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Deliquescence Behavior of Salts Deposited Inside the Drifts of a Potential High-Level Waste Repository

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Objective and Outline

- Objective of study: determine geochemical properties and deliquescence relative humidities of materials potentially present in a geologic repository
- Outline
  - Background
  - Chemistry results
  - Mineralogic results
  - Deliquescence results
  - Observations and conclusions

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Yucca Mountain, Nevada

- Site of potential deep geologic nuclear waste repository
- About 145 km NW of Las Vegas, Nevada, in the Mojave Desert
- Construction and operation by U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) if licensed by U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Deliquescence

- Defined: rapid absorption of water from air by salts to form a brine solution
- Deliquescence point varies by temperature and humidity
- Radioactive decay gives off heat and will raise the repository temperature
- When repository temperature falls, humidity will rise
- Salts present in dust and evaporated seepage water may deliquesce
- Brine solution may affect corrosion of waste package depending on composition

Technical Approach

- Samples collected by U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) from the Exploratory Studies Facility (underground tunnel) and Yucca Mountain surface
- Analyzed soluble and insoluble fractions
  - Anion, cation by Ion Chromatography (IC)
  - Metals by Inductively-Coupled Plasma (ICP)
  - Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)
  - Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectrometry (EDS)
  - X-ray Diffraction analysis (XRD)
- Determined weight fraction of soluble material
- Conducted deliquescence experiments

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Soluble Fraction Analysis

Analysis	Surface Sample (mg/kg)	Tunnel Sample (mg/kg)
Calcium	56.5	918
Sodium	17.8	686
Potassium	31.2	205
Silicon	42.9	21.9
Magnesium	8.84	101
Boron	0.72	3.03
Phosphorus	3.87	0.956
Molybdenum	-	0.910
Lithium	0.064	9.36
Iron	-	1.51
Manganese	-	7.28

Analysis	Surface Sample (mg/kg)	Tunnel Sample (mg/kg)
Sulfate	19.6	1920
Chloride	8.59	2350
Nitrate-N	1.69	218
Phosphate-P	3.22	-
Fluoride	1.40	14.1
Bromide	-	23.8
Nitrite-N	0.857	3.45

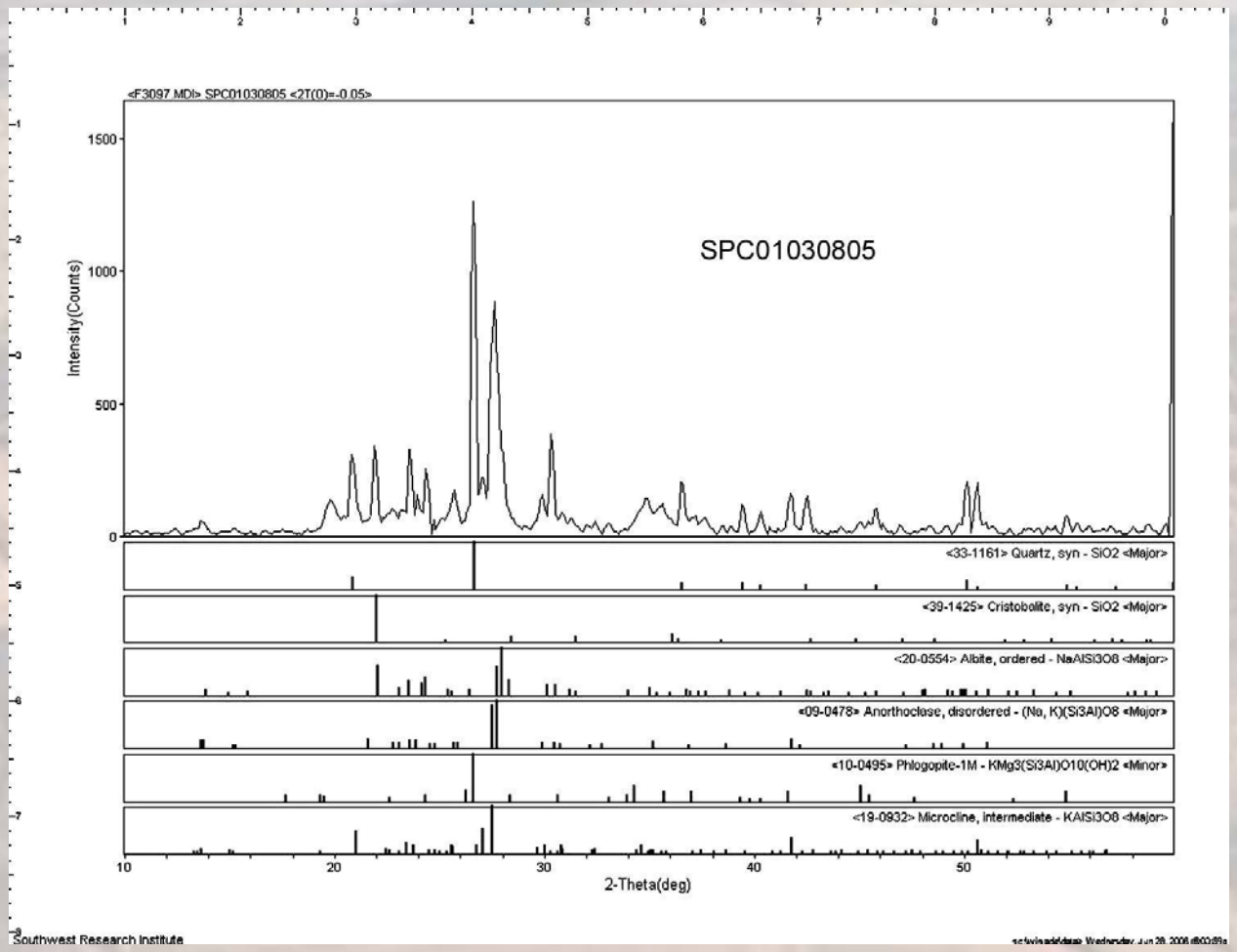
Soluble Fraction Weight Percent:

Surface Sample: <0.1%

Tunnel Sample: 0.69%

*Note: this data does not include analysis of H, O, or C.

XRD: Whole Dust, Surface Sample



Primary Minerals:

- Quartz SiO_2
- Cristobalite SiO_2
- Albite, ordered $NaAlSi_3O_8$
- Anorthoclase, disordered $(Na,K)(Si_3Al)O_8$
- Microcline, intermediate $KAlSi_3O_8$

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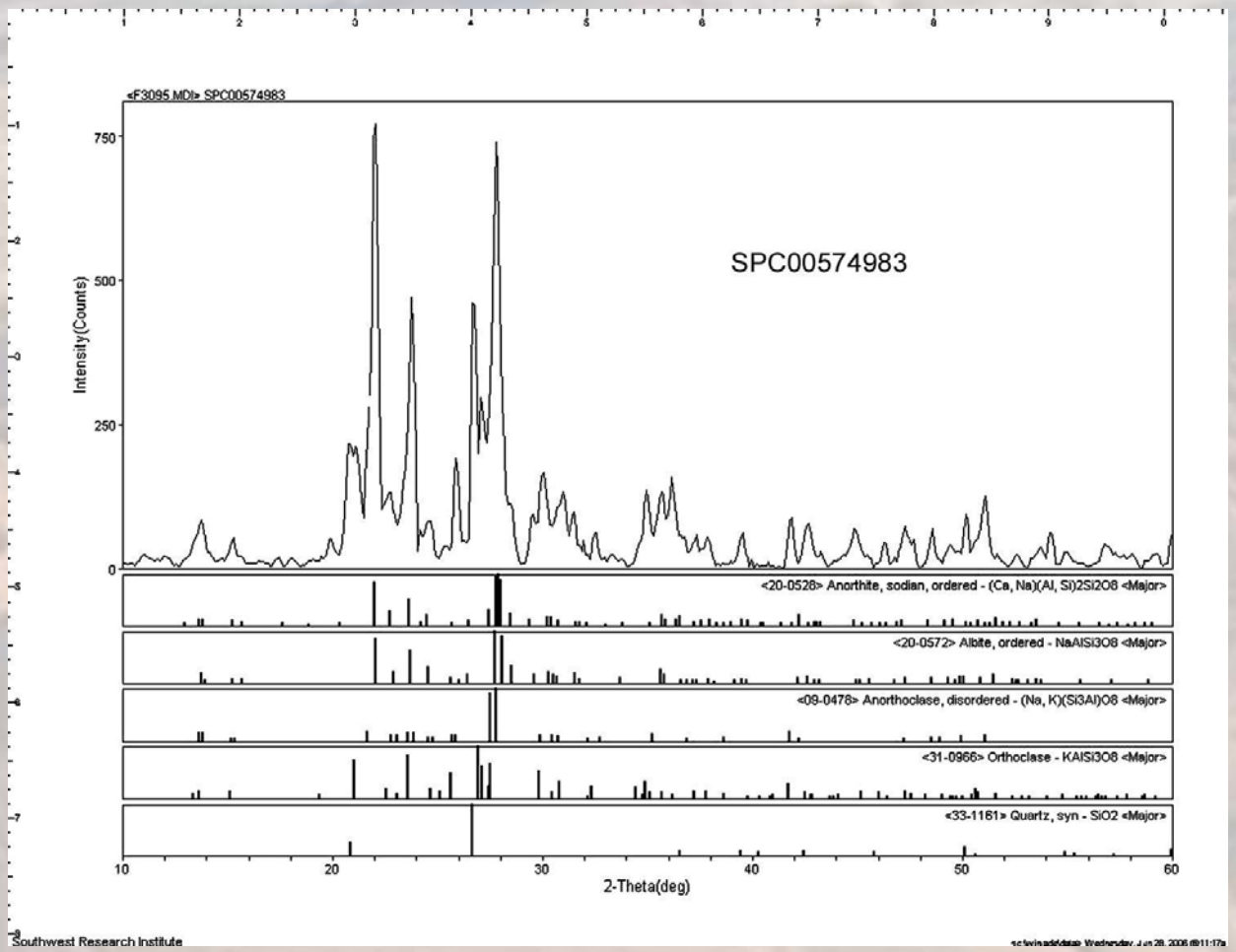
XRD: Whole Dust, Tunnel Sample



Primary Minerals:

- Anorthite, sodian, ordered $(Ca,Na)(Al,Si)2Si_2O_8$
- Albite, ordered $NaAlSi_3O_8$
- Anorthoclase, disordered $(Na,K)(Si_3Al)O_8$
- Orthoclase $KAlSi_3O_8$
- Quartz SiO_2

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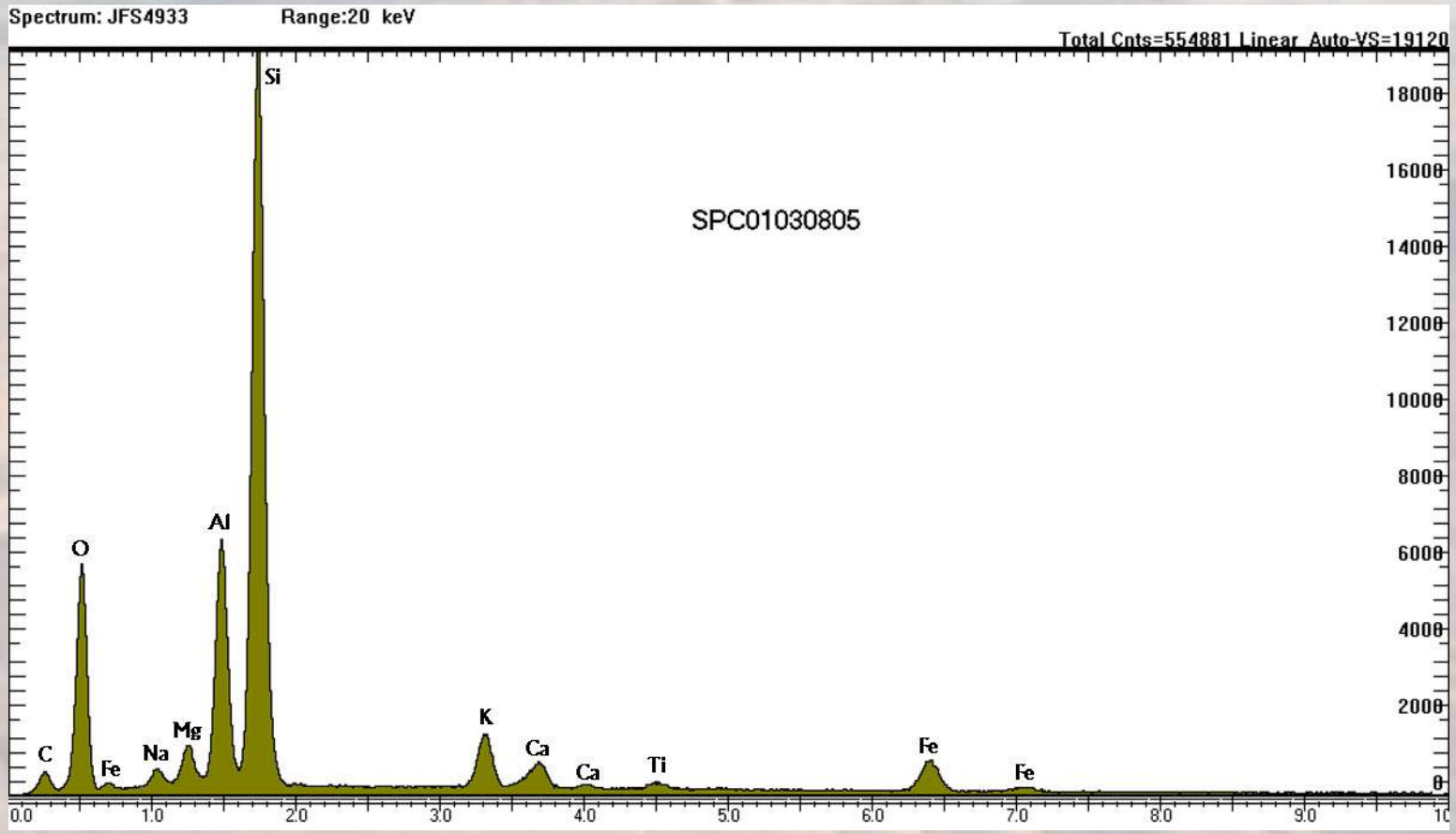
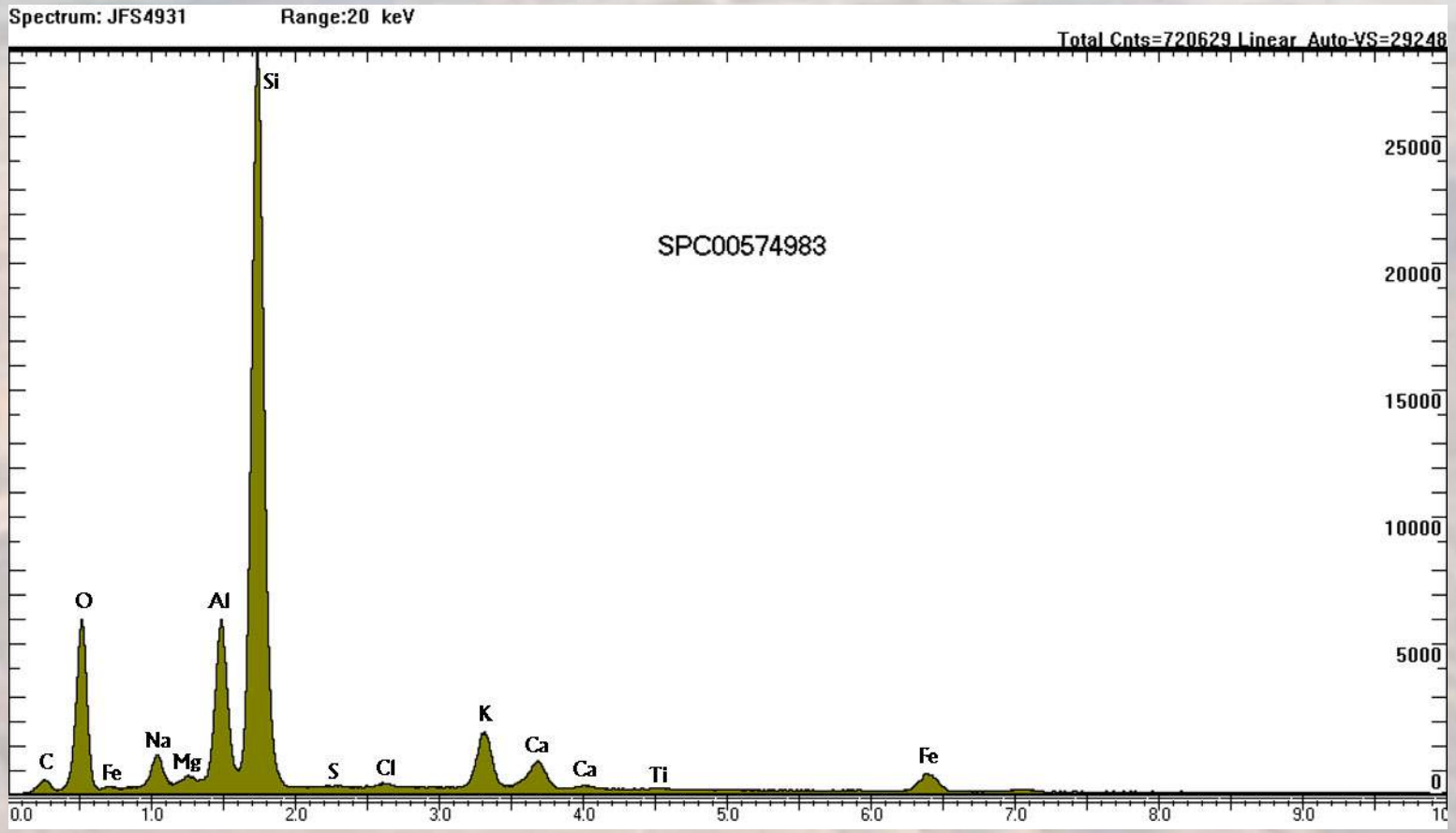
EDS: Whole Dust, Surface Sample



Silicon, 63.0%; Aluminum, 17.3%; Potassium, 5.8%; Iron, 6.7%; Sodium, 1.3%; Calcium, 2.9%; Magnesium, 2.1%

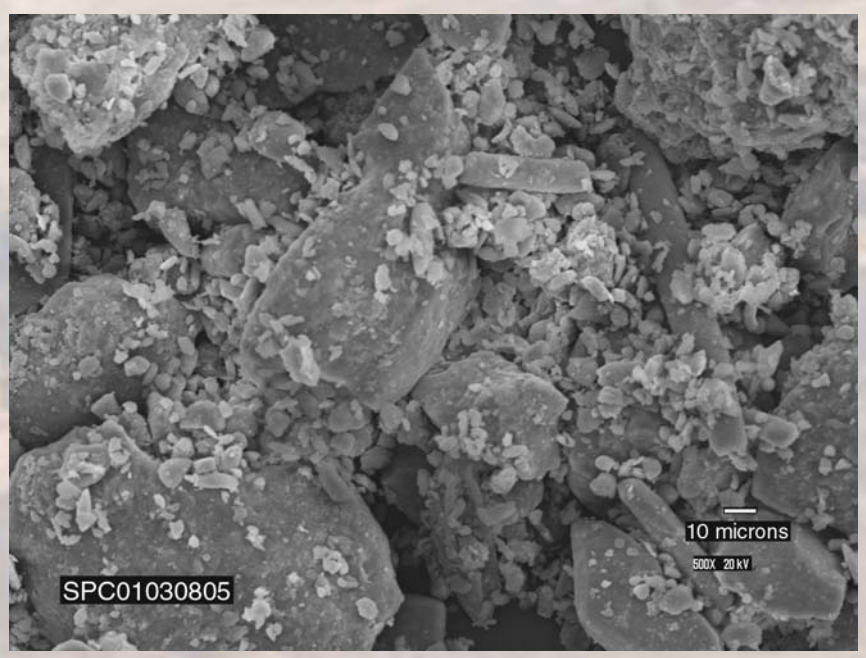
EDS: Whole Dust, Tunnel Sample



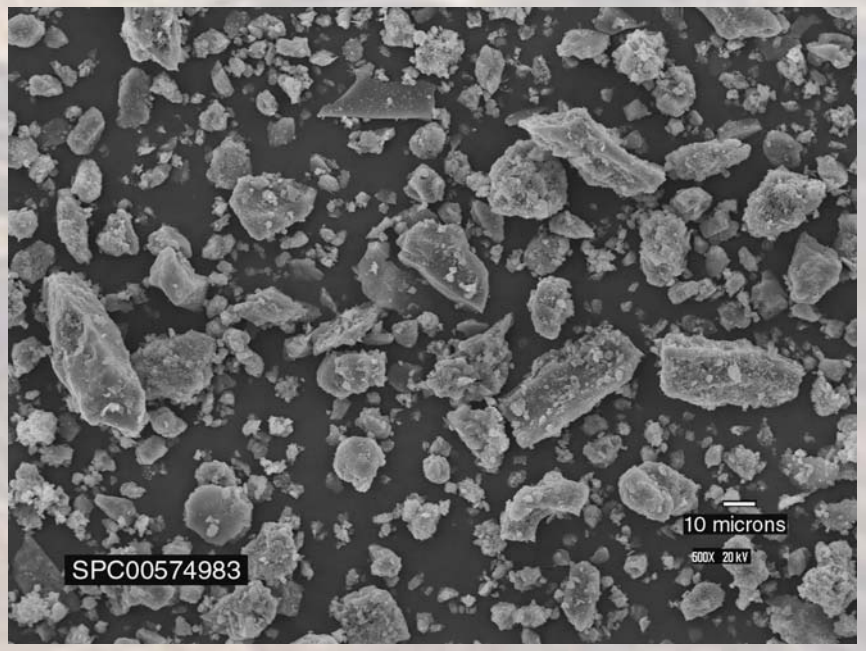
Silicon, 67%; Aluminum, 12.6%; Potassium, 7.1%; Iron, 4.2%; Sodium, 4.2%; Calcium, 3.4%

SEM of Whole Dusts

Surface Dust



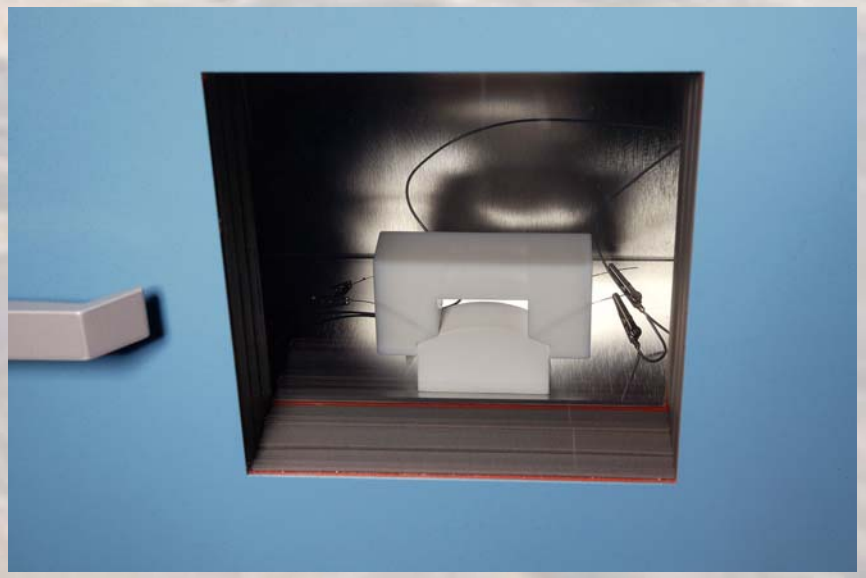
Tunnel Dust



Deliquescence Experiment

Deliquescence Experiment

- Impedance method used to detect Deliquescence Relative Humidity (DRH)
- Equipment
  - Thunder Scientific Model 2500 High Precision Humidity Chamber
  - Quadtech Model 7600 LCR meter
  - Custom-made Teflon conductivity cell fitted with filter paper between two platinum electrodes
- Filter paper creates a salt bridge that carries current depending on moisture availability



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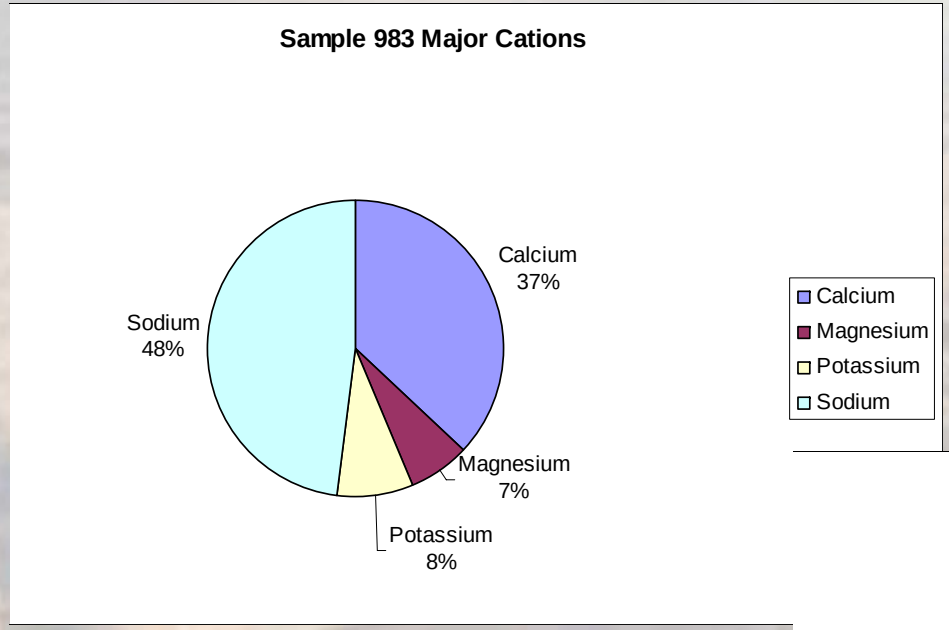
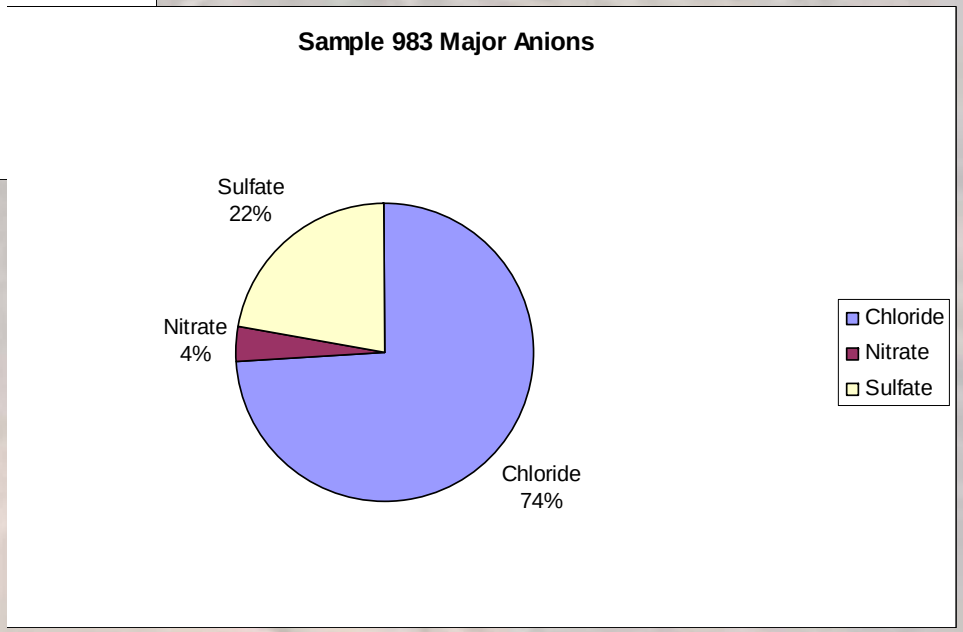
Synthetic Mixture Composition



- Trace elements ignored for simplicity



- Lithium and bromide used as tracers, ignored for synthetic composition

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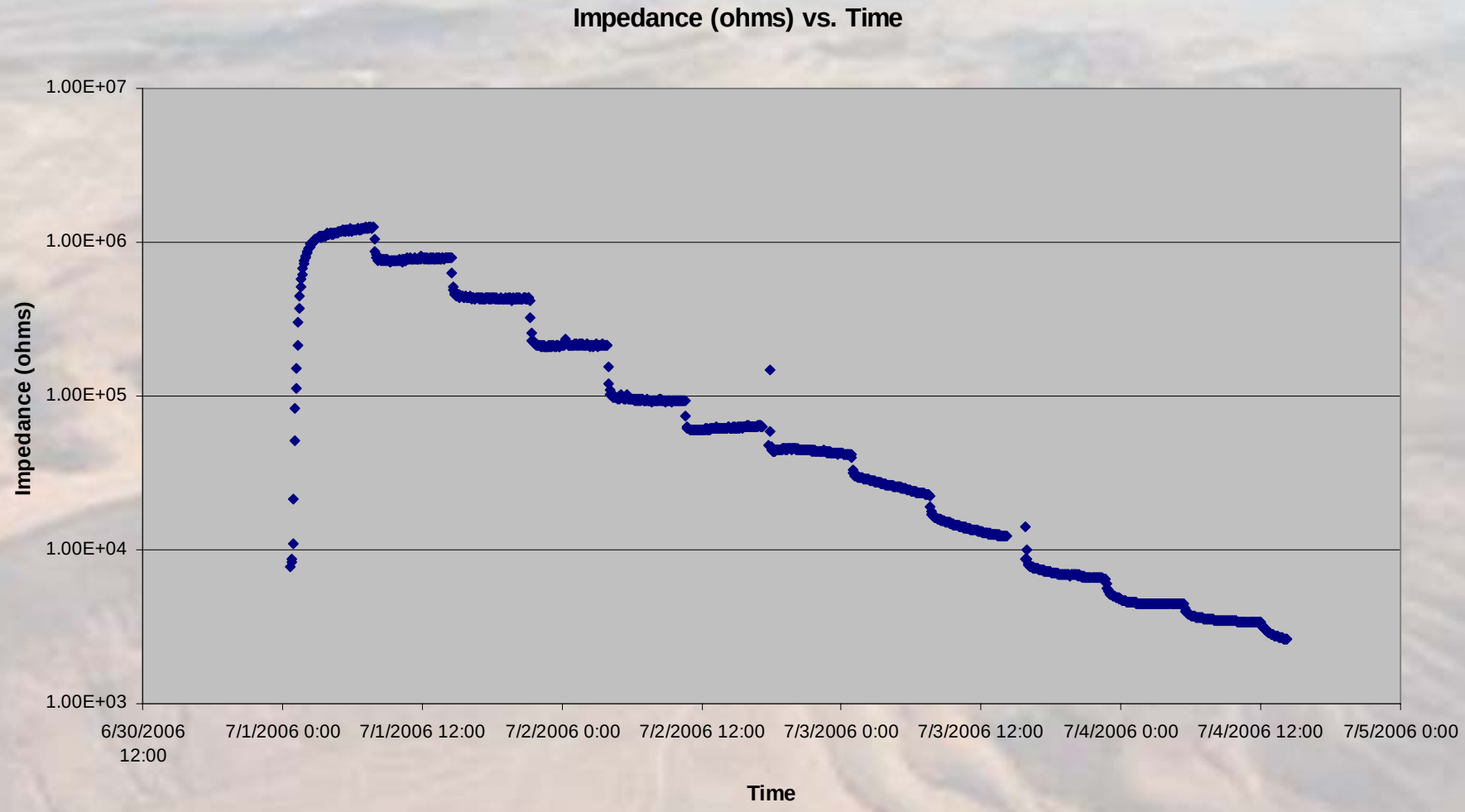
Deliquescence Behavior



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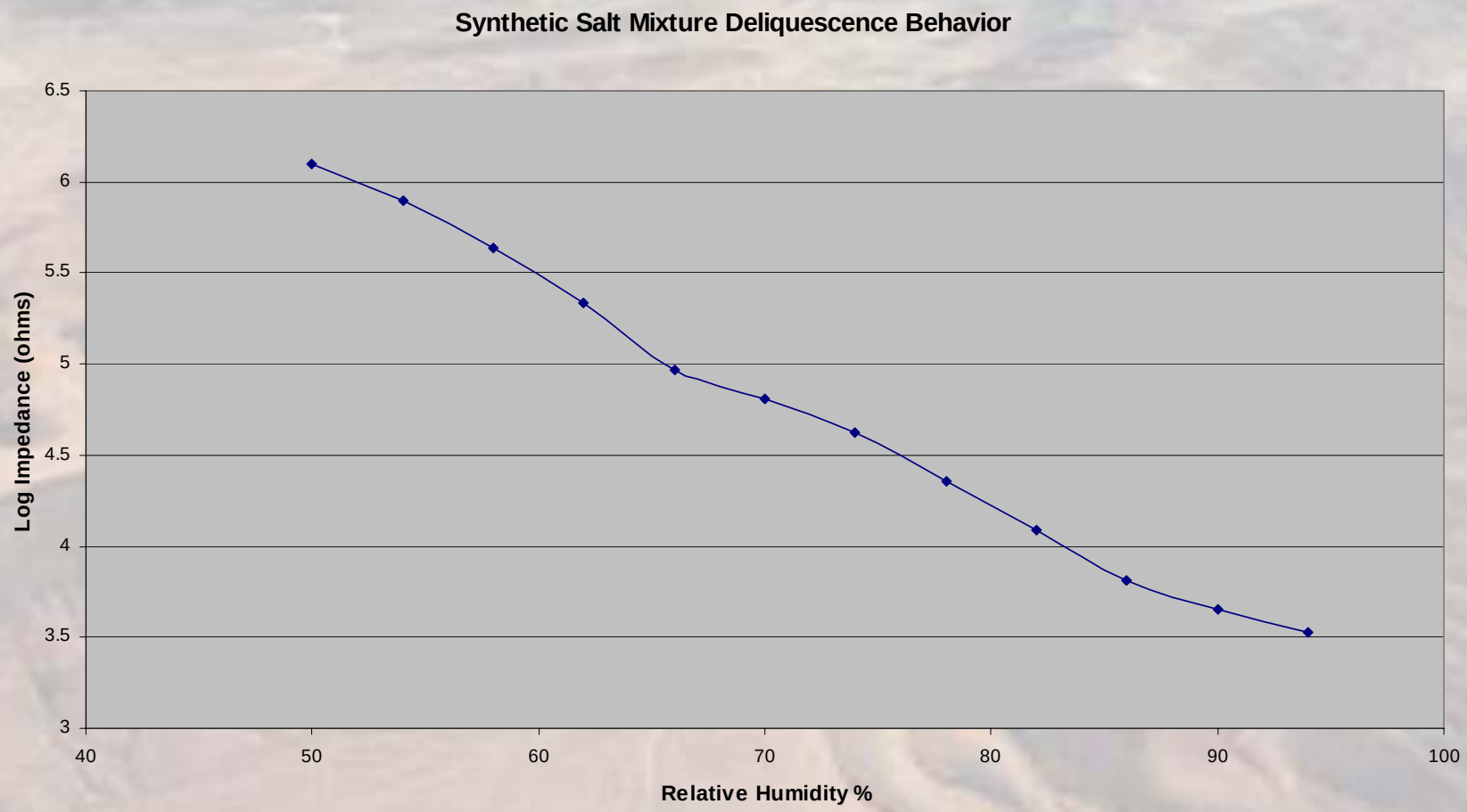
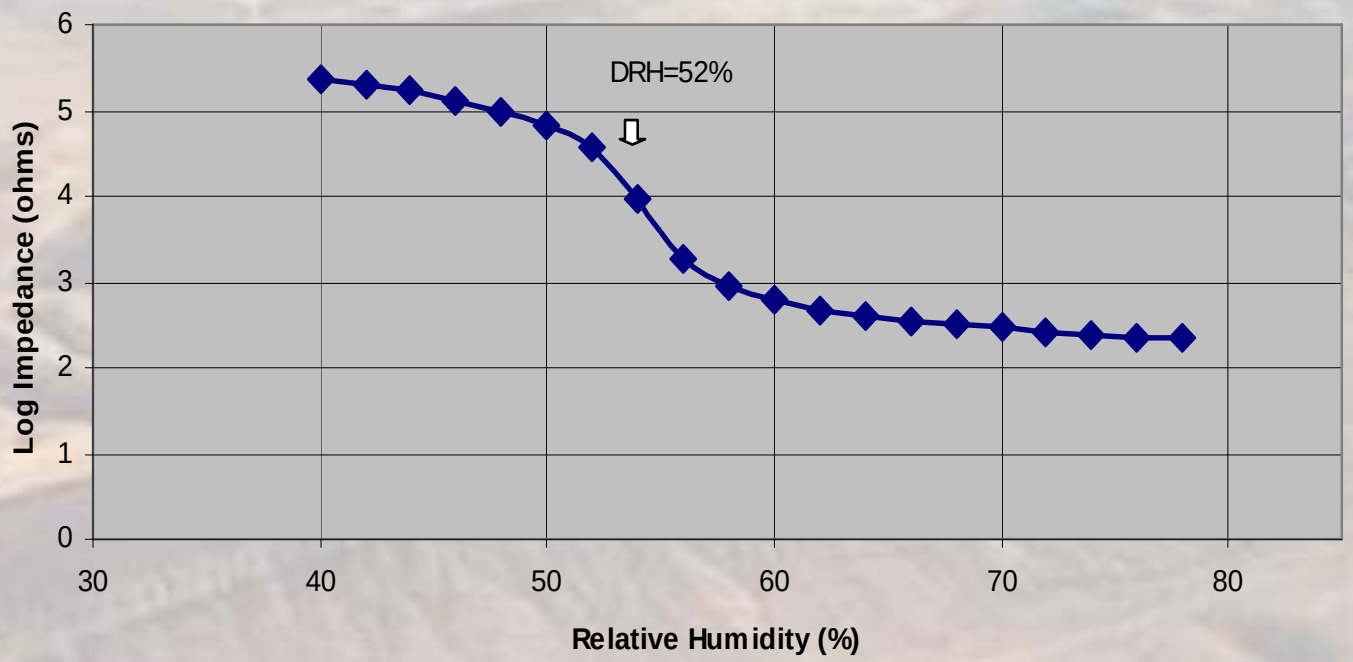
Deliquescence Behavior (continued)



Example of Deliquescence Data



Data from the system Na/K/Cl/NO_3 showing typical impedance behavior resulting from deliquescence as humidity is increased

Observations and Conclusions

- Deliquescence behavior is observed in a synthetic soluble fraction of the tunnel dust sample
- Chemical analyses show the presence of chloride, a species that can enhance localized corrosion, as well as nitrates and sulfides, which can mitigate localized corrosion of waste packages
- Higher concentrations of chloride were observed than typically discussed in DOE studies
- The fraction of soluble salts is very small (<1%) and greater in tunnel dust than in surface dust, perhaps due to rain washing and underground water flow

Ongoing Studies

- Additional studies of in-drift samples have been initiated using mixtures of soluble salts with insoluble dust (quartz powder)

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