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Thermal Analysis & Rheology



# **A REVIEW OF DSC KINETICS METHODS**

Differential Scanning Calorimetry (DSC) is used to measure heat flow into or out of a sample as it is exposed to a controlled thermal profile. DSC provides both qualitative and quantitative information about material transitions such as the glass transition, crystallization, curing, melting, and decomposition. For some of these transitions, DSC can provide not only the temperature at which the transition (reaction) occurs and how much total heat is involved, but DSC can also provide valuable information about the rate (kinetics) of reaction. Furthermore, with the advent of easy-to-use computer based data analysis programs, the ability to obtain such kinetic information has become more practical.

TA Instruments currently offers three software packages (approaches) for DSC kinetic studies:

- Borchardt and Daniels
- ASTM E-698 Thermal Stability
- Isothermal Kinetics

Each of these kinetic packages provides rapid automatic calculation of reaction order (n and/or m), activation energy (Ea), pre-exponential factor (Z), and rate constant (k). Each also provides the ability to use the kinetic parameters obtained to generate predictive thermal curves which can be used to assess the transition in terms of percent conversion, time, and temperature. Since no single approach is satisfactory for all transitions, care must be taken to select the correct approach to obtain meaningful kinetic parameters. The purpose of this review is to briefly describe the theoretical basis for each kinetic approach and to indicate typical applications.

## **THEORY**

### Borchardt and Daniels

The Borchardt and Daniels (B/D) kinetics approach permits the calculation of activation energy (Ea), pre-exponential factor (Z), heat of reaction ( $\Delta H$ ), reaction order (n), and rate constant (k) from a single DSC scan.

This approach was originally described by Borchardt and Daniels (1) for solutions and was subsequently refined for solids by other researchers (2).

The Borchardt and Daniels approach assumes that the reaction follows nth order kinetics and obeys the general rate equation:

$$d\alpha/dt = k(T) [1-\alpha]^n \quad (1)$$

where  $d\alpha/dt$  = reaction rate (1/sec)  
 $\alpha$  = fractional conversion  
 $k(T)$  = specific rate constant at temperature T  
n = reaction order.

The Borchardt and Daniels approach also assumes Arrhenius behavior:

$$k(T) = Z e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (2)$$

where  $E_a$  = Activation energy (J/mol)  
 $Z$  = pre-exponential factor or Arrhenius frequency factor (1/sec)  
 $R$  = gas constant = 8.314 J/mol K

Substituting equation (2) into equation (1), rearranging, and taking logarithms yields:

$$d\alpha/dt = Z e^{-E_a/RT} (1-\alpha)^n \quad (3)$$

$$\ln [d\alpha/dt] = \ln (Z) - \frac{E_a}{RT} + n \ln [1 - \alpha] \quad (4)$$

Equation (4) can be solved with a multiple linear regression of the general form:  $z = a + bx + cy$  where the two basic parameters ( $d\alpha/dt$  and  $\alpha$ ) are determined from the DSC exotherm as shown in Figure 1 for an epoxy prepreg.

The determination uses 20 segments of the curve, evenly spaced by temperature. The first segment starts at 10 percent of peak height and the last segment ends at 50 percent of peak area. A plot of  $\ln[k(T)]$  versus  $1/T$  (Arrhenius plot) from this data should be a straight line if the second assumption is valid (see Figure 2). The activation energy ( $E_a$ ) and pre-exponential factor ( $Z$ ) are obtained from the slope and intercept of this plot respectively.

Two predictive curves are obtained from the B/D kinetic modeling: isothermal plots (Figure 3) and isoconversion plots (Figure 4). Isothermal plots provide time conditions and degree of conversion information for specific isothermal temperatures. Isoconversion plots provide time and temperature conditions for a specific conversion level. Both predictive plots are useful in the development and control of reaction conditions in order to achieve the desired final product.

There are two additional experimental considerations necessary to achieve acceptable results with the B/D approach. First, no mass loss can occur during the reaction, since sample weight is used in the calculation of heat of reaction, and assumed constant in other calculations. To ensure that mass is constant, the sample is placed in a hermetically sealed pan, and weight is measured before and after the experiment. Second, it is necessary to avoid any thermal lag effects. This is accomplished by using heating rates which do not exceed 10°C/minute.

## ASTM E698 Thermal Stability

The ASTM E698 kinetics approach is based on the variable program rate method of Ozawa (3) which requires three or more experiments at different heating rates, usually between 1 and 10°C/minute.

This approach assumes Arrhenius behavior and first order reaction kinetics, yielding the equation:

$$d\alpha/dt = Z e^{-E_a/RT} (1-\alpha) \quad (5)$$

where:  $d\alpha/dt$  = reaction rate (1/sec)  
 $\alpha$  = fractional conversion  
 $Z$  = pre-exponential factor (1/sec)  
 $E_a$  = activation energy (J/mol)  
 $R$  = gas constant = 8.314 J/mol K

since  $\beta = dT/dt$ , where  $\beta$  = heating rate  
equation 5 can be rearranged to yield:

$$\beta d\alpha/dT = Z e^{-E_a/RT} (1-\alpha) \quad (6)$$

The method also assumes that the extent of the reaction at the peak exotherm,  $\alpha_p$ , is constant and independent of heating rate (4,5).

A plot of the natural logarithm of the program rate versus the peak temperature (Figure 5), provides the information necessary to calculate the activation energy ( $E_a$ ), pre-exponential factor ( $Z$ ), rate constant ( $k$ ), and half-life ( $t_{1/2}$ ). Refinements of the approximated activation energy ( $E_a$ ) are attained by reiterations using a fourth degree polynomial.

As with the B/D approach, the calculated kinetic parameters ( $E_a$ ,  $Z$ , and  $k$ ) can be used to generate isothermal and isoconversion predictive plots (Figures 3 and 4), as well as half-life plots.

## Isothermal

The two dynamic kinetic approaches described previously are rapid and simple, however, they are not quantitatively applicable to autocatalyzed systems. Autocatalyzed systems are characterized by the formation of some intermediate species which markedly accelerates the reaction. Epoxy systems used in industry, for example are autocatalyzed systems (6, 7, 8).

The isothermal kinetics approach can be applied theoretically to both nth order and autocatalyzed exothermic systems. It should be noted, however, that this approach is generally not used to model either endothermic reactions or crystallization kinetics.

An nth order reaction will follow equation (1), whereas an autocatalyzed reaction will follow the empirical relationship:

$$d\alpha/dt = k \alpha^m (1-\alpha)^n \quad (7)$$

$$k = Z e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (8)$$

where  $d\alpha/dt$  = reaction rate (1/sec)  
k = rate constant (1/sec)  
 $\alpha$  = fractional conversion  
m,n = reaction orders

This approach requires three or more isothermal experiments to generate the kinetic parameters ( $E_a$ ,  $Z$ ,  $n$ ,  $m$ , and  $k$ ). First, the heat flow ( $dH/dt$ ) and the partial heats ( $\Delta H_T$ ) are determined from the DSC isothermal exotherm as shown in Figure 6. These data values are then converted to a fractional conversion,  $\alpha$ , and reaction rate,  $d\alpha/dt$ , using a reference theoretical heat of reaction,  $\Delta H_0$ . The calculated values of  $\alpha$  and  $d\alpha/dt$  are subsequently entered into the appropriate kinetics model (either nth order or autocatalyzed) and the best fit kinetic parameters determined (Figure 7).

To select the proper temperatures for the required isothermal experiments, first heat the material at 5°C/minute. Then, choose isothermal temperatures that lie between a temperature 10-20°C below the onset of reaction and a temperature midway to the peak maximum (Figure 8). When performing the actual isothermal experiments, the cell is heated to the desired isothermal temperature using an "initial temperature" program segment. The cell is then rapidly opened, the sample loaded, and the cell reclosed. When the displayed temperature is within 4°C of the desired isothermal temperature, data collection is initiated.

## COMPARISON OF METHODS

### Autocatalyzed Versus Nth Order Reactions

DSC provides a means of quickly determining whether a given exothermic material is autocatalyzed or follows nth order kinetics. A sample of the material is maintained isothermally at an elevated temperature and the cure exotherm monitored as a function of time. Materials obeying nth order kinetics will have the maximum rate of heat evolution at time = 0, as displayed in Figure 9, while an autocatalyzed material will have its maximum heat evolution at 30 to 40 % of the reaction, as shown in Figure 6.

As mentioned earlier, materials which follow nth order kinetics can be modeled successfully using the Borchardt and Daniels approach. It should be noted, however, that the Borchardt and Daniels approach can still be used for nonquantitative assessment of autocatalyzed materials. For example, the Borchardt and Daniels activation energy is very sensitive to the level of B-staging or polymerization of commercial epoxy-amine adhesives. If an adhesive is allowed to age at room temperature or higher, the effect of the aging appears as a continuous drop in the Borchardt and Daniels activation energy. This is shown in Figure 10 for a commercial autocatalyzed epoxy-amine adhesive aged at

65°C. The sudden drop observed in activation energy after aging for 12 hours at 65°C is believed to be due to a significant change in the cure mechanism. This phenomenon is reflected also in the glass transition of the aged thermoset. Figure 11 is a plot of glass transition temperature ( $T_g$ ) versus aging time at 65°C. A large increase in  $T_g$  occurs after aging for 14 hours. Hence, the glass transition temperature can be used as a quality control parameter for autocatalyzed thermosets.

For autocatalyzed thermosets, the ASTM E-698 method generally gives an accurate assessment of the activation energy. However, the pre-exponential factor ( $Z$ ) may not be valid since the calculation of  $Z$  assumes  $n$ th order behavior. To determine whether the ASTM E-698 approach successfully describes the thermoset kinetics, the 60-minute half-life test should be used. In this procedure, the residual heat of cure of a sample which has been isothermally cured for 60 minutes at a temperature where half-life is about 120 minutes is compared to the heat of cure ( $\Delta H_o$ ) of a freshly prepared sample. The ratio of the two exotherms ( $\Delta H_{\text{residual}}/\Delta H_o$ ) should be  $0.5 \pm 0.05$ . If it is not, then the ASTM E-698 method does not successfully model the cure kinetics of the thermoset; probably due to an incorrect assessment of  $Z$ . A more accurate estimation of the pre-exponential factor can be subsequently made using an autocatalyzed cure-rate expression.

### Dynamic Versus Isothermal Techniques

As described previously, the Borchardt and Daniels approach requires only a single temperature programmed experiment. In theory, a dynamic DSC trace should contain all the kinetic information normally embodied in a series of isothermal experiments (9). This makes the B/D approach highly attractive. This technique is fairly rapid and works reasonably well for simple, first order reactions. On the other hand, previous work (4, 10, 11, 12) indicates the B/D method is not applicable in any of the following cases:

- Overlapping reaction peaks
- Decomposition occurs during reaction
- Autocatalyzed reactions

For more complex systems, therefore, ASTM or isothermal methods must be used.

The ASTM method is often the only means to analyze reactions with irregular baselines (13), solvent effects (14), or multiple exotherms (15). In these cases, the B/D method and isothermal measurements are unreliable. This is because the peak temperatures at different heating rates (the basis for ASTM calculations) is not affected significantly by baseline shift, while the peak area, which is used to determine reaction rate and fractional conversion in the B/D and isothermal approaches, is affected.

Conversely, some situations where the ASTM method may not be applicable include materials where isomerization changes occur at the reaction temperature or decomposition occurs upon melting (16). These cases can be recognized, however, by a non-linear plot of  $\log$  (program rate) versus peak temperature, or by a wide discrepancy between the predicted data and the isothermal aging confirmation. Also, both dynamic methods (B/D and ASTM) assume that the reaction under investigation follows Arrhenius behavior and  $n$ th order kinetics. Reactions which do not adhere to these assumptions, therefore, should be modeled with isothermal techniques.

Furthermore, the isothermal method offers the advantages of easier data interpretation and broader applicability. This technique has been successfully applied in both nth order (17, 18) and autocatalytic (6, 7) reactions. For the investigation of a new reaction where the order and the reaction mechanism are not known, the isothermal method should be used.

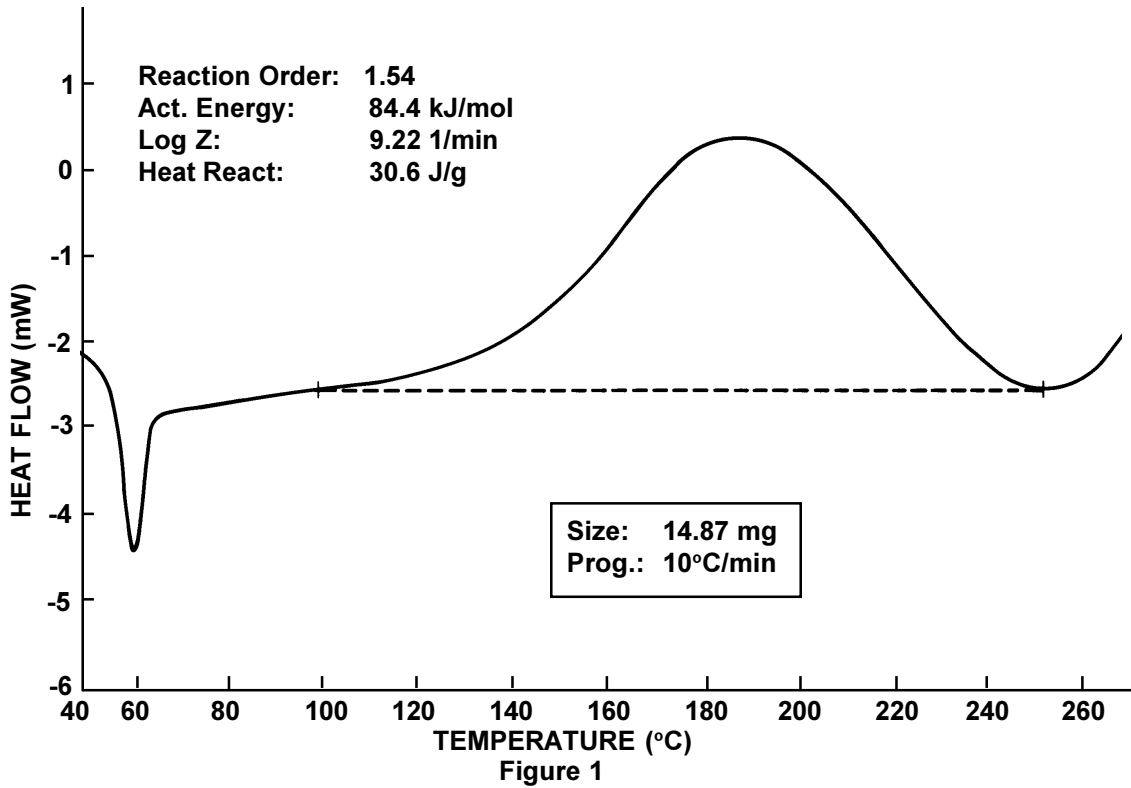
Although the isothermal experiments may be more time consuming, they often generate more reliable kinetic parameters. This is because the isothermal method introduces fewer experimental variables into a single measurement so that the scope for ambiguity in the interpretation of data is reduced (19).

## **SUMMARY**

Modeling the kinetics of material reactions provides the scientist and engineer with valuable information for: process development and prediction of optimum reaction temperatures, process control by optimization of reaction advancement or conversion, and estimation of material lifetimes. Several DSC approaches are available for obtaining this kinetic information. The chart shown in Figure 12 provides broad guidelines for deciding which DSC method is most appropriate.

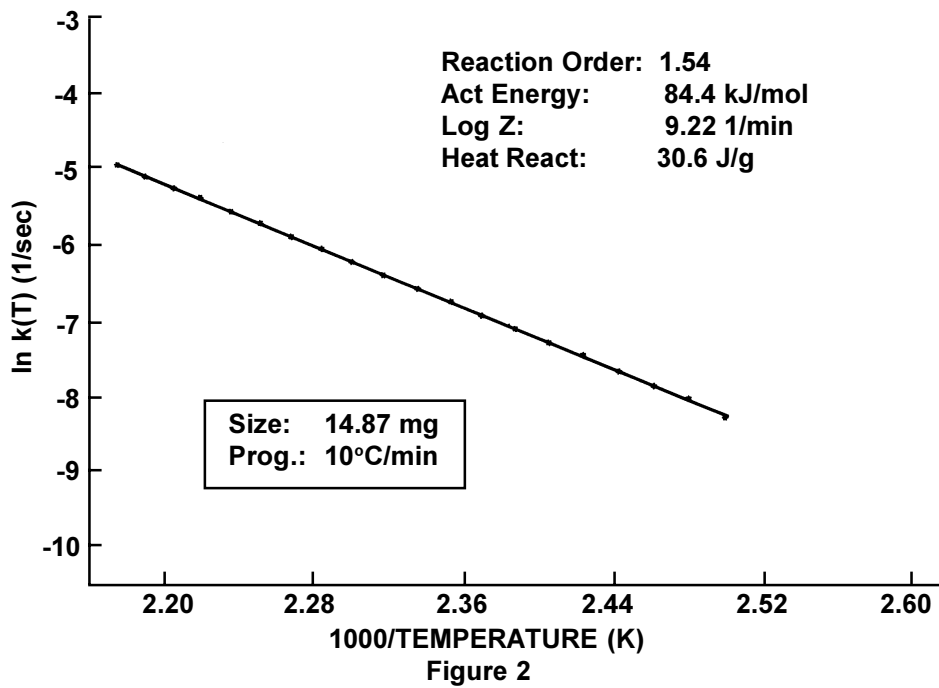
# EPOXY PREPREG CURE KINETICS

## RAW DATA WITH CALCULATION



# EPOXY PREPREG CURE KINETICS

## ARRHENIUS PLOT





# EPOXY PREPREG CURE KINETICS

## ISOTHERMAL PLOTS

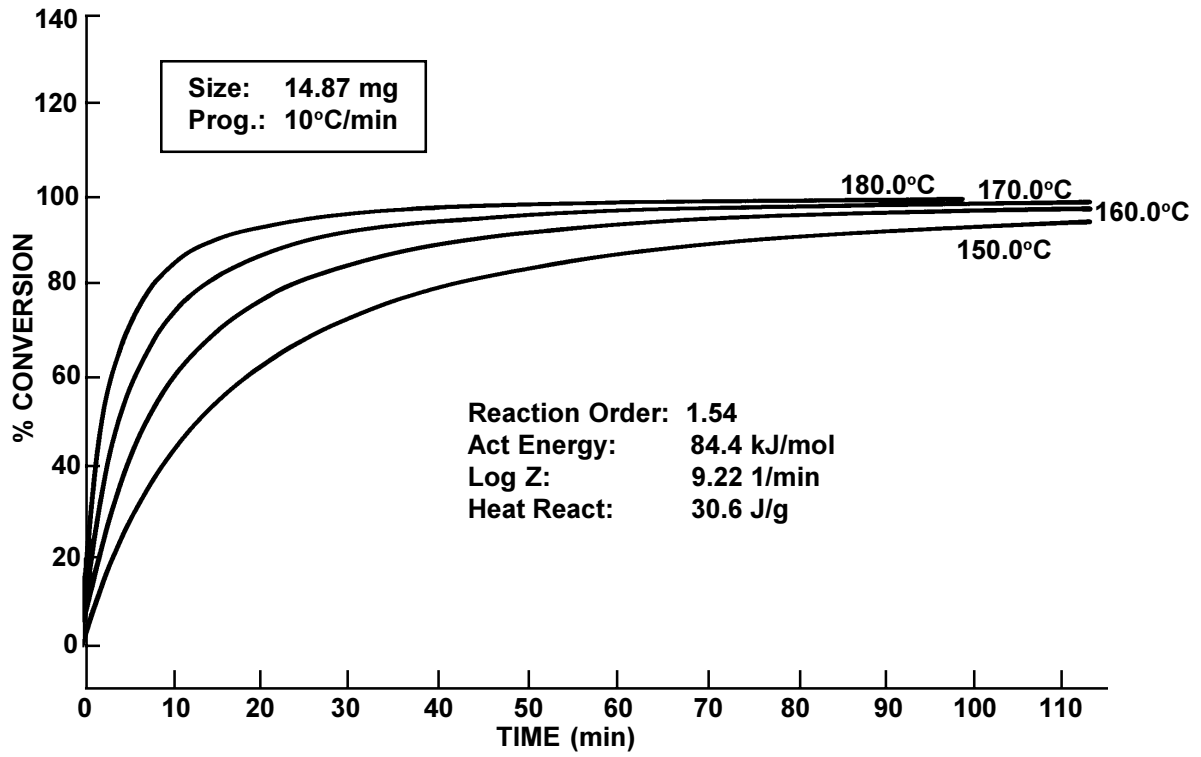


Figure 3

# EPOXY PREPREG CURE KINETICS

## ISO-CONVERSION CURVES

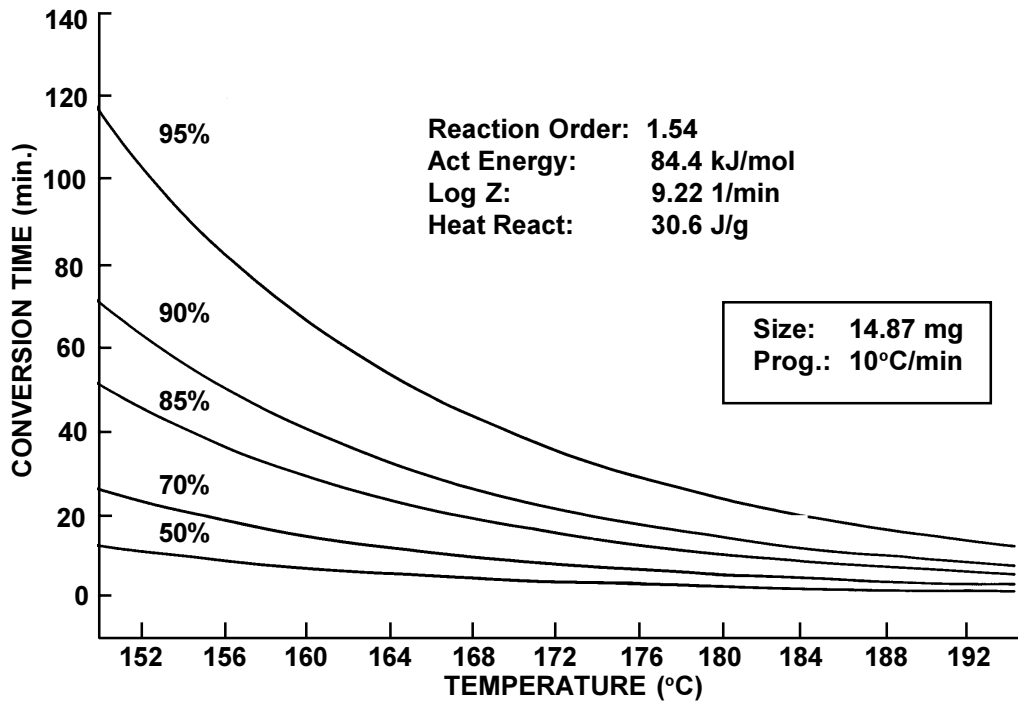


Figure 4

# EPOXY-N0VALAC-AMINE COMPOSITE ANALYSIS OF HIGH TEMPERATURE REACTIONS USING ASTM E698 KINETICS METHOD

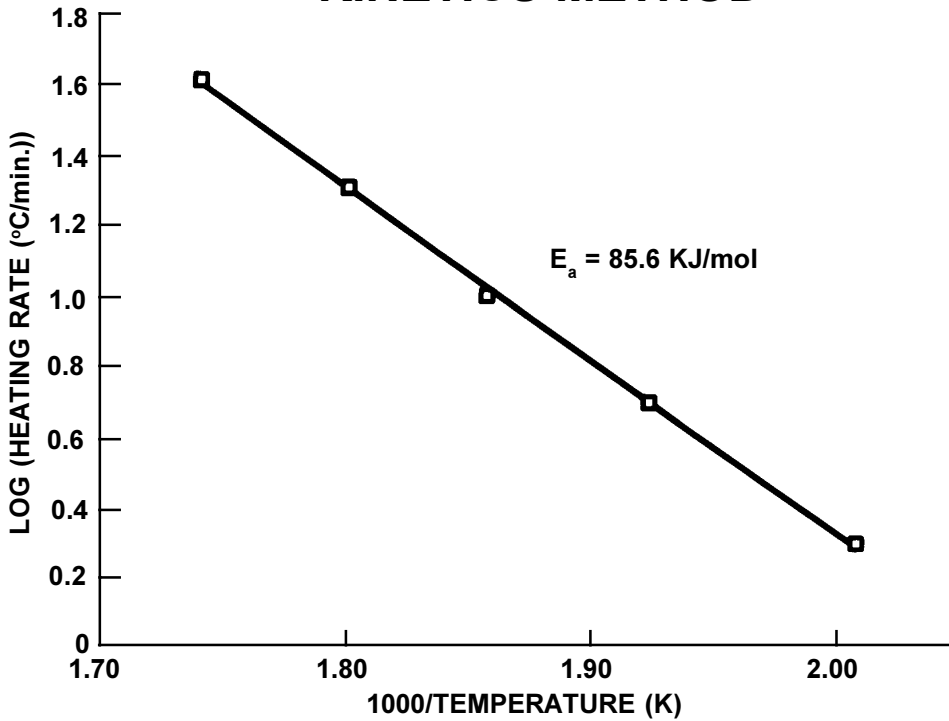


Figure 5

## METHOD OF CALCULATING PARAMETERS FOR KINETICS MODEL

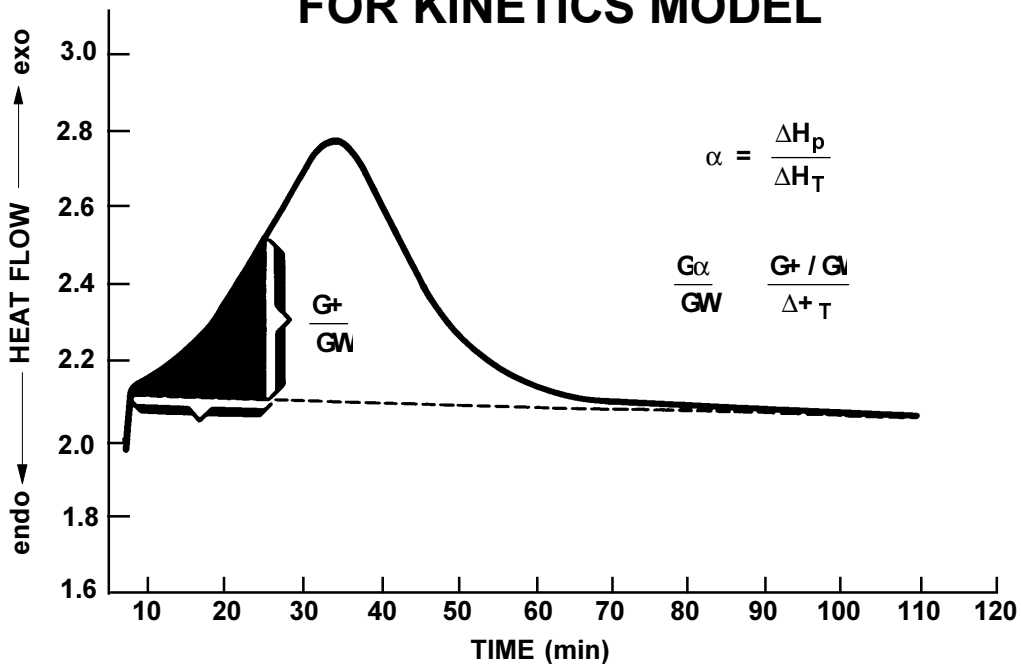
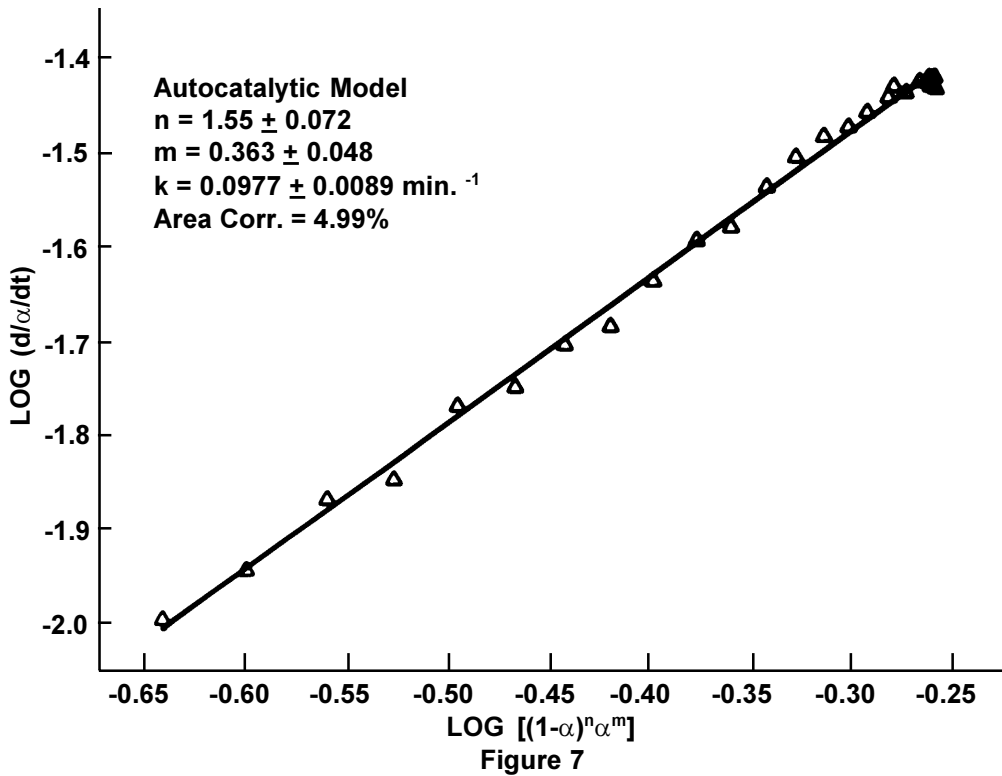
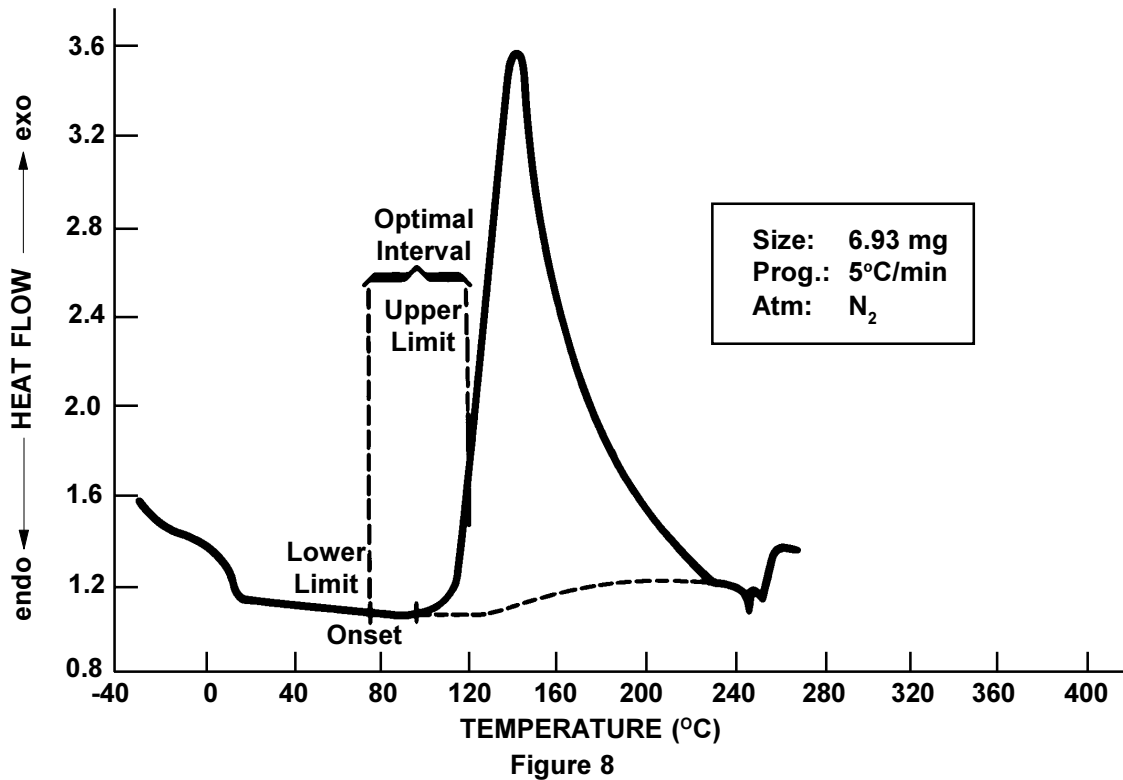


Figure 6

# LOG/LOG PLOT FOR EPON 828/DDS AT 175°C ISOTHERMAL KINETICS



# CURE OF AUTOCATALYZED THERMOSET



## ISOTHERMAL CURE OF MATERIAL FOLLOWING $n$ TH ORDER KINETICS

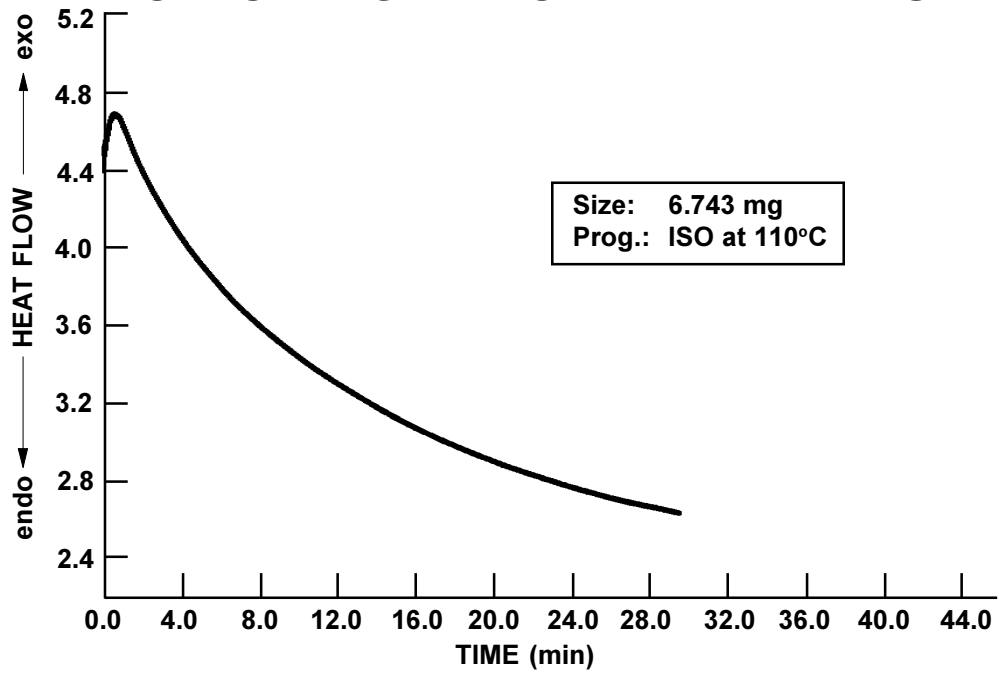


Figure 9

## EFFECTS OF AGING AT 65°C ON AN AUTOCATALYZED THERMOSET

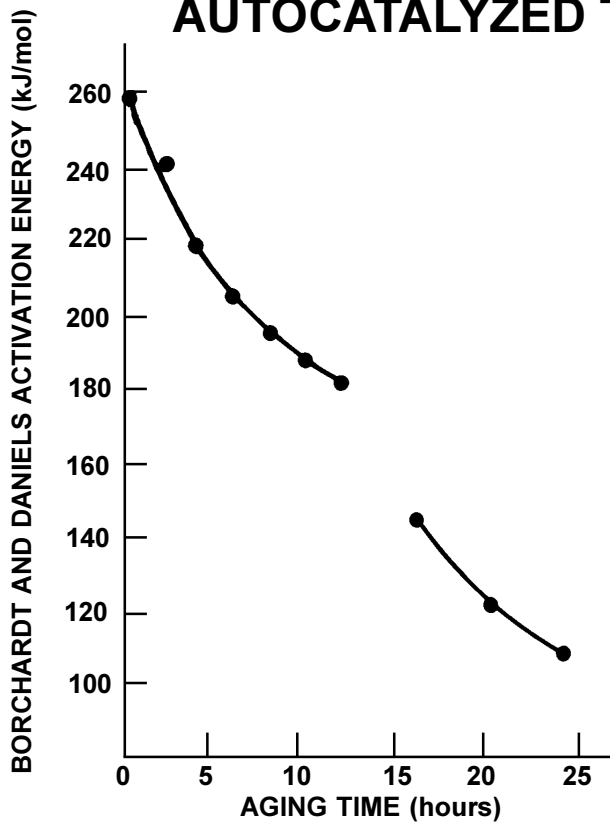


Figure 10

# AGING STUDY OF COMMERCIAL EPOXY ADHESIVE GLASS TRANSITION TEMPERATURE VERSUS AGING TIME AT 65°C

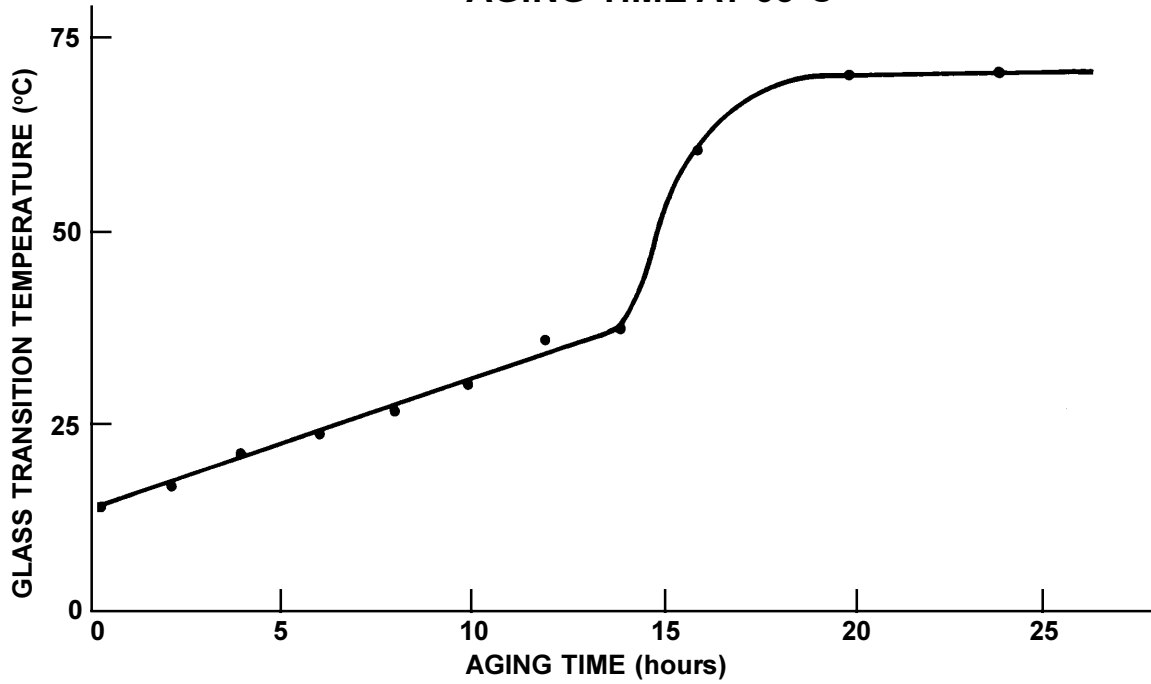


Figure 11

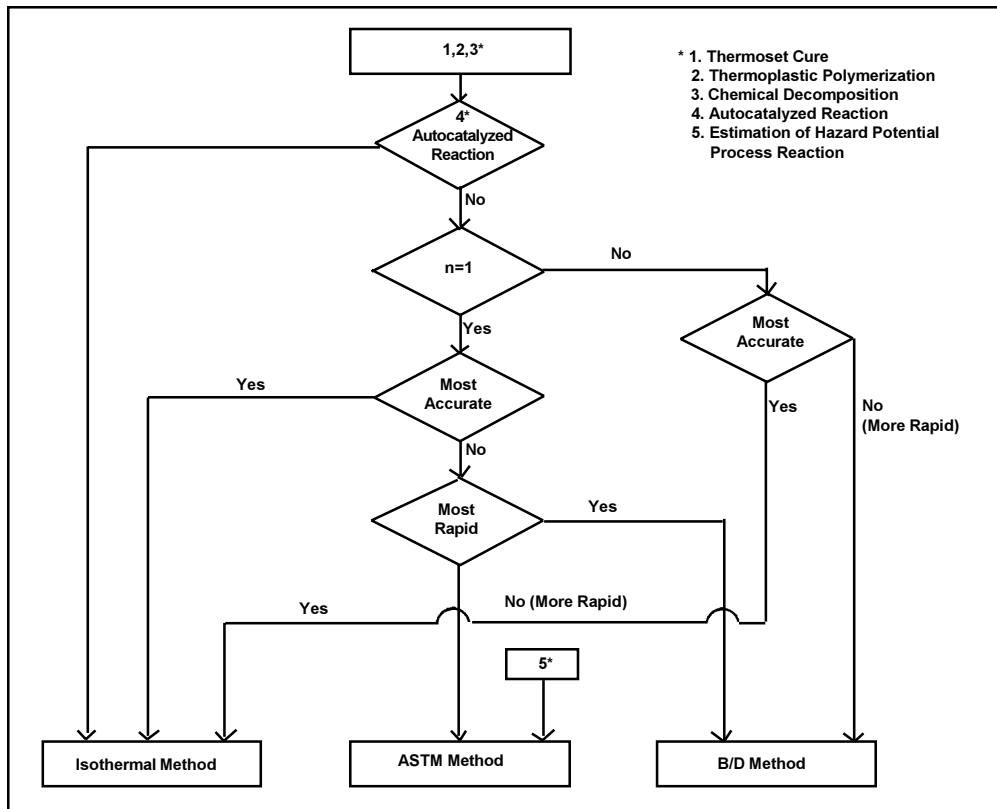


Figure 12

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