Feasibility study of Tritium recoil barrier for neutron reflectors

E. Ishitsuka¹ and N. Sakamoto²

¹Sector of Fast Reactor and Advanced Reactor Research and Development, Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), 4002 Narita-cho, Oarai-machi, Higashi Ibaraki-gun, Ibaraki-ken, 311-1393, Japan
²NGK Insulators, Ltd., 2-56, Suda-cho, Mizuho, Nagoya 467-8530, Japan
e-mail: ishitsuka.etsuo@jaea.go.jp

Tritium release into the primary coolant of the research and test reactors during operation had been studied, and it is found that the beryllium components used as a neutron reflector in the core strongly affect the tritium release into the primary coolant, and it is also found that the recoil release from chain reaction of ⁹Be is dominant. To reduce tritium concentration of the primary coolant, feasibility study of the tritium recoil barrier for the beryllium neutron reflectors was carried out, and the tritium recoils of various materials such as Al, Ti, V, Ni, Zr, etc., were calculated by PHITS. From these calculation results, it is clear that the thickness of tritium recoil barrier depends on the material and 20–40 μm is required for three orders reduction. Additionally, the denser materials have shorter recoil length in general, however, it is clear that the recoil lengths of Zr and Pb are similar with Ti.

Key words: primary coolant, tritium release, research and test reactors, beryllium, neutron reflectors, tritium recoil barrier.
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1 Introduction

Tritium release into the primary coolant during operation of the JMTR (Japan Materials Testing Reactor) and the JRR-3M (Japan Research Reactor-3M) had been studied [1-9], and it is clear that the beryllium components used as a neutron reflector [10] in the core strongly affect the tritium release into the primary coolant. The sources and mechanisms for the tritium release into the primary coolant are evaluated by calculations of the MCNP [11], PHITS [12] and ORIGEN2 [13,14], and it is found that the recoil release [15,16] from chain reaction of ⁹Be is dominant [17].

These studies show that the prevention of recoil release from beryllium is most effective to reduce the tritium release into the primary coolant. To prevent tritium recoil release, the surface area of beryllium neutron reflectors needs to be minimum in the core design and/or shielded with other material. In this paper, as the feasibility study of the tritium recoil barrier for the beryllium neutron reflectors, the tritium recoils of various materials were calculated.

2 Calculations of tritium recoil

Al, Ti, V, Ni and Zr shown in Table 1 are selected as the candidate materials from the viewpoint of low activation materials and forming intermetallic compound with beryllium [18]. The formation of the intermetallic compound considered that will prevent troubles such as peeling during the reactor operation. H₂O and Pb are selected as the reference materials.

The calculations of tritium recoil lengths were carried out by PHITS(Ver. 3.170) [12]. The calculation model for Al is shown in Figure 1. The tritium recoil was directly calculated using a triton (same meaning with tritium in this paper) source without the calculation of nuclear reactions [7], and small beryllium sphere is used in this model to get enough triton density even if short calculation time. The triton monochromatic energy (2.73MeV) of ⁶Li(n,α)³H reaction is used in these calculations [7]. The material densities are used from reference [19,20]. 10⁹ triton particles were generated in this calculation, and results are shown in Figure 2~Figure 4.
2D distribution of triton flux is shown in Figure 2, and enlarged view near boundary is shown in Figure 3. 1D distribution of triton flux near boundary is shown in Figure 4. It is clear from this calculation that the recoiled triton reached to about 40µm in Al from the boundary.

Similar calculations were carried out with different materials shown in Table 1 which surrounding beryllium sphere. Calculation results of the triton recoil length in various materials are shown in Figure 5. From these calculation results, the recoil barrier thickness that reduced to 1/1000 are estimated, and shown in Table 1.

* : Thickness reduced to 1/1000

| Materials | Density (g/cm³) | Recoil barrier thickness* (µm) |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| H₂O       | 0.99           | 59                            |
| Al        | 2.7            | 35                            |
| Ti        | 4.5            | 25                            |
| V         | 5.87           | 19                            |
| Ni        | 8.8            | 16                            |
| Zr        | 6.49           | 23                            |
| Pb        | 11.34          | 25                            |

* : Thickness reduced to 1/1000
3 Discussion

The denser materials have shorter recoil length in general, however, the triton recoil lengths of Zr and Pb are similar with Ti in these calculations. The tritium recoil release can be reduced by increasing the thickness of barrier. However, the tritium concentration in the primary coolant cannot be reduced to zero because tritium is also generated from the primary coolant. The tritium recoil release from beryllium is reported three orders of magnitude larger than that of the generated tritium from the primary coolant [17]. Therefore, the reduction performance of three orders of magnitude is sufficient as the tritium recoil barrier.

From the above calculation results, it is clear that the thickness of tritium recoil barrier depends on the material and 20-40 μm is required. As a next development step, the selection of materials in consideration of activation, the construction methods for the tritium recoil barrier, the stability under neutron irradiation, etc., will be listed.

4 Conclusions

As the feasibility study of tritium recoil barrier for the beryllium neutron reflectors, the tritium recoils of various materials were calculated, and the following results were obtained.
- The reduction performance of three orders of magnitude is sufficient as the tritium recoil barrier.
- The thickness of tritium recoil barrier depends on the material and 20-40 μm is required.

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