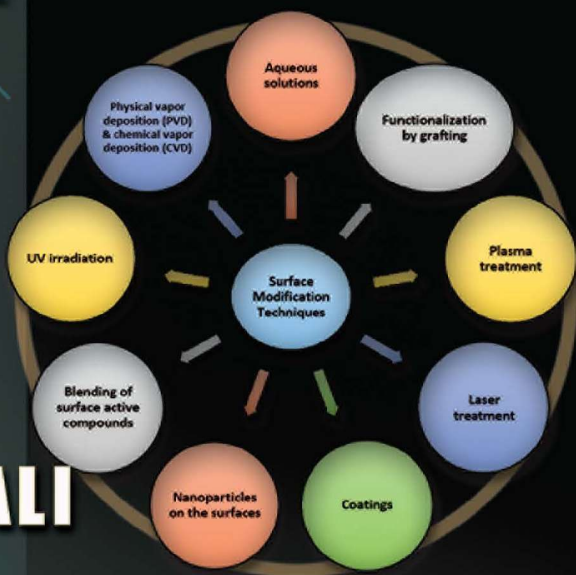


POLYMER SURFACE MODIFICATION TO ENHANCE ADHESION



Techniques and Applications

Edited by
K.L. MITTAL
A.N. NETRAVALI



Polymer Surface Modification to Enhance Adhesion

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Edited by
K.L. Mittal
and
A.N. Netravali



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Contents

Preface	xvii
Part I: Energetic Treatments	1
1 Atmospheric Pressure Plasma Treatment of Polymers to Enhance Adhesion	3
<i>K. Lachmann, M. Omelan, T. Neubert, K. Hain and M. Thomas</i>	
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 Historical Development of APPTs	6
1.3 Functional Groups Produced by APPTs	8
1.3.1 Nitrogen-Based Surface Modification	10
1.3.2 Oxygen-Based Surface Modification	12
1.4 Adhesion Improvement for Bonding	13
1.4.1 Adhesive Bonding by Functional Groups	13
1.4.2 Adhesive-Free Joining by Functional Coatings	17
1.5 Targeted Adhesion for Biomedical Applications	18
1.6 Relevance of Adhesion in Additive Manufacturing	23
1.6.1 Surface Modification for Adhesion Improvement	24
1.6.2 Enhanced Cell Adhesion and Growth on Additive Manufactured Parts	29
1.7 Summary	34
1.8 Acknowledgements	36
References	36
2 Corona Treatment of Polymer Surfaces to Enhance Adhesion	45
<i>N. Dole, K. Ahmadi, D. Solanki, V. Swaminathan, V. Keswani and M. Keswani</i>	
2.1 Introduction	46
2.1.1 Chemical <i>versus</i> Physical Methods in Polymer Surface Modifications	47
2.1.2 Corona Treatment and Impact on Polymers	48
2.1.3 Corona Treatment Applications and Limitations	49

2.2	Mechanism of Corona Treatment	50
2.2.1	Equipment and Operation Details for Corona Treatment	51
2.2.2	Effect of Plasma Source on Efficiency of Corona Treatment	54
2.3	Factors Affecting Performance of Corona Treatment	56
2.3.1	Effect of Material Surface Preparation: 2-D vs. 3-D	56
2.3.2	Mechanistic Discussions of Corona Parameters	57
2.3.3	Influence of Physical Factors and Equipment Design	58
2.3.4	Influence of Plasma Chemistry and Gas Composition	59
2.3.5	Effects of Process Control Methods	60
2.3.6	Hydrophobic Recovery and Mitigation by Additives	61
2.4	Surface Effects of Corona Treatment	62
2.4.1	Surface Polar Functional Groups	62
2.4.2	Modifying Surface Wettability	64
2.5	Adhesion Improvement by Corona Treatment	67
2.5.1	Polypropylene (PP)	67
2.5.2	Polyethylene (PE)	68
2.5.3	Poly(ethylene terephthalate) (PET)	68
2.5.4	Poly(vinyl chloride) (PVC)	69
2.5.5	Polystyrene (PS)	69
2.6	Summary	69
	References	70
3	Flame Surface Treatment of Polymers to Enhance Their Adhesion	77
	<i>Joseph DiGiacomo and LaWayne Johnson</i>	
3.1	Introduction	78
3.2	Chemistry of Flame Treatment	83
3.3	Flame Treatment Equipment	85
3.4	Factors Controlling Flame Plasma Surface Treatment	88
3.4.1	Flame Chemistry	90
3.4.2	Amount of Plasma Generated	98
3.4.3	Flame Geometry	100
3.4.4	Distance of the Substrate from the Flame	102
3.4.5	Dwell Time	103
3.5	Measurement of Treatment Level	109
3.6	Safety and Other Considerations	111
3.7	Adhesion Improvement	113
3.8	Summary	115
	References	115

4	Vacuum UV (VUV) Photo-Oxidation of Polymer Surfaces to Enhance Adhesion	119
	<i>Gerald A. Takacs and Massoud J. Miri</i>	
4.1	Introduction	119
4.2	Vacuum UV Photo-Oxidation Process	121
4.2.1	VUV Background	121
4.2.2	VUV Radiation	121
4.2.2.1	Emission from Excited Atoms	121
4.2.2.2	Emission from High Pressure Rare Gas Plasmas	123
4.2.2.3	Emission from Rare-Gas Halides and Halogen Dimers	125
4.2.2.4	Other VUV Radiation Sources	125
4.2.3	VUV Optical Filters	125
4.2.4	Penetration Depths of VUV Radiation with Polymers	126
4.2.5	Analytical Methods for Surface Analysis	126
4.2.6	VUV Photochemistry of Oxygen	126
4.2.7	Reactions of O Atoms and Ozone with a Polymer Surface	127
4.3	Adhesion to VUV Surface Photo-Oxidized Polymers	128
4.3.1	Fluorine-Containing Polymers	128
4.3.1.1	Fluoropolymers	128
4.3.1.2	Nafion [®]	130
4.3.2	Polyimides (PIs)	131
4.3.3	Polymers and Metals	133
4.3.4	Polyethylene (PE), $-(C_2H_4)_n-$	135
4.3.5	Polystyrene (PS)	135
4.3.6	Cyclo-Olefin Polymers	135
4.3.7	Poly(ethylene terephthalate) (PET)	136
4.3.8	Polybenzimidazole (PBI)	137
4.3.9	Poly(etheretherketone) (PEEK)	137
4.3.10	Polypropylene (PP), $-(C_3H_6)_n-$	138
4.3.11	Poly(ethylene 2,6-naphthalate) (PEN)	138
4.3.12	Polyethersulfone (PES)	138
4.3.13	Polyetherimide (PEI) and Epoxy Resin (RTM6)	140
4.4	Sustainable Polymers	140
4.5	Summary	144
	References	144

5	Application-Related Optimization of Adhesion of Polymers Using Photochemical Surface Modification	155
	<i>Thomas Bahners, Jochen S. Gutmann and Jörg Müssig</i>	
5.1	Introduction	156
5.2	Photochemical Surface Modification	159
5.2.1	Fundamentals of the Process	159
5.2.1.1	Photo-Addition or Photo-Grafting	161
5.2.1.2	Layer Formation by Homo-Polymerization and Graft-Co-Polymerization	162
5.2.2	General Process Design	166
5.3	Using Photo-Addition and Photo-Grafting to Promote the Adhesion Property of Hydrophobic Substrates	169
5.4	Enhancing Adhesion of Hydrophobic Materials on Hydrophilic Substrates – Biobased Composites as Case Study	174
5.5	Biosystems: Cell and Protein Adhesion, Antifouling Surfaces	179
5.6	Summary	190
	Acknowledgement	192
	References	192
6	UV/Ozone Surface Treatment of Polymers to Enhance Their Adhesion	199
	<i>Johannes A. Poulis and Adriaan Kwakernaak</i>	
6.1	Introduction	199
6.1.1	Adhesive Bonding of Polymers	199
6.1.2	UV-C Sensitivity of Polymers	200
6.1.3	UV/Ozone Treatment: Advantages	202
6.1.4	UV/Ozone Treatment: Disadvantages	203
6.2	Historical Development of UV/Ozone Surface Treatment	203
6.3	Parameters Controlling the UV/Ozone Surface Treatment Process	204
6.3.1	Ultraviolet (UV) Light Spectrum	204
6.3.2	UV-Light Generation	205
6.3.3	UV-Light Sources Used	206
6.3.4	Photochemical Ozone Generation	208
6.3.5	Relation between Ozone Generation and UV-Source Power	209
6.3.6	Temperature during UV/Ozone Treatment on Polyolefin Surfaces	210
6.3.7	Influence of Wavelength(s) and Gas Fill on Polyolefin Surfaces	211

6.3.8	Influence of Ozone Gas and UV-Light Spectrum on Polymer Surface Wetting	214
6.3.9	Main Process Variables: Overview	215
6.4	Surface Changes of Polymeric Materials by UV/Ozone Treatment	216
6.4.1	Polymer Bonds	216
6.4.2	Surface Cleaning by UV/Ozone: Increasing Hydrophilicity and Surface Free Energy	217
6.4.3	Photo-Degradation: Surface Roughness and Morphology Changes	219
6.4.4	UV-Light Treatment Depth in Polymer Surfaces	220
6.4.5	Surface Relaxation of HDPE	220
6.5	Surface Analysis of UV/Ozone Treated Polymeric Surfaces	222
6.5.1	Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) on UV/Ozone Treated Carbon Fibre Reinforced Polymer (CFRP)	222
6.5.2	Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM) on UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	223
6.5.3	X-Ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS) on UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	224
6.5.4	Attenuated Total Reflection Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (ATR-FTIR) Investigation on UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	225
6.5.5	Optically Stimulated Electron Emission (OSEE) Investigation on UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	226
6.5.6	Contact Angle Measurements on UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	228
6.6	UV/Ozone Treatment of Polymers: Improved Wetting and Adhesion	229
6.6.1	Introduction: UV/Ozone Treatment of Polymers	229
6.6.2	UV/Ozone Treatment of Thermoset Materials	230
6.6.2.1	Introduction: UV/Ozone Treatment of CFRP	230
6.6.2.2	Mechanical Tests on UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	231
6.6.2.3	Mechanical Fatigue Loading of UV/Ozone Treated CFRP	233
6.6.2.4	Adhesive Bonding of UV/Ozone Treated CFRP to Aluminium	233
6.6.2.5	UV/Ozone Treatment and Testing of Aerospace Primers	233
6.6.2.6	Mechanical Tests on UV/Ozone Treated Epoxy Coated Magnets	237

6.6.2.7	UV/Ozone Modification of Poly(dimethylsiloxane)	238
6.6.3	UV/Ozone Treatment of Thermoplastics	241
6.6.3.1	Adhesive Bonding of POM to Aluminium	241
6.6.3.2	Adhesive Bonding of Polyethylene (PE) to Stainless Steel	243
6.6.3.3	Adhesive Bonding and Aging of HDPE	244
6.6.3.4	Adhesive Bonding of Polyethylene (PE) to Acrylonitrile Styrene Acrylate (ASA)	246
6.6.3.5	Adhesive Bonding of Polypropylene (PP)	248
6.6.3.6	Surface Treatment of Nylon (Polyamide 6)	248
6.6.3.7	UV/Ozone Treatment of Poly(phenylene sulphide) (PPS)	250
6.6.3.8	UV/Ozone Treatment of Poly(methyl methacrylate) (PMMA)	251
6.6.3.9	Adhesive Bonding of Flexible Polymeric Solar Cells	253
6.6.3.10	Treatment of ABS for Adhesive Bonding	255
6.6.3.11	Adhesive Bonding of Styrene-Acrylonitrile (SAN) to a Thermoplastic Elastomer (TPE)	257
6.6.4	UV/Ozone Treatment of Rubbers	258
6.6.4.1	UV/Ozone Treatment of SBS Rubber	258
6.6.4.2	Surface Treatment of Ethylene Propylene Diene Monomer (EPDM) Rubber to Optimize the Adhesion of a Coating	259
6.6.4.3	EPDM Rubber Pre-Treated by a Low Pressure UV-Source	260
6.7	Prospects	262
6.8	Summary	263
	Acknowledgements	263
	References	264
7	Adhesion Enhancement of Polymer Surfaces by Ion Beam Treatment	273
	<i>Endu Sekhar Srinadhu, Dinesh P. R. Thanu, Srilakshmi Putta, Mingrui Zhao, Bishwambhar Sengupta, Lakshmi Phani Arabandi, Jatinder Kumar, Radhey Shyam, Vinay H. Keswani and Manish Keswani</i>	
7.1	Introduction	274
7.1.1	Ion Beam - Surface Interactions: Background	274
7.1.2	Ion Beam - Surface Interactions: Kinetics	275

7.1.3	Computer Simulations of Ion Beam - Solid Interactions	277
7.2	Ion Beam Treatment of Polymers	277
7.2.1	Principle of Technique	277
7.2.2	Types of Ion Beams and Interactions	278
7.2.3	Impacts and Outcome of Polymer Surface Modification	279
7.3	Analysis Techniques to Analyze Post Ion Beam Treatment	280
7.3.1	X-Ray Diffraction	281
7.3.2	Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)	282
7.3.3	Scanning Tunneling Microscopy (STM)	282
7.3.4	Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy	283
7.3.5	Raman Spectroscopy	283
7.3.6	UV Spectroscopy	284
7.3.7	X-Ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS)	285
7.3.8	Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM)	285
7.3.9	Wettability Measurements	286
7.4	Polymer Surface Modifications for Biomedical Applications	288
7.4.1	Poly(lactic acid) (PLA)	291
7.4.2	Poly(L-lactic acid) (PLLA)	293
7.4.3	Poly(L-lactide) (PLA), Poly(D, L-Lactide-co-glycolide) (PDLG) and Poly(L-lactide-co-caprolactone) (PLC)	294
7.4.4	Poly(dimethylsiloxane) (PDMS)	296
7.4.5	He ⁺ Ion Irradiation of Selected Polymeric Materials	298
7.4.6	Ion Beam Assisted Deposition (IBAD)	300
7.4.7	Ion Beam Texturing (IBT)	301
7.5	Polymer Surface Modification for Microelectronics Applications	302
7.5.1	Bisphenol A Polycarbonate (PC)	305
7.5.2	Aluminum Films on Bisphenol A Polycarbonate (PC)	307
7.5.3	Indium Tin Oxide (ITO) Films on Bisphenol A Polycarbonate (PC)	309
7.5.4	Polyimide Films	310
7.5.5	Cu/Polyimide Films	311
7.5.6	PVA/PANI Polymer Composite Films	312
7.5.7	Multiple Ion Beam Treatment of Polymers	313
7.5.7.1	Kapton H, Teflon PFA, Tefzel and Mylar Polymers	313
7.5.7.2	Polycarbonate (PC, Lexan)	314
7.6	Summary	317
	References	317

8	Polymer Surface Modification by Charged Particles from Plasma Using Plasma-Based Ion Implantation Technique	329
	<i>Takeshi Tanaka, Koji Kakugawa and Katia Vutova</i>	
8.1	Introduction	330
8.2	Overview of Literature About Polymer Surface Modification by Charged Particles from Plasma Using Plasma-Based Ion Implantation	331
8.3	Principle of PBII: Advantages and Limitations	334
8.4	Equipment Needed	335
8.5	Factors Influencing the Outcome/Results	339
	8.5.1 Wettability Studies	339
	8.5.2 Surface Free Energy and Wettability	340
	8.5.3 Surface Morphology	341
	8.5.4 XPS Spectra	342
	8.5.5 Raman Spectrometry	344
	8.5.6 FT-IR Measurements	347
8.6	Results Showing Adhesion Improvement after PBII Treatment	348
8.7	Prospects	349
8.8	Summary	349
	References	350
9	Laser Surface Engineering of Polymeric Materials for the Modification of Wettability and Adhesion Characteristics	365
	<i>D.G. Waugh and J. Lawrence</i>	
9.1	Introduction	366
9.2	Methods for Measuring Wettability and Adhesion Characteristics	367
	9.2.1 Contact Angle Goniometry	367
	9.2.2 Tensiometry	369
9.3	Laser Surface Engineering of Polymeric Materials	370
	9.3.1 Common Surface Engineering Techniques	370
	9.3.2 CO ₂ Laser and Ultraviolet (UV) Excimer Laser Surface Engineering of Polymeric Materials	372
	9.3.3 Ultrafast Lasers for Surface Engineering of Polymeric Materials	378
	9.3.4 Currently Available Literature Related to Laser Surface Engineering of Polymeric Materials	379
9.4	Summary	383
	Acknowledgements	384
	References	384

10 Competition in Adhesion between Polysort and Monosort Functionalized Polyolefin Surfaces Coated with Vacuum-Evaporated Aluminium	389
<i>Jörg Florian Friedrich</i>	
10.1 Introduction	390
10.2 Differences in Adhesion between Poly- and Monosort Functionalized Polyolefin Surfaces	392
10.2.1 General Comparison of Mono- and Polysort Functional Groups	392
10.2.2 Methods for Modifying Polyolefin Surfaces with Polysort Functional Groups	395
10.2.3 Polysort Functionalization of Polyolefins and the General Problem with Polymer Degradation	400
10.2.4 Polysort Functionalization and Surface Free Energy	403
10.2.5 Methods of Generating Polysort Functionalized Polyolefin Surfaces	406
10.2.6 Monosort OH Groups	407
10.2.7 OH Groups by Wet-Chemical Post-Plasma Transformation of Polysort O Functional Groups into OH Groups	408
10.2.8 Monosort COOH Groups	410
10.2.9 Monosort NH ₂ Groups	410
10.2.10 Other Methods for Selectively Modifying Polyolefin Surfaces with Monosort Functional Groups	412
10.2.11 Monosort Bromination	414
10.2.12 Advantages of Plasma Monosort Bromination	416
10.2.13 Transformation of C-Br Groups into Adhesion-Promoting OH- or NH ₂ -Groups	418
10.2.14 Monosort Functionalization via Grafting of Flexible Spacer Molecules	419
10.2.15 Advantages of Monosort Functionalized Surfaces Formed by Spacer Molecules	420
10.2.16 Monosort Functional Groups Deposited via Plasma Polymers as Ultra-Thin Film Adhesion Promoters	421
10.2.17 Variation of the Density of Monosort Functional Groups by Copolymerization	423
10.2.18 Plasmaless Coating with Classic Polymers Carrying Monosort Functional Groups	425
10.3 Bonding of Metal Coatings to Polysort and Monosort Functionalized Polyolefins	426

10.3.1	Physical Bonding	426
10.3.2	Covalent Bonding along the Metal-Polymer Interface	427
10.4	Adhesion Results for Evaporated Aluminium Coating on Poly- and Monosort Functionalized Polyolefin Surfaces	432
10.4.1	Competition of Adhesion Efficiency between Strong Covalent Bonds and Polar Groups with Weak Interactions	432
10.4.2	Peel Strength of Metal-Monosort Functionalized Polyolefin Laminates	434
10.4.3	Peel Strength of Monosort Terminal Groups of Flexible Spacers Grafted to the Polyolefin Surface	436
10.4.4	Role of Spacer Length and Associated Flexibility	438
10.4.5	Protection of Al-O-C Bonds against Hydrolysis	440
10.4.6	Redox Reactions and Ion Migration	442
10.5	Realization of Ideal Covalently Bonded Interface	443
10.5.1	Schematic Structure of “Ideal” Interface	443
10.5.2	Results	444
10.5.3	Comparison of Results	445
10.5.4	Limitations of Ideally Designed Interface	446
10.6	Summary	447
	Acknowledgements	449
	References	449

Part II: Chemical Treatments **459**

11	Amine-Terminated Dendritic Materials for Polymer Surface Modification to Enhance Adhesion	461
	<i>Zaynab Daneshzand, Kiana Karimi, Somaye Akbari and Atefeh Solouk</i>	
11.1	Introduction	462
11.2	Dendritic Materials	463
11.3	Amine-Terminated Dendritic Materials as Adhesion Modifiers	464
11.3.1	Hydrophilicity	465
11.3.2	Zeta Potential and Surface Charge	466
11.3.3	Surface Topography	466
11.3.4	New Interaction	467
11.4	Applications of Amine-Terminated Dendritic Materials in Adhesion	468
11.4.1	Cell Adhesion	468

11.4.2	Bacterial Adhesion	471
11.4.3	Adhesion in Composites	472
11.4.4	Adhesion in Water Treatment	474
11.4.5	Coatings Adhesion	476
11.5	Summary	478
	References	479
12	Arginine–Glycine–Aspartic Acid (RGD) Modification of Polymer Surfaces to Enhance Cell Adhesion	487
	<i>Yawen Li</i>	
12.1	Introduction	487
12.2	RGD Peptides	488
12.3	RGD Immobilization Techniques	492
12.3.1	Physical Entrapment	493
12.3.2	Covalent Attachment	493
12.3.2.1	Water-Soluble Carbodiimide (WSC) Chemistry	493
12.3.2.2	Click Chemistry	494
12.3.2.3	Photo-Immobilization	496
12.3.3	Micro/Nano-Patterning	497
12.3.3.1	Photolithography	498
12.3.3.2	Focused Laser Light	499
12.3.3.3	Soft Lithography	500
12.3.3.4	Dip Pen Nanolithography	502
12.3.3.5	Bioprinting	503
12.4	Characterization	505
12.5	Applications	506
12.6	Summary	509
	References	510
13	Adhesion Promotors for Polymer Surfaces	517
	<i>Thomas P. Schuman</i>	
13.1	To Coat or Not to Coat Polymer Surfaces	517
13.2	Theory of Adhesion: Adhesion Forces	519
13.3	Plastics	520
13.4	Polymer Adhesion Mechanisms	523
13.4.1	Mechanical	523
13.4.2	Electrical	526
13.4.3	Adsorption/Wetting	527
13.4.4	Diffusion	531
13.4.5	Covalent Bonding	532

13.4.6	Summary: Adhesion Mechanisms	533
13.5	Pretreatments	534
13.5.1	Solvent Wipe Treatment	535
13.5.2	Chemical Treatments	539
13.5.3	Chemical Etching	541
13.5.4	Adhesion Promoters	541
13.5.4.1	Chlorinated Polyolefin (CPO)	542
13.5.4.2	CPO Cosolvent	544
13.5.4.3	Other Chlorinated Tie-Coats	545
13.5.4.4	In-Mold Application of CPO	547
13.5.4.5	Non-Chlorinated Adhesion Promoters	547
13.5.4.6	Environmentally-Benign Approaches	548
13.5.4.7	Melt-Blended Polymer Additives	550
13.5.4.8	Silanes	552
13.6	Summary	553
	References	554
	Index	559

Preface

Polymers are used vastly in many industries for a variety of applications. However, their surfaces are intrinsically non-reactive due to their low surface free energy and absence of reactive chemical groups. Concomitantly, their surface modification (also known as surface treatment or surface activation) is a *sine qua non* to render them adhesionable or bondable.

Even a cursory look at the literature will evince that there is tremendous research activity in devising new and improved ways of ameliorating the existing techniques or coming up with novel ways to modify polymer surfaces. A legion of techniques ranging from mundane to sophisticated, vacuum to non-vacuum, dry to wet, and inexpensive to sumptuous have been documented for surface modification of a variety of polymer surfaces. The choice for an optimum technique depends on a host of factors, *inter alia*, the chemical structure of the polymer substrate, nature of mating phase, level of adhesion desired and cost. Also, the longevity of treatment is a very significant consideration. There have been different attempts to prolong the life of treatment as well.

The information on the topic of this book is scattered in many different publication media and there is no single, easily accessible, and comprehensive source available. This lacuna in the literature provides the vindication and motivation for bringing out this book.

This book containing 13 (a lucky number) chapters is divided into two parts: Part I: Energetic Treatments; and Part II: Chemical Treatments. Topics covered include: atmospheric pressure plasma treatment of polymers to enhance adhesion; corona treatment of polymer surfaces to enhance adhesion; flame surface treatment of polymers to enhance adhesion; vacuum UV photo-oxidation of polymer surfaces to enhance adhesion; optimization of adhesion of polymers using photochemical surface modification; UV/Ozone surface treatment of polymers to enhance adhesion; adhesion enhancement of polymer surfaces by ion beam treatment; polymer surface modification by charged particles; laser surface modification of polymeric materials; competition in adhesion between polysort and monosort

functionalized polyolefinic surfaces; amine-terminated dendritic materials for polymer surface modification; arginine-glycine-aspartic acid (RGD) modification of polymer surfaces; and adhesion promoters for polymer surfaces.

The chapters are written by renowned researchers actively engaged in surface modification of polymers. This book is profusely referenced and copiously illustrated.

This book should of great appeal and interest to polymer scientists, surface scientists, adhesionists, materials scientists, plastics engineers, and to those involved/interested in adhesive bonding, packaging, printing, painting, metallization, biological adhesion, biomedical devices, and polymer composites.

Now it gives us great pleasure to acknowledge all those who played essential roles in giving this book a body form. Naturally, first and foremost, our profound thanks go to the authors for their keen interest, sustained enthusiasm, unwavering cooperation, and sharing their valuable research experience in the form of written accounts (which essentially provided the grist for this book), without which this book could not be materialized. Also, the steadfast interest and whole-hearted support of Martin Scrivener (publisher) in this book endeavor is highly appreciated.

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Part I
ENERGETIC TREATMENTS

Atmospheric Pressure Plasma Treatment of Polymers to Enhance Adhesion

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Abstract

In this chapter, we present an overview on recent research and development work in the area of atmospheric pressure plasma treatments (APPTs) to generate adhesion-promoting surfaces of polymers used in various applications in automotive, aerospace, packaging, and medical fields. In comparison to the classical “corona treatment” the APPTs provide access to a broader range of industrially interesting surface modifications that are normally better controlled with respect to their physicochemical nature. Thus, application of APPTs may become a superior option for preparing polymer surfaces for adhesive bonding, adhesive-free low-temperature bonding involving homogeneous and heterogeneous substrates, lacquering, or coupling of specific biomolecules, proteins, or cells. APPT technology is, however, not only flexible for tuning surface chemistry but also is flexible with respect to plasma source and equipment design. Versatility of the APPT technology facilitates its integration into a variety of process chains. An example presented here is a hybrid technology combining both APPT and additive manufacturing based on 3D printing processes using fused filament deposition. Inline treatment by quasi-simultaneous execution of printing and APPT can, for instance, increase the adhesion of 3D printed products in print direction (z-Axis) and thus increase the mechanical stability of the printed part. In the medical field such a technology may be attractive for cell growth by promoting treatment of internal surfaces of printed porous scaffolds. In future, products made from bio-based or recycled polymers will become increasingly important. APPT technology could become an important enabler for meeting the technical requirements for the adhesion of such products.

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1.1 Introduction

Polymers play an important role in packaging, automotive, medical, biomedical, and aerospace applications. Polymer market still experiences growth, driven by the increased use of polyolefins and also of new bio-based and functional polymers. Most of these polymers exhibit inert surfaces that need to be treated to provide sufficient adhesion for lacquers, paints, and adhesive bonding. Treatment can be carried out using a wide range of surface-functionalizing processes including wet-chemical etching [1, 2], plasma [3–5], and laser modification [4, 6, 7], as well as ozone and UV treatment [4], many of which are nowadays well established in industry. In recent years, application of cold Atmospheric Pressure Plasma Treatments (APPTs) in industry has experienced very strong growth attributed to the high versatility in applications, low investment cost and the very good integration of the technology in existing process chains [8].

Changes in technical, social, and legal requirements will inevitably lead to changes in processes also in the adhesive bonding industry which are therefore the focus of this review. Adhesive bonding technology is used in a wide range of products as it offers various material combinations, long-term stability and safety while maintaining material properties and creating additional functions in the bonded product. Continuous inventions and innovations in the development of raw materials, adhesives and bonded products have enabled a dynamic development in the past decades.

Innovative bonding technology enables new, more environmentally-friendly and sustainable products and processes in many areas. For instance, improved resource efficiency can be achieved in the production of renewable energy power plant components where sealing of solar cells or joining of wind turbine rotor blades has become possible. Another example is the electromobility area with the sealing of battery cells, heat management of batteries with heat-conducting adhesives and hermetic sealing of fuel cells. In addition, adhesives with improved product properties can lead to savings, even in food packaging to increase shelf-life with resource-efficient materials.

In Europe the “European Green Deal” with its agenda responding to current socio-political changes will bring additional requirements and thus new challenges for bonding technology [9, 10]. The main point is

the transition from a linear to a circular economy, minimizing the use of resources, generation of waste and emissions, and the inefficient use of energy. This will be achieved by considering resource needs, life extension, repair, refurbishment, recycling and closing energy and material loops.

The eco-friendly APPT technology with its innovations in combining suitably functionalized surfaces with bonding technology certainly has the potential to meet the new set of requirements that may result from implementation of the agenda of the European Green Deal.

These new challenges must be realized in terms of closed-loop systems along the value chain. Therefore, life cycle assessments (LCAs) enable a holistic view of adhesively bonded products with regard to ecological and economical improvements along the complete value chains [11, 12]. In this context atmospheric pressure plasma treatments (APPTs) of polymers and other materials like paper, rubber, fabrics, steel, glass and different composite materials have gained considerable importance in recent years due to their technological and economical capabilities and thus offer the potential to become the future leading technology for surface functionalization to improve adhesive bonding technology. The main advantages of APPTs are that they need no expensive equipment, are easy to handle, have a very good scalability and can simply be integrated in existing process lines.

Considering that in most applications materials are joined with other structural parts, the adhesion behavior is of great significance. The adhesion property is strongly affected by the chemistry and morphology of the surfaces. APPTs alter surface morphologies and chemical composition of different materials without affecting their bulk properties. The plasma treatment can also change the surface from hydrophobic to hydrophilic state and vice versa, depending on the type of monomer or process gas used for surface activation. Thus, plasma treatment can alter the inert polymer surface to have greater chemical/physical affinity by incorporating chemical functional groups. This leads to an increase in surface free energy and enlargement of the contact area and thus improved adhesion property. Different research groups have carried out a variety of APPT processes to improve the surface properties of materials [13–19].

These cold plasma treatments have gained increasing interest as they represent environmentally-friendly solution and can even be performed under atmospheric pressure conditions at relatively low cost [20–22]. The plasma treatment can also affect the morphology by exerting the etching effect on the surface and changing the surface roughness and wettability. This results in improved adhesion of metal/plastic compounds [23]. The cold plasma treatment of various plastics such as polypropylene,

polyethylene, poly(ethylene terephthalate), poly(etheretherketone), etc. has been investigated [24–26].

In this chapter, we will focus on the use of APPTs to improve the adhesion by chemical functionalization for different applications. Firstly, we will give a short overview about the historical development of APPTs. The second section is about the establishment of functional surfaces with a high number of different chemical groups. In the third section, the adhesion improvement by APPT promoted joining of materials is discussed. In the fourth section we will show the relevance of APPTs for biomedical application for improving e.g. cell adhesion. Finally, we will give an overview on the use of APPTs to promote adhesion in additive manufacturing processes.

1.2 Historical Development of APPTs

The industrialization of APPTs started in 1951, when A. W. Eisby, a Danish engineer, invented a high-frequency treatment with a dielectric barrier discharge in air for polymer foils to improve the adhesion of inks [27]. This so-called “corona treatment” is nowadays commercially well established in the packaging sector for surface activation and cleaning. In the following decades different kinds of plasma sources for APPT working with air as process gas were developed, enabling the treatment of flat and complex surfaces [5]. In the meanwhile, APPTs have been established in the biological, pharmaceutical and medical fields, in automotive, aerospace, and electronics industries and have become important for the alternative energy sector, additive manufacturing as well as for the pretreatment of renewable and sustainable materials. Figure 1.1 shows the most common sources like dielectric barrier discharges, stabilized corona systems, and plasma jets or torches which can be operated using different types of excitations, e.g., alternating current (AC), pulsed direct current (DC), low-frequency (kHz), radio frequency (RF, 13.56 MHz) and microwaves (MW) with a frequency of 2.45 GHz.

Today APPTs can be used to functionalize a surface with various chemical groups including e.g. -OH, -COOH, -NH₂, -NO_x to improve the adhesion of, e.g., adhesives, lacquers and paints to polymers. Using nitrogen and nitrogen-hydrogen mixtures as process gases, for example, imines, amines or amides can be introduced on the polymer surface, frequently leading to higher surface free energy, better long-term stability and in many applications the desired high level of adhesion. DBD-based APPT using nitrogen or its mixtures with other gases like

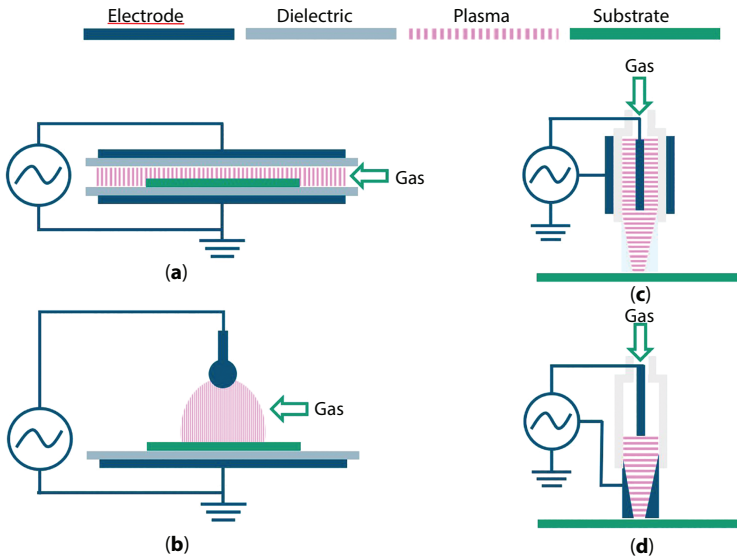


Figure 1.1 Examples of different types of plasma sources for APPTs; (a) Dielectric Barrier Discharge (DBD), (b) Stabilized Corona, (c) DBD jet, and (d) Arc jet.

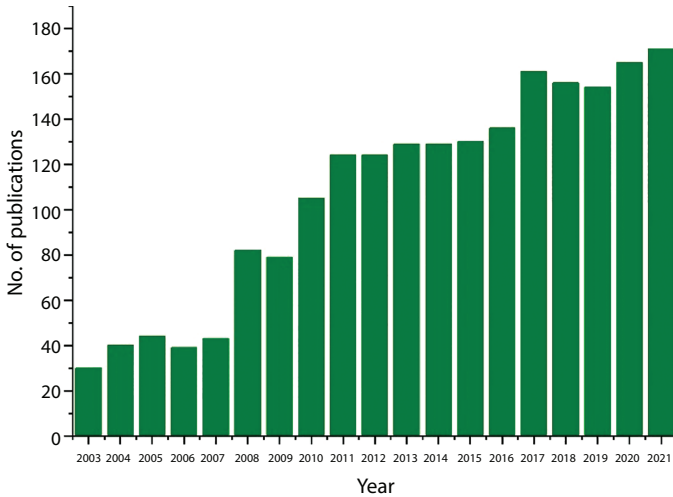


Figure 1.2 Number of publications on surface functionalization with APPT with relevance to adhesion (from Web of Science – date Nov. 15, 2022).

hydrogen as process gas are in the meanwhile commercially available on the market and have been recognized as a very good alternative to existing wet-chemical etching processes.

In the last decades an increasing number of leading research groups have worked on the topic of adhesion-promoting surface modifications for coating processes with atmospheric-pressure plasmas. Depending on the precursors and processes used, they have demonstrated that high densities of chemical functionalities such as alcohols, epoxides, amines, carboxylates or silanols can be obtained on the surface. Current statistics of publications as available via the website from “Web of Science” for surface functionalization using APPTs with relevance to adhesion is shown in Figure 1.2. With presently 170 publications per year this number has increased five-fold compared to 2003.

1.3 Functional Groups Produced by APPTs

Depending on the atmospheric pressure plasma system used, process gases, precursors and process parameters, the surfaces of several materials can be cleaned, activated or equipped with a wide range of functional layers.

Figure 1.3 shows the generated chemical species by a microdischarge in air of a dielectric barrier discharge (DBD), which has been modelled by Eliasson and Kogelschatz [28]. The predominant species are electrons, ionized species, free radicals, ozone and NO_x as well as UV light.

They have shown that the composition of species present varies depending on the timescale within a microdischarge of a DBD. On a nanosecond scale radicals and excited oxygen and nitrogen are dominant, whereas on a microsecond scale mostly ozone, NO_x and excited nitrogen are present. In the scale of seconds, ozone and also N_2O are the dominant species.

Compared to a cold DBD at room temperature, arc torches have higher temperatures of more than 600°C . At this high temperature the concentration of NO_x species will increase strongly and thus lead to different surface chemistry.

With the aforementioned reactive species organic contaminants, generally present on the surface, can be decomposed and removed. At the same time the surface becomes activated by formation of functional moieties such as nitrogen- and oxygen-containing groups. This leads to significant changes in the chemical composition of the topmost layer and thus in the surface free energy of the treated polymer. Direct electrical charging of the polymer surface by trapping ions by CH_2 groups of the polymer can also contribute to the increase of surface free energy [29].

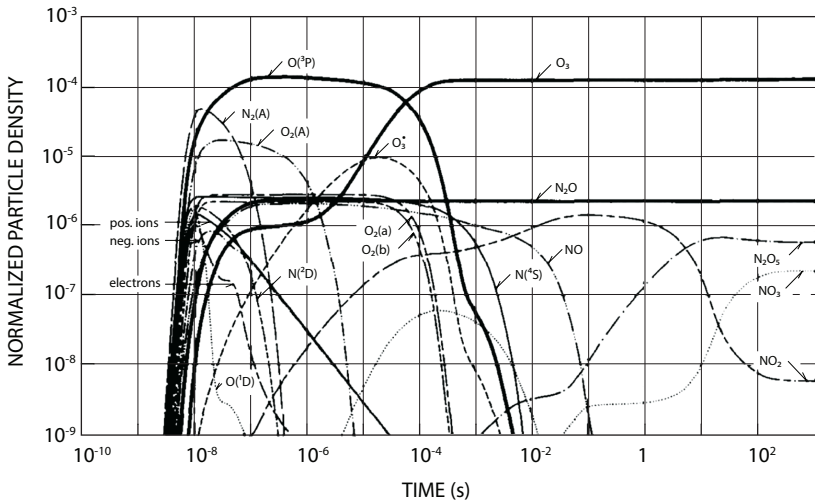


Figure 1.3 Chemical species generated by a microdischarge in air (from [28]).

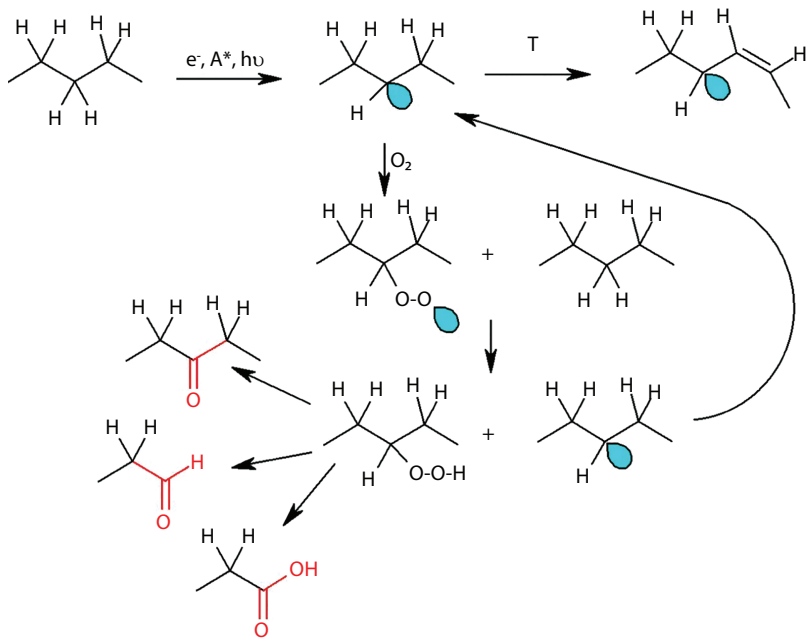


Figure 1.4 Important reaction steps for the activation of polypropylene surface (adapted from [30]).

In general, the surface free energy can be increased by atmospheric plasma treatment. A basic model for polypropylene was described by Dorai and Kushner and is presented in Figure 1.4 [30].

The first step is the formation of alkyl radicals which can also transform into allyl radicals. The next step is the formation of peroxide radicals by the reaction of the alkyl radicals with oxygen (diradical). The peroxide radicals abstract hydrogen from other alkyl groups and this leads to formation of new alkyl radicals. The hydroperoxides formed can react to form various stable oxygen functionalities like aldehydes, ketones or carboxylates, resulting in “active” surfaces and increased surface free energy and in many cases, this leads to an improved adhesion.

In general, the enhancement of the bonding quality is highly dependent on the material, the type of APPT system and treatment conditions used. An interesting example for future use of sustainable materials is the plasma treatment of wood. Solvent- and water-based polyurethane (PU) coatings showed deeper penetration in pre-treated wood in comparison to untreated wood substrates [31].

1.3.1 Nitrogen-Based Surface Modification

In addition to the classic “plasma pretreatment” of surfaces in air routinely used today, more and more processes with a defined oxygen-free (inert) gas atmosphere are becoming relevant. Such a defined atmosphere is necessary to establish specific chemical groups on the surface of the material and to avoid the influence of reactive oxygen groups. The easiest way is the use of nitrogen or nitrogen-hydrogen (forming gas) mixtures as process gas. Figure 1.5 shows possible functional groups on polypropylene surface generated by corona treatment and APPT using nitrogen/hydrogen as process gas. For example, when treating polypropylene with nitrogen or nitrogen/hydrogen mixtures, a relatively high density of N-containing reactive groups such as imines or amines can be generated on the surface [5, 32, 33].

In investigations studying the treatment of polypropylene surfaces with an AC Corona System stabilized by a dielectric barrier (RotoTEC, Tantec A/S, Denmark) it was found that using nitrogen and especially nitrogen-hydrogen mixtures higher surface free energy levels could be reached compared with classical air treatment and are presented in Figure 1.6. This indicates a difference in the types of surface compositions in these two cases. Further, surface free energy changes achieved with the N_2/H_2 mixtures were observed to be stable over a period of several weeks [34]. Moreover, in the case of adding hydrogen a long-term stability of the surface free energy for several weeks was shown.