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Catalytic ozonation with $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ to enhance the degradation of refractory organics in water

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Al$_2$O$_3$
Phenol
Advanced oxidation process

A B S T R A C T

Nowadays, heterogeneous catalytic ozonation appears as a promising way to treat industrial wastewaters containing refractory pollutants, which resist to biological treatments. Several oxides and minerals have been used and their behavior is subject to controversy with particularly the role of Lewis acid sites and/or basic sites and the effect of salts. In this study, millimetric mesoporous $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ particles suitable for industrial processes were used for enhancing the ozonation efficiency of petrochemical effluents without pH adjustment. A phenol (2,4-dimethylphenol (2,4-DMP)) was first chosen as petrochemical refractory molecule to evaluate the influence of alumina in ozonation. Single ozonation and ozonation in presence of $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ led to the disappearance of 2,4-DMP in 25 min and a decrease in pH from 4.5 to 2.5. No adsorption of 2,4-DMP occurred on $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$. Adding $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ in the process resulted in an increase of the 2,4-DMP oxidation level. Indeed, the total organic carbon (TOC) removal was 14% for a single ozonation and 46% for ozonation with $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$. Similarly, chemical oxygen demand (COD) removal increases from 35 to 75%, respectively. Various oxidized by-products were produced during the degradation of 2,4-DMP, but after 5 h ozonation 90% of organic by-products were acetic acid $\gg$ formic acid $\gg$ oxalic acid. Some of the carboxylic acids were adsorbed on $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$. The use of radical scavengers (tert-butanol) highlighted the involvement of hydroxyl radicals during catalytic ozonation with $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ in contrary to single ozonation, which mainly involved direct ozone reaction. $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ is an amphoteric solid with Lewis acid sites (Lewis acid AlOH(H$^+$) sites) and basic Al-OH sites. After ozonation the amount of basic sites decreased due to carboxylates adsorption, while the Lewis acid sites remained constant as evidenced by FTIR. Several ozonation runs with $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ reported a progressive decrease of its catalytic activity due to the cumulative sorption of carboxylates on the basic sites. After 80 h of ozonation, a calcination at 550 $^\circ$C allowed to recover all Al-OH basic sites and the initial activity of $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$. A synthetic petrochemical effluent containing various petrochemicals (phenol, acetic acid, naphtenic acid, pyrene, naphtalene) was then treated with $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ with and without NaCl. Sodium ions prevented carboxylates adsorption on $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ leading to a higher efficiency of $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ in presence of NaCl and allowed to decrease the toxicity of the petrochemical effluent.

1. Introduction

In recent years, many efforts on the advanced oxidation processes (AOPs) development have been done for wastewater treatment especially in industries to treat organic compounds resistant to biological treatments [1]. Among the AOPs, processes based on ozone appear as promising technologies for the removal
of refractory compounds [2–7]. In aqueous media, O₃ can react directly with organic compounds and/or indirectly when O₃ is decomposed into free radicals, which have higher oxidizing rate than O₃ itself [2–4,8]. Consequently, favoring this second route allows to reach higher levels of toxic pollutant mineralization. The indirect reaction in single ozonation is influenced by the pH of the solution (high pH), the solution composition and the temperature, but it is limited to a certain extend of mineralization [3,8]. In this context, some studies have focused on heterogeneous catalytic ozonation in aqueous media since the early 2000s, due to the enhancement of the production of hydroxyl radicals with materials such as activated carbons, zeolites, oxides (CeO₂, TiO₂, MgO, Al₂O₃, MnO₂, Fe₂O₃, Co₃O₄, NiO, CuO, ZnO, ZrO₂, ...) and the subsequent ozone economy [4,8–17]. However, all of these materials have never been studied in identical conditions, so it is difficult to compare their efficiency. An excellent review by Nawrocki and Kasprzyk-Hordern in 2010 reported the different materials and conditions used in catalytic ozonation in this last decade [8]. They report that the following order in term of better heterogeneous catalysts appears in certain conditions (ozonation of dinitrobenzene at pH 3): Fe₂O₃ > Co₂O₃ > MoO₃ > CuO ~ NiO > Al₂O₃ > TiO₂ > Cr₂O₃ > MnO₂ ~ O₃, which seems to follow the basicity strength of the oxides (Mn > Fe = Co > Ni > Cu > Zn) except for MnO₂. However, in some other studies MnO₂ was demonstrated as the more active catalyst, but leaching of some cations have been also observed, as well as for CuO. Some of these oxides need to be supported for industrial processes to avoid fine particles and the leaching of metal has to be avoided. In this review was also highlighted the wide controversy of mechanisms proposed in literature responsible for the increase of ozone activity in the presence of materials and especially the role of Lewis acid sites and/or basic sites, which remained a subject of debate. Catalytic ozonation appears as a highly suitable process for petrochemical wastewater treatments as ozone is especially active for refractory molecules of this industry such as aromatic molecules substituted with electron donor groups as alkyl-benzene (toluene, xylene, ethylbenzene), phenols (alkylphenols) and polyaromatic hydrocarbons (naphthalene, phenantrene, anthracene, ...).

It was previously shown that the catalytic activity of activated carbons in ozonation decreased after several runs by the loss of their basic sites and no regeneration was possible [5–7]. Inorganic catalysts should be preferred. Zeolites and oxides in ozonation for wastewater treatment provide many advantages: no chemicals to add, simplicity of use and high pollutant removal efficiency [15]. Concerning the zeolites in ozonation process for organic compounds removal, it seems that the reaction mechanisms are zeolite structures dependent [18]. Some studies revealed the adsorption capacity of pollutant and/or ozone into the micropores of zeolites, especially in ZSM-5 structure type, which does not confer any radical pathway but serve as reservoir of ozone and adsorbents of organic compounds [19–21]. Besides, it was also demonstrated that zeolites could catalyze ozone decomposition and enhance the generation of hydroxyl radicals (HO•) [11]. Indeed, it was recently reported that basic zeolites as LT-zeolite can enhance radicals generation by combining two pathways: the production of hydroxide ions during the cation-exchange of Na-zeolite with the protons of the solution and by the interaction of ozone with some hydroxyl groups present as defects in the material [18]. However, a decrease of the LT-zeolite catalytic activity was observed for a second run of phenol compounds ozonation due in part to the irreversibility of the cation-exchange [18]. Other porous materials especially γ-Al₂O₃ have been identified to generate free radicals from the interaction between their hydroxyl groups and ozone [20,22,23]. A study suggested that γ-Al₂O₃ combined to O₃ allowed an enhancement of HO• radical via •O₂⁻ and/or •O₂⁻ radicals, resulting in a faster carboxylic acids removal than single ozonation [22]. Recently, Ikhlaq et al. [20] confirmed this hypothesis and pointed out also that HO• radicals can combine with themselves to produce H₂O₂, depending on the pH of the solution. This was demonstrated after pH adjustment for pH higher than pH = 6.2. Another catalytic reaction mechanism with aluminum oxides was also proposed due to the ir capacity to adsorb ozone and to decompose it into free radicals by interacting with the hydroxyl groups of the materials [16,24]. Moreover, the catalytic effect of γ-Al₂O₃ was preserved after several ozonation runs, indicating no poisoning of the active sites for ozone decomposition [16]. However, the increase of the pollutant removal efficiency by heterogeneous ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ was also attributed to the adsorption of ozonation by-products. On the one hand, pharmaceutical pollutant removal experiments were performed by alternating single ozonation and catalytic ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ in order to observe the by-products adsorption capacity of γ-Al₂O₃. The authors explain that carboxylates could be adsorbed onto γ-Al₂O₃ when the solution pH is lower than the pHeq of the material [2]. On the other hand, 2,4-dimethylphenol (2,4-DMP) removal was performed by single ozonation in order to generate oxidized by-products and, then γ-Al₂O₃ was added to examine its adsorption ability [17]. These experiments clearly evidenced no adsorption of the oxidized by-products generated after 35 min of single ozonation, but an adsorption of the by-products generated after 3 h of single ozonation. Consequently, it appears that reaction mechanisms in aluminum oxides/ozone processes are by-products dependent and are still unclear, especially concerning γ-Al₂O₃ material. The adsorption of oxidized by-products and the role of Lewis acid sites and basic sites of γ-Al₂O₃ are subject to large controversy. In the present study, a commercial γ-Al₂O₃ with millimetric particles, suitable for industrial ozonation processes, was investigated for 2,4-DMP degradation in the presence of ozone, without adding any chemical, so without pH adjustment. Substituted phenols, such as 2,4-DMP are highly toxic compounds and are typical pollutants found in petrochemical wastewater [25,26]. The kinetics of pollutant degradation was followed, as well as the formation of the oxidized by-products by chromatography, by total organic carbon (TOC) and chemical oxygen demand (COD) measurements. Adsorption isotherms of 2,4-DMP and of the final oxidized by-products (carboxylic acids) on γ-Al₂O₃ were performed to clarify the adsorption capacity of γ-Al₂O₃. FTIR studies were performed to examine the acid and basic sites of the material before and after ozonation. The reusability of γ-Al₂O₃ was investigated by performing several ozonation runs of the pollutant. γ-Al₂O₃ was also used in the ozonation of a complex synthetic petrochemical effluent (phenol, acetic acid, naphtenic acid, pyrene, naphthalene) to confirm the observations obtained with 2,4-DMP. Toxicity tests were performed to evaluate the efficiency of γ-Al₂O₃ in ozonation.

2. Experimental procedure

2.1. Materials

Acetonitrile (ACN) and water (H₂O) for high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) analyzes by HPLC grade (Sigma Aldrich). γ-Al₂O₃ was purchased from Alpha Degussa. All other chemicals are high grade commercially available from Sigma Aldrich: 2,4-dimethylphenol (2,4-DMP) (98%), acetic acid, formic acid, oxalic acid, phenol, pyrene, naphthalene and tert-butanol (t-BuOH). Naphthenic acid was purchased from Fluka. 2,4-DMP and carboxylic acids solutions were prepared using Millipore Milli-Q water.

2.2. Inorganic materials characterization

X-ray diffraction (XRD) pattern of the material was performed using a Bruker D8 Advance diffractometer with a Bragg-Brentano
geometry and equipped with a Bruker Lynx Eye detector. XRD pattern was recorded in the range 4° to 85° (2θ) with a 0.0197° angular step size and a 0.2 s counting time per step. Textural properties of the material were determined by N₂ adsorption/desorption at −196 °C on a Micromeritics Tristar 3000 apparatus. The sample was previously outgassed in vacuum at 250 °C for 12 h. The surface area was determined according to the BET method. Total pore volume was calculated at the end of the adsorption step. Mesopore diameter was evaluated using the Broekhoff and De Boer method applied to the desorption branch of the isotherm as it has been shown to be one of the more accurate methods for mesopore size evaluation [27].

The $^{13}$C MAS NMR spectrum of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ after 5 h ozonation was performed on filtered and dried material and was obtained on a Varian VNMRS 300 MHz spectrometer with a magnetic field of 7.05 T. The operating frequency for $^{13}$C was 75.43 MHz. The sample was packed in a 7.5 mm ZrO₂ rotor. The chemical shifts are presented in parts per million.

FTIR analyses of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ were performed on dried materials before and after ozonation. Samples were pressed (~$10^6$ Torr) into self-supported disks (2 cm² area, 7–10 mg cm⁻²) and placed in a quartz cell equipped with KBr windows. A movable quartz sample holder permits one to adjust the pellet in the infrared beam for spectra recording and to displace it into a furnace at the top of the cell for thermal treatment. The cell was connected to a vacuum line for evacuation ($P_{\text{residual}} \approx 10^{-6}$ Torr) and for the introduction of gases into the infrared cell. The gas pressure inside the cell was measured by a pressure gauge ($10^{-2}$–$10^{-1}$ Torr range). A Bruker Vertex 80 V spectrometer equipped with a mercury cadmium telluride (MCT) cryodetector and an extended KBr beam splitter was used for the acquisition of spectra recorded at room temperature, in the 600–5500 cm⁻¹ range. The resolution of the spectra was 4 cm⁻¹, and 128 scans were accumulated for each spectrum. Strength of acid sites of the materials was obtained by pyridine adsorption followed by FTIR spectroscopy for different temperatures of desorption. Basic sites of the materials were analyzed by CO₂ adsorption/desorption.

2.3. Adsorption and ozonation experiments

Prior to ozonation experiments, 2,4-DMP adsorption capacity of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ was assessed to quantify its possible contribution to the degradation of the pollutant. Adsorption of the pollutant was performed at 25 °C in abiotic conditions: 0.2 g of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ were stirred in a glass bottle containing 100 mL of pollutant solution until the equilibrium was reached, which was corresponding to 4 h. Equilibrium isotherms of adsorption were plotted for 2,4-DMP concentrations ranging from 1 to 400 mg L⁻¹. Equilibrium isotherms of carboxylic acids adsorption (acetic acid, formic acid, oxalic acid) were performed following the same procedure than for 2,4-DMP adsorption.

The ozone decomposition of the pollutant was assessed in a glass stirred batch reactor of 2 L, as previously described [18]. Experiments were conducted at 25 °C, feeding the reactor with a 40 mL h⁻¹ O₃ gas flow rate with a 2 g Nm⁻³ O₃ concentration (obtained from air). In a typical run, 3 g of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ were added in the reactor with 1.5 L of 2,4-DMP solution at 50 mg L⁻¹. The solution was stirred at 400 rpm at 25 °C and O₃ was injected to the reactor immediately after introducing $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$. In order to avoid limitation by O₃ gas to liquid transfer, the stirring velocity of the reactor was optimized by progressively increasing the velocity from 200 to 400 rpm and optimal stirring velocity was found at 400 rpm [18]. The pollutant removal and its oxidized by-products were monitored taking samples within time through PTFE syringe filters (0.45 μm).

The reuse and regeneration of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ were also investigated by performing several ozonation runs of the 2,4-DMP degradation.

These experiments were performed using another lab scale reactor described elsewhere [17], similar to the first one but with a volume of solution of 2 L, an amount of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ of 5 g L⁻¹, a O₃ gas flow rate is 30 L h⁻¹ and O₃ gas concentration is 5 g Nm⁻³ (obtained from O₂).

A synthetic petrochemical effluent was also ozonized with $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ without and with NaCl (50 g L⁻¹). These experiments were performed in a third pilot plant scale reactor described elsewhere [28] with a volume of solution of 1.5 L, an amount of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ of 2 g L⁻¹, a O₃ gas flow rate of 24 L h⁻¹ and a gas concentration of 5 g O₃ Nm⁻³. The complex synthetic effluent was a mixture of several aromatic hydrocarbons and associated acids: phenol, acetic acid, naphtenic acid, pyrene, naphtalene with initial concentration of 200, 200, 25, 0.05, 0.95 mg L⁻¹, respectively, corresponding to TOC = 230 mg L⁻¹ and COD = 750 mg L⁻¹. Toxicity tests were performed on the experiments performed in presence of NaCl (50 g L⁻¹). Non-standardized toxicity tests (Toxkits), named ARTOXKIT and ROTOXKIT, were performed using two different sea-water organisms Artemia franciscana and Brachionus calyciflorus, respectively. Toxicity tests were performed after pH adjustment at pH 7 of the effluent treated by 150 and 300 min of ozonation with $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$. The efficiency of the process was assessed by the effluent concentration able to provoke 50% mortality of the species after 24 h of exposure (LC₅₀ 24 h). Results were expressed in toxic unit: Equitox/m³ ≈ 100/LC₅₀ 24 h.

2.4. Analysis of soluble pollutant and by-products

The 2,4-DMP concentration in the aqueous solutions was monitored by HPLC (Waters 600E controller and pump, 717 plus Autosampler) equipped with an UV detector (2996 PDA, fixed wavelength λ = 279 nm). HPLC analyzes was performed on a C18 grafted silica column (Interchim, Uptisphere® C18-ODB, 150 mm × 4.6 mm × 5 μm). 20 μL sample were injected and a mobile phase composed of 45/55 (ACN/H₂O) at 0.8 ml min⁻¹ was used. Solutions were filtered before analysis with a PTFE syringe filter (0.45 μm). Under these analytical conditions, the retention time of 2,4-DMP was about 5 min.

The total organic carbon (TOC) values of the solutions were determined with a Shimadzu TOC-V meter. The gas flow-rate (air) was set to 130 mL min⁻¹ and the gas pressure was 190 kPa. The TOC measurement is based on the oxidation of the organic matter (except volatile organic compounds) by thermal oxidation. The solution is first acidified with HCl (2 N) to transform carbonates into CO₂. Air is then bubbled in the solution to remove CO₂. Samples are then injected in an oven heated at 680 °C containing a catalyst (Pt) to transform the organics into CO₂, which is therefore analyzed by an IR detector.

The chemical oxygen demand (COD) is the quantity of oxygen necessary to chemically oxidize all molecules in water. This analysis is performed using oxidation with K₂Cr₂O₇ in closed containers in acidic medium in presence of Ag₂SO₄ catalyst. HgSO₄ is also added to precipitate chloride anions. After addition of 2 mL of polluted water solution in tubes containing the oxidative reactants at different concentrations to analyze COD between 0 and 150 mgL⁻¹ (purchased to Hash), the mixtures were heated at 150 °C for 2 h. The amount of produced Cr⁶⁺ was measured by spectrophotometry (Hash instrument) at 600 nm, which allowed to calculate COD.

The carboxylic acids concentrations were determined by ion chromatography (IC) using a Dionex ICS 1000 system equipped with an ASRS 4 mm ionization system and a Dionex AS19 column. 25 μL samples were injected. Eluent was a KOH solution at 1 mL min⁻¹ and with the following gradient conditions: 10 mM from 0 to 10 min, then 45 mM from 10 to 40 min and finally 10 mM from 40 to 50 min.

LC-MS analyses were achieved with a UPLC Acquity H-Class (Waters) and a Synapt G2-S (Waters) detector equipped with a
dual electro-spray (ESI). 10 μL samples were injected, a column Acquity BEH I was used (C18, 50 mm × 2.1 mm × 1.7 μm) and the mobile phase was constituted of ACN and H2O at 0.8 ml min⁻¹.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Characterization of γ-Al2O3

γ-Al2O3 was purchased as 3–5 mm cylindrical pellets (Fig. S1), which is a suitable size for industrial ozonation processes. XRD pattern indicated principally three broad peaks around 35, 45 and 66° in 2θ (Fig. S2), which showed the gamma crystalline phase of this alumina oxide [29]. N2 adsorption/desorption isotherm of γ-Al2O3 is of type IV according to IUPAC classification characteristic of a mesoporous material (Fig. 1). A hysteresis loop (H1) was observed at high relative pressures revealing cylindrical pores of mean pore diameter of 15 nm. The material featured a BET specific surface area of 236 m² g⁻¹ and a mesopore volume of 0.60 cm³ g⁻¹.

3.2. Adsorption of 2,4-DMP on γ-Al2O3

Prior to O3 experiments, adsorption of the pollutant on γ-Al2O3 was verified to assess the adsorption contribution in the 2,4-DMP removal. First, adsorption kinetic was monitored at 25 °C by stirring a 2,4-DMP solution (50 mg L⁻¹) with γ-Al2O3 (2 g L⁻¹) in order to estimate the time necessary to reach equilibrium. The expected maximum adsorption would be 25 mg 2,4-DMP per gram γ-Al2O3. Equilibrium was reached after 4 h and only 0.2 mg 2,4-DMP per gram γ-Al2O3 was obtained. The 2,4-DMP adsorption isotherm was then built for an equilibrium time of 4 h and by varying the 2,4-DMP concentration from 1 to 400 mg L⁻¹. For the highest 2,4-DMP concentration (400 mg L⁻¹) only 3.2 mg 2,4-DMP were adsorbed per gram of γ-Al2O3 (Fig. S3). Therefore, in this study (using a 2,4-DMP solution of 50 mg L⁻¹) the contribution of the pollutant adsorption in the ozonation process can be neglected.

3.3. Ozonation of 2,4-DMP in aqueous solution with and without γ-Al2O3

Ozonation experiments were conducted with 2,4-DMP solutions (50 mg L⁻¹) at 25 °C with an initial pH of deionized water around 4.5. No chemicals were added in the solution in accordance of industrial process requirement (no buffer or base added). The pH was continuously measured but not controlled. The pH value of the 2,4-DMP solutions with and without γ-Al2O3 was monitored during the ozonation experiments (Fig. S4). The pollutant removal over time was monitored as well as the total organic carbon (TOC) removed from the solution after 25 min even with low ozone concentration (2 g Nm⁻³) (Fig. 2a). Similar fast 2,4-DMP removal by single ozonation was also previously noticed with similar initial concentration indicating a high reactivity of this pollutant with ozone [17,18,30]. Adding γ-Al2O3 (2 g L⁻¹) in the ozonation process led to a slight increase of 2,4-DMP removal rate with a complete removal after 22 min (Fig. 2a), as observed also previously using zeolites in similar conditions [17,18]. The initial degradation of 2,4-DMP seems independent of the presence of any inorganic catalysts and encountered presumably to fast direct reaction of ozone with 2,4-DMP. Ozone reacts preferentially with organic molecules featuring double bonds (Scheme 1) and activated aromatics. 2,4-DMP is an aromatic molecule substituted by three electron donor groups (one hydroxyl strongly e⁻ donor and two methyl) and is therefore very favorable to ozonation degradation. Two simplified pathways can be imagined for direct ozonation of 2,4-DMP due to the

| Table 1 |
| Rate constants for COD removal during 2,4-DMP ozonation for single ozonation and ozonation with γ-Al2O3. |
| k_{COD, unm} × 10^3 (s⁻¹) | k_{COD, down} × 10^3 (s⁻¹) |
| Single ozonation | 7.8 ± 0.1 | 1.1 ± 0.1 |
| O3/γ-Al2O3 | 11.9 ± 0.1 | 5.8 ± 0.1 |

Fig. 1. N2 adsorption (●) and desorption (○) isotherms of γ-Al2O3 at ~196 °C.

Fig. 2. 2,4-DMP removal (a) and TOC removal (b) during single ozonation (●) and during ozone/γ-Al2O3 coupled treatment with different amount of γ-Al2O3: 1 g L⁻¹ (+); 2 g L⁻¹ (●); 5 g L⁻¹ (*). Temperature: 25 °C. O3 flow rate: 40 Lh⁻¹. [O3]_inlet: 2 g Nm⁻³. [2,4-DMP]₀: 50 mg L⁻¹. Volume of solution: 1.5 L.

Fig. 3. Chemical oxygen demand (COD) (Fig. 3; Table 1) with and without γ-Al2O3. Some 2,4-DMP oxidized by-products were identified and followed within time (Table 2).
3.3.2. Removal of total organic carbon from the water solution

The removal of specific pollutant (as 2,4-DMP in our case) is one of the objectives of the water treatment. However, the efficiency of a water treatment process should also assess the amount of total organic carbon (TOC) remaining in the solution resulting from the degradation of the initial product. Indeed oxidized by-products of pollutants may have also a toxic character and sometimes are even more toxic than the initial pollutant, as it will be shown in the last part of this study. So, it is of prime importance to estimate the oxidation efficiency of a water treatment process through TOC measurement [32,33]. If no adsorption of pollutants or by-products is noticed, TOC removal corresponds to the mineralization level of the pollutant. Concerning single ozonation, only 14% TOC removal was reached after 5 h ozonation. Adding polarizability of the double bond bearing the OH group (Scheme 2).

Different intermediary by-products are however expected as for nitrobenzene ozonation [31]. Expected final products are carboxylic acids. They are very stable against ozonation as acetic acid but not formic acid, which reacts with ozone to give CO2.
Table 2
Identification by LC-MS of some 2,4-DMP oxidized by-products after single ozonation and ozonation with γ-Al2O3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2,4-DMP oxidized by-products</th>
<th>m/z</th>
<th>t_1 (min)</th>
<th>t_2 (min)</th>
<th>t_3 (min)</th>
<th>t_4 (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C_8H_6O_2</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_8H_6O_4</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_8H_4O_4</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t_1: \text{retention time}; t_4: \text{complete removal time.} \]

γ-Al2O3 (2 g L\(^{-1}\)) to the ozonation process allowed a remarkable increase of the TOC removal corresponding to 46% of organic carbons removal (Fig. 2b). TOC removal increased linearly during about 60 min and then became slower (especially after ca. 170 min), which probably indicated that some oxidized by-products are very stable towards ozonation. Moreover, this slowdown in the mineralization rate can be explained by the low ozone dosage chosen in this study (2 g Nm\(^{-3}\)) in comparison with usual industrial conditions (25 to 100 g Nm\(^{-3}\)). Increasing the amount of γ-Al2O3 from 1 to 5 g L\(^{-1}\) in the ozonation process yielded to an increase of TOC removal from 26 to 57%, respectively. However, TOC removal efficiencies for 2 and 5 g L\(^{-1}\) γ-Al2O3 were overlapping during 90 min of reaction. We may explain this fact considering two parallel reactions: catalytic ozonation and adsorption on γ-Al2O3 of highly oxidized by-products formed after 90 min ozonation. Similar catalytic ozonation efficiency between 2 and 5 g L\(^{-1}\) γ-Al2O3 is suspected, whereas adsorption ability of highly oxidized by-products is enhanced with higher amount of γ-Al2O3 adsorbent.

3.3.3. Chemical oxygen demand (COD) removal
The chemical oxygen demand (COD) is another way to indirectly measure the amount of organic compounds remaining in water. TOC measures the organic matter that can be oxidized by thermal treatment (expressed in mg of C per L), whereas COD measures the organic matter that can be oxidized chemically. COD is expressed in mg of O\(_2\) per L, which indicates the mass of oxygen consumed per liter of solution to oxidize organics [11]. Single 2,4-DMP ozonation led to 35% COD removal corresponding to a decrease from 130 to 83 mgO\(_2\) L\(^{-1}\) after 5 h treatment. Similarly to the TOC evolution, the COD decreased more rapidly in the presence of γ-Al2O3. Indeed, adding γ-Al2O3 (2 g L\(^{-1}\)) in the process allowed a significant reduction of the COD from 143 to 37 mgO\(_2\) L\(^{-1}\), corresponding to 75% COD removal. The kinetics of COD removal was modeled using a two-pathways first-order kinetic model [2]. This model distinguishes organic compounds oxidizing fast during the ozonation experiments from those oxidizing slowly. The experimental data for fast and slow oxidations were fitted with the first order kinetic model (Eq. (1)) and reported in Fig. 3a. In each pathway of the model the corresponding rate constants for COD removal were higher in the presence of γ-Al2O3 (Table 1). The change of regime was clearly observed after 60 min of ozonation (Fig. 3a).

\[
\frac{d[\text{COD}]}{dt} = k[\text{COD}]_x
\]

\[
\frac{d[\text{COD}]}{[\text{COD}]_x} = k dt
\]

\[
- \ln \left( \frac{\text{COD}_x}{\text{COD}_0} \right) = kt + \text{constant}
\]

with \(x\) fast or slow.

An interesting factor to consider is the average oxidation state of carbon (AOSC) [2,34,35], which informs indirectly about the average oxidation state of the organic compounds remaining in the solution by comparing thermal oxidation (TOC) with chemical oxidation (COD) according to Eq. (2).

\[
\text{AOSC} = 4 - \left( 4 \times 0.375 \frac{\text{COD}}{\text{TOC}} \right)
\]

with 0.375 being the ratio between the molecular mass of C and O\(_2\) to observed COD and TOC in mmol.

Higher AOSC values will be obtained for higher oxygenated molecules. AOSC values are in the range [−4 to +4] with −4 accounting for low oxidation state as methane and +4 for high oxidation state as CO\(_2\). The AOSC value of the starting 2,4-DMP solution is around −1.4, as the average oxidation state of the molecule is low. For single ozonation, the average oxidation level of the organic compounds increased to −0.2 after 4 h indicating an increase of the average oxidation states of the organics in solution, which however remains low. Adding γ-Al2O3 during the ozonation process resulted in a three steps process: from 0 to 60 min (AOSC from −1.4 to −0.2), from 60 to 170 min (AOSC − 0.2) and above 170 min with a remarkable increase of the AOSC from −0.2 to +1.6 between 3 and 5 h ozonation (Fig. 3b). This evidences that the by-products obtained after 170 min of ozonation with γ-Al2O3 are different to the one obtained by single ozonation and have a higher level of oxidation state.
Identification of byproducts obtained during 2,4-DMP ozonation

3.4. Ozonation of 2,4-DMP in presence of HO• radical scavenger (t-BuOH)

The pH value of the 2,4-DMP solutions with and without γ-Al2O3 was monitored during the ozonation experiments (Fig. S4). For single ozonation, a decrease in the pH value was observed from 4.0 to 2.8. This is likely due to the formation of carboxylic acids during ozonation as reported elsewhere [36–39]. A higher pH decrease was noticed for ozonation in presence of acids during ozonation as reported elsewhere [36–39]. A higher pH was monitored during the ozonation experiments (Fig. S4). For ozonation in the presence of HO• scavenger and during ozone/γ-Al2O3 coupled treatment with (+) and without (●) t-BuOH. Temperature: 25 °C; O3 flow rate: 40 L·h⁻¹; O3 flow rate: 2 g Nm⁻³·min⁻¹; 2,4-DMP; 50 mg L⁻¹; volume of solution: 1.5 L; γ-Al2O3; 2 g L⁻¹; t-BuOH: 25 mg L⁻¹.

3.4.1. By-products identified by LC-MS during single ozonation (t-BuOH)

For single ozonation, a decrease in the pH value was observed from 4.0 to 2.8. This is likely due to the formation of carboxylic acids during ozonation as reported elsewhere [36–39]. A higher pH decrease was noticed for ozonation in presence of acids during ozonation as reported elsewhere [36–39]. A higher pH was monitored during the ozonation experiments (Fig. S4). For ozonation in the presence of HO• scavenger and during ozone/γ-Al2O3 coupled treatment with (+) and without (●) t-BuOH. Temperature: 25 °C; O3 flow rate: 40 L·h⁻¹; O3 flow rate: 2 g Nm⁻³·min⁻¹; 2,4-DMP; 50 mg L⁻¹; volume of solution: 1.5 L; γ-Al2O3; 2 g L⁻¹; t-BuOH: 25 mg L⁻¹.

3.4.2. By-products identified by LC-MS during ozonation in the presence of γ-Al2O3

During the degradation of the pollutant in presence of γ-Al2O3, LC-MS analyzes revealed the same by-products than for the single ozonation and thus the same oxidation pathways. The maximum apparition and the complete removal of these by-products occurred at the same time than for single ozonation. All of these by-products have been degraded after 90 min (Table 2; Fig. S5). The main difference consists in the amount of these by-products, which is much abundant in presence of γ-Al2O3 (except for C6H6O2, which was formed in similar amount) (Fig. S5).

3.5. Identification of by-products obtained during 2,4-DMP ozonation

3.5.1. By-products identified by LC-MS during single ozonation

As oxidized phenolic compounds are known to have a possible toxic character, their identification can give information about the toxicity level of the solution [32,33]. The identification of the first by-products from 2,4-DMP oxidation during single ozonation was attempted by LC-MS analysis. The non-exhaustive list of the products observed is presented in Table 2. Considering the products identified, several types of reactions were involved in the oxidation process: (i) Hydroxylation of the aromatic ring: hydroxylation of the aromatic ring, producing C6H10O2 (product 1 in Scheme 2) is consistent with hydroxylation products usually observed during phenol ozonation [40,41]. This by-product was the most abundant (Fig. S5). It appeared since the beginning of the reaction, reached an optimum after 25 min ozonation and was totally degraded after 61 min of reaction (Table 2). (ii) Opening of the aromatic ring by direct addition of ozone (Criegee mechanism): the identification of C6H10O2 (product 2 in Scheme 2) confirms that the direct addition of ozone on 2,4-DMP led to opening the aromatic ring and produced dimethyl muconic acid. Indeed, muconic acid is considered as one of the major transient products during ozonation of phenol [41,42]. This transient product was at its maximum in 20 min and was totally degraded after 91 min (Fig. S5; Table 2). (iii) Dimerization of 2,4-DMP: during the first minutes of ozonation the solution became turbid indicating the apparition of less soluble products. The compound C8H10O2 (Table 2; Fig. S5) has a higher molar mass than 2,4-DMP, which could result from the reaction of oxalic acid with C6H10O2 (product 1 in Scheme 2) and/or a degradation of a dimer. Dimerization of phenoxy radicals in acidic water was previously observed leading to non-soluble species [30,43]. Such a dimerization of dimethylphenols was also observed in oxidizing conditions in presence of ozone or copper [41,44,45]. Another compound C6H8O observed by LC-MS is considered as a by-product of C6H8O2 after several successive demethylation of the ring and decarboxylation of the aliphatic chain bonded with the first carbon of the aromatic ring. These two by-products were at their maximum at 15 min and were completely degraded after 91 min of ozonation (Fig. S5; Table 2).

3.5.2. By-products identified by LC-MS during ozonation in the presence of γ-Al2O3

During the degradation of the pollutant in presence of γ-Al2O3, LC-MS analyzes revealed the same by-products than for the single ozonation and thus the same oxidation pathways. The maximum apparition and the complete removal of these by-products occurred at the same time than for single ozonation. All of these by-products have been degraded after 90 min (Table 2; Fig. S5). The main difference consists in the amount of these by-products, which is much abundant in presence of γ-Al2O3 (except for C6H6O2, which was formed in similar amount) (Fig. S5).

3.5.3. Identification and quantification of carboxylic acids obtained during single ozonation

Ionic chromatography analysis allowed to identify and quantify the carboxylic acids formed during 2,4-DMP ozonation. Three carboxylic acids were mainly formed in the following increasing amount (Fig. S5a): acetic acid > formic acid > oxalic acid (products 3, 5, 4 in Scheme 2). Acetic acid was the most abundant reaching a plateau after 100 min, which corresponded to a final concentration of 62 mg L⁻¹. The formation of acetic acid is a consequence of an opening of the aromatic ring that could occur from the beginning of the ozonation reaction and of the oxidation of the by-products (Scheme 2). It must be noticed that acetic acid is a highly refractory molecule that is very stable against ozonation and will not be oxidized in formic acid or oxalic acid. The release of formic acid can correspond to a demethylation of 2,4-DMP from the beginning of the reaction and/or to the oxidation of other by-products after several breakages of the C-C bonds. The highest formic acid concentration (28 mg L⁻¹) was observed after 60 min of reaction and then decreased to reach a concentration...
of 21 mg L\(^{-1}\) after 5 h. This decrease is due to its oxidation into carbon dioxide (Scheme 2). Concerning oxalic acid, a slight and steady increase of its concentration was noticed to reach a value of 6 mg L\(^{-1}\) after 5 h ozonation. Oxalic acid can be released from an opening of the aromatic ring and/or from the oxidation of dimers. The study of mass balance of the process (Table 3) indicated that after 1 h of reaction 0.41 mmol of 2,4-DMP was transformed into 1 mmol CH\(_3\)COOH, 0.65 mmol HCOOH and 0.02 mmol HOOC-COOH, which corresponds to the transformation of 1 molecule of 2,4-DMP into 2.4 molecules of CH\(_3\)COOH, 1.6 molecules of HCOOH and 0.05 molecule of HOOC-COOH. This result is close to the expected simplified direct ozonation of 2,4-DMP into acetic acid and formic acid (Scheme 2). The higher amount of acetic acid and the lower amount of formic acid were presumably due to the route implying dimerization of 2,4-DMP. The very low amount of oxalic acid could result from its reaction with the bihydroxylated by-product (product 1 in Scheme 2) as soon as it was produced. Taking into account TOC measurement and the initial amount of 2,4-DMP (2.28 mmol CL\(^{-1}\)) it was possible to determine the amount of organics remaining in the solution and the level of mineralization (Table 3). After 5 h of single ozonation 2.82 mmol CL\(^{-1}\) remained in the solution composed at 90% of carboxylic acid and 10% of unknown by-products.

### 3.5.4. Identification and quantification of carboxylic acids obtained during ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\)

During ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) the same carboxylic acids as for single ozonation were identified and quantified: 1 molecule of 2,4-DMP was converted into 1.7 molecules CH\(_3\)COOH, 1.0 molecule HCOOH and 0.05 molecule HOOC-COOH. Lower amounts of carboxylic acids were obtained for ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) except for oxalic acid, which followed the same trend as for single ozonation (Fig. 5b). By allowing the generation of HO\(^*\) radicals γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) favors a different oxidation mechanism leading to less acetic acid and less formic acid. It could also be hypothesized that a non-reactive phenomenon occurred such as the adsorption of the carboxylic acids on the solid. Indeed the maximum concentration of acetic acid was reached after 75 min and then decreased, which cannot be due to the oxidation of acetic acid. Adsorption of carboxylic acids was thus investigated in the following paragraph. Concerning mass balance calculated from TOC and from the amount of carboxylic acids (Table 3) it was demonstrated that ozonation in presence of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) generated after 1 h ozonation more by-products (other than carboxylic acids) due to the different mechanism pathway using HO\(^*\) radicals with 0.73 mmol C\(_{by-product}\) L\(^{-1}\) after 1 h for ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\), whereas single ozonation produced only 0.43 mmol C\(_{by-product}\) L\(^{-1}\). After 5 h ozonation the amount of by-products (other than carboxylic acids) decreased and reached a similar value of ~0.26 mmol C\(_{by-product}\) L\(^{-1}\) for both ozonation processes. However, the remaining by-products (other than carboxylic acids) resulting from 5 h ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) are different from those obtained by single ozonation as they featured a higher level of oxidation state as previously demonstrated from AOSC measurements. Carboxylic acids represent 86% of the carbon remaining in the solution after 5 h ozonation. Ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) allowed after 5 h to decrease the amount of organics in water from 3.28 to 1.77 mmol CL\(^{-1}\), whereas single ozonation reached only 2.82 mmol CL\(^{-1}\).

### 3.6. Adsorption of carboxylic acids on γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\)

#### 3.6.1. Adsorption isotherms of carboxylic acids on γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\)

During 2,4-DMP oxidation, three carboxylic acids (acetic acid, formic acid and oxalic acid) have been identified and γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) adsorption properties towards these acids have been studied. The adsorption isotherms of the three carboxylic acids were carried out varying the acids concentrations from 5 to 400 mg L\(^{-1}\) (Fig. 6). The adsorption capacity of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) became significant for equilibrium acid concentration higher than 25 mg L\(^{-1}\). For the highest acid concentration (400 mg L\(^{-1}\)) an adsorption 20, 23, 35 mg g\(^{-1}\) (or 0.33, 0.50 and 0.38 mmol g\(^{-1}\)) was obtained for acetic acid, formic acid and oxalic acid, respectively. During ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) the maximum acid equilibrium concentrations were found after 1 h and corresponded to 43, 20 and 2 mg L\(^{-1}\), for acetic acid, formic acid and oxalic acid, respectively. Considering the adsorption isotherms, an adsorption capacity on γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) of 3.4, 3.7 and 0.9 mg g\(^{-1}\) (or 0.06, 0.08 and 0.01 mmol g\(^{-1}\)) for acetic acid, formic acid and oxalic acid, respectively, could be expected, which will contribute as 0.43 mmol CL\(^{-1}\) in TOC removal. Adsorption of
carboxylic will give a participation of 13% in the 46% TOC removal with γ-Al₂O₃, which is below to what was predicted (19%) considering 11% of direct ozonation reaction (as for single ozonation) and 16% of radical reaction. Three possibilities could be considered: (1) other by-products could be adsorbed as dimethyl muconic acid, (2) the contribution of direct ozonation is higher (17%) in presence of alumina due to ozone adsorption at the surface of the particles and (3) the amount of adsorbed carboxylic acids is higher in presence of ozone. Indeed during adsorption experiments of carboxylic acids on γ-Al₂O₃, the pH of the solution increased from 4.5 to 7.6. In this range of pH carboxylic acids are under carboxylates form (CH₃COO⁻-HCOO⁻-OOCCOO⁻- as pH is higher than the pKₐ of the acids (pKₐCH₃COOH = 4.76, pKₐHCOOH = 3.74, pKₐHOOC-COOH = 1.25 and 4.27). The adsorption of the carboxylates (RCOO⁻⁻) on γ-Al₂O₃ occurs via a ligand exchange with Al-OH groups forming Al-O(COR) groups and liberates OH⁻ responsible for the increase of pH. In ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ the mechanism of adsorption is different as in contrary a decrease of pH from 4.5 to 2.5 was observed. At these pH carboxylic acids are under their protonated forms: CH₃COOH, HCOOH, HOOC-COO⁻, which could encountered for a different mechanism of adsorption and maybe a higher adsorption. Therefore, it is difficult from adsorption experiments to accurately estimate the amount of carboxylic acids adsorbed on γ-Al₂O₃ during ozonation.

3.6.2. Identification of carboxylic acids adsorbed on γ-Al₂O₃ after ozonation by ¹³C CP MAS NMR

In order to confirm the adsorption of carboxylic acids on γ-Al₂O₃ in presence of ozone, solid state ¹³C CP MAS NMR was performed on the materials after ozonation. ¹³C NMR spectrum (Fig. S6) exhibited three major peaks with chemical shifts at 178, 164 and 21 ppm, confirming the adsorption of acetic acid, formic acid and/or oxalic acid at the surface of γ-Al₂O₃ [46,47]. It is difficult to assign the peak at 164 ppm to either formic acid or oxalic acid. Indeed in liquid ¹³C NMR, formic acid is identified by a peak (COO⁻) at 165.8 ppm and oxalic acid by a peak (COO⁻) at 160.9 ppm. For acetic acid the two peaks at 178.1 (COO⁻) and 22 (CH₃) ppm were clearly identified. Additional peaks of lower intensity of unidentified products are present on the spectrum at 142, 131, 81, 42 and 29 ppm. The peaks at 142, 131 and 29 could come from the adsorption of some dimethyl muconic acid, as muconic acid in solution presents three peaks at 166, 140 and 129 ppm and the peak at 29 ppm could come from the contribution of methyl groups. The peak at 42 ppm could come from the adsorption of methyl malonic acid (Product 7 in Scheme 2), as malonic acid in solution presents two peaks at 178 and 49 ppm. However, it is very difficult to quantify each of these adsorbed products due to their very low amount on the material giving peaks just higher than the background noise on the spectrum.

3.6.3. Identification of carboxylates adsorbed on γ-Al₂O₃ after ozonation by FTIR

The adsorption of the carboxylic acids on γ-Al₂O₃ in presence of ozone was also confirmed by FTIR (Fig. S7). In comparison to FTIR spectrum of γ-Al₂O₃ before ozonation several additional vibrational bands of low intensity were found on the FTIR spectrum of γ-Al₂O₃ after ozonation after outgassing the sample at 150°C to remove the adsorbed water (large bending vibration of water at 1639 cm⁻¹): at 1254, 1312, 1375, 1392, 1460, 1505, 1550, 1572, 1589, 1615 cm⁻¹. For each carboxylic acids four bands are expected: the symmetric and antisymmetric modes of C=O stretching are in the ranges 1625–1687 and 1660–1740 cm⁻¹, respectively, the C-O-H in-plane bending at 1395–1440 cm⁻¹ and the C-O stretch at 1315–1280 cm⁻¹. However, no bands above 1625 cm⁻¹ have been observed in the spectrum of γ-Al₂O₃ after ozonation revealing that carboxylic acids are under their carboxylates form. Indeed, for carboxylates salts only two vibrations for each salts are expected as C=O and C-O bonds of the acid are replaced by two equivalent C-O-bond- and-a half bonds. These CO₂⁻⁻ bonds interact out-of-phase and in-phase to give two bands. The antisymmetric CO₂ stretch band is usually seen at 1540–1650 cm⁻¹ and the symmetric CO₂ stretch band is usually seen at 1360–1450 cm⁻¹. Acetate salts bands are usually observed at 1400–1450 and 1550–1600 cm⁻¹, formate at 1360 and 1600 cm⁻¹ and oxalate at 1320 and 1620 cm⁻¹. Considering the vibrational bands observed in the spectrum of γ-Al₂O₃ after ozonation, the bands relative to carboxylates adsorbed on γ-Al₂O₃ could therefore be assigned as follows: for acetate bands at 1460 and 1550 cm⁻¹; for formate bands at 1375 and 1589 cm⁻¹; for oxalate bands at 1312 and 1615 cm⁻¹. The remaining bands correspond to unidentified adsorbed products (1254, 1392, 1505, 1572 cm⁻¹), which could result from the adsorption of other carboxylate by-products as dimethyl muconic acid, as assumed by ¹³C NMR. Quantification of these products by FTIR was not possible as in too low amounts.

3.7. Basic and acid sites of γ-Al₂O₃ before and after ozonation by FTIR

γ-Al₂O₃ is an amphoteric solid with Lewis acid Al(OH)(H⁺) sites and basic Al-OH sites (Scheme 3). The acidic properties of γ-Al₂O₃ before and after ozonation have been determined by FTIR after pyridine adsorption on dried materials (Fig. S8). FTIR/pyridine spectrum of γ-Al₂O₃ before ozonation featured no band at 1547 cm⁻¹ characteristic of Brönsted acid site, and after ozonation a very weak band at 1639 cm⁻¹, which could result from the adsorption of other carboxylate by-products as dimethyl muconic acid, as assumed by ¹³C NMR Qads/mg/L

Fig. 6. Adsorption isotherms of acetic acid (Δ), formic acid (×) and oxalic acid (▲) onto γ-Al₂O₃ at 25°C. [Acids]: from 5 to 400 mg L⁻¹.

[Diagram: Fig. 6. Adsorption isotherms of acetic acid (Δ), formic acid (×) and oxalic acid (▲) onto γ-Al₂O₃ at 25°C. [Acids]: from 5 to 400 mg L⁻¹.]
The presence of Al\(^{3+}\) extra-framework species evidenced by a fine band at 2365 cm\(^{-1}\) of CO\(_2\) is linearly coordinated to these Al species. FTIR spectra of CO\(_2\) adsorbed on γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) before and after ozonation showed also similar four major peaks at 1231, 1482, 1644 and 1774 cm\(^{-1}\) characteristic of the formation of carbonates at the surface of the material due to the chemisorption of CO\(_2\) on the Al-OH basic sites. Lower amount of carbonates were observed on γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) after ozonation. Furthermore, chemisorbed carbonates were desorbed at 250 °C for γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) before ozonation featuring a medium force of the basic sites and at lower temperature (200 °C) on γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) after ozonation revealing a slightly lower force of the basic sites. Ozonation implied a decrease of the basicity of Al-OH species in number and in force due most probably to carboxylates adsorption on the basic sites. An example of simplified possible mechanisms is given in Scheme 3 to explain the competition between Al-OH as active site for catalytic ozonation and Al-OH as adsorption sites for carboxylates. This hypothesis allows to explain the additional decrease of pH during ozonation with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\). Ozonation implied the OH region (3000–4000 cm\(^{-1}\)) and a higher amount of entering O\(_3\) (1.1 mmol OH g\(^{-1}\)) and contributes to decrease the pH (Scheme 3). The amount of Al-OH species could not be calculated at 25 °C due to the presence of water hiding FTIR bands of the OH region (3000–4000 cm\(^{-1}\)). After outgassing the samples at 500 °C, which implies water removal but also carboxylates removal, similar FTIR spectra of Al-OH bands at 3793, 3774, 3730, 3689, 3675 cm\(^{-1}\) were observed for γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) before and after ozonation with an amount of OH groups ∼1.1 mmol OH g\(^{-1}\) (Fig. S10). Basic Al-OH sites are affected by carboxylates adsorption and their number decreased during ozonation, however the recovery of all Al-OH groups after outgassing suggests a possible regeneration of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) by calcination at 500 °C.

3.8. Reuse and regeneration of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\)

3.8.1. Reuse of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) in successive ozonation reactions

To establish the durability of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) during ozonation, the material has been reused in 10 successive runs with a higher amount of solid (5 g L\(^{-1}\)) and a higher amount of entering O\(_3\) (5 g Nm\(^{-3}\) produced from O\(_2\)). This slightly harder condition of ozonation allowed for the first run to reach a higher level of TOC removal with 71% after 8 h with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\), whereas for single ozonation TOC removal was only 30% (Fig. 7). Then a series of 10 ozonation runs was performed using the same γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) sample, in order to assess the stability of the material (Fig. 7). Each run lasted about 8 h and γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) was reused without any regeneration or specific treatment. Millimetric γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) particles were put in a perforated basket easy to immerge in the solution and easy to remove and to place in another batch of effluent. TOC removal clearly progressively decreased during the successive runs with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\). After 7–10 runs with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) TOC removal was quite reproducible with 40% TOC removal, which remained higher than single ozonation (30% TOC removal). The decrease of TOC removal with γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) is due to the decrease of the amount of basic Al-OH sites by irreversible chemisorption of carboxylates (Scheme 3). If for each run 0.15 mmol of carboxylates per gram of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) are chemisorbed on Al-OH (as found in Section 3.6.1), seven runs will be enough to eliminate all Al-OH groups of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) (1.1 mmol OH g\(^{-1}\)), which is consistent with the result obtained in this reuse study.

![Scheme 3. Expected interaction of O\(_3\) with (a) acid and (b) basic sites of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) (scheme adapted and modified from Ref. [8]). (b) Hypothesis for adsorption mechanism of carboxylic acids with the basic sites of γ-Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) during ozonation.](image-url)
The remaining stable activity of γ-Al₂O₃ after 7–10 runs, which is 10% higher than single ozonation is due either to reversible catalytic activity of Lewis sites of γ-Al₂O₃ or to a higher efficiency of direct O₃ reaction at the solid surface. As for the previous study 16% TOC removal were assigned to radical reaction (Section 3.4), radicals are produced either by acid sites or acidic sites (Scheme 3), it seems that basic sites are also involved in the catalytic activity of γ-Al₂O₃. Basic sites of γ-Al₂O₃ act in TOC removal as carboxylic acids adsorbents and also as basic catalytic sites, which are lost at each carboxylate adsorption.

3.8.2. Regeneration of γ-Al₂O₃ after ozonation

After 10 runs of ozonation (80 h ozonation), γ-Al₂O₃ was removed from the solution, dried at 120°C during 20 min and calcined at 500°C during 6 h. A part of the resulting material (1.85 g L⁻¹) was then used in a new ozonation experiment and its performance was compared to the same amount of a fresh γ-Al₂O₃ sample. The thermally regenerated γ-Al₂O₃ showed a similar efficiency of the new γ-Al₂O₃ with 60% TOC removal after 8 h (Fig. 8). As observed earlier by FTIR (Section 3.7), a calcination at 500°C allowed to remove adsorbed carboxylates and to recover all basic Al-OH groups of γ-Al₂O₃. Therefore, a calcination at 500°C allows to regenerate and reuse this catalyst without any loss of performances.

3.9. Ozonation of a synthetic petroleum effluent

3.9.1. Ozonation of a synthetic petroleum effluent without any additive

A synthetic petrochemical effluent containing various petrochemicals was treated with γ-Al₂O₃. This experiment was performed in a third pilot plant scale reactor described elsewhere [28]. The complex synthetic effluent was a mixture of several aromatic hydrocarbons and associated acids: phenol, acetic acid, naphthenic acid, pyrene, naphthalene with initial concentration of 200, 200, 25, 0.05, 0.95 mg L⁻¹, respectively, corresponding to TOC = 230 mg L⁻¹. With γ-Al₂O₃ TOC removal was much faster than for single ozonation during the first 50 min and then stopped and remained at 50% equivalent to single ozonation (Fig. 9). In the synthetic effluent a large amount (200 mg L⁻¹) of acetic acid was added, which blocked Al-OH basic sites of γ-Al₂O₃ from the beginning of the process. Considering the adsorption isotherm (Fig. 6) a concentration of acetic acid of 200 mg L⁻¹ will correspond to 12 mg g⁻¹ (0.20 mmol g⁻¹) of acetate adsorbed on the solid. A large amount of phenol (200 mg L⁻¹, 2.1 mmol L⁻¹) was also added and if we consider a similar mechanism as for 2,4-DMP (Section 3.5.4) 1 mol of phenol will produce 1.7 mol acetic acid, 1 mol formic acid and 0.05 mol oxalic acid. This will correspond to a production of 216 mg L⁻¹ of acetic acid, 100 mg L⁻¹ formic acid and 9 mg L⁻¹ oxalic acid and therefore an adsorption capacity (calculated from the adsorption isotherms in Fig. 6) on γ-Al₂O₃ of 13 mg g⁻¹ (0.22 mmol g⁻¹), 10 mg g⁻¹ (0.21 mmol g⁻¹), 6 mg g⁻¹ (0.07 mmol g⁻¹) for each acid, respectively. The total of expected carboxylates adsorbed on the solid will be therefore at least 0.7 mmol g⁻¹, which means that for only two molecules (acetic acid and phenol) already ~65% of Al-OH basic sites will be rapidly blocked. The stopover of the reaction after 50 min with γ-Al₂O₃ is therefore due to the total obstruction of Al-OH basic sites by adsorbed carboxylates. For single ozonation a slightly higher TOC removal is obtained after 300 min (58% TOC removal). The fact that γ-Al₂O₃ presents no better activity than single ozonation when all of the basic sites are blocked let suppose that the Lewis acidic sites of γ-Al₂O₃ do not participate to the ozonation process. We have previously observed that Lewis acidic sites were not affected during ozonation (Section 3.7). We therefore proposed that the catalytic activity of oxides in water ozonation is due principally to the basic sites (M-OH) of the materials (Scheme 3). The Lewis acidic sites previously demonstrated as responsible for catalytic ozonation in
gaseous phase cannot participate to the reaction in water, as these sites are surely blocked by water molecules that O$_2$ cannot displace.

3.9.2. Ozonation of a synthetic petroleum effluent in presence of NaCl and toxicity tests

The effect of NaCl in ozonation processes is very important as some wastewater contains some salts as NaCl, which can be present in high concentration level in tannery and dye manufacturing wastewater, for instance, and also in lower amount in produced water from off-shore oil extraction. An excess of NaCl (50 g L$^{-1}$) was added to the ozonation process whereas in seawater NaCl concentration is around 10 g L$^{-1}$. Adding NaCl to the solution containing various chemicals (phenol, acetic acid, naphthenic acid, pyrene, naphthalene) led to an increase in TOC removal for both processes single ozonation and ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ (Fig. 9). The inverse phenomenon was observed previously in ozonation of 2,4-DMP with basic Na-LTA zeolites with the same amount of NaCl [18]. It was observed that Cl$^-$ ions were scavenging HO* radicals similarly as t-BuOH for a pH solution varying from pH 5 to 7 and no effect (or a slight negative effect) was observed for the single ozonation [18]. It was showed in literature that the efficiency of chloride ions as HO* scavenger increases by a factor of 100 then pH decreases from 6 to 3 and then the concentration of NaCl increases from 1.5 to 73 g L$^{-1}$ [50]. For low salinity water (<1.5 g L$^{-1}$) and at pH 5 no effect of chloride ions was observed. For concentration of NaCl > 75, 50 and 10 g L$^{-1}$ 75, 70 and 25% of HO* were removed, respectively. As in the present study the salinity of the solution is high (50 g L$^{-1}$) and the pH of the solution is acidic (4 > pH > 3) chloride ions should present a very strong scavenging effect on HO* radicals produced during ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$. The equations corresponding to the reaction of chloride ions with HO* are the following [50]:

$$\text{HO}^* + \text{Cl}^- \rightarrow \text{HOCl}^- $$

$$\text{HOCl}^- + \text{H}^+ \rightarrow \text{Cl}^* + \text{H}_2\text{O} \quad \text{pK}_7 = 7.2$$

The first reaction is fast and the second reaction is five times more rapid than the first one. At pH < 7.2 Cl$^*$ is the dominant species. Although HO* should be seriously scavenged by Cl$^-$ a remarkable positive effect of NaCl was noticed with TOC removal reaching 90% against 50% without NaCl. This high level of TOC removal indicates that acetic acid has been mineralized during the ozonation process with NaCl. NaCl avoid carboxylates to block the basic sites of γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ with presumably sodium cations interacting with carboxylic acids to give the corresponding salts. Considering single ozonation the only difference with our previous study about ozonation in presence of Cl$^-$ was observed. For concentration of NaCl > 75, 50 and 10 g L$^{-1}$ 75, 70 and 25% of HO* were removed, respectively. As in the present study the salinity of the solution is high (50 g L$^{-1}$) and the pH of the solution is acidic (4 > pH > 3) chloride ions should present a very strong scavenging effect on HO* radicals produced during ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$. The equations corresponding to the reaction of chloride ions with HO* are the following [50]:

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Ozone in presence of chloride anions in acidic aqueous medium reacts following the proposed equations [51,52]:

$$\text{O}_3 + \text{Cl}^- \rightarrow \text{O}_2 + \text{ClO}^- \quad \text{(rate determining reaction, very slow reaction)}$$

$$\text{2H}^+ + \text{Cl}^- + \text{ClO}^- \rightarrow \text{Cl}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O} \quad \text{(rapid)}$$

Cl$_2$ has been observed as the main and only product resulting from O$_3$ decomposition in presence of NaCl [52] although Cl$_2$ in water is in equilibrium with other products [53]:

$$\text{Cl}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{HOCI} + \text{H}^+ + \text{Cl}^- \quad \text{pK}_1 = 3.3$$

$$\text{HOCI} \rightarrow \text{OCI}^- + \text{H}^+ \quad \text{pK}_2 = 7.5$$

For pH < 3.3 Cl$_2$ will be the main species, for 3.3 < pH < 7.5 HOCI and for pH > 7.5 OCI$^-$ [53]. At low initial pH (pH < 2.5) chlorine species are able to degrade efficiently some carboxylic acids (oxalic > citric > maleic acids) leading to a pH increase from 2.5 to 9 [53]. However, acetic acid is barely decomposed except if a new source of HO* radical is produced as for instance by UV irradiation [53]. However, under UV generally an intermediate product as H$_2$O$_2$ is produced as for O$_3$/UV [50]:

$$\text{O}_3 + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \quad \text{UV light at 254 nm (low pressure lamp)}$$

$$\text{O}_3 + \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \rightarrow 2\text{HO}^- + 3\text{O}_2$$

As in our study HO* are most probably highly scavenged by Cl$^-$, therefore we propose that H$_2$O$_2$ could be also produced as an intermediary product during ozonation of PAH in presence of NaCl to explain the higher oxidation level of single ozonation and the mineralization of acetic acid. Indeed H$_2$O$_2$ could react with acetic acid to give peracetic acid, which is a powerful oxidant. We suggest that PAH compounds react with Cl$^+$ or Cl$_2$ to produce H$_2$O$_2$ and HO*. Indeed PAHs are known to decompose in water by chlorine [55] and give the corresponding quinones [56]. Industrially H$_2$O$_2$ is produced from the oxidation of dihydroxytetracene by O$_2$ giving anthraquinone and H$_2$O$_2$. For ozonation in presence of NaCl and PAH we suggest the formation of an intermediate dihydroxypolyaromatic compounds giving corresponding quinone and H$_2$O$_2$. It has been demonstrated that pyrene with chlorine decomposes into pyrene-4,5-dione and 1-chloroppyrene by both oxidation and chlorine-substitution reactions, respectively [57]. Authors evidenced that pyrene decomposition was associated with the formation of other reactive species than chlorine and they suggest the formation of HO* radicals. These reactive species produced during pyrene decomposition in chlorination have not been identified but are reacting with ethanol. As we previously showed that acetic acid could not decomposed by HO* radicals, we suggest that one of these reactive species could be H$_2$O$_2$. The increase of TOC removal in the presence of NaCl was accompanied by the increase of the pH of the solution (Fig. 9) from 3.5 to 6 with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ after 25 min revealing the degradation of the sodium carboxylates liberating CO$_2$ and HO*. For single ozonation, the pH of the solution increased from 3 to 7 after 100 min due to the degradation of the carboxylic acids. The faster efficiency observed with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ is most probably due to the faster formation of Cl$^+$ from HO* in comparison to the slow formation of Cl$_2$ from O$_3$. After 5 h the two processes have equivalent TOC removal (90%).

It was previously demonstrated in literature that the toxicity of a solution containing pollutants increased when single ozonation was performed in presence of NaCl [54]. Toxicity tests were therefore performed for ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ in presence of NaCl using two non-standardized testkits named ARTOTOXKIT and ROTOXKIT exploiting two different seawater organisms Artemia franciscana and Brachionus calyciflorus, respectively. The toxicity tests were performed after pH adjustment at pH 7 of the synthetic effluent treated after 150 and 300 min of ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$. The efficiency of the process was assessed by the effluent concentration able to induce 50% of mortality of the species after 24 h of exposure to the aqueous solution (LC$_{50}$ 24 h). The results were expressed in toxic unit: Equitox m$^{-3} = 100$/LC$_{50}$ 24 h (Table 4). After 150 min of ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ the toxicity level of the solution increased revealing that the first by-products produced during ozonation are more toxic than the initial pollutants. After 300 min of ozonation with γ-Al$_2$O$_3$ the toxicity level of the solution decreased. The synthetic effluent, which was initially considered as slightly toxic, became non-toxic for at least one seawater organism.
Catalytic ozonation in presence of NaCl with γ-Al₂O₃ allowed to decrease the toxicity of the petrochemical effluent.

4. Conclusion

The effect of γ-Al₂O₃ during ozonation for 2,4-DMP removal was investigated through different experiments. It appeared clearly that the material allowed increasing the oxidation efficiency of the initial pollutant in comparison to single ozonation. The beneficial effect of γ-Al₂O₃ was linked to two phenomena: its adsorption capacity for carboxylic acids by-products (acetic acid, formic acid and oxalic acid) and its ability to generate *OH radicals. The identification of different by-products during 2,4-DMP ozonation confirmed that both mechanisms of direct O₂ reaction and radical type reaction coexisted during ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃, in contrary to single ozonation, which is mainly governed by direct O₂ reaction. Radical type reaction for ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ produced initially more by-products (other than acetic, formic and oxalic acids) than single ozonation leading at the end to less carboxylic acids formation. After 5 h ozonation similar amount of by-products (other than carboxylic acids) were found for both processes, but final by-products were more oxidized with γ-Al₂O₃ than those resulting of single ozonation. Cumulative adsorption of carboxylic acids on the basic Al-OH sites of γ-Al₂O₃ resulted in a progressive decrease of the TOC removal during successive runs of ozonation until all Al-OH groups were blocked by carboxylates. Lewis acid sites of γ-Al₂O₃ were not affected during ozonation. A complete regeneration of Al-OH basic sites was obtained by thermal treatment at 500 °C without altering the properties of the solid. Finally, γ-Al₂O₃ was used to treat a synthetic petrochemical effluent containing different pollutants (phenol, naphthenic acid, pyrene, naphthalene) and a large amount of acetic acid. TOC removal with γ-Al₂O₃ was very fast in the first hour of ozonation, much faster than single ozonation, and then stopped due to the inhibition of all Al-OH groups by carboxylates. A similar activity as single ozonation was then obtained with 50% TOC removal. This result allows us to propose that only Al-OH basic sites are involved in catalytic ozonation in water. By adding NaCl to the ozonation processes remarkable higher TOC removals were reached for single ozonation and for ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ with 90% TOC after 5 h. Two antagonism mechanisms occur with γ-Al₂O₃: sodium cations prevent the adsorption of carboxylates on the basic sites of γ-Al₂O₃ by forming preferentially sodium carboxylates in solution, while chloride ions are strong *OH scavengers especially in the conditions of the study (low pH and high NaCl concentration). The higher TOC removal is concomitant with the increase of pH due presumably to the degradation of carboxylates liberating hydroxyl ions. The reaction is faster with γ-Al₂O₃ in comparison to single ozonation due to different mechanism pathways between chloride ions with *OH and with O₂, respectively. The enhancement of the mineralization of the solution is also conjoinly most probably induced by the formation of H₂O₂ resulting from oxidation reactions between polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH) and *OH or Cl⁻ for ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ and for single ozonation, respectively. Ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ in presence of large amount of NaCl led to a first increase of the toxicity of the effluent (after 1.5 h) and then to a decrease of the toxicity below the initial toxicity (after 5 h). γ-Al₂O₃ is therefore a good candidate for catalytic ozonation of refinery wastewater containing refractory PAH and should be better performing in lower salinity water as seawater. The large controversy observed in ozonation in water is because ozonation depends of a lot of parameters as pH, presence of salts, nature of the catalysts, but also is effluent composition dependent.

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References


Table 4

| Percentage of TOC removal and toxicity index of the synthetic petrochemical effluent (phenol, acetic acid, naphthenic acid, pyrene, naphthalene) after ozonation with γ-Al₂O₃ after 150 and 300 min treatment. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Initial solution | 0 | 5.2 | 5.9 | Slightly toxic |
| O₃/γ-Al₂O₃ (150 min) | 82 | 10.1 | 8.4 | Slightly toxic |
| O₃/γ-Al₂O₃ (300 min) | 89 | 2.6 | 5.0 | Non-toxic and slightly toxic |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOC removal (%)</th>
<th>ARTOXKIT (toxic unit’)</th>
<th>ROTOXKIT (toxic unit’)</th>
<th>Toxicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial solution</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

1. *OH unit: non-toxic < 3; 3 < slightly toxic < 10; 10 < toxic < 50; 50 < very toxic < 100; extremely toxic > 100.
2. Temperature: 35 °C; O₂ flow rate: 24L h⁻¹; [O₃]max: 5 g Nm⁻³; TOC cat: 230 mg L⁻¹; volume of solution: 1.5 L; NaCl: 2 g L⁻¹; NaCl: 50 g L⁻¹.