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

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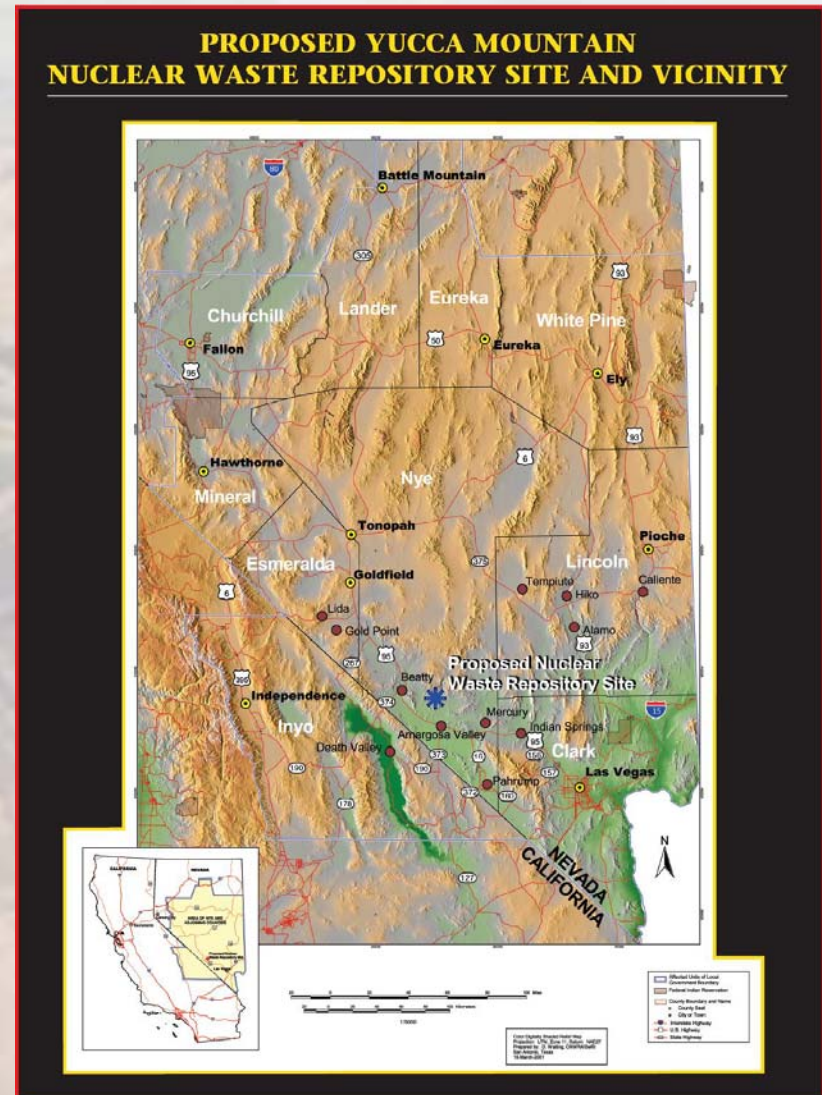


Objective and Outline

- 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

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

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%

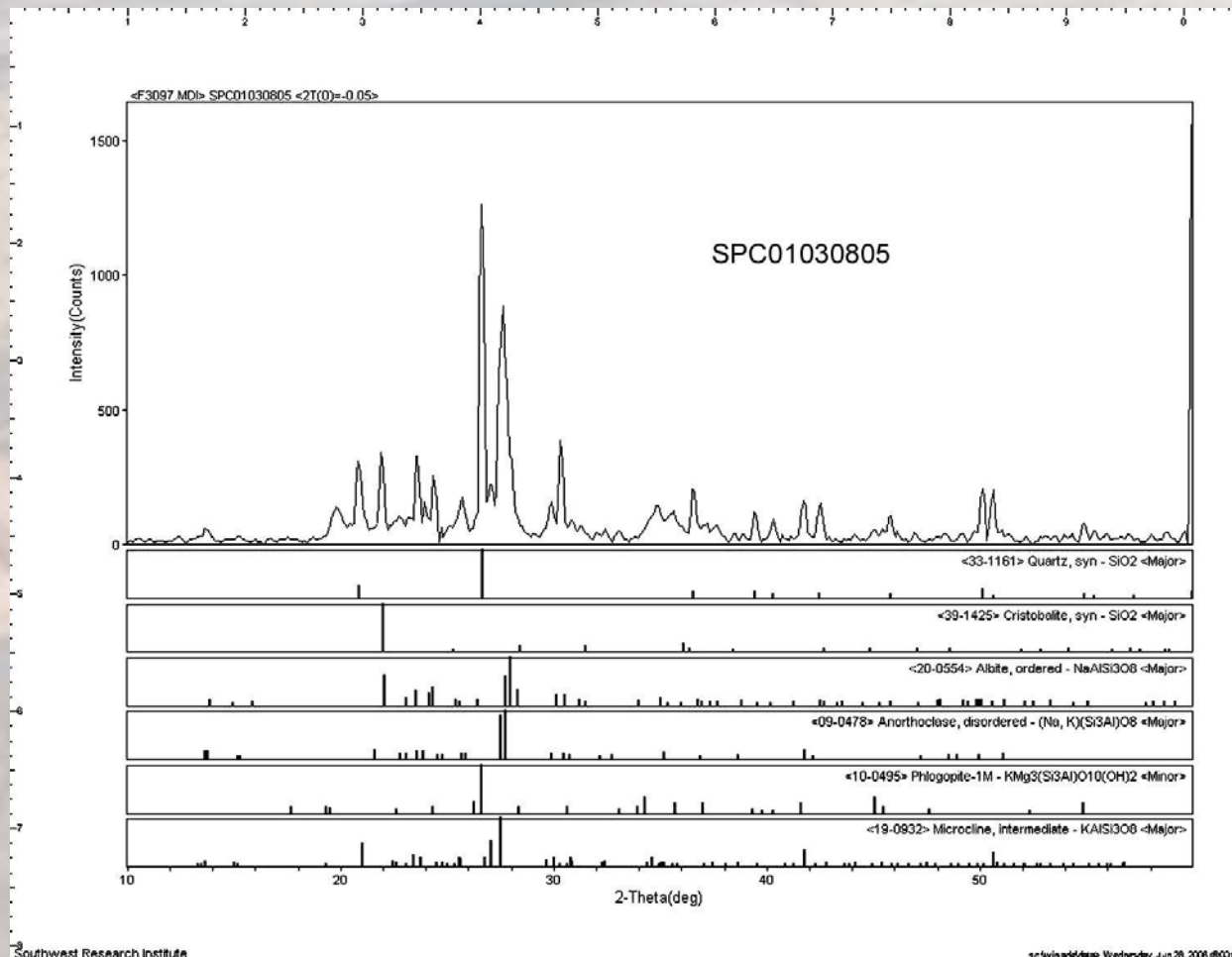
Tunnel Sample: 0.69%

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

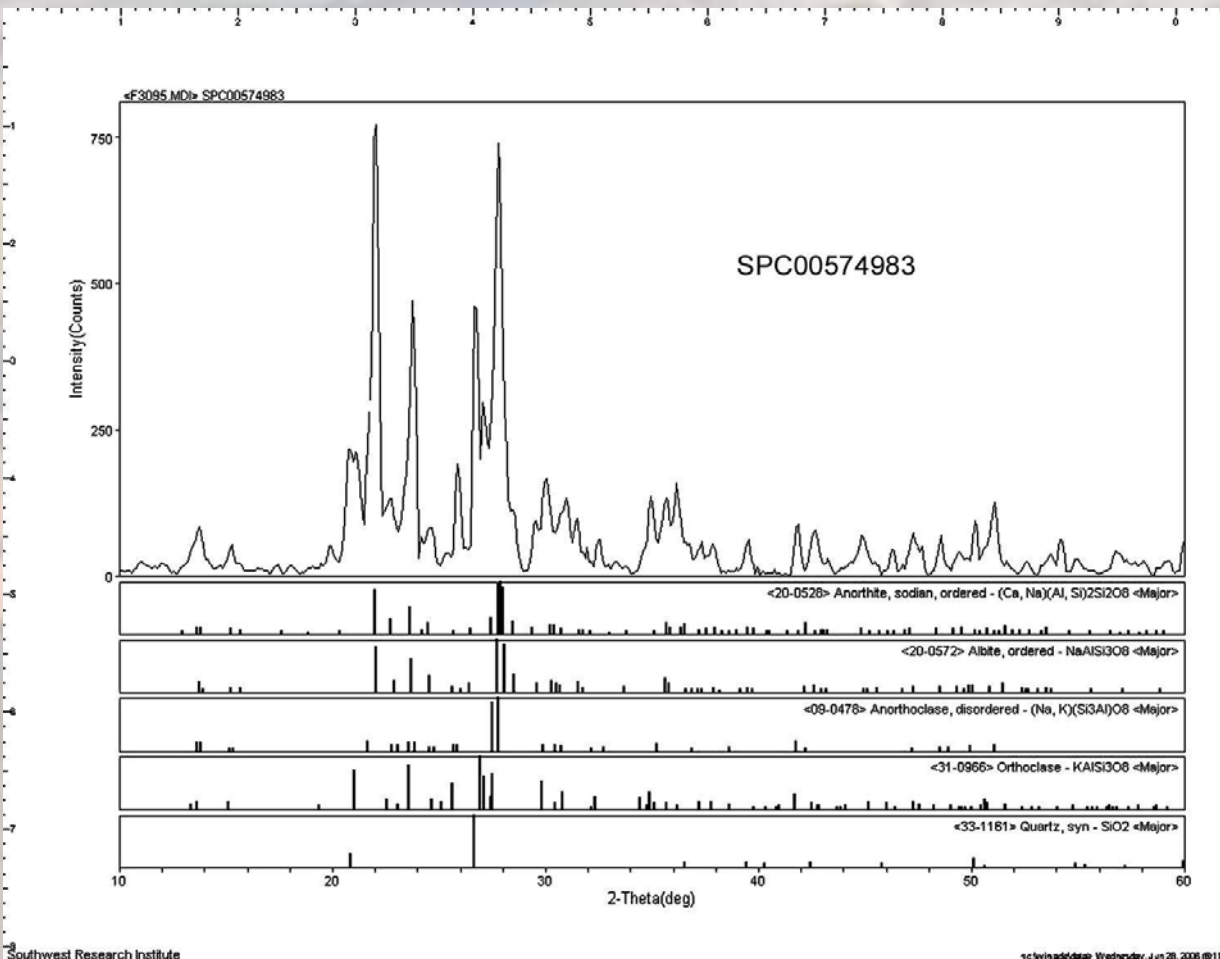
XRD: Whole Dust, Surface Sample

Primary Minerals:

- Quartz SiO_2
- Cristobalite SiO_2
- Albite, ordered
 $\text{NaAlSi}_3\text{O}_8$
- Anorthoclase,
disordered
 $(\text{Na,K})(\text{Si}_3\text{Al})\text{O}_8$
- Microcline,
intermediate
 KAlSi_3O_8



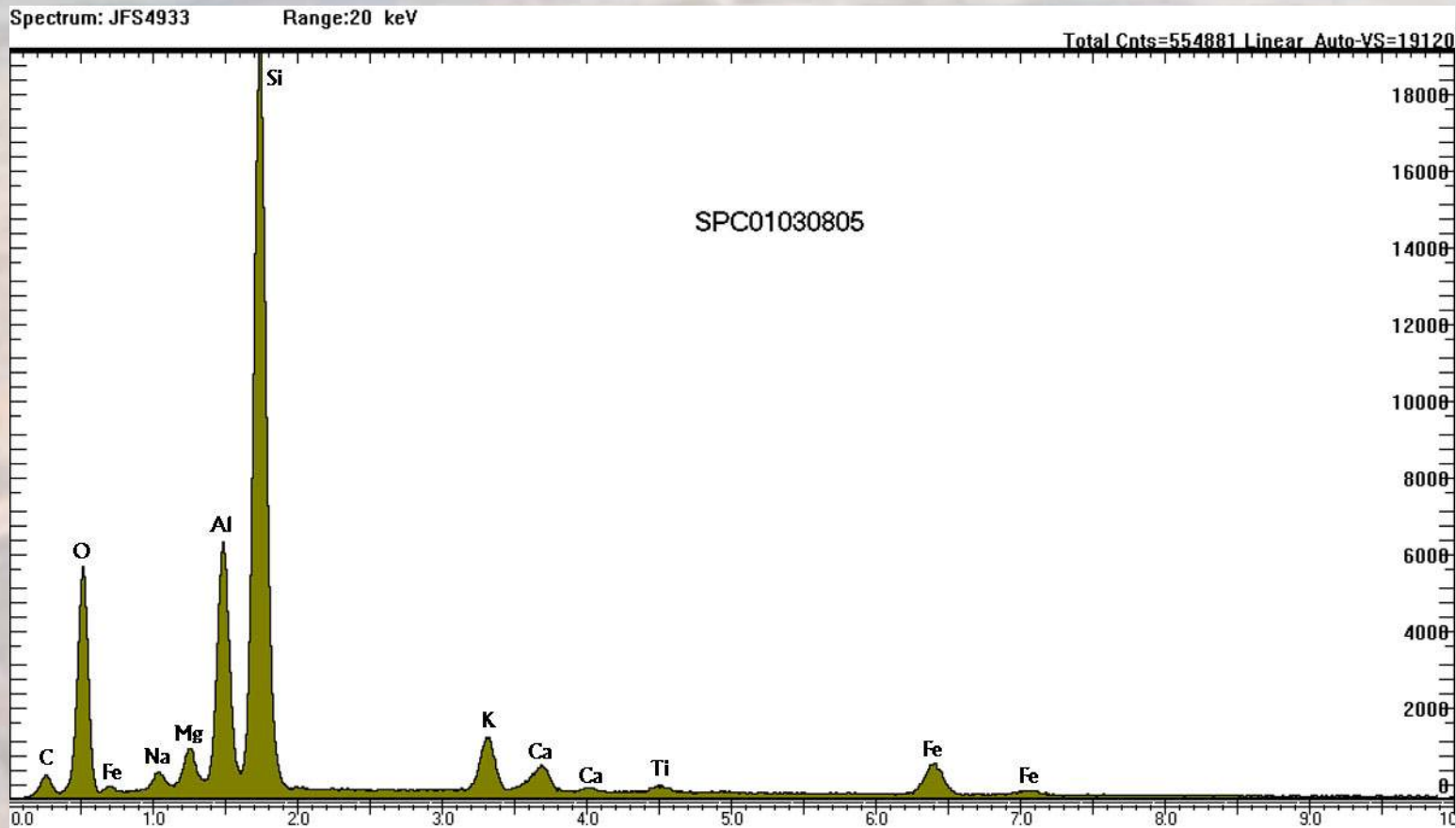
XRD: Whole Dust, Tunnel Sample



Primary Minerals:

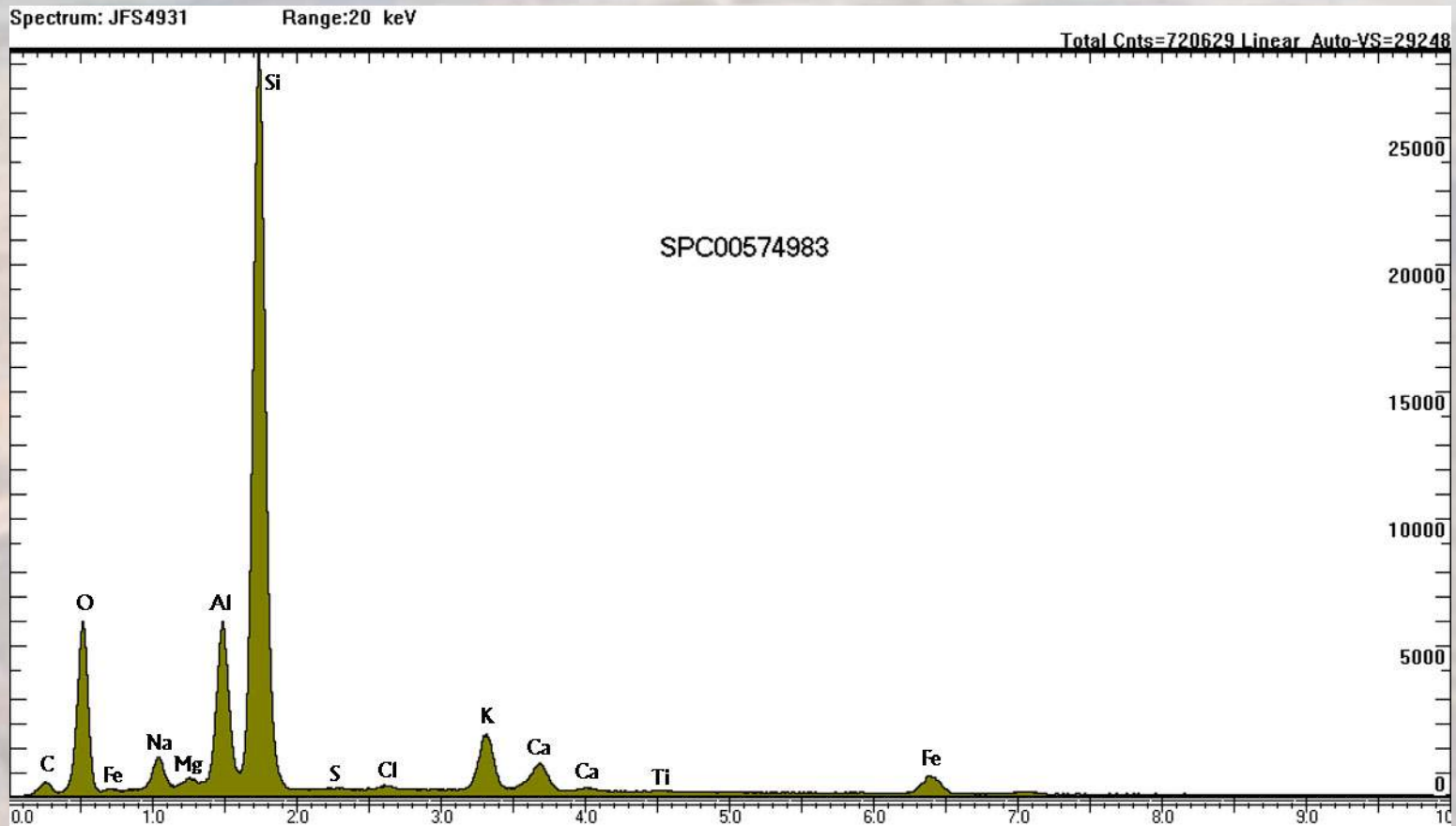
- Anorthite, sodian, ordered
 $(Ca, Na)(Al, Si)_2Si_2O_8$
- Albite, ordered
 $NaAlSi_3O_8$
- Anorthoclase, disordered
 $(Na, K)(Si_3Al)O_8$
- Orthoclase $KAlSi_3O_8$
- Quartz SiO_2

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%**

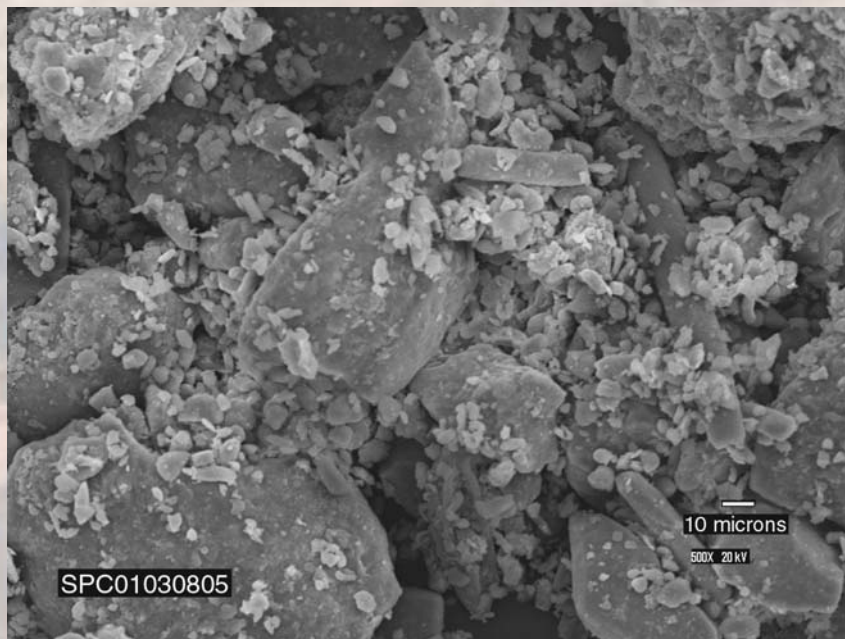
EDS: Whole Dust, Tunnel Sample



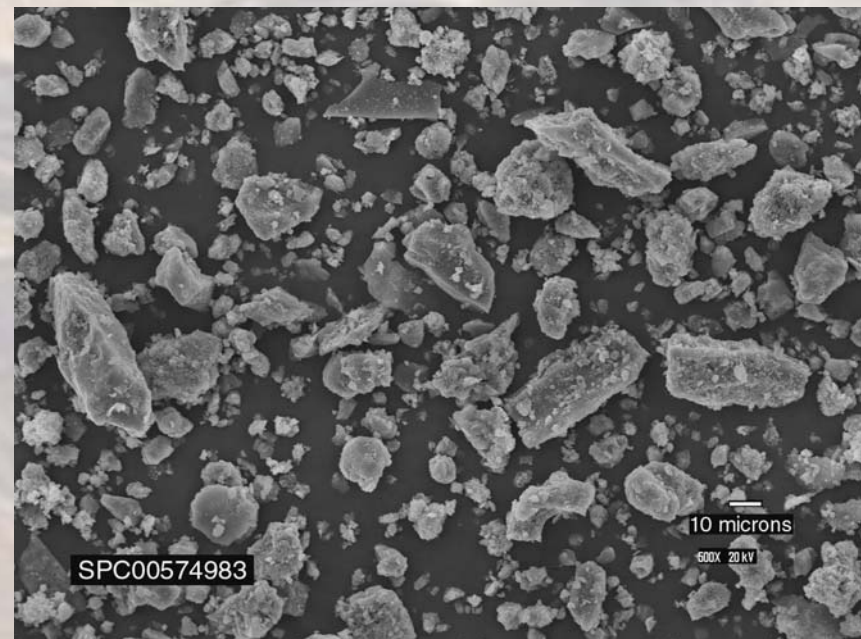
**Silicon, 67%; Aluminum, 12.6%; Potassium, 7.1%; Iron, 4.2%;
Sodium, 4.2%; Calcium, 3.4%**

SEM of Whole Dusts

Surface Dust



Tunnel Dust



An aerial photograph of a desert landscape, likely in the southwestern United States. The terrain is arid and hilly, with a prominent road winding through the center. A large, dark rectangular area is visible in the lower-left quadrant, possibly representing a study site or experimental area. The sky is clear and blue.

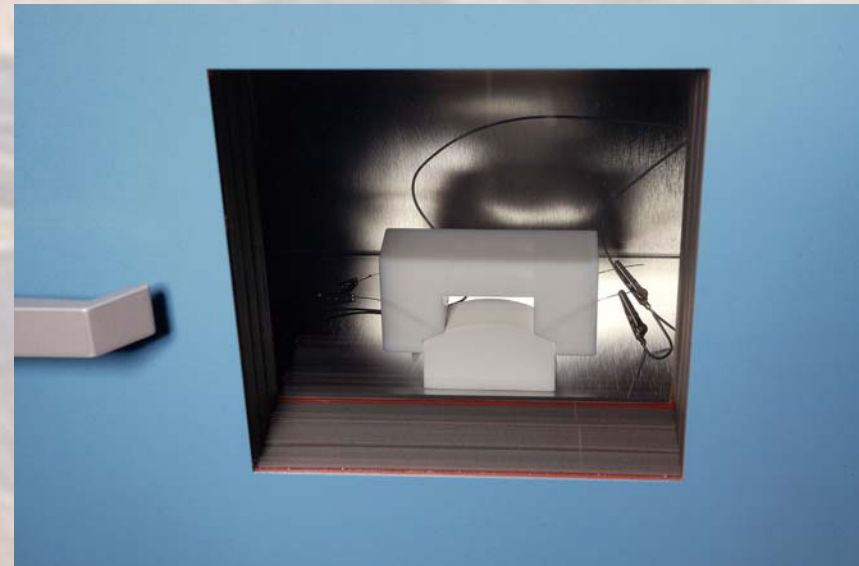
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Deliquescence Experiment

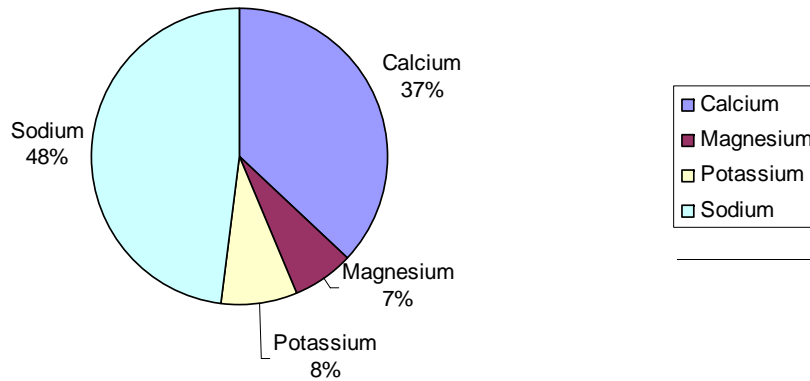
Deliquescence Experiment

- 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



Synthetic Mixture Composition

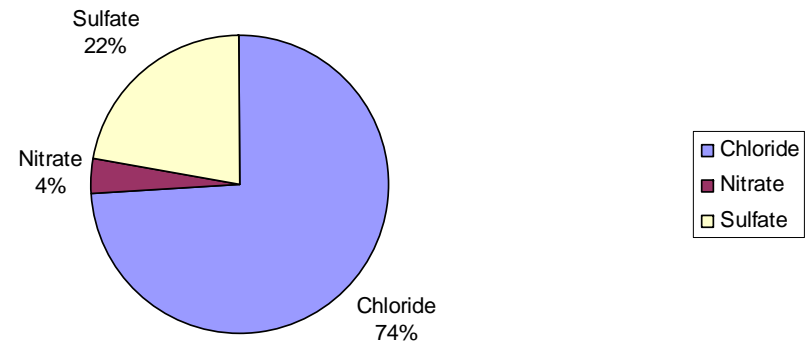
Sample 983 Major Cations



- Trace elements ignored for simplicity

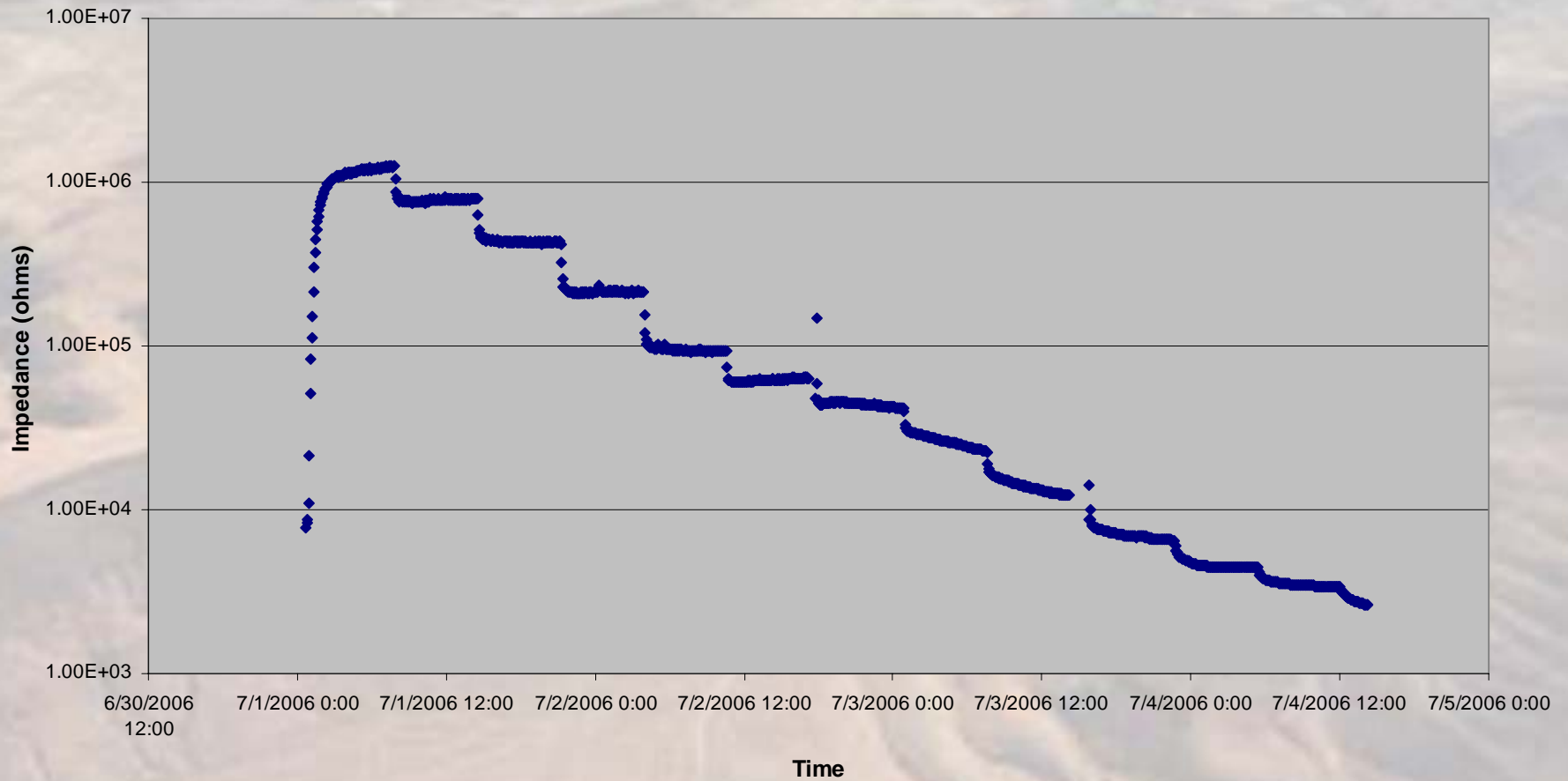
- Lithium and bromide used as tracers, ignored for synthetic composition

Sample 983 Major Anions



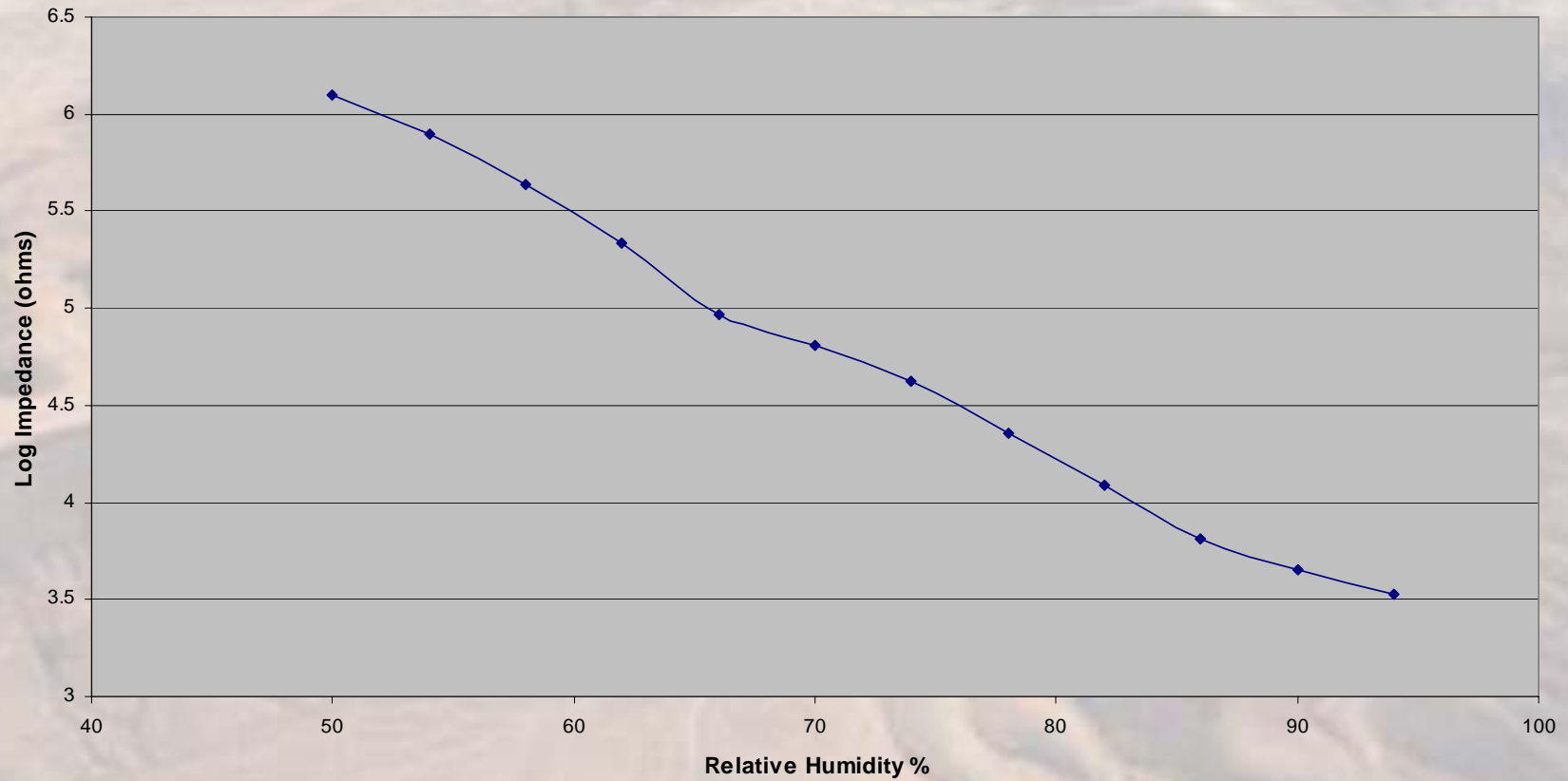
Deliquescence Behavior

Impedance (ohms) vs. Time

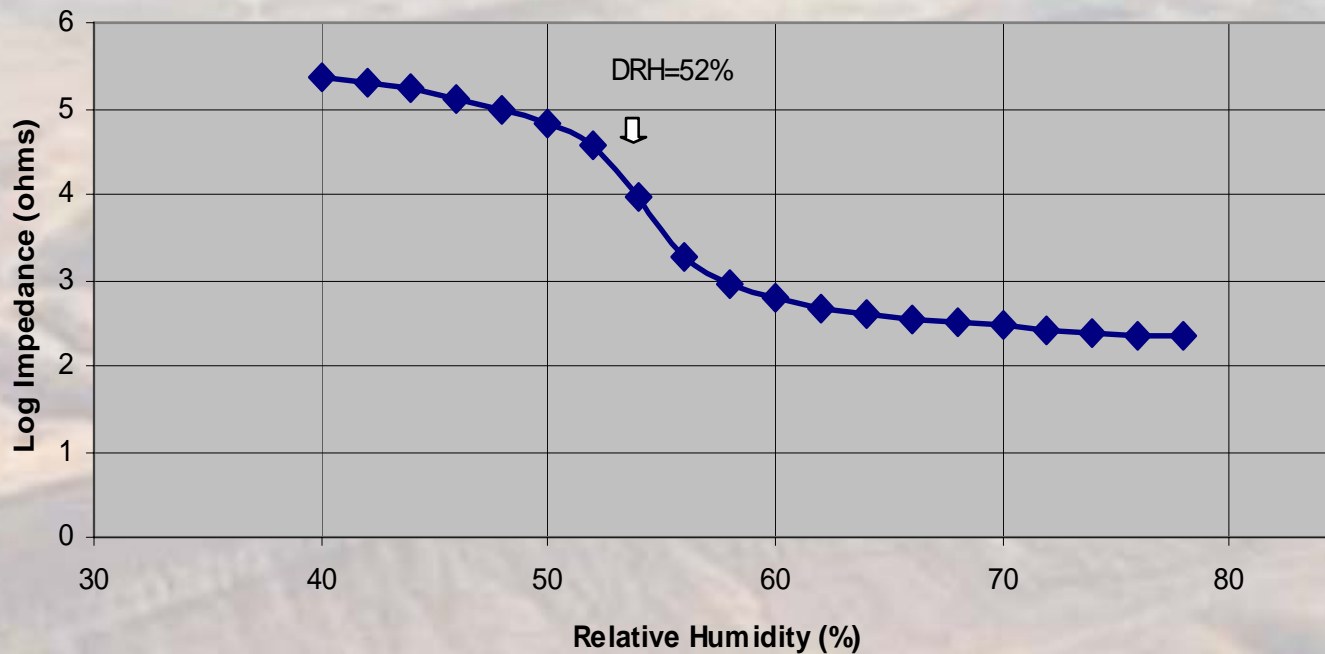


Deliquescence Behavior (continued)

Synthetic Salt Mixture Deliquescence Behavior



Example of Deliquescence Data



Data from the system Na/K/Cl/NO₃ 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)

Acknowledgments

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