Silica Radical-induced DNA Damage and Lipid Peroxidation

Xianglin Shi,¹ Yan Mao,¹ Lambert N. Daniel,¹ Umberto Saffiotti,¹ Nar S. Dalal,² and Val Vallyathan³

¹Laboratory of Experimental Pathology, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland; ²Department of Chemistry, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia; ³Division of Respiratory Disease Studies, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Morgantown, West Virginia

In recent years, more attention has been given to the mechanism of disease induction caused by the surface properties of minerals. In this respect, specific research needs to be focused on the biologic interactions of oxygen radicals generated by mineral particles resulting in cell injury and DNA damage leading to fibrogenesis and carcinogenesis. In this investigation, we used electron spin resonance (ESR) and spin trapping to study oxygen radical generation from aqueous suspensions of freshly fractured crystalline silica. Hydroxyl radical (·OH), superoxide radical (O₂⁻) and singlet oxygen (¹O₂) were all detected. Superoxide dismutase (SOD) partially inhibited ·OH yield, whereas catalase abolished ·OH generation. H₂O₂ enhanced ·OH generation while deferoxamine inhibited it, indicating that ·OH is generated via a Haber–Weiss type reaction. These spin trapping measurements provide the first evidence that aqueous suspensions of silica particles generate O₂⁻ and ¹O₂. Oxygen consumption measurements indicate that freshly fractured silica uses molecular oxygen to generate O₂⁻ and ¹O₂. Electrophoretic assays of in vitro DNA strand breakages showed that freshly fractured silica induced DNA strand breakage, which was inhibited by catalase and enhanced by H₂O₂. In an argon atmosphere, DNA damage was suppressed, showing that molecular oxygen is required for the silica-induced DNA damage. Incubation of freshly fractured silica with linoleic acid generated linoleic acid-derived free radicals and caused dose-dependent lipid peroxidation as measured by ESR spin trapping and malondialdehyde formation. SOD, catalase, and sodium benzoate inhibited lipid peroxidation by 49, 52, and 75%, respectively, again showing the role of oxygen radicals in silica-induced lipid peroxidation. These results show that in addition to ·OH, O₂⁻ and ¹O₂ may play an important role in the mechanism of silica-induced cellular injury. — Environ Health Perspect 102(Suppl 1):149–154 (1994)

Key words: silica-based radicals, hydroxyl radical, singlet oxygen, superoxide radical, DNA damage, lipid peroxidation, electron spin resonance, spin trapping, crystalline silica, silicosis, carcinogenesis

Introduction

Epidemiologic and pathologic studies have established that inhalation of silica incites the development of acute and chronic pulmonary silicosis (1,2). In addition, increasing evidence in the recent years from epidemiologic and animal experimental studies has implicated crystalline silica as a potential carcinogen (3). However, the biochemical mechanisms involved in the silica-induced fibrogenesis and carcinogenesis are enigmatic. Indeed it is not known whether damage to DNA plays a role in the carcinogenesis process. It is thought that one event of primary importance is the perturbation of cell membranes due to silica particle interactions (2,4). This cell membrane damage releases certain lytic enzymes that cause additional cell injury and eventual fibrosis (2). Thus, considerable effort is currently devoted to understanding the mechanism whereby silica particles disrupt the cell membrane. Earlier studies (4–7) have suggested that the silica-based free radicals (Si*, SO*, and SiOO*) on the surface of freshly fractured silica and the associated generation of H₂O₂ and hydroxyl radicals (·OH) might be directly or indirectly involved in the mechanism of lipid peroxidation, leading to the loss of membrane integrity and eventual pulmonary fibrosis.

While our earlier studies (4–7) have demonstrated that freshly fractured silica are capable of generating ·OH radicals upon reaction with aqueous media, recent studies suggest that superoxide radical (O₂⁻) may also be generated (8–11). However, whether silica particles generate O₂⁻ upon reaction with aqueous medium has not been firmly established.

In a previous study, Karmanova and co-workers (12) provided evidence for the emission of singlet oxygen (¹O₂) during the reconstruction of a freshly generated quartz surface bearing nonexcluded adsorbed oxygen molecules. It is unclear, however, whether singlet oxygen can be produced from aqueous suspension of silica particles under biologically relevant conditions. The current study was undertaken to answer the following questions: a) Does an aqueous suspension of silica particles generate O₂⁻; b) does an aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica generate ¹O₂; c) do O₂⁻ and other oxygen free radicals, generated by reactions of freshly fractured silica, play an important role in DNA damage and lipid peroxidation; d) is freshly fractured silica-induced DNA damage strongly dependent on molecular oxygen?

Materials and Methods

Chemicals

Iron(II) sulfate (FeSO₄), hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), 5,5-dimethyl-1-pyrroline N-oxide (DMPO), N-tert-buty1-α-phenyl- nitron (PBN), ethidium bromide, 2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-4-piperidone, superoxide dismutase (SOD), cis-9-cis-12-octadeca- dienoic acid (linoleic acid), xanthine, xanthine oxidase, defereroxamine, diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid (DTPA), and sodium benzoate were purchased from Sigma Chemical Company (St. Louis, MO). Beef liver catalase was purchased from Boehringer Mannheim (Indianapolis, IN). DNA (A
Hind III digest marker fragments) was obtained from BRL (Gaithersburg, MD). Chelex-100 chelating resin was purchased from Bio-Rad Laboratories (Richmond, CA). Phosphate buffer, pH 7.4, was treated with Chelex-100 to remove putative metal ion contaminants. DMPO solutions were purified using activated charcoal until free radical impurities disappeared as verified by ESR spectroscopy.

Silica Preparations

Crystalline silica particles of 0.2 to 5 mm in diameter were obtained from the Generic Respirable Dust Technology Center, State University, Pennsylvania State University Park, PA. Crystalline silica was hand ground in an agate mortar with a pestle to produce freshly fractured silica in a size range smaller than 20 μm. The mortar ground silica exhibited a wide size distribution pattern that was considered roughly comparable to the dust produced in mining or milling processes (5,6).

Electron Spin Resonance Measurements

Electron spin resonance (ESR) spin trapping (13,14) was used to detect short-lived free radical intermediates. All ESR measurements were made using a Varian E4 spectrometer and a flat cell assembly. Hyperfine splittings were measured (to 0.1 G) directly from magnetic field separations using potassium tetraperoxochromate (K₂Cr₂O₇) (15) and 1,1-diphenyl-2-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) as standards. Reactants were combined in a total final volume of 250 μl and then transferred to a flat cell for ESR measurements. All measurements were made under ambient conditions.

Oxygen Consumption Measurements

Oxygen consumption experiments were performed at 25°C using a Clark oxygen electrode (Model 5300, Yellow Springs Instrument Co., Yellow Springs, OH). The sample contained 50 mg/ml freshly fractured silica in 10 mM phosphate-buffered solution (pH 7.4). Oxygen consumption was monitored over a period of 5 min.

DNA Strand Breakage Assays

DNA double-strand breakage assay was carried out according to the method described earlier (11). Briefly, reactions were carried out in 10 mM phosphate buffer, pH 7.4, in 1.5 ml polypropylene tubes at 37°C. Each reaction mixture contained 10 μg DNA (λ Hind III digest) in a total volume of 100 μl. Freshly fractured silica suspensions were added to each reaction mixture to a final concentration of 10 mg/ml. DNA damage was assessed for each reaction by removal of a 10-μl aliquot from the supernatant of each reaction tube after centrifugation. To each sample, 0.2 ml volumes of gel loading buffer (50 mM EDTA, 2.5% SDS, 0.1% bromophenol blue, and 6.25% glycerol) was added. Samples were then electrophoresed in 0.7% agarose at 1 to 2 V/cm in 40 mM Tris-acetate buffer containing 2 mM EDTA (pH 8.0). Gels were stained in ethidium bromide (5 μg/ml) for 10 min and photographed under ultraviolet transillumination.

Lipid Peroxidation Measurements

Lipid peroxidation of the model polynsaturated lipid, linoleic acid, by freshly fractured silica was measured by monitoring the malondialdehyde (MDA) formed according to an earlier described procedure (16,17). A typical reaction mixture contained 2.5 mg/ml silica and 20 μl of 0.52 mM linoleic acid emulsion in a total volume of 0.5 ml. The mixture was incubated for 1 hr in a shaking water bath at 37°C. The reaction was terminated by the addition of 0.5 ml of 3% SDS and then 2.0 ml of 0.1 N HCl, 0.3 ml of 10% phosphotungstic acid, and 1.0 ml of 0.7% 2-thiobarbituric acid. The mixture was then heated for 30 min at 95 to 100°C. Thiobarbituric acid reactive substances were extracted with 5 ml 1-butanol after cooling. This extraction was centrifuged at 3000g for 1 min and the butanol layer was separated. The fluorescence of the butanol layer was then measured at 515 nm excitation and 555 nm emission using Perkin-Elmer fluorospectrophotometer (model MPG-36). MDA standards were prepared from 1,1,3,3-tetramethoxypropane to obtain a calibration curve, which was used for calculating the amount of MDA produced.

Results

Superoxide Radical Generation

In our earlier studies (5,6), we provided evidence for the generation of OH radicals from aqueous suspensions of freshly fractured silica. In this study, OH generation was measured with emphasis on the possible involvement of O₂⁻ in the mechanism of OH generation. Figure 1A shows a typical ESR spectrum obtained from aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica (150 mg/ml) containing 100 mM DMPO. The analysis of this spectrum yields the hyperfine splittings of a_H = a_D = 4.9 Gauss, which are identical to those reported earlier for the DMPO/OH adduct (18). These results are in agreement with our previous reports on OH generation from aqueous suspensions of freshly fractured silica (5,6).

To investigate the possible involvement of O₂⁻ in the mechanism of OH generation, SOD (50 μg/ml) was used. As shown in Figure 1B, SOD decreased the intensity of the DMPO/OH spin adduct, indicating that O₂⁻ is involved in OH generation. Figure 1C shows that catalase (5000 units/ml) suppressed the formation of DMPO/OH. H₂O₂ (10 mM) significantly enhanced OH generation, suggesting a role of H₂O₂ in the mechanism of OH generation. The iron chelator deferoxamine also inhibited OH generation (Figure 1D). The above results are consistent with a mechanism of OH generation by the reaction of H₂O₂ with metal ions or with the reactive silica surface via a Fenton-like mechanism. As reported earlier H₂O₂ is generated by the reaction of the silica surface with water (5,11,19).

![Figure 1](image-url)
predominantly with 'OH, and only the DMPO/OH signal would be observable. In order to trap O_2^-, we used a relatively high concentration of DMPO. DMPO alone at concentration of 2 M did not generate any signal (Figure 2A). When freshly fractured silica particles (150 mg/ml) were added with 2 M DMPO, spin adduct signals were observed (Figure 2B). Computer simulation analysis showed that this spectrum is a composite of two spin adduct signals. The signal with hyperfine splittings of a_n = 16.7 G and a_\perp = 22.5 G (marked by asterisks) were assigned to a DMPO/OH spin adduct ('R represents a carbon-centered alkyl radical). This assignment was made based on the known hyperfine splittings of such adducts (18). The 'R may result from the oxidation of DMPO. The other signal with hyperfine splittings of a_n = 14.2 G, a_\perp = 11.5 G and a_\perp = 1.2 G was assigned to a DMPO/O_2^- adduct. The broadening of the signals is likely due to the simultaneous trapping of 'OH. Addition of SOD significantly inhibited the intensity of the spin adduct signal generated with 2 M DMPO and freshly fractured silica (Figure 2C). Xanthine and xanthine oxidase was used as a positive control for O_2^- generation. In the presence of DMPO, xanthine and xanthine oxidase generated typical spectra of the DMPO/O_2^- spin adduct (data not shown). The above results thus show that O_2^- was indeed generated from freshly fractured silica.

Singlet Oxygen Generation

ESR spin trapping has been used for detecting 'O_2 employing sterically hindered 2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-4-piperidine (TMP) to generate a stable free radical nitroxide (21,22). Figure 3A shows the spectrum generated from an aqueous suspension of silica particles (150 mg/ml) containing 15 mM H_2O_2 and 200 mM TMP. The 3-line spectrum with 1:1:1 ratio was identical to that of TMP reacting with 'O_2 reported earlier (21,22). Aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica with TMP without H_2O_2 did not generate detectable amounts of nitroxide radicals (data not shown). TMP solution containing H_2O_2 or containing H_2O_2 plus Fe^{2+} without freshly fractured silica generated nitroxide radical but at a much lower degree (Figure 3B, C). These results thus show that freshly silica in aqueous suspension containing H_2O_2 generate 'O_2^-.

To monitor the disappearance of dissolved molecular oxygen in association with the generation of O_2^- and 'O_2, we employed a Clark-type oxygen electrode to measure oxygen consumption in an aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica. As shown in Figure 4, the freshly fractured silica suspension rapidly consumed molecular oxygen, indicating the role of molecular oxygen in silica reactions that generate oxygenated species.

Lipid-derived Free Radical Generation from Linoleic Acid by Freshly Fractured Silica

Figure 5A shows an ESR spectrum obtained from a mixture containing linoleic acid (5 mM) and freshly fractured silica. Omission of freshly fractured silica resulted in the loss of the spin adduct signal (Figure 5B), indicating that free radicals generated from freshly fractured silica in the suspension reacted with linoleic acid to generate free radicals. Because of the broad peak of the spectrum, we have not identified the free radicals generated. We also directly monitored lipid peroxidation induced by freshly fractured silica using linoleic acid as a model lipid. As shown in Figure 6, freshly fractured silica induced lipid peroxidation in a dose-dependent

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Figure 2. (A) ESR spectrum recorded from a phosphate-buffered solution containing 2 M DMPO. (B) Same as (A) but with 150 mg/ml freshly fractured silica. The spectrum was recorded 2 min after adding freshly fractured silica particles. (C) Same as (B) but with 50 mg/ml SOD added. Asterisks indicate DMPO/OH spin adduct signal.

Figure 3. (A) ESR spectrum recorded 2 min after mixing 200 mM 2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-4-piperidine, 25 mM H_2O_2 and 150 mg/ml freshly fractured silica in a pH 7.4 phosphate-buffered solution. (B) Same as (A) but without freshly fractured silica particles. (C) ESR spectrum recorded 2 min after mixing 200 mM 2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-4-piperidine, 15 mM H_2O_2, and 2 mM FeCl_2.

Because SOD partially inhibited 'OH generation from an aqueous suspension of silica particles, we deduced that O_2^- may be involved. However, spin trapping measurement detected only the DMPO/OH adduct (Figure 1A). It is known that the reaction rate of DMPO with 'OH is much faster than that of DMPO with O_2^- as shown by the following data:

DMPO + 'OH → DMPO/OH
K_1 = 3.4 × 10^8 M^-1 sec^-1 [1]

or K_1 = 2.1 × 10^8 M^-1 sec^-1 [20]

DMPO + O_2^- → DMPO/O_2^- 
K_2 = 10 M^-1 sec^-1 [20] [2]

If the relative concentration of O_2^- is not higher than that of 'OH, DMPO will react with 'OH, and only the DMPO/OH signal would be observable. In order to trap O_2^-, we used a relatively high concentration of DMPO. DMPO alone at concentration of 2 M did not generate any signal (Figure 2A). When freshly fractured silica particles (150 mg/ml) were added with 2 M DMPO, spin adduct signals were observed (Figure 2B). Computer simulation analysis showed that this spectrum is a composite of two spin adduct signals. The signal with hyperfine splittings of a_n = 16.7 G and a_\perp = 22.5 G (marked by asterisks) were assigned to a DMPO/OH spin adduct ('R represents a carbon-centered alkyl radical). This assignment was made based on the known hyperfine splittings of such adducts (18). The 'R may result from the oxidation of DMPO. The other signal with hyperfine splittings of a_n = 14.2 G, a_\perp = 11.5 G and a_\perp = 1.2 G was assigned to a DMPO/O_2^- adduct. The broadening of the signals is likely due to the simultaneous trapping of 'OH. Addition of SOD significantly inhibited the intensity of the spin adduct signal generated with 2 M DMPO and freshly fractured silica (Figure 2C). Xanthine and xanthine oxidase was used as a positive control for O_2^- generation. In the presence of DMPO, xanthine and xanthine oxidase generated typical spectra of the DMPO/O_2^- spin adduct (data not shown). The above results thus show that O_2^- was indeed generated from freshly fractured silica.

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Figure 4. Dissolved oxygen concentration in parts per million (ppm) of an aqueous suspension of (50 mg/ml) freshly fractured silica in a pH 7.4 phosphate-buffered solution.

Figure 5. (A) ESR spectrum recorded 2 min after mixing 200 mM PBN, freshly fractured silica (20 mg/ml) and 1% linoleic acid in a pH 7.4 phosphate-buffered solution. (B) Same as (A) but without silica.
manner. SOD and catalase inhibited the lipid peroxidation, as did sodium benzoate, an 'OH scavenger.

DNA Damage by Freshly Fractured Silica and the Role of Molecular Oxygen

As shown in Figure 7A, lines 1 and 2, incubation of DNA with freshly fractured silica for 24 hr did not cause significant DNA double-strand breaks. H2O2 enhanced DNA double-strand breakage (Figure 7A, line 3). When the sample was incubated with freshly fractured silica for 3 weeks, a significant increase in DNA double-strand breaks was observed (Figure 7B, lines 1 and 2). When the incubation was carried out under argon for the same period of time, no DNA double-strand breaks were observed (Figure 7B, line 3). Addition of catalase also inhibited DNA double-strand breaks (Figure 7B, line 4) confirming the role of oxygen radicals.

Discussion

Earlier ESR studies have shown that aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica generate 'OH (5–7). This study demonstrates that freshly fractured silica in aqueous suspension is also capable of generating O2- and 'O2. The following experimental observations support this conclusion.

'OH generation was inhibited in the presence of SOD, suggesting that O2- was not only generated but also involved in the mechanism of 'OH radical generation. O2- may function as a reductant to reduce metal ions or reactive centers on the surface of silica particles. These redox reactions may facilitate silica-mediated 'OH generation from H2O2 according to Equations 3 to 5.

\[ O_2^- + M^{n+} \rightarrow M^{(n-1)+} + O_2 \quad [3] \]

\[ M^{(n-1)+} + H_2O_2 \rightarrow M^{n+} + 'OH + OH^- \quad [4] \]

Overall, \( O_2^- + H_2O_2 \rightarrow M^{n+}/M^{(n-1)+} + 'OH + O_2 + OH^- \quad [5] \)

where Mn+ represents metal ions or certain reactive centers on the surface of silica. The reactions described in Equations 3 to 5 are Haber-Weiss type reactions. The inhibitory effect of deferoxamine provides additional support for the presence of metal ions or reactive centers on the surface of silica particles.

The spin trapping measurements show that at a higher concentration of DMPO, the O2- generated in an aqueous suspension of silica can be trapped. In addition, O2- may react efficiently with metal ions or reactive centers on the surface of silica particles (Equation 3). O2- may also be site-specifically generated and bound to the surface of silica particles. Higher concentration of DMPO is thus required to generate DMPO/O2- and to prevent O2- from reacting with other species.

Oxygen consumption measurements showed that an aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica rapidly consumed molecular oxygen. While further investigations are needed to establish the mechanism of oxygen consumption, the following reactions (Equations 6–8) are proposed.

\[ Si + O_2 \rightarrow SiO_2^+ \quad [6] \]

\[ SiO_2^+ + H_2O \rightarrow SiOH + HO_2 \quad [7] \]

\[ HO_2 \rightarrow O_2^- + H^+ \quad [8] \]

O2- may also be generated via metal autoxidation as reported earlier (11,23). The presence of Si on the surface of freshly fractured silica has been reported in the literature (24–28).

Using ESR spin trapping, we have provided evidence for the generation of O2- from aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica in the presence of H2O2. This species is very reactive and can cause DNA damage. For example, it has been reported that O2- can cause hydroxylation of the dG residue in DNA to generate 8-hydroxy-2-deoxyguanosine (29–30). It may be noted that O2- generation in Cr(VI)-, Ni(II)-, and Co(II)-mediated reactions have been suggested to play an important role in carcinogenesis induced by these metal ions (21,22,31). Thus O2- generated by freshly fractured silica may also play a significant role in the mechanism of silica-induced cellular injury and carcinogenesis.

The results obtained in this study demonstrate that freshly fractured silica is able to cause DNA double-strand breaks. Catalase inhibited the DNA damage while H2O2 enhanced it. In our previous study, it was shown that SOD accelerated DNA strand breakage by silica in aqueous suspensions (11). On the other hand, the ESR data show that SOD decreases 'OH formation. This apparent contradiction may be due to the following reasons: a) DNA strand breakage assays measure the cumulative effect of DNA damage by 'OH, while ESR spin trapping measures instantaneous 'OH generation; b) in the earlier DNA damage assays (11), aged silica containing lower concentration of free radicals was
used while in the current ESR study freshly fractured silica containing more free radicals was used; (2) the \( \cdot \text{OH} \) may be generated site-specifically on the surface of silica particles. These site-specifically generated \( \cdot \text{OH} \) radicals may efficiently attack DNA. In a very recent study, it was reported that DNA binds to the surface of silica particles (32), thus facilitating site-specific \( \cdot \text{OH} \) reactions. The ESR spin trapping measurements utilized DMPO as a \( \cdot \text{OH} \) probe; DMPO may not bind directly to the surface of silica particles. The current study also shows that DNA damage by freshly fractured silica is dependent on the presence of molecular oxygen. The above results point out an important role of oxygen radicals in the mechanism of silica-mediated DNA damage.

There is experimental evidence to support that crystalline silica is a potential carcinogen in rats (3). The development of neoplasms, predominantly adenocarcinomas close to silicotic lesions, provide further support to a cause and effect theory. There is also some epidemiologic evidence for silica/silicosis-associated lung cancer in humans (33). The role of host susceptibility factors for silica-induced carcinogenicity is currently a subject of active investigation (34). The observation that freshly fractured silica can cause DNA damage via oxygen-dependent, free radical-mediated reactions may significantly contribute to our understanding of the mechanism of silica-induced carcinogenesis and its prevention.

The results obtained from this study also demonstrate that freshly fractured silica reacts with inorganic acid to induce lipid peroxidation and can generate lipid-derived free radicals. SOD, catalase, and the \( \cdot \text{OH} \) scavenger sodium benzoate all efficiently inhibit lipid peroxidation, supporting the role of oxygen radicals in silica-induced lipid peroxidation. This finding is particularly interesting since membrane damage via silica-induced lipid peroxidation is considered to be a primary step in the pathogenesis of silicosis (4).

Based on the results reported here and those in the literature (4,11), Scheme 1 is proposed for silica-induced cellular damage. 

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O}_2 & \rightarrow \text{O}_2^* \\
\text{silica} & \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \\
\text{silica} & \rightarrow \text{OH} \\
\text{OH} & \rightarrow \text{DNA damage} + \text{lipid peroxidation}
\end{align*}
\]

**Scheme 1.** Generation of oxygen radicals and singlet oxygen by silica and the relationship to cellular damage.

\( \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \) is thought to be generated by reaction of \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \) with silicon-based radicals (5,19) and/or by \( \text{O}_2^- \)-related reactions involving surface metal oxidation (11,23).

In summary, the present results lead to the following conclusions. Aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica generate \( \text{O}_2^- \) and \( \text{OH} \), as demonstrated by ESR spin trapping. Aqueous suspension of freshly fractured silica causes DNA double strand breakage via oxygen-dependent, free radicals-mediated reactions. Freshly fractured silica cause lipid peroxidation and generate lipid-derived free radicals, which can be prevented by oxygen radical scavengers.

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