



Review article

CBM and CO₂-ECBM related sorption processes in coal: A reviewAndreas Busch ^{a,*}, Yves Gensterblum ^{b,**}^a Shell Global Solutions International, Kessler Park 1, 2288GS Rijswijk, The Netherlands^b RWTH Aachen University, Institute of Geology and Geochemistry of Petroleum and Coal, Lochnerstr. 4–20, D-52056 Aachen, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the state of research on sorption of gases (CO₂, CH₄) and water on coal for primary recovery of coalbed methane (CBM), secondary recovery by an enhancement with carbon dioxide injection (CO₂-ECBM), and for permanent storage of CO₂ in coal seams.

Especially in the last decade a large amount of data has been published characterizing coals from various coal basins world-wide for their gas sorption capacity. This research was either related to commercial CBM production or to the usage of coal seams as a permanent sink for anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. Presently, producing methane from coal beds is an attractive option and operations are under way or planned in many coal basins around the globe. Gas-in-place determinations using canister desorption tests and CH₄ isotherms are performed routinely and have provided large datasets for correlating gas transport and sorption properties with coal characteristic parameters.

Publicly funded research projects have produced large datasets on the interaction of CO₂ with coals. The determination of sorption isotherms, sorption capacities and rates has meanwhile become a standard approach. In this study we discuss and compare the manometric, volumetric and gravimetric methods for recording sorption isotherms and provide an uncertainty analysis. Using published datasets and theoretical considerations, water sorption is discussed in detail as an important mechanisms controlling gas sorption on coal. Most sorption isotherms are still recorded for dry coals, which usually do not represent in-seam conditions, and water present in the coal has a significant control on CBM gas contents and CO₂ storage potential. This section is followed by considerations of the interdependence of sorption capacity and coal properties like coal rank, maceral composition or ash content. For assessment of the most suitable coal rank for CO₂ storage data on the CO₂/CH₄ sorption ratio data have been collected and compared with coal rank.

Finally, we discuss sorption rates and gas diffusion in the coal matrix as well as the different unipore or bidisperse models used for describing these processes.

This review does not include information on low-pressure sorption measurements (BET approach) to characterize pore sizes or pore volume since this would be a review of its own. We also do not consider sorption of gas mixtures since the data base is still limited and measurement techniques are associated with large uncertainties.

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Contents

1.	Introduction	50
2.	Adsorption methods	51
2.1.	Methods to determine gas sorption	51
2.1.1.	Manometric method	52
2.1.2.	Volumetric method	52
2.1.3.	Gravimetric method	52
2.1.4.	Alternative methods for recording gas sorption on coal	53
2.2.	Uncertainties in recording sorption isotherms	53
2.2.1.	Helium as reference gas	54

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2.2.2.	Temperature	54
2.2.3.	Equations of state (EOS)	54
2.2.4.	Volume calculations	55
2.2.5.	Impurities in the measurement gas	55
2.2.6.	Gas dissolution in water and gas sorption on mineral matter	56
2.2.7.	Minor sources of errors related to gas sorption on coal	56
2.3.	Modeling of adsorption isotherms	56
2.4.	Excess versus absolute sorption	56
2.4.1.	Gravimetric method	56
2.4.2.	Manometric method	57
3.	Water sorption on coal	57
3.1.	Coal-specific factors controlling water sorption	57
3.1.1.	Functional groups	57
3.1.2.	Coal rank	58
3.2.	The isosteric heat of water sorption on coal	58
3.3.	Water sorption/desorption hysteresis	59
3.4.	CH ₄ and CO ₂ sorption of coals in the presence of water	59
3.4.1.	Effects on sorption capacity	59
3.4.2.	CH ₄ sorption capacity and the influence of moisture at elevated temperatures	60
3.5.	Water sorption kinetics on coal	61
4.	Dependence of CO ₂ , CH ₄ and water sorption on coal properties	61
4.1.	The influence of coal composition on gas sorption	61
4.2.	Total organic carbon (TOC) and ash content	61
4.3.	Coal rank	61
4.4.	Dull/bright coals and maceral composition	62
4.5.	Temperature	63
4.6.	Isosteric heat of adsorption	63
4.7.	CO ₂ versus CH ₄ sorption	64
5.	CO ₂ and CH ₄ sorption kinetics on coal	64
5.1.	Unipore sorption/diffusion models	65
5.2.	Bidisperse sorption/diffusion models	66
5.3.	Results from CO ₂ and CH ₄ gas sorption kinetic experiments	66
5.4.	Summary of sorption kinetic experiments with CO ₂ and CH ₄	67
6.	Conclusions	67
	Acknowledgements	68
	References	68

1. Introduction

The technical development of coalbed methane (CBM) and secondary CO₂ enhanced CBM (CO₂-ECBM) production and CO₂ storage in and from coal seams requires detailed and reliable information on fluid transport and gas sorption as well as their inter-dependent interaction. An improved understanding of these processes from the macroscopic to the microscopic scale is important for the accurate prediction of gas and water production as well as CO₂ injection rates. The mechanisms of storage and transport of gas and water in coal differ significantly from conventional gas reservoirs. Commonly, gas transport in coal is considered to occur at two scales (Fig. 1): (I) laminar flow through the cleat system, and (II) diffusion and sorption in the coal matrix. Flow through the cleat system is pressure-driven and may be described using Darcy's law, whereas flow through the matrix is assumed to be concentration-driven and is modeled using Fick's law of diffusion. Gas storage by physical sorption occurs mainly in the coal matrix (e.g. Harpalani and Chen, 1997).

Various articles address laboratory or field research performed in the context of primary coalbed methane (CBM) or secondary CO₂ enhanced CBM (CO₂-ECBM) recovery and reviews are provided by e.g. White et al. (2005).

There are many factors that need to be addressed when attempting to understand the complexity of the interaction of CH₄, CO₂ and water with coal in the cleat system and the coal matrix, and research has diversified substantially, especially since CO₂ storage in coal is considered as a potential way of permanently immobilizing CO₂ in the sub-surface.

CBM recovery projects are currently developed commercially all over the world with a main focus on countries like Australia, China and the United States, and exploration is ongoing in many further

regions in e.g. Europe, Ukraine, or Indonesia. One of the first CO₂-ECBM micro-pilot field tests was set up in Alberta, Canada (Gunter et al., 2004) which was similarly performed in China some years later (Wong et al., 2007). One operation with a two-well test setting was carried out in Japan (Ohga et al., 2006; Yamaguchi et al., 2004). The

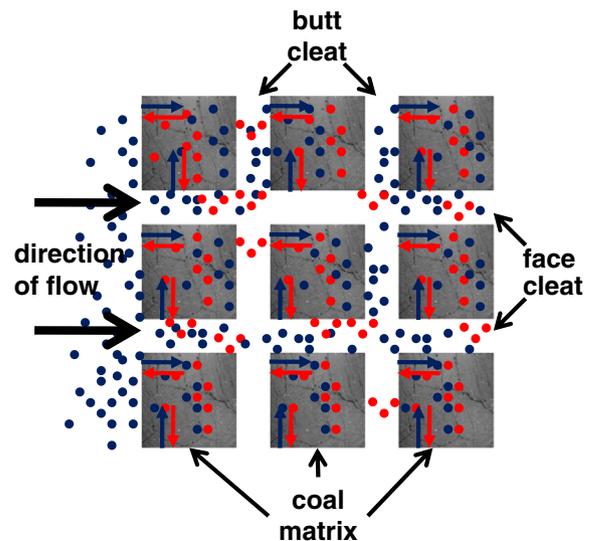


Fig. 1. Illustration showing coal matrix blocks and cleat system of a coal.

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