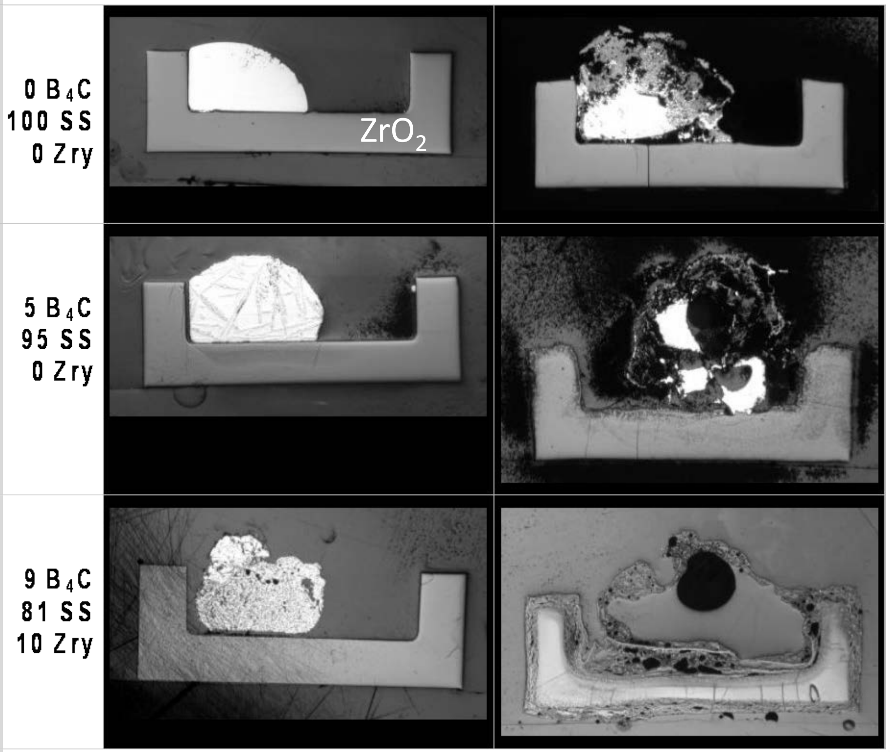
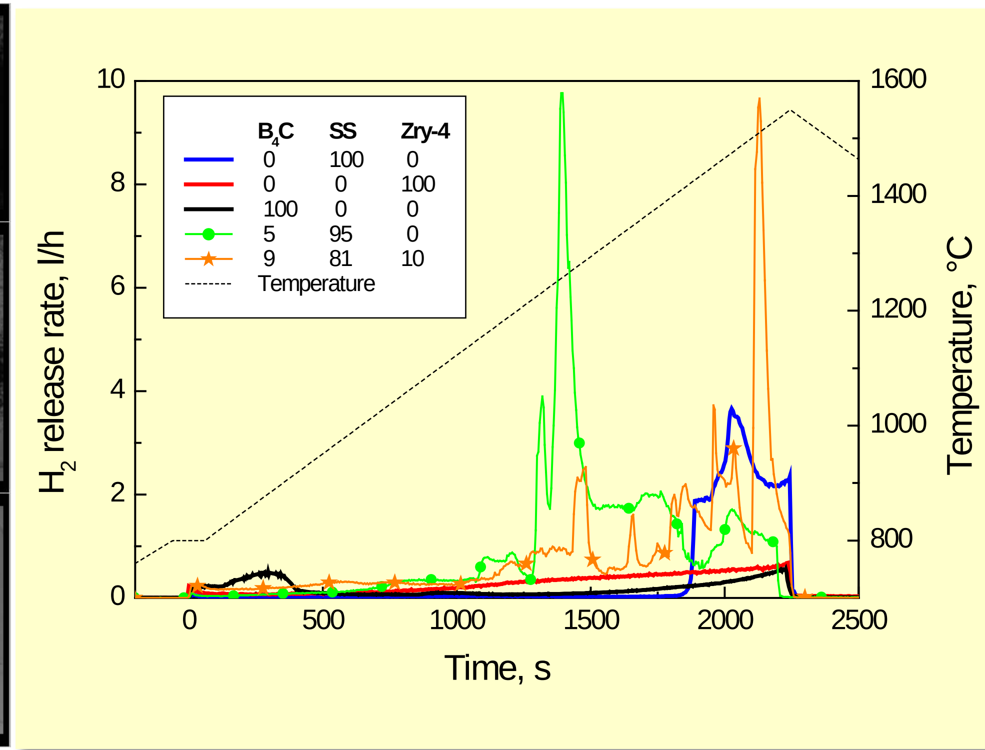
Transient oxidation of B_4C/SS/Zry-4 absorber melts in steam between 800 and 1550 °C





before oxidation after oxidation

Oxidation rate during reaction of absorber melts and pure CR components in steam

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Gas release during oxidation of B_4C (melts)

- Hydrogen
  - Up to 290 g H_2 per kg B_4C
  - Up to 500 kg additional H_2 production for BWRs
- Carbon monoxide/dioxide
  - Ratio depending on temperature and oxygen activity
  - Non-condensable gases affecting THs and pressure
  - CO combustible and poisonous
- Methane
  - Would have strong effect on fission product chemistry (iodine!)
  - Bundle experiments and SETs reveal only insignificant release of CH_4
- Boric acids
  - Volatile and soluble in water
  - Deposition at colder locations in the circuit

Energetic effects of B_4C oxidation

- Oxidation of B_4C in steam: 13 MJ/kg_{B4C}
- Oxidation of B_4C in oxygen: 50 MJ/kg_{B4C}

➡ Significant contribution to energy release in the core

For comparison:

- Oxidation Zr in steam: 6 MJ/kg_{Zr}
- Fuel value of mineral oil: 12 MJ/kg_{oil}
- Fuel value of black coal: 30 MJ/kg_{coal}

Possible consequences for Fukushima accidents

- Boiling water reactors with cruciform-shaped blades
- 1 control blade = 7 kg B_4C + 93 kg SS
- ➔ Complete liquefaction of the blade at T>1200°C

Fukushima Daiichi NPPs:

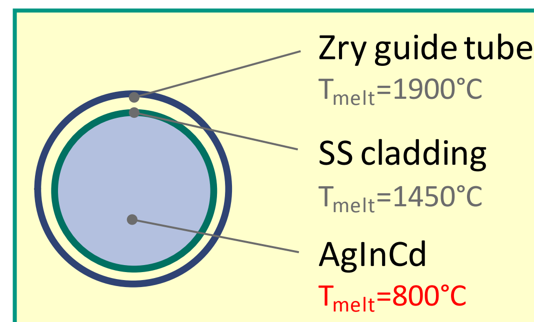
- Unit 1: 97 control blades
- Unit 2-4: 137 control blades

- Complete oxidation of B_4C inventory by steam:
- ➔ 195/275 kg H_2
- ➔ 2700/3800 kWh (10/14 GJ)

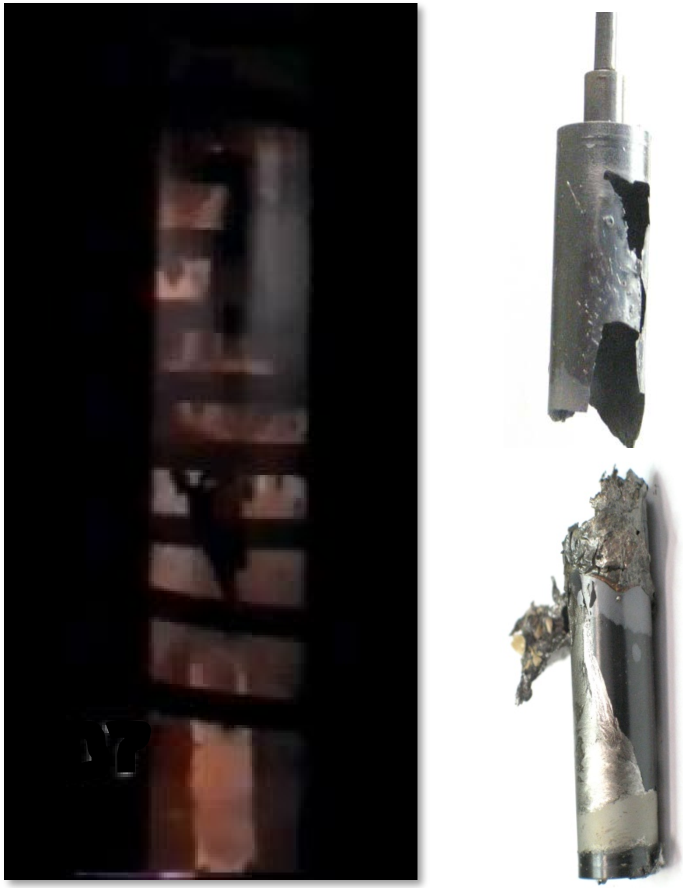
BWR control rod

Failure of AgInCd absorber rod

- Ag-In-Cd control rods fail at temperatures above 1200°C due to the eutectic interaction between SS and Zry-4
- Failure is very stochastic (from local to explosive) with the tendency to higher temperatures for symmetric samples and specimens with inner oxidation
- No ballooning of the SS cladding tube was observed before rupture
- Burst release of cadmium vapour is followed by continuous release of indium and silver aerosols and absorber melt



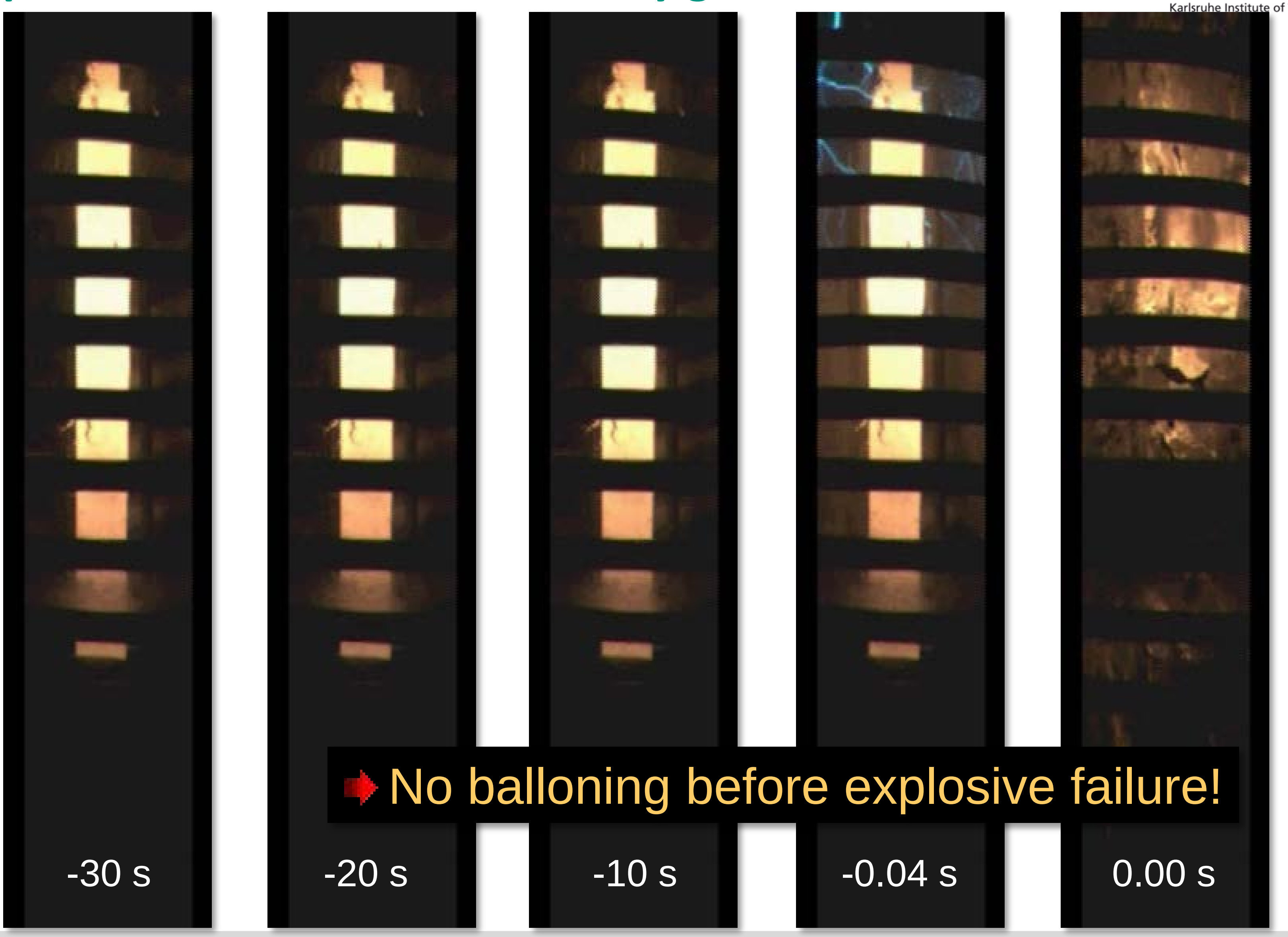
Different failure types of AgInCd absorber rod



SIC-02 (asym. rod)
Local failure at 1230°C

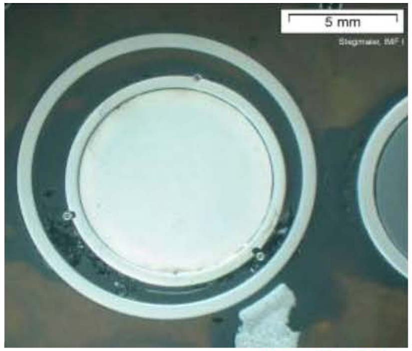
SIC-05 (symmetric rod)
Global failure at 1350°C

Explosive failure of SIC-11 w/o Zry guide tube

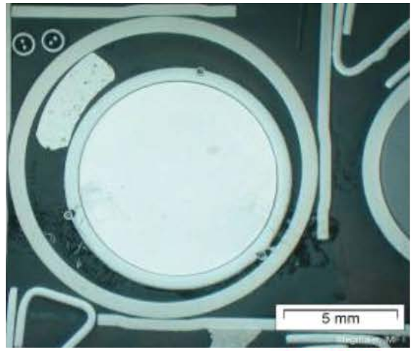


➔ No balloning before explosive failure!

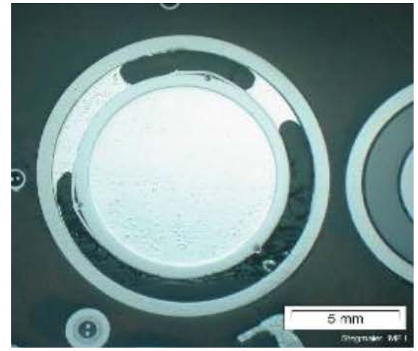
QUENCH-13 control rod appearance



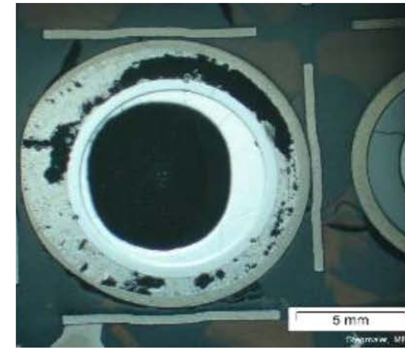
50 mm 540°C



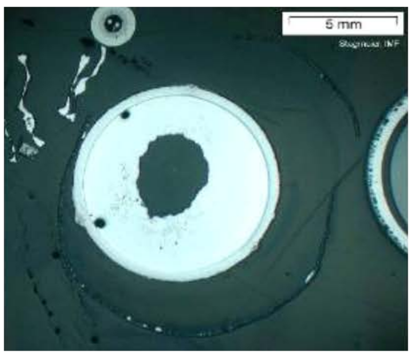
170 mm 650°C



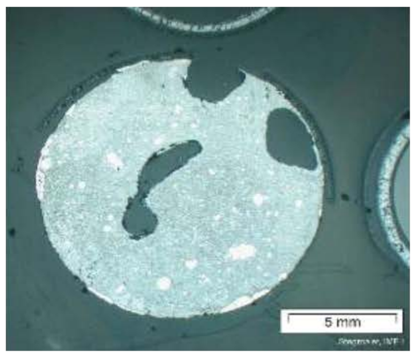
350 mm 850°C



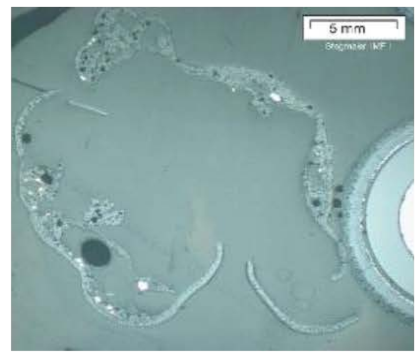
550 mm 1026°C



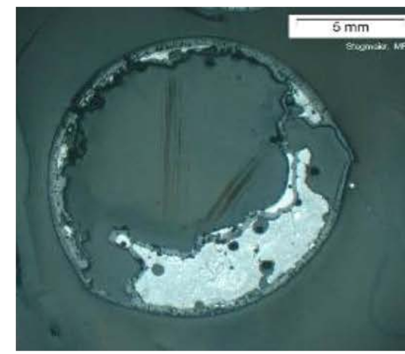
750 mm 1280°C



850 mm 1437°C

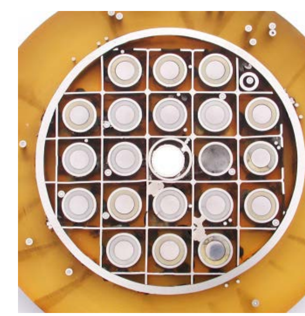


950 mm 1418°C



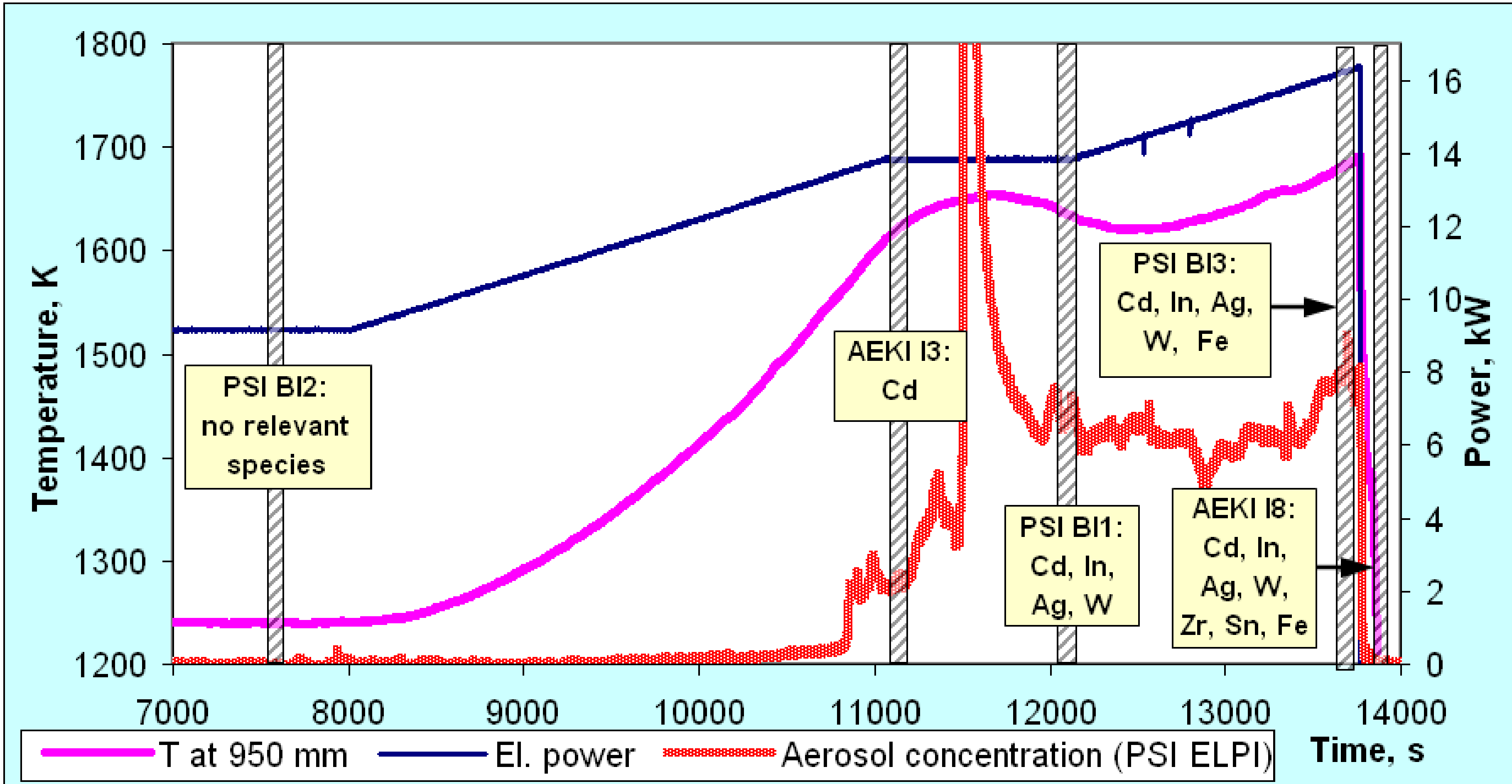
1050 mm 1216°C

- No direct interaction between AIC and steel
- Increasing interactions between relocated AIC and Zry in gap with temp.
- Increasing interaction between melt and steel with increasing Zr content



QUENCH-13 bundle test: aerosol release

- First burst release of cadmium vapor, then aerosols mainly consisting of silver and indium



Summary

- Chemical interactions may strongly affect the early phase of a severe nuclear accident.
- The main hydrogen source term is produced by metal-steam reactions
- Exothermal chemical reactions can cause heat release larger than the decay heat and hence strongly contribute to the power generation in the core
- Nitrogen does not behave like an inert gas during the conditions of a severe accident
- Eutectic interactions between the various materials in the core (i.e. B_4C-SS, SS-Zry) cause liquefaction of materials significantly below their melting temperatures
- Boron carbide may (at least locally) significantly contribute to release of heat, hydrogen and other gases