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Study of the iron nitride FeN into the megabar regime

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Abstract

In this work, the nitrogen-rich portion of the Fe-N binary phase diagram is investigated up to 128 GPa. The samples, largely in excess of nitrogen, were laser-heated in diamond anvil cells to temperatures of 1500-2500 K at regular pressure intervals to help in crossing possible activation barriers towards the more stable phase. Three Fe-N compounds: ZnS-type FeN, Fe₂N and NiAs-type FeN, are characterized by powder X-ray diffraction and their observed stability domain reported. Below 12.5 GPa, orthorhombic Fe₂N is found to be the energetically-favored compound while NiAs-FeN becomes stable above 17.7 GPa. Energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy measurements and a Rietveld refinement confirmed the stoichiometry and structure of the recovered NiAs-FeN sample. A precise determination of its bulk modulus (K_0 = 200(5) GPa) as well as its pressure derivative (K_0 ' = 5.3(2)) is obtained and, based on its unit cell axial ratio evolution, the NiAs-FeN compound appears to decrease in ionicity concomitantly with pressure. Within the pressure-temperature conditions reached here, the predicted iron pernitride FeN₂ is not observed.

keywords: high pressure, chemical synthesis, X-ray diffraction, synchrotron radiation, crystal structure and symmetry

1. Introduction

Transition metal nitrides are known to be a large group of industrially relevant compounds with outstanding physical properties, specifically regarding their high hardness, high bulk modulus and refractory, superconducting as well as catalytic properties.^{1,2} Of particular interest are the nitrogen-rich metal pernitrides, composed of charged single-bonded N-N dimers.³ Their unique mechanical and electronic properties are thought to originate from the significant transition metal-nitrogen charge transfer and the nature of the N-N bond.^{4–6} With the notable exception of TiN₂,⁶ synthesized transition metal pernitrides (OsN₂, IrN₂, PtN₂, RuN₂, PdN₂)^{4,5,7–10} form N-N connected MN₆ octahedrons (M standing for metal) and exhibit a variety of electronic structures corresponding to that of a metal, semiconductor and insulator. Furthermore, they are known for their ultrahigh-incompressibility, similar to that of cubic boron nitride.¹¹

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