HIGH-TEMPERATURE HEAT-INSULATING MATERIALS: A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY AND RELIABILITY

N.M. Piriyeva[1], R.K. Karimova[2], G.K.Abdullayeva[3]

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Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University, Baku, Azerbaijan
[1]naciba.piriyeva@asoiu.edu.az, [2] rashida.karimova@asoiu.edu.az,
[3]gulshan.abdullayeva@asoiu.edu.az

Abstract

This article examines heat transfer mechanisms in high-temperature thermal insulation materials, addressing key operational challenges such as thermal degradation, mechanical stability, and chemical resistance. The novelty of the study lies in an integrated approach that includes optimizing the micro- and nanostructure to minimize radiative and conductive heat transfer, developing advanced multilayer and composite systems, applying predictive computational modeling for property assessment, and exploring self-healing coatings and intelligent materials. These innovations ensure reduced thermal conductivity without compromising mechanical strength, enhance resistance to thermal cycling and aggressive chemical exposure, and significantly extend the service life of insulation systems, making them highly promising for aerospace, energy, metallurgy, and other industries requiring reliable thermal protection. Additionally, the proposed solutions contribute to increased energy efficiency, reduced material consumption, and improved environmental sustainability, paving the way for next-generation thermal insulation technologies with broader industrial applicability.

Keywords: High-temperature insulation materials, thermal conductivity, mechanical strength, reliability.

I. Introduction

Modern industrial and energy systems operating at extremely high temperatures require reliable thermal insulation materials capable of simultaneously reducing heat loss and maintaining mechanical strength. In industries such as aviation and space technology, metallurgy and energy, the use of traditional thermal insulation materials faces problems with degradation, shrinkage and loss of structural integrity during long-term operation.

The main task of developers is to find the optimal balance between low thermal conductivity, providing effective thermal insulation, and high mechanical resistance, preventing material destruction under thermal loads. Modern solutions include the use of porous ceramic materials, aerogels, multilayer structures and nanocomposites, which demonstrate improved characteristics compared to traditional insulators.

The purpose of this article is to consider the key heat transfer mechanisms in high-temperature thermal insulation materials, identify the main problems associated with their operation and offer promising solutions to improve their reliability.

II. Problem setting

High-temperature thermal insulation materials play a key role in metallurgy, energy, aviation, space and chemical industries, protecting structures from overheating and reducing heat loss. However, their development faces serious scientific and technical challenges associated with the need to achieve a compromise between thermal conductivity, mechanical strength and resistance to aggressive operating conditions.

Table 1.: *Main difficulties in the development and application of high-temperature thermal insulation materials*

Difficulty	Problem Description	Consequences
Compromise between thermal conductivity and mechanical strength	Materials with low thermal conductivity have high porosity, which reduces their mechanical strength.	Brittleness, tendency to fracture under load, reduced operational lifespan.
Degradation of structure at high temperatures	Oxidation, sintering, thermochemical erosion, and structural breakdown reduce insulation properties.	Loss of thermal insulation efficiency, frequent material replacement.
Thermal cycling loads	Frequent temperature fluctuations cause thermal expansion and formation of microcracks.	Reduced strength, accelerated deterioration, and shortened lifespan.
Need to reduce density while maintaining strength	In the aerospace industry, it's crucial to minimize the structure's weight without compromising reliability.	Limited material options, difficulty in achieving the required balance of properties.
Limited temperature ranges of traditional materials	Most commercial thermal insulators lose their properties at temperatures above 1500°C.	Limited applicability, risk of overheating and structural failure in extreme conditions.

One of the main factors affecting the reliability of insulating materials is their structural stability under high temperatures [1-3]. Traditional thermal insulators, such as ceramic fibers, foam glass, and refractory bricks, are susceptible to thermal aging, sintering, and oxidation, which leads to a deterioration in their insulation properties and mechanical strength. For example, porous ceramics, which are effective at reducing thermal conductivity, lose their mechanical load resistance over time due to grain growth and structural degradation.

To illustrate the key issues with thermal insulation materials, Table 2 is presented, showing the main operational limitations of various types of insulators.

Another serious issue is the impact of thermal cycling loads. Materials subjected to rapid temperature fluctuations experience repeated expansion and contraction, leading to the formation of microcracks and gradual destruction. This is particularly critical in aerospace and aviation technology, where temperatures can change from extreme cold to very high values in a short time.

Additional challenges arise when there is a need to reduce material density without losing strength, especially in the aerospace industry, where the minimum weight of a structure is a key requirement [4]. Ultra-lightweight thermal insulation materials, such as aerogels, have unique properties, but their mechanical fragility limits their field of application.

Thermal conductivity of thermal insulation materials is determined by various heat transfer mechanisms, including heat conduction through the solid skeleton, convection in porous structures, and radiative heat exchange [5-7]. Under conditions of extremely high temperatures, the contribution of radiative heat transfer increases, requiring the development of special methods for its suppression. Optimizing the material structure to reduce thermal conductivity without compromising mechanical properties remains one of the key research challenges.

Table 2: *Problems and limitations of various thermal insulation materials*

Material Type	Main Advantages	Main Problems and Limitations
Ceramic Fibers	Lightness, high temperature resistance	Brittleness, tendency to degrade, limited mechanical strength
Aerogels	Low thermal conductivity, high thermal resistance	High cost, mechanical fragility, production complexity
Foam Glass	Resistance to chemical environments, good mechanical strength	High density, limited flexibility, high production cost
Refractory Bricks	Durability, resistance to thermal cycling	High thermal conductivity, significant weight, structural sintering
Multi-layer Coatings	High adaptability, property regulation capability	Application difficulty, potential delamination under thermal cycling

In addition, in a number of industries, the chemical resistance of insulation materials is an important factor. In the operation of gas turbine engines, reactor installations, and high-temperature furnaces, materials are exposed to aggressive components such as oxygen, water vapor, and sulfur compounds [8-10].

Oxidation and chemical erosion can significantly reduce the service life of thermal insulation, requiring the creation of new materials with high chemical inertness. Thus, solving the problem of the reliability of thermal insulation materials requires a comprehensive approach, including optimizing their microstructure, using nanotechnology, developing multilayer structures, and applying modern computer modeling methods to predict operational characteristics.

III. Examples of practical application

The development of high-temperature thermal insulation materials is focused on achieving an optimal balance between low thermal conductivity, mechanical strength, and thermal stability. Modern technologies allow for the creation of materials with enhanced properties by utilizing nanostructures, multilayer systems, optimizing porosity, and phase transition processes (Table 3). Computer modeling also plays a key role in accelerating the development and predicting the performance characteristics of new thermal insulators.

To demonstrate the impact of various structural modifications on thermal conductivity, the graph below (Figure 1) shows the relationship between thermal conductivity and density for different classes of thermal insulation materials based on Table 4.

Based on Figure 1, it can be concluded that the lower the material density, the lower its thermal conductivity [11]. Aerogels and porous ceramics demonstrate the best performance; however, as the density decreases, mechanical strength diminishes, which requires additional solutions.

Approaches to Improving the Reliability of Thermal Insulation Materials

Modern technologies in thermal insulation not only focus on reducing thermal conductivity but also on enhancing the operational reliability of materials [13-17]. This is especially important in conditions of high temperatures, mechanical stresses and aggressive environments, such as in the aerospace industry, energy sector, and metallurgy.

Developers use combined methods that integrate various technologies to enhance thermal stability, mechanical strength, and durability (Table 5). For example, integrating aerogels with reinforcing fibers results in materials with low density but high strength, which is critical for aviation and space applications.

Table 3. *Modern methods for improving thermal insulation materials*

Method	Principle of Action	Achievable Results
Nanomaterials and aerogels	Reducing the size of structural elements to the nanoscale to suppress heat transfer.	Ultra-low thermal conductivity (~0.02 W/m·K), high thermal stability, reduced material density.
Multilayer systems	Combination of materials with different thermal conductivity and mechanical strength.	Improved balance between strength and insulation, high resistance to thermal cycling.
Porous ceramics and glass ceramics	Optimization of porosity to reduce thermal conductivity and increase thermal stability.	Reduced heat loss, resistance to oxidation and high temperatures.
Phase change materials (PCM)	Use of phase transition energy for temperature regulation.	Stabilization of temperature fluctuations, protection from overheating.
Computer modeling	Numerical methods (finite element method, molecular dynamics) for optimizing material structure and composition.	Reduced development costs, accurate prediction of properties.

Table 4. *Dependence of thermal conductivity on density for various insulation materials*

Material	Density (kg/m³)	Thermal Conductivity (W/m·K)
Silicon aerogel	150	0.02
Porous ceramics	500	0.1
Traditional refractories	1800	1.2
Metal ceramics	3000	3.5

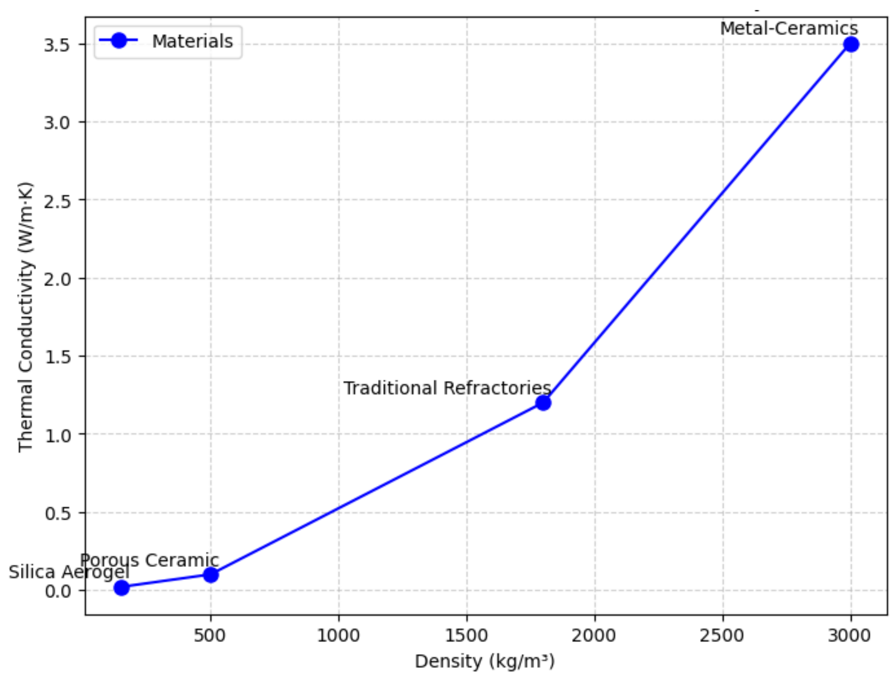

Figure 1.: *Effect of material structure on thermal conductivity*

Table 5. *Combined Methods for Improving the Reliability of Thermal Insulation Materials*

Combined Method	Application	Advantages
Aerogels + Reinforcing Fibers	Aviation, Space, Metallurgy	Resistance to mechanical stresses, reduced weight
Porous Ceramics + Protective Coatings	Gas Turbines, Industrial Furnaces	Enhanced resistance to oxidation and thermal cycles
Phase-Change Materials + Multi-Layered Structures	Energy Sector, Thermal Protection Systems	Effective temperature regulation, reduced heat loss

An example of combined technology application is the use of porous ceramics with protective coatings in gas turbines. In gas turbines, operating temperatures can exceed 1400°C, which requires the use of heat-resistant materials. Ordinary metal components cannot withstand such conditions without additional protection. One solution is the use of porous ceramics (based on ZrO_2 — zirconium dioxide) with a protective coating of Al_2O_3 (aluminum oxide). This results in reduced heat transfer to the turbine's metal parts, increasing the lifespan of the components.

To illustrate the effect of multi-layer thermal insulation coatings, let's consider a graph showing the temperature change across the thickness of the material (Figure 2).

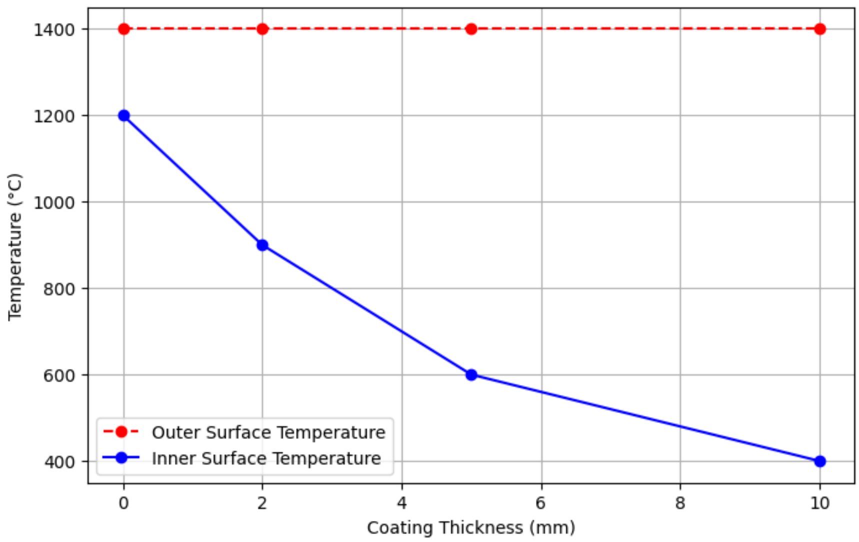

Figure 2.: *Influence of multilayer structures on the temperature distribution.*

From the graph shown in Figure 2, it can be concluded that adding a multilayer thermal insulation coating reduces the temperature on the inner surface by more than three times, significantly decreasing the thermal impact on the structure.

The future of thermal insulation materials lies in the development of innovative technologies aimed at improving their reliability and efficiency. One promising direction is the creation of self-healing coatings, which, due to oxide layers, can regenerate during oxidation, extending the insulation's lifespan. Research is also being conducted in the field of smart materials, which have the ability to change their properties depending on temperature, allowing them to adapt to various operating conditions.

Additionally, the active development of 3D printing for ceramic materials is enabling the design of complex thermal insulation structures with optimized geometries, improving their operational characteristics. These technologies open new horizons in the field of thermal protection, providing not only a reduction in heat losses but also increased resistance to thermal, mechanical, and chemical impacts. Future research will focus on creating adaptive and self-regulating materials that can function in extreme conditions without losing effectiveness.

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