

## IS HYDROGEN A SAFE FUEL?\*

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(Received for publication 9 February 1978)

**Abstract**—The safety aspects of hydrogen are systematically examined and compared with those of methane and gasoline. Physical and chemical property data for all three fuels are compiled and used to provide a basis for comparing their various safety features. Each fuel is examined to evaluate its fire hazard, fire damage, explosive hazard and explosive damage characteristics. The fire characteristics of hydrogen, methane and gasoline, while different, do not largely favor the preferred use of any one of the three fuels; however, the threat of fuel-air explosions in confined spaces is greatest for hydrogen. Safety criteria for the storage of liquid hydrogen, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and gasoline are compiled and presented. Gasoline is believed to be the easiest and perhaps the safest fuel to store because of its lower volatility and narrower flammable and detonable limits. It is concluded that all three fuels can be safely stored and used; however, the comparative safety and level of risk for each fuel will vary from one application to another. Generalized safety comparisons are made herein but detailed safety analyses will be required to establish the relative safety of different fuels for each specific fuel application and stipulated accident. The technical data supplied in this paper will provide much of the framework for such analyses.

### INTRODUCTION

FOR MANY years hydrogen has been considered a suitable, if not ideal, synthetic fuel for future generations. Its clean-burning, rapid-recycling characteristics are lauded by hydrogen advocates and its explosive characteristics are emphasized by hydrogen opponents. The safety aspects of hydrogen are many times uppermost in the mind of the man-on-the-street when he is first introduced to the hydrogen fuel concept. This spontaneous fear reaction is probably attributable to the automatic association of hydrogen fuel with the "hydrogen-bomb" and the Hindenburg fire. Subsequent to the Hindenburg incident the U.S.A. has experienced more tragic and devastating fires involving natural gas, yet natural gas is a fuel that is commonly accepted by the general public. Also, there is no connection whatsoever between the chemical explosive potential of hydrogen fuel and the thermonuclear explosive potential of the hydrogen isotopes as they relate to "hydrogen-bombs". Thus, even the novice will recognize that the wide-eyed fear of hydrogen is unjustified. Simultaneously we must realize that hydrogen is one of the most flammable and explosive fuels available to us and it must be handled with appropriate respect and safeguards.

Evaluation of the safety hazards of a particular fuel is a highly complex task requiring interpretation of specific technical data and intercomparisons with other fuels. Fire and explosion hazards must be carefully assessed to determine the relative safety of a fuel in each potential application. Therefore, hydrogen can be safer than conventional fuels in some applications and more hazardous in other applications. Because of the complexity and depth of this topic, it is treated rather superficially in page-limited technical articles dealing with hydrogen-energy concepts. In this paper we present the condensed results of a comprehensive document† prepared to systematically examine the safety aspects of hydrogen and to determine if hydrogen is sufficiently safe for use as a future fuel. It will be demonstrated herein that the answer is overwhelmingly, YES, although its use may be restricted in some future applications.

### GENERAL PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL PROPERTIES

To permit insight and provide perspective for the relative safety of hydrogen, comparative data are given in Table 1 for methane and gasoline. Methane is the major constituent of most compressed natural gases and of liquefied natural gas (LNG); therefore, methane and LNG are used interchangeably in this document. The significance of the technical data, listed in Table 1, is discussed in considerable detail throughout the remainder of this paper. These data were obtained from numerous

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† See Reference [65].

TABLE I. Properties of hydrogen\*, methane and gasoline\*\*

| Property  | Hydrogen      | Methane      | Gasoline                    |
|---|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Molecular weight  | 2.016 [1]     | 16.043 [5]   | ~107.0 [7]                  |
| Triple point pressure, atm  | 0.0695 [1]    | 0.1159 [5]   | ---                         |
| Triple point temperature, K   | 13.803 [1]    | 90.680 [5]   | 180 to 220 <sup>1</sup> [7] |
| Normal boiling point (NBP) temperature, K                           | 20.268 [1]    | 111.632 [1]  | 310 to 478 [7,8]            |
| Critical pressure, atm  | 12.759 [1]    | 45.387 [5]   | 24.5 to 27 [7]              |
| Critical temperature, K   | 32.976 [1]    | 190.56 [5]   | 540 to 569 [7]              |
| Density at critical point, g/cm <sup>3</sup>                        | 0.0314 [1]    | 0.1604 [5]   | 0.23 [9]                    |
| Density of liquid at triple point, g/cm <sup>3</sup>                | 0.0770 [1]    | 0.4516 [5]   | ---                         |
| Density of solid at triple point, g/cm <sup>3</sup>                 | 0.0865 [1]    | 0.4872 [1]   | ---                         |
| Density of vapor at triple point, g/m <sup>3</sup>                  | 125.597 [1]   | 251.53 [5]   | ---                         |
| Density of liquid at NBP, g/cm <sup>3</sup>                         | 0.0708 [1]    | 0.4226 [1]   | ~.70 <sup>2</sup> [7]       |
| Density of vapor at NBP, g/cm <sup>3</sup>                          | 0.00134 [1]   | 0.00182 [1]  | ~0.0045 <sup>2</sup> [9]    |
| Density of gas at NTP, g/m <sup>3</sup>                             | 83.764 [1]    | 651.19 [1]   | ~4400 [9]                   |
| Density ratio: NBP liquid-to-NTP gas                                | 845 [1]       | 649 [1]      | 156 <sup>3</sup> [7,9]      |
| Heat of fusion, J/g   | 58.23 [1]     | 58.47 [1]    | 161 [12]                    |
| Heat of vaporization, J/g   | 445.59 [1]    | 509.88 [1]   | 309 [7,9]                   |
| Heat of sublimation, J/g  | 507.39 [1]    | 602.44 [1]   | ---                         |
| Heat of combustion (low), kJ/g                                      | 119.93 [2]    | 50.02 [2]    | 44.5 [2,4,9]                |
| Heat of combustion (high), kJ/g                                     | 141.86 [2]    | 55.53 [2]    | 48 [2,4,9]                  |
| Specific heat (C <sub>p</sub> ) of NTP gas, J/g-K                   | 14.89 [1]     | 2.22 [1]     | 1.62 <sup>2</sup> [9]       |
| Specific heat (C <sub>p</sub> ) of NBP liquid, J/g-K                | 9.69 [1]      | 3.50 [1]     | 2.20 <sup>2</sup> [9]       |
| Specific heat ratio (C <sub>p</sub> /C <sub>v</sub> ) of NTP gas    | 1.383 [1]     | 1.308 [1]    | 1.05 <sup>2</sup> [7]       |
| Specific heat ratio (C <sub>p</sub> /C <sub>v</sub> ) of NBP liquid | 1.688 [1]     | 1.676 [1]    | ---                         |
| Viscosity of NTP gas, g/cm-s  | 0.0000875 [1] | 0.000110 [1] | 0.000052 [9]                |
| Viscosity of NBP liquid, g/cm-s                                     | 0.000133 [1]  | 0.001130 [1] | 0.002 [9]                   |
| Thermal conductivity of NTP gas, mW/cm-K                            | 1.897 [1]     | 0.330 [1]    | 0.112 [9]                   |
| Thermal conductivity of NBP liquid, mW/cm-K                         | 1.00 [1]      | 1.86 [1]     | 1.31 [9]                    |
| Surface tension of NBP liquid, N/m                                  | 0.00193 [1]   | 0.01294 [1]  | 0.0122 [9]                  |
| Dielectric constant of NTP gas                                      | 1.00026 [3]   | 1.00079 [1]  | 1.0035 <sup>5</sup> [10]    |
| Dielectric constant of NBP liquid                                   | 1.233 [3]     | 1.6227 [1]   | 1.93 <sup>b</sup> [9]       |
| Index of refraction of NTP gas                                      | 1.00012 [1]   | 1.0004 [1]   | 1.0017 <sup>5</sup> [10]    |
| Index of refraction of NBP liquid                                   | 1.110         | 1.2739 [1]   | 1.39 <sup>b</sup> [9]       |
| Adiabatic sound velocity in NTP gas, m/s                            | 1294 [1]      | 448 [1]      | 154                         |
| Adiabatic sound velocity in NBP liquid, m/s                         | 1093 [1]      | 1331 [1]     | 1155 <sup>6</sup> [12]      |
| Compressibility factor (Z) in NTP gas                               | 1.0006 [1]    | 1.0243 [1]   | 1.0069                      |
| Compressibility factor (Z) in NBP liquid                            | 0.01712 [1]   | 0.004145 [1] | 0.00643 <sup>2</sup>        |
| Gas constant (R), cm <sup>3</sup> -atm/g-K                          | 40.7037 [1]   | 5.11477 [1]  | 0.77                        |
| Isothermal bulk modulus (α) of NBP liquid, MN/m <sup>2</sup>        | 50.13 [3]     | 456.16 [6]   | 763 <sup>6</sup> [11]       |
| Volume expansivity (β) of NBP liquid, K <sup>-1</sup>               | 0.01658 [3]   | 0.00346 [6]  | 0.0012 <sup>2</sup> [9]     |

TABLE 1. Properties of hydrogen, methane and gasoline (continued)

| Property  | Hydrogen                      | Methane                       | Gasoline                     |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Limits of flammability in air, vol. %   | 4.0 to 75.0 [13,14]           | 5.3 to 15.0 [13,14]           | 1.0 to 7.6 [8,18]            |
| Limits of detonability in air, vol. %   | 18.3 to 59.0 [15]             | 6.3 to 13.5 [19]              | 1.1 to 3.3 [20]              |
| Stoichiometric composition in air, vol. %                                     | 29.53                         | 9.48                          | 1.76                         |
| Minimum energy for ignition in air, mJ  | 0.02 [16]                     | 0.29 [16]                     | 0.24 [16,21]                 |
| Autoignition temperature, K   | 858 [17]                      | 813 [8]                       | 501 to 744 [8,18]            |
| Hot air-jet ignition temperature, K   | 943 [22]                      | 1493 [22]                     | 1313 <sup>7</sup> [22]       |
| Flame temperature in air, K   | 2318 [23]                     | 2148 [23]                     | 2470 [24]                    |
| Percentage of thermal energy radiated from flame to surroundings, %           | 17 to 25 [25,26]              | 23 to 33 [25,26]              | 30 to 42 [25,26]             |
| Burning velocity in NTP air, cm/s   | 265 to 325 [27,28]            | 37 to 45 [18,19]              | 37 to 43 [18,24]             |
| Detonation velocity in NTP air, km/s  | 1.48 to 2.15 [29,35]          | 1.39 to 1.64 [19]             | 1.4 to 1.7 <sup>8</sup> [30] |
| Diffusion coefficient in NTP air, cm <sup>2</sup> /s                          | 0.61                          | 0.16                          | 0.05                         |
| Diffusion velocity in NTP air, cm/s   | ≤2.00                         | ≤0.51                         | ≤0.17                        |
| Buoyant velocity in NTP air, m/s  | 1.2 to 9                      | 0.8 to 6                      | nonbuoyant                   |
| Maximum experimental safe gap in NTP air, cm                                  | 0.008 [31]                    | 0.12 [32]                     | 0.07 [31]                    |
| Quenching gap in NTP air, cm  | 0.064 [16,33]                 | 0.203 [16,33]                 | 0.2 [33]                     |
| Detonation induction distance in NTP air                                      | L/D ≈ 100 [35,36]             | —                             | —                            |
| Limiting oxygen index, vol. %   | 5.0 [34]                      | 12.1 [34]                     | 11.6 <sup>9</sup> [34]       |
| Vaporization rates (steady state) of liquid pools without burning, cm/min     | 2.5 to 5.0 [26]               | 0.05 to 0.5 [26]              | 0.005 to 0.02                |
| Burning rates of spilled liquid pools, cm/min                                 | 3.0 to 6.6 [25,26]            | 0.3 to 1.2 [25,26]            | 0.2 to 0.9 [25,26]           |
| Flash point, K  | gaseous                       | gaseous                       | ~230 [8]                     |
| Toxicity  | nontoxic [37]<br>(asphyxiant) | nontoxic [37]<br>(asphyxiant) | slight [37]<br>(asphyxiant)  |
| Energy <sup>10</sup> of explosion, (g TNT)/(g fuel)                           | ~24                           | ~11                           | ~10                          |
| Energy <sup>10</sup> of explosion, (g TNT)/(cm <sup>3</sup> NBP liquid fuel)  | 1.71                          | 4.56                          | 7.04                         |
| Energy <sup>10</sup> of explosion, (kg TNT)/(m <sup>3</sup> NTP gaseous fuel) | 2.02                          | 7.03                          | 44.22                        |

NBP = Normal boiling point.

NTP = 1 atm and 20 C (293.15 K).

\* Thermophysical properties listed are those of parahydrogen.

\*\* Property values are the arithmetic average of normal heptane and octane in those cases where "gasoline" values could not be found (unless otherwise noted).

<sup>1</sup> Freezing temperatures for gasoline @ 1 atm.

<sup>2</sup> @ 1 atm and 15.5 C.

<sup>3</sup> Density ratio @ 1 atm and 15.5 C.

<sup>4</sup> @ 1 atm and 20 C.

<sup>5</sup> @ 1 atm and 100 C.

<sup>6</sup> @ 1 atm and 25 C.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the properties of butane.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the properties of n-pentane and benzene.

<sup>9</sup> Average value for a mixture of methane, ethane, propane, benzene, butane and higher hydrocarbons.

<sup>10</sup> Theoretical explosive yields.

sources and are believed to be the best available. Some of the data given in Table 1 were obtained by giving weighted consideration to several sources of data and by performing appropriate computations.

Most of the properties listed in Table 1 will be familiar to the average reader; however, some of the combustion properties will be briefly described in the following paragraphs because of their importance to this safety analysis or because they are not commonly used properties. The thermophysical properties conform with the conventionally accepted definitions; however, explanatory notes are provided at the bottom of Table 1 to explain the bases for some of the "gasoline" properties. The heats of fusion and sublimation are taken at the triple point (at the freezing point for gasoline) and the heats of vaporization are taken at the normal boiling point.

#### *Hot air-jet ignition temperature*

The temperature of a jet of hot air as it enters pure fuel vapors or a combustible fuel-air mixture at N.T.P. and causes ignition to occur. The data given in Table 1 represent the jet temperature of hot air as it enters pure fuel vapors at N.T.P. The jet diameter for these data is 0.4 cm. This ignition temperature decreases with increasing jet diameter [22, 38, 39] and for a given jet diameter the hot gas jet ignition temperature increases if hot jets of nitrogen gas (rather than air) are squirted into combustible fuel-air mixtures [38]. The hot gas jet ignition temperature is dependent upon the composition of the combustible mixture and the velocity of the jet of hot gas.

#### *Percentage of thermal energy radiated from flame to surroundings*

The percentage of the heat of combustion (high) that is radiated from the combustion zone to its surroundings. The higher heating value of every flame is eventually dissipated by radiative processes. The data given in Table 1 are for flames fueled by vaporization of pools of liquid fuels in an air environment. These data are similar to those obtained in laboratory experiments with stationary gaseous diffusion flames [25, 26]. Atmospheric moisture absorbs thermal energy radiated from a fire and can reduce the values recorded in Table 1. Hydrogen fires benefit most from this absorption effect [25], e.g. it is estimated that 45% of radiant hydrogen flame energy is absorbed within a distance of 8 m in 25°C air containing water vapor at 15 mmHg partial pressure.

#### *Diffusion velocity in N.T.P. air*

The velocity at which a gaseous fuel diffuses through air. For a specified fuel concentration gradient the diffusion velocity is proportional to the diffusion coefficient and can be estimated from Stefan's equation [40]. Diffusion velocity varies with temperature according to  $T^{3/2}$  and consequently low temperature gases produced by cryogenic liquid fuel spills will diffuse more slowly than N.T.P. fuel gases. The values recorded in Table 1 are based on N.T.P. fuel gas and N.T.P. air densities and fuel concentrations that vary from 99.99% to 0.0% over path lengths of 3 cm to 30 m.

#### *Buoyant velocity in N.T.P. air*

The velocity at which gaseous fuels rise in air under the influence of buoyant forces. This velocity cannot be determined in a direct manner as it is dependent upon drag and friction forces that oppose buoyant forces acting on the rising volume of gaseous fuel. Atmospheric turbulence as well as shape and size of the rising volume of gas can affect the terminal velocity of the buoyant gas. Buoyant forces are related to the difference in air and fuel densities; therefore, cold, dense fuel gases produced by cryogenic fuel spills will rise more slowly than NTP fuel gases. The buoyant velocities recorded in Table 1 were estimated from fundamental principles of dynamics and with the aid of empirical data [41, 42]; it was assumed that the radii of the buoyant masses of N.T.P. fuel gas varied from 3 cm to 1.5 m.

#### *Maximum experimental safe gap (MESG) in N.T.P. air*

The maximum permissible clearance, between flat parallel steel surfaces, that prevents the propagation of dangerous flames or sparks through the gap. The MESG is measured by igniting a combustible fuel-air mixture inside of a test enclosure and observing a similar combustible mixture surrounding the enclosure to detect its ignition. The MESG is the largest gap size that does not permit ignition outside of the test enclosure and is of vital importance to the design and manufacture of explosion-proof equipment.

*Quenching gap in N.T.P. air*

The spark gap between two flat parallel plate electrodes at which ignition of combustible fuel-air mixtures is suppressed, i.e. smaller gaps have the effect of totally suppressing spark ignition and flame propagation.

*Detonation induction distance in N.T.P. air*

The distance required for a deflagration to transit to a detonation in a detonable fuel-air mixture. This distance is usually experimentally determined in a long cylindrical tube with a spark or hot wire ignitor on one end of the tube. The tube is instrumented along its length to sense the velocity of the flame front as it propagates through the detonable mixture of gases. The distance from the ignitor to the axial position in the tube where the flame front first attains the detonation velocity is reported as the induction distance. This distance is dependent upon the combustible mixture constituents, the pressure, temperature and concentration of the gaseous mixture, the enclosure geometry [43] and strength of the ignition source [18]. A deflagration is a low order explosion resulting from subsonic flame speed, relative to the unburned gas. It is conventionally defined as a propagating reaction in which the energy transfer from the reaction zone to the unreacted zone is achieved through ordinary rate-limiting transport processes such as heat and mass transfer. A detonation is a high order explosion resulting from supersonic flame speed, relative to the unburned gas. It may be defined as a propagating reaction in which energy is transferred from the reaction zone to the unreacted zone on a reactive shock wave.

*Limiting oxygen index*

The minimum concentration of oxygen that will support flame propagation in an unknown mixture of fuel, air and nitrogen, e.g. no mixture of hydrogen, air and nitrogen at N.T.P. conditions will propagate flame if the mixture contains less than 5.0 vol. % oxygen [14]. Use of diluents other than nitrogen results in different values for the limiting oxygen index of each fuel [14, 34].

*Vaporization rates of liquid pools without burning*

The rate at which the liquid level decreases after a pool of liquid fuel has been formed by spilling fuel onto a warm surface such as sand or soil. These evaporation rates are measured after subsidence of the violent boiling that accompanies the initial liquid spill. Vaporization rates of the cryogenic fuels can be expected to vary widely with the conductivity and heat capacity of the soil or other material confining the spilled liquid fuel. In the case of gasoline, vaporization rates will vary with the volatility of constituents (blend), age, fuel temperature, ground surface texture and temperature, etc. Wind velocity influences the vaporization rate of all fuels considered herein.

*Burning rates of spilled liquid pools*

The rate at which the liquid level decreases after a pool of liquid fuel has been formed by spilling fuel onto a warm surface and the resultant vapor-air mixture has been ignited. Again, these burning rates are measured after the initial-spill violent boiling has subsided and the vapor is mixing and burning in air above the pool of spilled fuel. These burning rates may also be obtained by adding the vaporization rate (without burning) and the liquid level regression rate attributable to the burning of vapors in the open air over liquid fuels that are contained in open-mouthed insulated vessels. Steady state burning rates increase with liquid pool diameter while vaporization rates continuously decrease with time, irrespective of pool size. Burning rates can be expected to vary with pool diameter and wind velocity [25, 26, 44].

*Energy of explosion*

The theoretical maximum energy available from a chemical explosion. This maximum energy release is determined by computing the isothermal decrease in the Helmholtz free-energy function. Explosive energies listed in Table 1 are expressed in terms of equivalent quantities of TNT (symmetrical trinitrotoluene) and may be converted directly to energy units by multiplying by 4602 J/(g TNT).

## FIRE HAZARDS

By considering fire hazards, fire damage, explosive hazards and explosive damage attributable to each fuel we can expose the relative safety merits of each fuel for potential fuel applications. By definition, a hazard identifies a pending risk or peril. Of course, the existence of a hazard does not assure the occurrence of a fire or explosion or that damage will be sustained if a fire or explosion does occur. Thus, the safety hazards and damage potential of candidate fuels must be compared to provide the requisite safety criteria for fuel selection. The degree or extent of hazard and damage potential are frequently difficult to express in indisputable scientific terms. Consequently, scientific data are usually tempered with experienced judgment to formulate safety evaluations for different fuels. Hence, the perpetual controversy over the relative safety of fuels.

By referring to the combustion properties listed in Table 1 we can systematically step through the fire hazards of hydrogen, methane and gasoline. First we will consider the accidental or inadvertent means of obtaining flammable mixtures of fuel in air. Usually, such mixtures are the result of fuel leakage or spillage which may be attributable to mechanical failure of equipment, material failure, erosion, physical abuse, improper maintenance, collision, etc.

The rate at which the fuel vapors mix with air is indicated by their diffusion velocities and their buoyant velocities. The buoyant effect is dominant for hydrogen and methane and from the data listed in Table 1 it is apparent that hydrogen can be expected to mix with air more rapidly than methane or gasoline—the latter is obviously the slowest mixing fuel of the three fuels considered. In the event of a fuel spill, one could expect hydrogen to form combustible mixtures more rapidly than methane because hydrogen has a higher buoyant velocity and a slightly lower flammable limit. Again, gasoline would be orders of magnitude slower than hydrogen or methane in forming combustible mixtures in air. In some fuel applications these relative mixing times may be important while in others they are meaningless, e.g. an instantaneous fire hazard exists for the impact rupture of an auto fuel tank irrespective of the type of fuel carried.

Because of their higher buoyant velocities, hydrogen and methane can also be expected to disperse more rapidly than gasoline and thus shorten the duration of the flammable hazard. Even though the upper flammable limit (UFL) of hydrogen is much higher than that of methane the higher buoyant velocity of hydrogen permits it to disperse to concentrations below the lower flammable limit (LFL) more rapidly [45] than methane. Thus, one could expect a fire hazard to exist most readily with hydrogen, methane and gasoline, respectively, and to persist in the inverse order.

We must exercise some caution in analyzing fuel mixing and dispersion rates by comparing relative buoyant and diffusion velocities of the N.T.P. fuel gases. In large cryogenic liquid fuel spills, the vaporization of liquid and warming of the vapor can cool large masses of air. In addition, NBP hydrogen vapor density approaches that of N.T.P. air while NBP methane vapor density is greater than the density of N.T.P. air. Consequently, for some finite period of time these cold vapor-air mixtures are nonbuoyant and may extend to appreciable distances from the spill. Therefore, both the range and duration of the fire hazard may be extended somewhat when cryogenic liquid fuels are spilled. More definitive experimental data are needed in this area to supplement existing knowledge [25, 26, 46]. Some experimental data and analyses for LNG spills are available [44, 46]; these data treat the dispersion and drift characteristics of vapor clouds that form over LNG spills.

The low value of limiting oxygen index reflects the high value of the UFL for hydrogen-air mixtures. The wide flammability limits of hydrogen are of practical significance only when fuel leakage into enclosed spaces is a major concern. In this case the flammable limits of hydrogen are sufficiently wide to enhance the probability of combustion from a random ignition source. This flammability characteristic should not preclude the use of hydrogen because the LFL is the vital one in most applications. The LFL is important because ignition sources are nearly always present when a leaking fuel first reaches combustible proportions in air.

The rate of vapor generation and burning over spilled liquid pools is of interest for the various fuels. As indicated in Table 1 the volumetric vaporization rates and burning rates are highest for hydrogen, methane and gasoline, respectively. Consequently, for a given liquid spillage volume, gasoline fires will last the longest and hydrogen fires the shortest while all of the fuels burn at about the same flame temperature. The thermal energy radiated from these pool-fed fires may be computed by multiplying the appropriate (burning rate)  $\times$  (NBP liquid density)  $\times$  (high heat of combustion)  $\times$  (percentage of thermal energy radiated from the flame to its surroundings) using the data given in Table 1. These

computations indicate that the radiated thermal energy should not exceed  $276 \text{ W/cm}^2$  of pool liquid-vapor surface area for hydrogen,  $155 \text{ W/cm}^2$  for methane or  $212 \text{ W/cm}^2$  for gasoline. Then, the scene of a hydrogen fire may be hotter than that of a hydrocarbon fire, but the hydrocarbon fires will last five to ten times longer than hydrogen fires (for equivalent fuel spillage volumes). Additional data for LNG vaporization and burning rates and for radiant heat flux emitted from fires over LNG pools are presented in [44].

Another matter of concern in evaluating fire hazards is the rate of leakage flow of liquids or gases through leakage paths of varying geometries, e.g. leakage through cracked welds, improperly mated flanges, threaded fittings, damaged seals, etc. Previous work [47] has shown that volumetric leakage rates are either inversely proportional to the square root of the density, or inversely proportional to the absolute viscosity of the leaking fluid. Since care is usually taken to minimize fuel leaks the viscous leakage flows are considered to have the greatest practical significance. Using the data given in Table 1 we can estimate the relative volumetric leakage rates of the NBP liquid fuels and of the gases at N.T.P. We find that liquid hydrogen is much more difficult to contain than liquid methane or liquid gasoline and that N.T.P. gasoline vapors are more difficult to contain than either N.T.P. hydrogen or N.T.P. methane. Industry has proven that all of these fuels can be safely and easily contained.

Techniques for detection of hydrogen leakage are effectively summarized by two documents [48, 49] and general procedures for leak testing are detailed in the handbook by Marr [48].

The minimum spark energy required for ignition of hydrogen in air is about an order of magnitude less than that for methane or gasoline; however, the ignition energy for all three fuels is sufficiently low that ignition is relatively assured in the presence of thermal (weak) ignition sources, e.g. sparks, matches, hot surfaces or open flames. Even a weak spark due to the discharge of static electricity from a human body may be sufficient to ignite any of these fuels in air—10 mJ sparks may be produced in such electrostatic discharges [50].

Although hydrogen has a higher auto-ignition temperature than methane or gasoline, its low ignition energy characteristic makes it more readily ignitable than either of the hydrocarbon fuels. The hot air-jet ignition temperature is highest for methane and lowest for hydrogen; therefore, hydrogen is easiest to ignite by jets of hot combustion products emitted from an adjacent enclosure. The flash point is meaningless for the cryogenic fuels, hydrogen and methane, within the temperature range of interest because these fuels will flash at all temperatures above their normal boiling points. The boiling points of the cryogenic liquid fuels are so low that these fuels are considered to behave like gases. The flash point of gasoline is also well below room temperature; therefore, all three fuels must be considered volatile and will generate sufficient vapor to create a fire hazard at earth surface temperatures. Then, all three fuels are relatively easy to ignite. Hydrogen is most susceptible while methane and gasoline appear to be equally susceptible to ignition.

The burning velocity is a fundamental property of a combustible gas mixture and should not be confused with the flame speed [51]. The burning velocity influences the severity of the explosion and along with quenching gap is important in the design of flame arresters [51]. Higher burning velocities indicate a greater tendency for the combustible gas mixture to support the transition from deflagration to detonation in long tunnels or pipes. In general, faster-burning gases have smaller quenching gaps and flame arresters for faster-burning gases must have smaller apertures [51]. The quenching gap is the passage gap dimension required to prevent propagation of an *open flame* through a flammable fuel-air mixture that fills the passage and it is clearly distinguishable from the MESG. The latter is the maximum permissible clearance between flanges to assure that an *explosion* does not propagate from within an enclosure to a flammable mixture surrounding the enclosure. Because of the high explosion pressures the MESG is always smaller than the quenching distance.

Available data [52] indicate that the pressure rise ratios for adiabatic combustion of stoichiometric mixtures of hydrogen-air and methane-air in closed vessels are nearly identical. Similar data [31] produced pressure rise ratios for hydrogen-air that were 20 to 40% higher than those for gasoline-air. In long tubes or tunnels, hydrogen-air mixtures will transit to detonation more rapidly than methane-air or gasoline-air mixtures; therefore, overpressure hazards in confined spaces are enhanced in hydrogen systems. Thus, the high burning velocity of hydrogen is an indication of its high explosive potential and of the difficulty of confining or arresting hydrogen flames and explosions. Industrial equipment is currently available to safely confine hydrogen explosions but hydrogen pipeline flame arresters are not yet considered reliable [53].

## FIRE DAMAGE

Some of the combustion characteristics discussed in the previous section are also applicable to comparisons of fire damage by the different fuels. Similarly, many of these characteristics are applicable to explosive hazard and explosive damage criteria, as will be revealed in subsequent sections of this paper. In the previous section we discussed the risk or likelihood of having a fire. In this section we examine the damage potential of a fire.

The main fire damage parameters are thermal radiation, flame engulfment (fireball), smoke inhalation, fire detection and extinguishment. Explosion overpressure, impulse and shrapnel damage are related parameters that are reserved for detailed discussion under the section entitled explosive damage. Thermal radiation characteristics of the three fuels under consideration have already been discussed so we turn our attention to fireballs.

Fireball damage is the direct result of combustion of materials initiated through contact or engulfment by flames that are consuming fuels. A fireball may result from the ignition of fuel-air mixtures or from the explosion of solid or chemical explosives. The explosion fireball is short-lived but flames will persist until all of the fuel is consumed in fuel-air fires. Ignition of fuel-air mixtures above pools of spilled liquid fuels produces flames with dimensions that vary with the volume of spilled liquid, rate of spillage, nature of spillage containment surface, wind velocity, location of ignition source and time delay before ignition. A simple mathematical expression [54] seems to adequately predict the maximum equivalent spherical radii of fireballs for a wide variety of explosives including hydrogen-air and rocket bipropellants. The diameter of the fireball is given by

$$D \approx 7.93 W_f^{1/3},$$

where  $D$  = diameter in meters and  $W_f$  = weight of fuel in kilograms. The fireball duration may be estimated from

$$t \approx 0.47 W_f^{1/3},$$

where  $t$  is in seconds and  $W_f$  is the weight of fuel in kilograms. See [54] for limitations of these approximations. Various fireball and fire radiation criteria are summarized along with overpressure criteria on Figs 1 and 2. The development and discussion of these figures has been treated elsewhere [54]

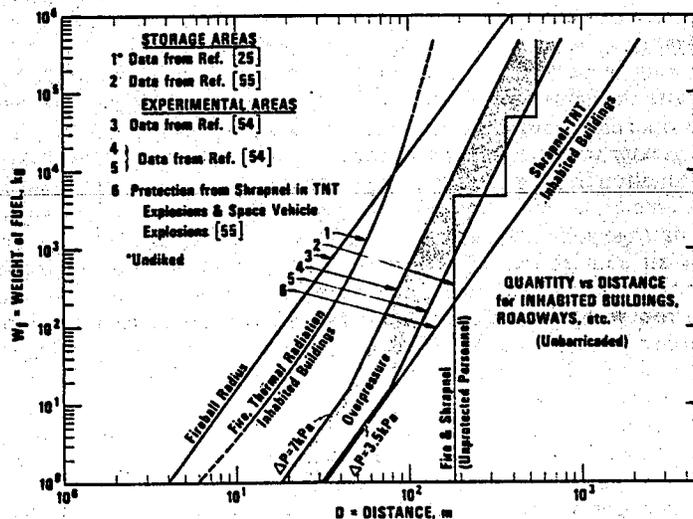


FIG. 1. Quantity-distance relationships for the protection of personnel near liquid hydrogen storage and experimental areas (unbarricaded).

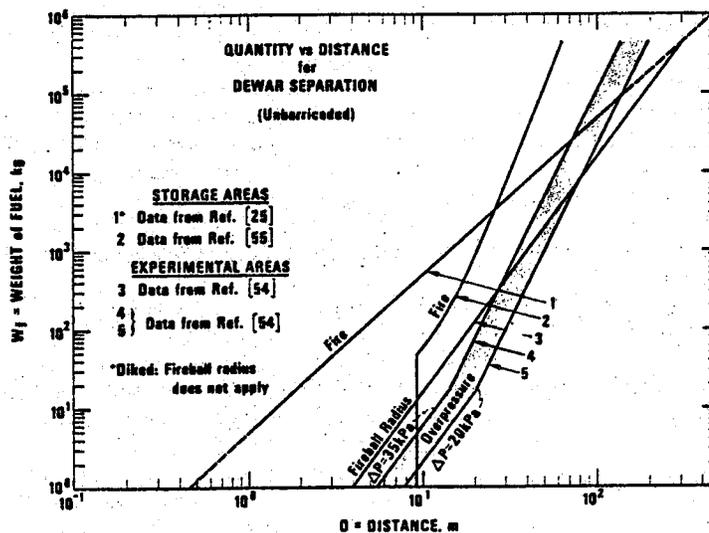


FIG. 2. Quantity-distance relationships for liquid hydrogen dewar separation in storage and experimental areas (unbarricaded).

and will not be repeated here. Although these figures were developed specifically for hydrogen they are believed to provide conservative safety criteria for methane and gasoline. It must be emphasized that these figures are based upon potential fire and explosion hazards in unbarricaded storage and experimental areas and are not indicative of industrial storage standards for fuels. Industrial hydrogen storage standards are much less stringent—see Fig. 3.

Smoke inhalation is one of the major causes of injury and death in any fire. When fuel-air fires cause buildings and other combustible materials to burn, smoke inhalation is of concern for hydrogen, methane and gasoline. When fuels burn in the open air only gasoline can cause severe smoke inhala-

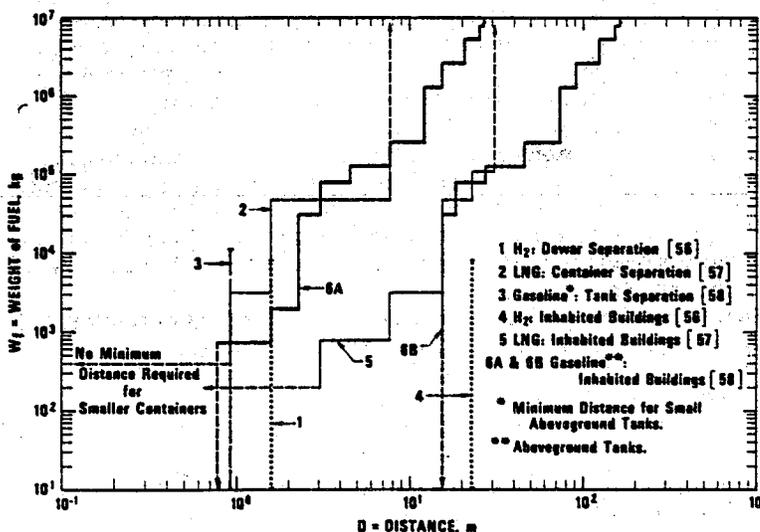


FIG. 3. Industrial storage standards (quantity-distance) for hydrogen, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and gasoline.

tion damage as both hydrogen and methane are clean burning fuels. Inhalation of the combustion products from hydrogen-air or methane-air fires is considered less serious because both of these fuels are buoyant and require a large influx of fresh air to sustain the fire. Also, the combustion products of hydrogen-air fires (mainly nitrogen and water vapor) and methane-air fires (mainly nitrogen, carbon dioxide and water vapor) are not foreign to the lungs as are the sooty combustion products of gasoline-air fires. Of course, the lungs can be seared by breathing hot combustion gases produced by burning any of these fuels. Breathing any of these fuels or their combustion products in sufficiently rich concentrations can also cause asphyxiation. The physiological effects of breathing aerosols, toxic gases (such as CO and CO<sub>2</sub>), hot gases and oxygen-deficient gases are reviewed by Custer and Bright [59].

Current fire detection technology is summarized in a recent document [59] and hydrogen fire detection is reviewed in an older publication [49]. Hydrogen flames are nearly invisible in daylight but their visibility is improved by the presence of moisture and/or impurities in the air. Hydrogen fires are readily visible in the dark or in subdued light and large hydrogen fires are quite detectable in daylight because convective "heat ripples" are visible in the air at near-range distances and thermal radiation heats the skin. Small hydrogen fires are more difficult to detect and require that certain precautions be taken to avoid personnel and equipment damage. Methane flames, though clean-burning, are yellowish in color and quite visible in daylight. Gasoline flames are similar to those of methane but are mixed with large volumes of soot and smoke so that fire detection is obvious.

Two types of sensors, thermal and optical, are used to detect hydrogen fires. Thermal sensors are the conventional type and are fully discussed by Custer and Bright [59]. These conventional sensors (including smoke and ionization detectors), coupled with flame visibility, are adequate for detection of methane or gasoline fires and not quite adequate for detection of all hydrogen fires. The aerospace industry has advanced the use of optical sensors for detecting hydrogen fires in bright-field environments. The most common optical sensors detect ultraviolet or infrared radiation and several detection schemes exist [49, 59]. Closed-circuit infrared and ultraviolet television sets, equipped with appropriate filters, have been successfully used to detect hydrogen fires on rocket engine test stands [49]. Intumescent paints have also been used to detect hydrogen fires. These paints char and swell at low temperature (~200°C) and emit pungent gases. Hydrogen fires are obviously more difficult to detect than methane or gasoline fires; however, the availability of modern detection equipment makes it possible to quickly and reliably detect the flames of all three fuels.

A brief review of fire extinguishment methods and recommended fire extinguishing procedures for various combustible materials has been published by the NFPA [8]. Class B extinguishing agents [8] are generally suited for gasoline fires and water deluge, or water spray, are usually useful in fighting gasoline, methane or hydrogen fires. The water is used to cool and protect adjacent exposed combustibles and may not extinguish the fire unless it is used in a prescribed manner by skilled personnel. Water may be particularly ineffective in extinguishing liquid gasoline fires as the gasoline is less dense than water and will float on top of the water and continue to burn.

It is sometimes advisable to permit hydrogen and methane fires to burn until gas-flow is stopped or liquid-spills are consumed because of the potential explosive hazard created by extinguishing such flames. If the fuel source is neither depleted nor shut off, an explosive fuel-air mixture may be formed with far greater damage potential (if ignited) than the original fire. In those instances where extinguishment is judged imprudent, a water deluge may be used to cool surrounding combustibles and control fire damage.

Recent experiments [44] have evaluated the effectiveness of commercially available dry chemical agents and high-expansion foams in controlling and extinguishing LNG pool fires. These experimental results show that dry chemicals can be used to extinguish LNG fires and foams applied to the pool surface reduce the radiant heat flux to surroundings while reducing vapor evolution. Thus, fire control and fire extinguishment methods and equipment are commercially available to combat LNG fires.

It is anticipated that these same fire-fighting procedures would be effective in controlling liquid hydrogen fires but no such data exist. Inert gas-flooding and CO<sub>2</sub> extinguishers have been successfully used to extinguish gaseous hydrogen fires.

Thus, we may conclude that: (1) water deluge or water spray is useful in fighting hydrogen, methane or gasoline fires, (2) gasoline or methane (LNG) fires may be controlled or extinguished using commercial dry chemical or high-expansion foam agents and (3) the effectiveness of dry chemicals or foams in controlling or extinguishing liquid hydrogen fires has not been evaluated.

## EXPLOSIVE HAZARD

The ignition of a combustible mixture of fuel-air can result in a fire or an explosion. An explosion is always accompanied by a fireball and a pressure wave (overpressure). The fireball may ignite surrounding combustibles or fuel released by the explosion so that a fire may follow an explosion. If the fuel-air mixture is partially or totally confined the explosion may propel fragments of the enclosure material at high velocities over great distances. By its nature an explosion hazard constitutes fire, overpressure, impulse and shrapnel hazards. The extent of overpressure, impulse (overpressure-force multiplied by the time interval of explosive overpressure) and shrapnel hazards is dependent upon the severity of the explosion. Detonations cause more damage than deflagrations.

The same combustion parameters that influence fire hazards also influence the explosive hazards associated with each fuel; therefore the discussion on fire hazards is equally applicable to this section on explosive hazards. Two of the combustion properties previously reviewed, MESH and hot air-jet ignition temperature, are vitally important to the containment of an explosion and to prevent propagation of the explosion to explosive mixtures of fuel-air surrounding the enclosure. The containment vessel must be sufficiently strong to withstand the explosion pressure without emitting jets of combustion products that are larger or hotter than those specified by the "hot air-jet ignition temperature" and simultaneously the MESH must not be exceeded.

The limits of detonability are important in an evaluation of the explosive hazards of fuel-air mixtures. The wider these limits, the greater the probability of a high-order explosion with attendant high overpressures and severe shrapnel hazards—detonation. The flammable limits define the fuel-air concentrations that will burn and low-order explosions may occur within these limits. Such explosions are called deflagrations and they result in lower overpressures and less shrapnel hazard than those associated with detonations. In order to have a fire or an explosion there must exist in combination an oxidant, a fuel and an ignition source. The fuel and oxidizer are supplied and mixed by the release of fuel into the air. Hydrogen has by far the widest limits of detonability of the three fuels considered herein; therefore, it presents the greatest hazard to explosion damage. The explosive potential of all three fuels is discussed in the next section.

The ignition source may be a mechanical or electrostatic spark, flame, impact, heat by kinetic effects, friction, chemical reaction, etc. The strength of the ignition source influences whether a detonable mixture deflagrates or detonates. Weak (thermal) ignition sources initiate deflagrations in open and closed systems; however, a deflagration may develop into a detonation in a closed system due to the influence of the confining walls. Strong (shock-wave) ignition sources tend to initiate detonations in open or closed fuel-air systems. Matches, sparks, hot surfaces and open flames are considered to be thermal (weak) ignition sources while shock-wave (strong) ignition sources are blasting caps, bursting vessels, TNT, high voltage-capacity shorts (exploding wires), lightning and other explosive charges.

The geometry of an enclosure has a strong effect on the transition from deflagration to detonation. Experimental data indicate that a U-shaped enclosure plus the ground comprise sufficient confinement to support "strong" explosions in detonable hydrogen-air mixtures that are ignited by thermal ignition sources. Geometrical changes in the confining walls that induce turbulence also enhance transition to detonation. The distance in a tunnel, pipeline, heating duct, or hallway that it takes for a reaction to progress from a deflagration to a detonation is related to the detonation induction distance. Hydrogen is a rapid burning fuel and the flame front has a tendency to accelerate in long enclosures. Consequently, detonation induction distances have been experimentally observed using hydrogen-air mixtures but no such data exist for the slower burning gasoline-air or methane-air mixtures. Transition to detonation occurs because compression of the unburned fuel-air mixture by deflagration increases the mixture temperature and pressure, both of which increase the burning velocity of the mixture. Recent experiments [53] indicate that it is difficult to design flashback arrestors that successfully disrupt deflagrative or detonative combustion in hydrogen-rich mixtures of hydrogen, methane and air that are contained within or flowing in cylindrical pipelines. Burgess [20], Zabetakis [60] and Carhart [30] agree that methane-air and gasoline-air mixtures will transit from deflagration to detonation if the pipe is long enough and its diameter is large enough. Experimental apparatus used to determine detonation induction distance is usually small and consequently these data are yet to be determined for methane and gasoline. The largest detonation experiments conducted to date were performed by Kogarko [19] and Burgess *et al.* [61]. Kogarko used a 30.5 cm inside-diameter tube

and Burgess *et al.* used a 61 cm diameter pipe and earthen tunnels with cross-sectional areas ranging from 0.025 to 1.39 m<sup>2</sup>. We have no assurance that gasoline-air or methane-air mixtures will not detonate from spark ignition in long tunnels or corridors; however, we can be quite sure that hydrogen-air mixtures will detonate under the proper circumstances ( $L/D \gtrsim 100$ ).

We are belaboring the fuel detonation characteristics as they are believed to be of vital importance in future fuel applications. The tendency of hydrogen to detonate from spark ignition is perhaps the most significant deterrent to its widespread use. The pressure rise ratio of a detonation may easily be an order of magnitude higher than that of a deflagration—see detailed discussion in reference [54]. Overpressures due to deflagrations in open air are usually considered negligible; however, open-air deflagrations can cause structural damage if they are close to the structure and are of sufficiently large volume.

Shrapnel hazards relate directly to explosion overpressures so that all of the foregoing arguments concerning overpressure apply to the evaluation of shrapnel hazards for the different fuels. Thus, we see that overpressure shrapnel hazards associated with ordinary enclosures ( $L/D \lesssim 30$ ) are about the same for hydrogen-air and methane-air and somewhat less stringent for gasoline-air. In long tunnels, etc., hydrogen is a greater explosion threat than either of the other two fuels because it has a greater tendency to transit to detonation. The wider flammable limits and detonable limits of hydrogen also tend to make hydrogen a greater explosive threat than methane or gasoline.

A number of preventive measures can be enacted to minimize the explosive threat of all three fuels and are particularly helpful for the rapid-dispersion fuels, hydrogen and methane. Roof vents and forced ventilation, where practical, are accepted methods of minimizing accumulations of gaseous fuel within enclosures. In some applications the quantity of fuel permitted within an enclosure can be restricted. Ignition sources can be minimized but seldom are they eliminated. Frangible (weak) walls can be used to relieve deflagration overpressures within enclosures—rupture discs can be used to provide the same protection for pressure vessels. Frangible walls and discs are of little value in relieving detonation overpressures, although in some instances they may prevent or lessen the effects of detonation [54]. It appears that weak but pressure-wave reflecting walls will support transition from deflagration to detonation—the use of elastic membranes (plastic curtains) may inhibit or prevent transition to detonation. Fuel storage tanks can be buried or storage areas can be diked (for fuel containment), barricaded and confining structures minimized. Major spillage can be avoided by using storage vessels constructed of ductile materials and by adherence to established safety procedures.

## EXPLOSIVE DAMAGE

The elements of explosive damage, fireball, ensuing fires, overpressure and shrapnel, have already been discussed and only overpressure and shrapnel warrant additional attention.

Explosions that create overpressures and shrapnel may be rated in terms of the amount of energy that is released. This energy release may be evaluated directly in energy units such as kJ although it is commonly expressed as an equivalent quantity of TNT. The explosive strength of TNT is well-known and reproducible and it is a good standard for rating the explosive potential of various substances. Expressing explosive potential in terms of an equivalent mass of TNT is a good technique for evaluating damage potential at distances well-removed from the explosion; however, at distances inside or near the reaction zone, this procedure is less accurate because of the differences in shape and peak magnitude of the impulse diagrams for TNT and fuel-air mixtures. A fuel-air explosion may deliver a considerably lower overpressure, relative to TNT, over a longer time interval and thus have less crushing effect on some structures, but a greater overturning moment. Although there is general dissatisfaction [62] with the TNT concept, it will continue to be used until non-ideal explosions can be characterized more definitively. To provide conservative results the TNT equivalent concept can be used [54] to evaluate impulse and overpressure effects at distances far from the explosion source, and to evaluate impulse effects in the near-combustion zone.

The theoretical TNT equivalent, of various fuels, can be determined by using the decrease in Helmholtz free energy to compute the maximum energy available for explosive yield. Following this procedure we obtain the theoretical limiting values of explosive potential for hydrogen, methane and gasoline as recorded in Table 1. Note that hydrogen is the most potent on a mass basis and the least potent on a volumetric basis. The explosive potential per kJ of stored heating value (based on the

high heat of combustion) is 0.17 (g TNT)/kJ for hydrogen, 0.19 (g TNT)/kJ for methane and 0.21 (g TNT)/kJ for gasoline. Thus, for equivalent energy storage, hydrogen has the least theoretical explosive potential of the three fuels.

It must be emphasized that only a fraction of this theoretical explosive yield can be realized in an actual open-air mishap because it is virtually impossible to spill or release a large quantity of fuel and have all of it mixed in proper proportions with air prior to ignition. Experimental data and computations indicate that the fraction [46, 54, 62] of fuel within the combustible range at any time following a massive or continuous fuel spillage will be less than 10% of the quantity spilled. Such explosive yield data are meager for all three fuels; however, the vapor or gas phase mixing limitations are equally applicable to all fuels. Hydrogen disperses much more rapidly than methane or gasoline, but it also has much wider flammable and detonable limits, etc. Thus, in the absence of more definitive experimental data it is impossible to accurately assess the probable explosive yield attributable to accidental release and ignition of hydrogen, methane or gasoline in air. The "energy of explosion" values listed in Table 1 should be considered theoretical maxima and yield factors of 10% are considered reasonable for fuel-air explosions.

Overpressure damage is highly dependent upon the nature of the explosion. A confined and unvented deflagration [52] of hydrogen-air or methane-air will produce a static pressure rise ratio of less than 8:1. Explosion pressures [31] for confined deflagrations of gasoline-air are about 70-80% of those for hydrogen-air. Unconfined deflagration overpressures are usually less than 7 kPa; however, 3-4 kPa is sufficient side-on pressure to cause structural damage [63] to buildings and unconfined large volume gas-phase explosions can be destructive. Ordinary glass window panes fracture under pressures of 3-7 kPa, non-reinforced masonry walls fail at pressures below 55 kPa, and human eardrums rupture at pressures of approximately 35 kPa. Thus, it is apparent that confined deflagrations (even if relieved) can be very devastating—up to 8 atm (811 kPa) of explosion pressure—and unconfined deflagrations can cause slight to moderate structural damage and injure people via fire, window-glass shrapnel, etc.

Detonations, whether confined or unconfined, can be expected to severely damage or totally destroy ordinary buildings in the near vicinity of the explosion. TNT pressure-distance data [55] can be used [55, 61] to estimate overpressures resulting from fuel-air detonations. The applicability of TNT equivalence to vapor or gas-cloud explosions is fully reviewed in [55, 62]. The pressure accompanying detonation of any fuel is approximately double that obtained by adiabatic combustion of a stoichiometric mixture of the fuel in air at constant volume. Consequently, we could expect static pressure rise ratios of ~15:1 for hydrogen-air or methane-air detonations and a ratio of ~12:1 for a gasoline-air detonation. Much higher reflected pressure rises can be attained if the explosion transits from deflagration to detonation because the deflagration compresses the unburned fuel-air mixture prior to transition to detonation, e.g. a reflected pressure rise ratio of 120:1 (8:1 × 15:1) could be achieved where a hydrogen or methane deflagration transits to detonation. Such transitions are more easily accomplished with hydrogen than with methane or gasoline.

The impulse created by explosion overpressures is of concern in evaluating explosion damage and in the design of barricades or structures to withstand explosions. Although the overpressure created by a gas-phase explosion is of lower peak magnitude and longer duration [64] than the overpressure due to an equivalent quantity of TNT, the extensive TNT data may be used [55, 61, 64] for design purposes. The fundamentals of dynamic blast loads and structural response to shock waves is treated elsewhere [28] as is the applicability [55, 61, 62, 64] of TNT explosive data to the design of structures to withstand gas-phase explosions.

Unbarricaded distances required for the protection of personnel in inhabited buildings that are exposed to shrapnel from TNT explosions are indicated by curve 6 of Fig. 1. These data also predict the maximum observed fragment distances for space vehicle explosions [55] and are more restrictive than the unbarricaded distances required for shrapnel protection of personnel on roadways—see curve 2 of Fig. 1. Fletcher [64] has suggested that TNT shrapnel hazard data may be used to estimate propellant-explosion shrapnel hazards if the appropriate TNT equivalent is used. There is evidence [64] that large low-velocity fragments emitted from such explosions may exceed the TNT shrapnel scatter limits. This situation results because propellant explosions endure longer and can impart more impulse to the projectile; however, the range of high population-density projectile scatter is normally greatest [64] for an equivalent quantity of TNT. As an interim measure the Department of Defense and NASA have adopted [55] the TNT shrapnel hazard data for propellant explosives at

range launch pads and rocket engine test stands. These TNT data adequately predict [55] maximum fragment distances for known incidents involving propellant explosions.

Design for shrapnel protection is difficult because it is necessary to estimate the size, mass, and velocity of fragments emitted from explosions of varied type, strength, and location. In brief, shrapnel shields made of materials with large modulus of elasticity (Young's) are the most effective; for example, steel is more shrapnel resistant than copper and copper is more resistant than aluminum, etc. The opposite is true for shrapnel projectiles themselves. A projectile having a given size and momentum will penetrate deeper if it has a lower density—aluminum will penetrate deeper than copper and copper deeper than steel, etc. Recall that momentum is mass  $\times$  velocity and a constant momentum and size require a higher velocity for the lower density projectiles. Selected references on this subject are given in the parent-document [65] of this paper.

Figures 1 and 2 summarize much of the fire and explosive hazard data presented herein. These figures illustrate the variation in conservatism of various authorities that generate safety criteria. Obviously, when in doubt, the more conservative criteria should be used. The overpressure band on Fig. 1 corresponds to breakage of ordinary window glass (3.5–7 kPa) and the overpressure band on Fig. 2 relates to the estimated external pressure capability of liquid hydrogen storage dewars. The derivation and use of data shown on these figures (safe unbarricaded distances) are fully discussed in a summary document [54] treating the explosive hazards of hydrogen. Safe barricaded distances for TNT and fuel-air explosions may also be estimated from data made available in references [54, 55]. A single series of documents [55] offer comprehensive treatment of overpressure, impulse, fireballs, shrapnel, barricades, structural response and physiological effects, as they relate to propellant explosions. The author feels that these documents are applicable to fuel-air explosions where the TNT equivalent is properly estimated. Care should be exercised when attempting to assess the damage potential of large-volume gas-phase explosions because line-of-sight from such explosions to vulnerable targets may pass over or around barricades that were erected to provide protection from concentrated explosives.

Figure 3 provides a ready comparison of industrially accepted fuel storage standards for hydrogen, LNG and gasoline. By comparing curves 1 and 4 of Fig. 3 with the data given on Figs 1 and 2, we find that the industrial quantity-distance standards (Fig. 3) for hydrogen are less demanding than those suggested for experimental areas (Figs 1 and 2). Also, by comparing curves 1, 2, 3 and curves 4, 5, 6 of Fig. 3 we observe that industrial storage standards are more restrictive for hydrogen, methane and gasoline, respectively.

Curve 3 of Fig. 3 represents the minimal distance for separation of two adjacent above-ground gasoline storage tanks. The distance [58] between such tanks shall not be less than 3 ft and not less than one-sixth the sum of the diameters of two adjacent tanks. When the diameter of one tank is less than one-half the diameter of the adjacent tank, the distance [58] between the two tanks shall not be less than one-half the diameter of the smaller tank. Curves 6A and 6B of Fig. 3 represent the variation in quantity-distance standards for the protection of personnel in buildings adjacent to gasoline storage tanks. These curves bound standards [58] that vary with type of tank construction, fire control measures and protection for exposures, tank operating pressure and emergency venting equipment. The distance [58] from any part of an underground tank (storing gasoline) to the nearest wall of any basement or pit shall be not less than 1 ft, and not less than 3 ft from inhabited buildings.

It is apparent that industrial storage standards are least restrictive for gasoline; however, the industrial storage standards for LNG and hydrogen fuels are not prohibitive and should not limit their use.

#### COMPARISON OF FUEL STORAGE METHODS

Hydrogen may be stored in the compressed gas, liquid or hydride forms. The relative costs [66] of storage in these various forms are dependent upon the quantity of hydrogen stored and upon desired storage pressure and storage duration.

Currently, the most promising alloys for metallic hydride storage contain titanium and magnesium. Storage data [67] for magnesium-nickel (Mg-Ni) and iron-titanium (Fe-Ti) hydrides are available and hydride storage system evaluations are in progress [68]. Safety standards for the production, processing, handling and storage of titanium and magnesium are well documented [69]; however, the safety hazards are much less certain for the candidate Fe-Ti and Mg-Ni ores in combination with stored hydrogen. A recent experimental evaluation [70] indicates that Fe-Ti hydride can be con-

sidered a safe method of storing hydrogen and hydride storage appears attractive [68] for certain short-term storage applications.

Hydrogen is routinely stored as a compressed gas in industry and this practice must be considered safe. It is usually stored in metal containers at pressures ranging from near-ambient to more than 20 MPa. It may also be possible to store compressed hydrogen in abandoned natural gas fields, caverns, aquifers, etc. Metal storage containers are normally constructed of a hydrogen-compatible ductile steel and are not generally susceptible to catastrophic failures. Such containers are normally equipped with pressure and thermally-induced pressure relief devices. Vessel fracture would most likely be accompanied by autoignition of the released hydrogen and air mixture with an ensuing conflagration lasting until the contents of the ruptured vessel are consumed. Considerable experimental data substantiate this statement—see [54, 71]. Adjacent metal storage vessels are relatively shrapnel and fire resistant and may be water-cooled or buried in sand for additional fire and blast resistance.

Hydrogen is also routinely stored as a liquid in industry and in university and government laboratories supporting the U.S. space exploration program. Again, catastrophic failures are not technically plausible as dewars are constructed of ductile metals and are diked to confine the liquid contents of the dewar in the event of spillage. The purpose of the dike is to reduce the liquid evaporation rate and to confine the potential conflagration to the vicinity of the defective dewar. The double wall construction of liquid storage dewars provides good protection against fire and shrapnel and additional fire resistance for adjacent storage dewars can be provided with a water deluge system. Liquid hydrogen storage dewars are usually built with carbon steel vacuum jackets and aluminum or stainless steel inner vessels. Liquid hydrogen has been safely stored in large metal dewars for nearly 20 years.

Hydrogen continues to be stored and used in both the compressed gas and liquid forms in an industrially safe manner. Hydride storage should prove to be equally safe.

Gasoline is normally stored in simple steel containers at near-ambient pressures both above and below ground. The principles of diking and water-cooling to protect adjacent buildings or storage vessels are equally applicable to above-ground gasoline, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquid hydrogen storage. The use of ductile steel tanks virtually precludes catastrophic failures and diking confines potential conflagrations. Gasoline has been safely stored in large quantities for over half a century.

Methane is commonly and safely stored in large quantities as a constituent of compressed gas in natural gas fields, caverns, abandoned coal mines, etc. The safety record of the natural gas industry is exceptionally good.

Liquefied natural gas, whose primary constituent is methane, has been stored in large quantities in the U.S. since 1941. The early tanks were of double-walled steel construction (3.5% nickel steel inner shell and carbon steel outer shell) and a disastrous fire accompanied the failure of one of these tanks in 1944. Changing the inner shell material from 3.5% nickel steel to 9% nickel steel or aluminum has cured the early storage problems associated with LNG and it has been safely stored in large quantities since the mid-sixties. Storage vessels with concrete inner shells and carbon steel outer shells have also been placed in service within the last several years. Liquefied natural gas is stored in above-ground and below-ground containers and the space between the double walls is usually filled with a foam, powder, or fibrous insulation material and gas-filled with nitrogen or natural gas. All of the foregoing arguments concerning the storage of gasoline and liquid hydrogen apply to the storage of LNG. In fact, a comprehensive fire and explosion hazard study [26] by the Bureau of Mines concluded that LNG could be safely stored in much the same manner as gasoline.

Of the three fuels examined, gasoline is certainly the easiest and perhaps the safest fuel to store because of its higher boiling point, lower volatility and narrower flammable and detonable limits. All of the previous discussion in this paper concerning fire and explosion hazards support this generalized conclusion; however, we must recognize that hydrogen and methane (or LNG) can also be safely stored. The degree of risk associated with the storage of each fuel cannot be specified at this time but industrial experience indicates that all three fuels can be safely stored using current technology.

#### FUTURE HYDROGEN APPLICATIONS

Hydrogen is being considered as a replacement fuel [72] in all of the major fuel markets and will continue to penetrate these markets as time passes. It is anticipated that all of the major fuel markets

(industrial, commercial, transportation and residential) will ultimately rely on electricity or hydrogen. A detailed safety analysis covering the use of hydrogen fuel in each of these market areas is needed but well beyond the scope of this paper. Credible accidents must be postulated and detailed fault trees must be developed to provide meaningful hazards data. A resourceful analyst is required because some of the experimental data required for thorough hazards evaluation are nonexistent, e.g. the effects of partial confinement on explosion overpressure and transition to detonation, the effects of elastic weak-walls on deflagration overpressures and the effects of atmospheric dispersion rates on vapor or gas-cloud accumulations—see [46, 54, 62]. A current review article [62] summarizes the state-of-the-art concerning characterization and evaluation of accidental explosions and is a useful guide to current research efforts in this area. The interested reader or analyst may find additional information and assistance with hydrogen safety problems by referring to the recent compilations by Ludtke [73] and to the safety manual [74] prepared by the NASA.

The data and discussions presented in this paper are intended to aid the hazards analyst in preparing safety analysis for each specific application of hydrogen fuel as the applications arise. Without resorting to specific applications and specific accident criteria we can categorically analyze some of the safety hazards associated with the various fuel markets.

Hydrogen is a feedstock in the process industries [72] and has been successfully handled for decades. Thus, the use of hydrogen in industry is essentially routine and no major safety problems are anticipated with its increased use in industrial processes. New processes and new uses of hydrogen may pose new safety hazards that must be dealt with as they arise.

Hydrogen has not been used extensively in commercial applications although it has been successfully piped cross-country as a compressed gas in a few locales. A demonstration project [68] is currently in progress to evaluate the feasibility of using hydrogen in electrical utility load-leveling operations. The electrical utility industry has also successfully used hydrogen gas to cool the rotor and stator coils in large turbine-generators for more than 40 years. No significant hydrogen safety problems are foreseen in the commercial sector.

Hydrogen is a potential replacement fuel in the voracious transportation market. Conceptually, and technically, hydrogen can be used to fuel aircraft, ships, trains, trucks, buses and automobiles; however, the economics, logistics and safety of supplying and distributing hydrogen to fuel these vehicles are as yet undetermined. Excluding a few demonstration projects with automobiles, trucks, buses and airplanes, we find that hydrogen is a relatively untried fuel in the transportation market. Hydrogen was tried briefly as an auto fuel in the mid-thirties and as an inflatable for balloons and dirigibles prior to the ill-fated Hindenburg fire of 1937. Considerable safety analysis is in order prior to the widespread use of hydrogen fuel in transportation—particularly in highway vehicles where personnel exposure is maximum and fuel handling procedures are most difficult or impossible to enforce. Hydrogen is already the accepted fuel of the aerospace industry and is safely handled in large quantities. Bowen [75] and Lippert [76] recently completed reviews of some of the hazards associated with the use of hydrogen as a military fuel.

Hydrogen can also be used to supply residential fuel needs because appliances, furnaces, etc. can be made to operate on hydrogen gas. From a technical viewpoint this application can be readily satisfied, but from a safety viewpoint there are a number of significant concerns. The major concerns relate to the problems of gas leakage, detection and the potential severity of explosions of hydrogen-air mixtures in confined or partially-confined spaces. More experimental data and safety analyses are needed to fully resolve these questions and to determine the comparative risks of hydrogen and natural gas as residential fuels; however, hydrogen-enriched gases (coal gas, town gas, producer gas, etc.) have been successfully used in European countries to satisfy residential fuel needs during the last century. Thus, there also appears to be ample precedent for acceptably safe use of hydrogen in the residential sector.

## SUMMARY

The safety aspects of any fuel are intimately related to the fuel application and to the postulated accident criteria. Thus, specific conclusions await hard comparisons of competing fuels in applications where credible accidents can be specified; however, generalized conclusions and judgments may be drawn from the comparative technical data and discussions presented herein.

A comprehensive list of thermophysical and combustion properties of hydrogen, methane and

gasoline was compiled and presented in this paper. These data provide the bases for future safety analysis and for direct safety comparisons of hydrogen, methane and gasoline.

Liquid hydrogen is more difficult to contain than either liquid methane or liquid gasoline and N.T.P. gasoline vapors are more difficult to contain than either N.T.P. hydrogen or N.T.P. methane. Industry has proven that all three fuels can be safely and easily contained in both gaseous and liquid phases.

In the event of a fuel spill, we can expect a fire hazard to develop most rapidly with hydrogen, methane and gasoline, respectively, and the fire hazard should persist in the inverse order. For a specified liquid spillage volume and ensuing fire we can expect gasoline fires to last the longest and hydrogen fires to be the shortest lived, while all three fuels burn at nearly the same flame temperature. The scene of a hydrogen fire may be hotter ( $1.3 \times$  to  $1.8 \times$ ) than that of a hydrocarbon fire, but the hydrocarbon fires will endure five to ten times longer than hydrogen fires (for spillage of identical liquid fuel volumes).

All three fuels are easily ignited by weak ignition sources such as matches. Even a weak spark generated by the discharge of static electricity from a human body may be sufficient to ignite any of these fuels in air. Hydrogen is more readily ignitable than either of the hydrocarbon fuels which appear to be equally susceptible to ignition.

Hydrogen fires are more difficult to detect than methane or gasoline fires but modern detection equipment makes it possible to quickly and reliably detect the flames of all three fuels. In some applications hydrogen and methane fires should be allowed to burn until gas flow is stopped or until liquid spills are consumed because of the potential explosive hazard created by extinguishing such flames; however, the fire should be controlled in all situations and in many cases it is advisable to extinguish the fire. Water may be used to fight fires of all three fuels and commercial dry chemicals and high-expansion foams can be used to extinguish LNG and gasoline fires.

The potential for smoke inhalation damage is judged to be most severe in gasoline, methane and hydrogen fires, respectively.

The wider flammable limits and detonable limits of hydrogen coupled with its rapid burning velocity tend to make hydrogen a greater explosive threat than methane or gasoline. Unconfined fuel-air explosions are not normally very destructive; however, confined fuel-air explosions can be devastating and hydrogen presents the greatest confined-explosion threat of the three fuels considered.

For equivalent energy storage or for equivalent volume storage, hydrogen has the least theoretical explosive potential of the three fuels considered—even though it has the highest heat of combustion (and explosive potential) on a mass basis.

Hydrogen is currently being safely stored and used in industry in both the compressed gas and liquid forms and it is anticipated that metal hydride storage will be equally safe. Of the three fuels examined, gasoline is the easiest and perhaps the safest fuel to store because of its lower volatility and narrower flammable and detonable limits.

Personnel and equipment safety criteria (fuel quantity-distance) are concisely charted on figures presented herein. It is believed that these figures provide safe exposure distances for all three fuels.

Consideration of future hydrogen applications reveals no safety problems in the industrial and commercial markets. Hydrogen safety problems may exist in the transportation and residential fuel markets and additional safety analyses are needed in these areas. Lower risk (or lower cost) fuels will most likely be used to satisfy many of these markets over the next few decades; however, hydrogen cannot currently be considered unsafe and cannot be excluded from consideration in any of these applications on the grounds of safety. It is the author's belief that fuel availability and cost will outweigh fuel safety in the selection of fuels in the future and hydrogen must be considered a contender in the chemical fuel market.

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