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Hierarchical Carbon Nanotube Carbon Fiber Unidirectional Composites with Preserved Tensile and Interfacial Properties

Richard Li, Noa Lachman, H. Daniel Wagner, Brian L. Wardle

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Authors: Richard Li^{a,*}, Noa Lachman^b, H. Daniel Wagner^c, Brian L. Wardle^d

Affiliations: ^aDepartment of Aeronautics and Astronautics, MIT 77 Mass. Ave., Bldg. 41-317, USA, 617-253-7214, richli@mit.edu.

^bDepartment of Aeronautics and Astronautics, MIT 77 Mass. Ave., Bldg. 41-317, USA, 617-253-7214, noal@mit.edu.

^cDepartment of Materials & Interfaces, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot 76100, Israel, +972 89342594, Daniel.Wagner@weizmann.ac.il

^dDepartment of Aeronautics and Astronautics, MIT 77 Mass. Ave., Bldg. 33-408, USA, 617-252-1539, wardle@mit.edu.

*Corresponding author.

Abstract: Hybrid hierarchical carbon-nanotube (CNT)-based composites, such as radially-aligned CNT arrays grown onto microfiber filaments, have significant potential to expand the performance and functionality of fiber reinforced composites. Here, a novel method for high-yield growth of aligned CNTs on aerospace-grade carbon fibers (CFs) is demonstrated at the composite level for the first time. Fuzzy carbon fiber reinforced plastics (fuzzy CFRP) unidirectional composites with >60% microfiber volume fraction are fabricated via vacuum-assisted resin infusion of CNT-grafted tows using an unmodified aerospace-grade epoxy. Preservation of microfiber tensile modulus and strength are demonstrated by longitudinal composite tensile testing, consistent with single-fiber tensile tests. Fiber-matrix interface strength is also unchanged by the CNT growth as revealed through continuously-monitored fiber fragmentation tests. Taken together, the results provide needed new composite-level understanding of hierarchical structural composite laminates and motivate future work on structural CF composite laminates with integrated multifunctionality and improved interlaminar and intralaminar performance.

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