Solid State Communications 150 (2010) 2329–2332

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Solid State Communications

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssc

Enhancement of the magnetocaloric effect and magnetic transition temperature in $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ by hydrogenation

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 20 March 2010
Received in revised form
24 September 2010
Accepted 4 October 2010
by C. Lacroix
Available online 13 October 2010

Keywords:
A. $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ hydrides
D. Magnetocaloric effect
D. Magnetic entropy change

ABSTRACT

The magnetic properties and magnetocaloric effect (MCE) of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ ($x = 0.12$, 0.6 and 1.3) have been investigated. Introducing hydrogen atoms can drive the Curie temperature T_C to ambient temperature. The magnetic transition is changed from second order to weakly first order with increasing hydrogen content, leading to an increase in the magnetic entropy change ΔS_M. The maximal value of ΔS_M for $x = 1.3$ is determined to be 6.7 J/kg K at 295 K under a field change of 0–2 T. Good reversible MCE at low fields makes the hydrides promising room-temperature magnetic refrigerants.
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1. Introduction

In the past few years, the search for room-temperature large magnetocaloric materials has been of special interest because of their potential application in magnetic refrigeration. Several materials with a giant magnetocaloric effect (MCE) have been discovered [1–4]. $NaZn_{13}$-type $La(Fe, Si)_{13}$-based compounds are among the most attractive magnetocaloric materials due to their outstanding performance with respect to MCE, tunable Curie temperature (T_C), and low cost; thus they show the potential of becoming a favorite working material near room temperature [5,6]. It has been reported that $LaFe_{11.4}Si_{1.6}$ shows a large magnetic entropy change (ΔS_M) of 19.4 J/kg K at 208 K under a field change of 0–5 T due to a first-order magnetic transition at T_C [2]. The Curie temperature could be adjusted by substituting some Fe by other elements and/or by introducing interstitial hydrogen or carbon atoms into $LaFe_{13-x}Si_x$. It has been reported that the appropriate substitution of Co for Fe in $LaFe_{13-x}Si_x$ compounds can cause the T_C to increase even to room temperature and the compounds to display a large ΔS_M, larger than or similar to that of Gd [7–10]. T_C increases from 195 to 250 K and ΔS_M decreases from 24.8 to 12.1 J/kg K in $LaFe_{11.6}Si_{1.4}C_x$ interstitial compounds with x increasing from 0 to 0.6 [11]. The interstitial insertion of hydrogen atoms into the $La(Fe, Si)_{13}$ lattice can increase T_C up to room temperature, while ΔS_M still remains a very large value [12–14].

$La(Fe_{1-x}Al_x)_{13}$ compounds with $0.08 \leq x \leq 0.12$ were found to exhibit a weak antiferromagnetic (AFM) coupling, which can be overcome by applying a field of a few Teslas or adjusting the Fe concentration, temperature, volume, and pressure in the compounds [15,16]. It has been confirmed that, by substituting Co for Fe [17,18], magnetic rare earths for La [19,20], or introducing interstitial H, N or C atoms [21–26], the magnetic ground state of $La(Fe, Al)_{13}$ compounds can be changed from the AFM state to a ferromagnetic (FM) state. Previous investigations found that $La(Fe_{0.98}Co_{0.02})_{11.7}Al_{1.3}$ exhibits a ΔS_M of 10.6 J/kg K under a field change of 0–5 T at 198 K [17]. A modest ΔS_M has also been observed in other $NaZn_{13}$-type $La(Fe, Al)_{13}$-based compounds: e.g., 9.0 J/kg K at $T_C = 303$ K for $La(Fe_{0.92}Co_{0.08})_{11.83}Al_{1.17}$ [18], 10.1 J/kg K at $T_C = 262$ K for $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}C_{0.5}$ [24], and 8.3 J/kg K at $T_C = 266$ K for $LaFe_{11.44}Al_{1.56}C_{0.6}$ [25] under a field change of 0–5 T. $La_{0.8}Nd_{0.2}Fe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ is found to undergo two magnetic phase transitions, which lead to a table-like ΔS_M peak (9.0 J/kg K) in a wide temperature range of 160–185 K for a field change of 0–5 T around the transition temperature [27]. Although the change in the magnetic ground state from AFM to FM by hydrogenation has been reported, accompanied by a significant increase in T_C [21], a study on the MCE of $La(Fe, Al)_{13}H$ has been lacking until now. In the present paper, we report the influence of interstitial hydrogen atoms on the magnetic phase transition and MCE in $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$. A good reversible room-temperature MCE at low magnetic fields is obtained in $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ by hydrogenation.

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doi:10.1016/j.ssc.2010.10.006

2. Experiments

Samples with the nominal composition of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ were prepared by arc-melting the appropriate amounts of the starting materials in an atmosphere of argon gas. The purity of the elements was better than 99.9%. A subsequent annealing was carried out at 1223 K for two weeks and then the samples were quenched into liquid nitrogen. X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis, using a Rigaku D/max-2400 diffractometer, showed that a single-phase sample was obtained with the $NaZn_{13}$-type structure. Hydrogenations of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ were carried out at different hydrogen pressures in order to obtain certain hydrogen contents by solid–gas reaction at 623 K. The hydrogen contents in $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ were determined by the ideal gas law ($PV = nRT$), where P is the hydrogen pressure, V is the volume of the sealed chamber, n is the number of moles of hydrogen in the chamber, R is the ideal gas constant, which equals 8.3145 J/mol K, and T is the temperature at which the initial compounds were annealed in hydrogen. The estimated error for hydrogen content is about 5 wt%. Magnetization was measured as a function of temperature and magnetic field around the Curie temperature by using a superconducting quantum interference device magnetometer from Quantum Design. By using the Maxwell relation $\Delta S_M = \int_0^H \left(\frac{\partial M}{\partial T}\right)_H dH$, ΔS_M was calculated based on the isothermal magnetization data. The sweep rate of the field was 0.015 T/s to ensure that the M–H curves could be recorded in an isothermal process.

3. Results and discussion

The XRD patterns show that the hydrogenation of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ does not modify the $NaZn_{13}$-type crystal structure, and only leads to a lattice expansion. The lattice constant in $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ is found to increase with x from $a = 1.1592(7)$ nm for $x = 0$ to $a = 1.1651(2)$ nm for $x = 1.3$; that is, the room-temperature lattice constant of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_{1.3}$ is about 0.5% larger than that of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$. This result is comparable with $LaFe_{11.5}Si_{1.5}H_x$, in which the room-temperature lattice constant of the hydride for $x = 1.3$ ($a = 1.1528$ nm) is larger than that of the parent alloy $LaFe_{11.5}Si_{1.5}$ ($a = 1.1475$ nm) by about 0.46% [12]. Fig. 1 shows the temperature dependence of magnetization under a field of 0.01 T in zero-field-cooled and field-cooled processes for $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ ($x = 0$, 0.12, 0.6 and 1.3). It is evident that the parent $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ compound undergoes a transition from an AFM state to a paramagnetic (PM) state at the Néel temperature $T_N = 201$ K (see the inset of Fig. 1). However, an FM-to-PM transition is observed in the hydrides at the respective T_C, which increases monotonically from 225 to 295 K with x varying from 0.12 to 1.3. This demonstrates that the magnetic ground state of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$ changes from the AFM state to the FM state upon hydrogenation. The AFM-to-FM transition is characterized by the multiple free-energy minima in relation to invar effects [28]. The free-energies in the FM and AFM states are almost the same in magnitude, being separated by an energy barrier which can easily be overcome by introducing hydrogen. For the Fe-rich rare-earth iron compounds, T_C depends usually on Fe–Fe direct exchange interactions. The Rietveld refinement for $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ shows that the interatomic Fe–Fe average bond length increases with the increase of hydrogen content from 0.276(6) nm for $x = 0$ to 0.277(5) nm for $x = 1.3$. Therefore, one of the reasons for the increase in T_C with x for $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ may be the increase in the interatomic Fe–Fe distance upon hydrogen insertion.

Fig. 2 shows the magnetization curves of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ ($x = 0$, 0.12, 0.6 and 1.3) at 5 K. For the parent compound $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$, the magnetization increases slowly with increasing field until a critical field about 4.9 T, when a sharp metamagnetic AFM-to-FM transition is observed. A large hysteresis occurs in field

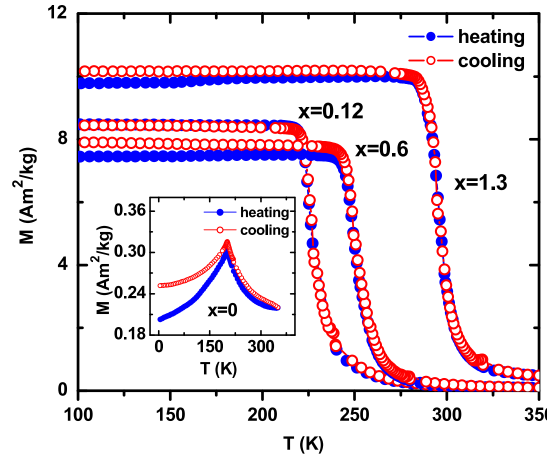

Fig. 1. Temperature dependence of the magnetization for $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ ($x = 0.12$, 0.6 and 1.3) measured in heating and cooling processes under a magnetic field of 0.01 T. The inset shows the M–T curve of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}$.

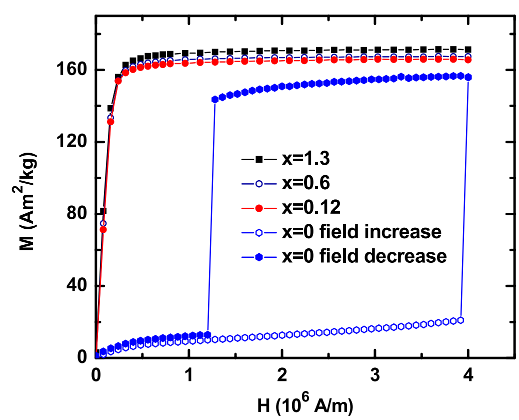

Fig. 2. Magnetization curves at 5 K for $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ with $x = 0$, 0.12, 0.6 and 1.3.

increase and decrease modes. A similar result has been observed in $LaFe_{13-x}Al_x$ [15,16,28]. However, the $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ ($x = 0.12$, 0.6 and 1.3) compounds exhibit ferromagnetic behavior. The saturated magnetic moment is estimated from the M^2–H/M plots. It is found that the saturated magnetic moment has a remarkable increase from 1.99 μ_B/Fe to 2.12 μ_B/Fe with x increasing from 0 to 0.12. Further addition of hydrogen atoms leads to only a mild increase of the saturated magnetic moment. For $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_{1.3}$, the saturated magnetic moment is 2.19 μ_B/Fe.

From the above results, it is observed that the larger the lattice parameter, the higher the Curie temperature and the saturation magnetization, which indicate that the magnetic properties of the $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ compounds are sensitive to volume change. The effects of hydrogen atoms on the magnetic properties of $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ are mainly caused by 3d band narrowing. The lattice expansion caused by interstitial hydrogen atoms depresses the overlap between Fe 3d electrons, thus leading to an increase of magnetic moment and T_C.

For an itinerant-electron system at a finite temperature, the magnetic free energy is renormalized by the thermally excited spin fluctuations, accompanied by significant changes in magnetic properties. The renormalization of the free energy due to spin fluctuations may bring about further variation of magnetic phase transitions [28]. To verify the nature of the magnetic phase transition, the Landau coefficients in $LaFe_{11.5}Al_{1.5}H_x$ compounds with x ranging from 0.12 to 1.3 are calculated from the data of isothermal magnetization. The magnetic free energy based on

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