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Enhanced thermo-oxidative stability of polydicyclopentadiene containing covalently bound nitroxide groups

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A B S T R A C T

The antioxidant 2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidine-1-oxyl (**TEMPO**) group was covalently introduced into polydicyclopentadiene (**PDCPD**) through ring-opening metathesis polymerization (ROMP) copolymerization of dicyclopentadiene (**DCPD**) with a **TEMPO**-derived norbornene comonomer. The thermal oxidation of the resulting thin films was monitored by ThermoGravimetric Analyses (TGA) and Fourier-Transform Infra-Red spectroscopy (FT-IR). This new **PDCPD** stabilized by immobilization of the **TEMPO** antioxidant shows a better thermo-oxidative stability at 60 °C under air than an industrial formulation of **PDCPD** stabilized with 2,6-di-*tert*-butyl-4-methylphenol (**BHT**). Impact of thermal oxidation on mechanical behaviour of both formulations have been studied by tensile tests and fracture tests, based on the essential work of fracture (EWF) concept. The **TEMPO**-functionalized **PDCPD** offers a promising alternative to **BHT**-stabilized **PDCPD** with comparable ductility but slower decay and better cracking resistance, confirming the benefit of the **TEMPO** antioxidant in **PDCPD** formulation when chemically bound to the matrix.

1. Introduction

Polydicyclopentadiene (**PDCPD**) is one of the most industrially manufactured polymers by ring-opening metathesis polymerization (ROMP) of dicyclopentadiene (**DCPD**) [1], which is produced in large quantities as a byproduct of petroleum cracking [2–4] (Scheme 1). This thermoset polymer processed by reaction injection moulding (RIM) is extensively crosslinked [5] and displays particularly interesting physical and chemical properties, i.e., a very high impact resistance coupled with a good resistance to chemical corrosion and a high heat deflection temperature [6,7]. These properties have been exploited for manufacturing of impact-resistant and tough moulded parts used in automotive industry to produce body panels, bumpers, and other components for trucks, buses and tractors [8–10]. However, compared with other hydrocarbon polymers, the high concentration in remaining double bonds in **PDCPD** and a high catalyst residues concentration used for the ROMP of **DCPD** enhances the sensitivity to oxidation compared

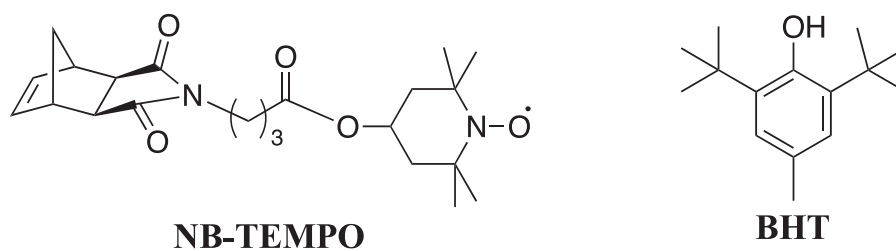
to other hydrocarbon polymers [11], limiting its use in severe environments such as the marine environment for deep-sea oil extraction [12].

PDCPD is usually stabilized by adding 2,6-di-*tert*-butyl-4-methylphenol (**BHT**) to the **DCPD** formulation, which offers high inhibition efficiency and low cost [13–15]. However, the effectiveness of such low-molar mass additive is limited by incompatibility [16] and migration out polymer matrix [17–18]. Despite the presence of **BHT**, **PDCPD** undergoes oxidation that favors crosslinking leading to a large increase in glass transition temperature (T_g) together with an increase in rubbery modulus and maximal stress [19] and, as a consequence, an embrittlement of the polymer. Use of the hindered amine light stabilizer (HALS) stabilizer Tinuvin 123 or Chimassorb 2020 instead of **BHT** allows to improve the protection performance especially when lowering the ageing temperature [20].

Approaches that can dramatically improve polyolefin thermal-oxidative stability have been developed by chemically binding antioxidant groups along the polymer chain. The addressed synthetic strategies are based on (i) post-polymerization modification (PPM) [21–23], and (ii) copolymerization of an antioxidant-containing comonomer with olefin or vinyl monomers [24–26]. This latter

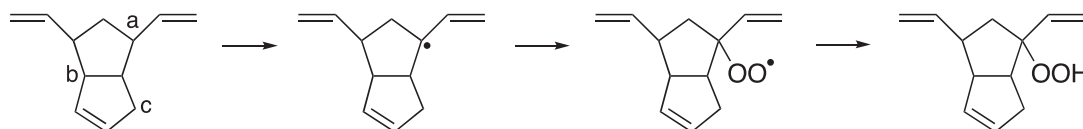
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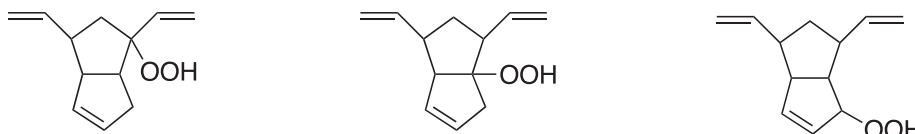


Scheme 3. Structures of the commercially available stabilizing agent **BHT** and the nitroxide radical-containing norbornene used as comonomer and stabilizing agent incorporated in the **DCPD** formulation.

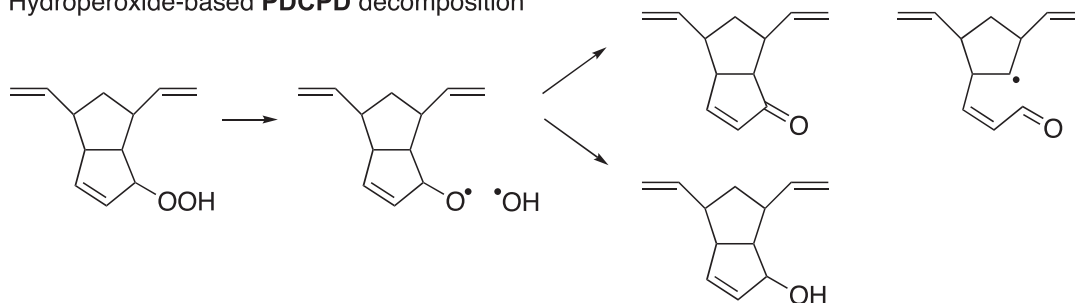
(A) Generation of hydroperoxide-based PDCPD



(B) Various possible structures of hydroperoxide-based PDCPD



(C) Hydroperoxide-based PDCPD decomposition



Scheme 4. PDCPD thermo-oxidative pathways: (A) hydrogen abstraction, (B) various possible structures of hydroperoxide-based PDCPD, and (C) the resulting alcohol- and carbonyl-based PDCPD after decomposition by a unimolecular or bimolecular process of hydroperoxide-based PDCPD.

two notches (ligament length, L) was in the range between 3 and 9 mm. Tests were recorded with a high resolution camera (Camera Basler™ PIA 2400–12 GM). Images from the camera were used to measure the actual ligament length (L) before testing and fracture energy was measured from the area of the load/displacement curve. The reported values are the average ± 1 standard deviation of at least eight measurements. More details about concept and methodology are available in Refs. [34–36]. The fracture energy (W_f) is measured from the area of the load/displacement curve and then plotted as a function of ligament length, see Fig. 4.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Preparation of stabilized PDCPD films

Stabilized bulk PDCPD materials were obtained by bulk copolymerization between DCPD and the nitroxide radical-containing norbornene (**NB-TEMPO**, Scheme 3) used both as comonomer and stabilizing agent using a ruthenium salicylidimine phenylindenyldene complex as the initiator. The concentration of the stabilizing agent has been set at the same concentration as in the industrial formulation (see experimental section) when 2,6-di-*tert*-butyl-4-methylphenol (**BHT**) is used, i.e. 1.044 mmol in phenol function

per 100 g of DCPD. Indeed, previous studies have shown that the use of more stabilizing agent in PDCPD does not improve its efficiency [20]. For comparison, incorporation of antioxidant in the PDCPD formulation has then been performed by bulk polymerization of DCPD in the presence of the commercially available stabilizing agent: hindered phenol **BHT** (Scheme 3).

3.2. Stabilized PDCPD films thermo-oxidation

The effect of stabilizers was evaluated by accelerated ageing tests. For that purpose, a **BHT**-stabilized bulk PDCPD (**PDCPD-BHT**) film, a purified PDCPD film, i.e. a **PDCPD-BHT** film from which the antioxidants have been removed by extraction according to a literature procedure [37], and a **NB-TEMPO**-stabilized bulk PDCPD (**P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO)**) film were *in situ* aged in ThermoGravimetric Analyses (TGA) apparatus under pure oxygen flow at 120 °C. During ageing, thermal oxidation has been shown to occur according to the following process [38]. Allylic radicals are generated by the abstraction of hydrogen from the allylic C–H of the PDCPD (labelled a, b and c in Schema 4A) by radical species. These allylic radicals react with oxygen to give peroxy radicals POO•. These in turn abstract a hydrogen from another allylic C–H to form hydroperoxides POOH (Scheme 4B). They then undergo decomposi-

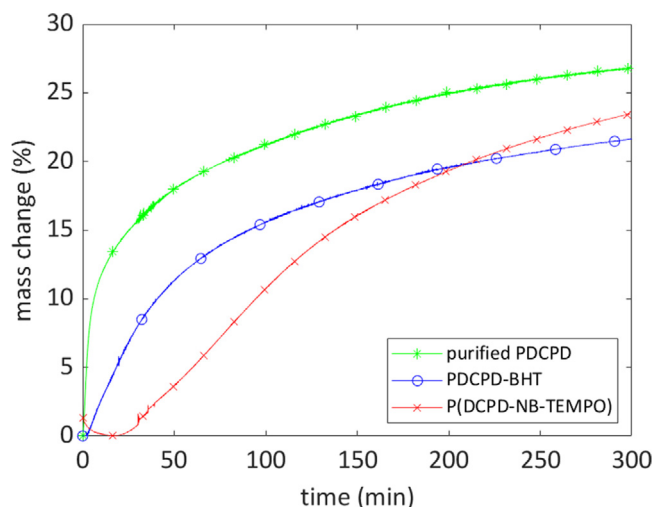


Fig. 1. Kinetics of mass uptake at 120 °C under pure oxygen flow for (A) purified PDCPD, (B) PDCPD-BHT, and (C) P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) films.

tion by a unimolecular or bimolecular mechanism [39], leading to alkoxy PO^\bullet radicals, which rearrange into unsaturated ketones, with or without cleavage of the vicinal C–C bond, or to alcohols (Scheme 4C). Thermal oxidation of PDCPD thus leads to a progressive increase in the mass of the film, which is monitored by TGA.

As observed in Fig. 1A, kinetic curves for mass increase display the classical behaviour with an induction period followed by an auto-acceleration stage classical for the oxidation of hydrocarbon polymers. As previously described [37], induction period for purified PDCPD is almost close to 0, due to the relatively high instability of this polymer at the considered temperature. This induction period is significantly increased (Fig. 1B) by adding the stabilizing agent usually used in industrial PDCPD formulations: hindered phenol BHT.

The replacement of free stabilizer BHT by the covalently bounded NB-TEMPO in PDCPD films with the same concentration in active groups allows to increase the induction period (Fig. 1C), demonstrating the greater efficiency of the TEMPO stabilizing agent. This implies (i) that the TEMPO group displays a better radical trapping capacity and/or (ii) that the BHT migration out of the polymer limits its antioxidant behaviour. The greater efficiency of mobile (non-grafted) hindered amine stabilizers compared to BHT to stabilize PDCPD supports the second hypothesis [20]. The thermal ageing of these films at 60 °C and 90 °C has

also been monitored by Fourier Transform Infra-Red (FT-IR) spectroscopy by converting carbonyl absorbances appearing at 1650–1750 cm^{-1} (stretch vibration mode of C=O) into concentrations using Beer-Lambert's law with $\epsilon_{\text{CO}} = 300 \text{ L}\cdot\text{mol}^{-1}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1}$ [40] (Fig. 2). The results confirm the higher efficiency of amine-based stabilizers compared to hindered phenols.

3.3. Impact of the thermal ageing on the mechanical properties of stabilized PDCPD films

Fig. 3 presents typical stress/strain curves obtained during uniaxial tensile test for PDCPD-BHT and P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) 60 μm thick dog-bone specimens in order to obtain homogeneous oxidation through the sample thickness. Let us first focus on unaged P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) material (black curve, Fig. 3A), a linear portion is first observed corresponding to an elastic behaviour. Then, at a stress close to 22 MPa, a yield occurs where plastic deformation takes place within the polymer. Finally, an elongation at break can be measured, about 20% for the unaged samples. In presence of BHT (black curve, Fig. 3B), the mechanical behaviour of PDCPD-BHT is the same except that maximal stress is about 30 MPa suggesting a higher crosslink density in this material before ageing. During ageing, the same behaviour is observed for both materials, i.e. a decrease in elongation at break as well as an increase in maximal stress and finally a complete embrittlement for PDCPD-BHT (after 120 h at 60 °C). The most interesting point here is the fact that even after 408 h at 60 °C, P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) is not brittle whereas PDCPD-BHT is brittle after 120 h. These results confirm improvement of the PDCPD durability already observed by FT-IR spectroscopy and mass changes using nitroxide radical-containing norbornene both as stabilizer and comonomer.

As shown in a previous study [19], determination of fracture properties in PDCPD can be achieved using DENT (double edge notched specimen) samples through the Essential Work of Fracture specially to understand the decrease in strain at break.

At the unaged state, the energy necessary to propagate a crack in P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) is lower than for PDCPD-BHT. Here again, this behaviour could be due to a lower crosslink density in the polymer. During ageing, a clear decrease in βW_p (i.e. the slope in Fig. 4B) is observed for PDCPD-BHT during oxidation at 60 °C. When this value is equal to 0 then it means that the polymer is brittle. On the contrary, for P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO), there is no large impact of thermal oxidation on the βW_p even after 120 h at 60 °C.

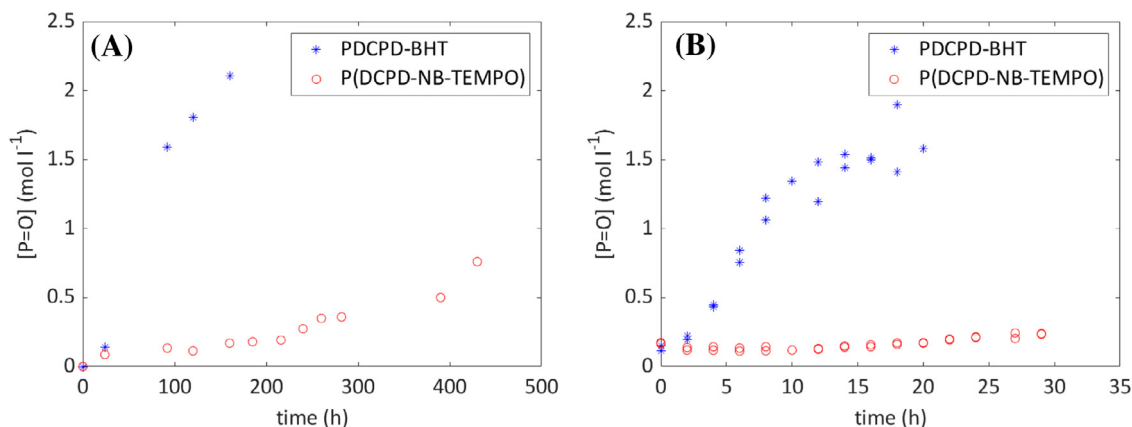


Fig. 2. Carbonyls concentration-time profiles during ageing under air of PDCPD-BHT and P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) films at (A) 60 °C and (B) 90 °C.

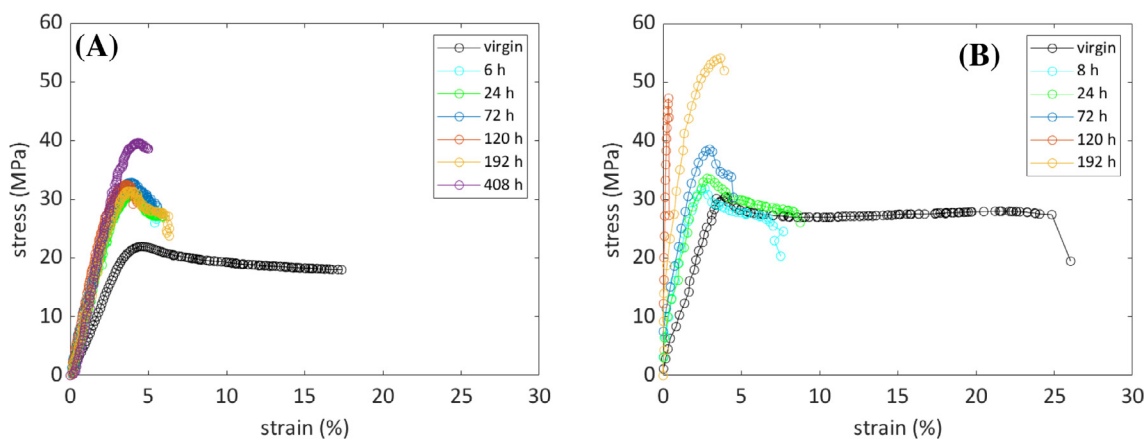


Fig. 3. Tensile curves during ageing at 60 °C for (A) P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) (left) and (B) PDCPD-BHT (right).

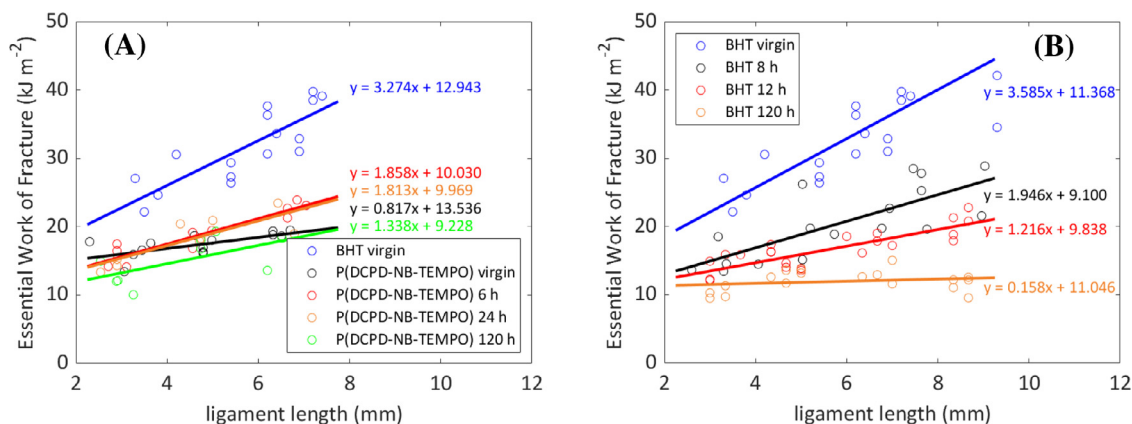


Fig. 4. Impact of oxidation on fracture properties in (A) P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) (left) and (B) PDCPD-BHT (right) at 60 °C.

As a conclusion on the study of the impact of thermal oxidation on mechanical properties of two PDCPD stabilized with the usually used BHT in industrial PDCPD formulations and the nitroxide radical-containing norbornene NB-TEMPO used both as comonomer and stabilizing agent, it appears that the consequences of oxidation are the same for the two polymers, i.e. an embrittlement of the material. However, with both tensile tests and fracture tests, the embrittlement time is much longer for P(DCPD-NB-TEMPO) (more than 400 h vs 120 h with PDCPD-BHT at 60 °C). These results confirm the benefit of using the new stabilizer developed in this study.

4. Conclusion

A new antioxidant moiety was chemically bound to a PDCPD matrix by bulk copolymerization between DCPD and a TEMPO-containing norbornene. The thermal oxidation of resulting thin films studied by TGA at 120 °C in pure oxygen shows an improved stability with an increase of the period induction compared with thin films of BHT-stabilized PDCPD which was confirmed by kinetics of carbonyl concentration built up monitored by FT-IR for ageing at 60 and 90 °C under air. While the consequences of oxidation of the BHT-stabilized PDCPD and TEMPO-functionalized PDCPD formulations on their mechanical properties both lead to an embrittlement of the material, this embrittlement occurs for this latter after an improved latency of a factor of 3. The opportunity to immobilize an antioxidant to the PDCPD matrix gives a new perspective for use in severe environments such as the marine environment for deep-sea oil extraction.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Clémence Nicolas: Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft. **Jing Huang:** Methodology, Investigation. **Emmanuel Richaud:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Adelina David:** Methodology, Investigation. **Pierre-Yves Le Gac:** Conceptualization, Supervision. **Wendy Minne:** Investigation. **Renata Drozdak:** Conceptualization, Methodology. **Gilles Recher:** Conceptualization, Methodology. **Laurent Fontaine:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Véronique Montebault:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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