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Introduction

Since May 1981, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has used aircraft to collect cosmic dust (CD) particles from Earth's stratosphere. Specially designed dust collectors are prepared for flight and processed after flight in an ultraclean (Class-100) laboratory constructed for this purpose at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston, Texas. Particles are individually retrieved from the collectors, examined and cataloged, and then made available to the scientific community for research. Cosmic dust thereby joins lunar samples and meteorites as an additional source of extraterrestrial materials for scientific study.

This catalog summarizes preliminary observations on particles retrieved from collection surfaces L2071, L2076, L2079, L2083, and W7068. These surfaces were flat plate collectors which were coated with silicone oil (dimethyl siloxane) and then flown aboard NASA ER-2 and WB-57F aircraft during a series of flights as follows:

L2071	50 hours of flight time over the Eastern coast of the USA, the Great Lakes, and Canada between June 30 and July 30, 2008
L2076	21.7 hours of flight time off the California coast between April 27 and May 9, 2009
L2079	16.4 hours of flight time off the Pacific coast and the Pacific Ocean between June 2 and 23, 2010
L2083	32 hours of flight time between May 6 and 23, 2010 from California to Texas, then off the Gulf of Mexico coast line to the Western coast of Florida and over the Gulf of Mexico, covering the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill
W7068	33 hours of flight time between November 1 and December 1, 1983

All of the collectors were installed in specially constructed wing pylons which ensured that the necessary level of cleanliness was maintained between periods of active sampling. During successive periods of high altitude (20 km) cruise, the collectors were exposed in the stratosphere by barometric controls and then retracted into sealed storage containers prior to descent.

Processing of Particles

Particle mounts designed for the JEOL 100CX scanning transmission electron microscope (STEM) are currently the standard receptacles for CD particles in the JSC laboratory. Each mount consists of a graphite frame (size ~3x6x24 mm) onto which a nucleopore filter (0.4 μm pore size) is attached. A conductive coat of carbon is vacuum evaporated onto the mount and then a microscopic reference pattern is "stenciled" onto the carbon-coated filter by vacuum evaporation of aluminum through an appropriately sized template. Particles are individually removed from collectors using glass-needle micromanipulators under a binocular stereo- microscope. Each particle is positioned on an aluminum-free area of a Freon-cleaned (Freon 113), carbon-coated filter and washed in place with hexane to remove silicone oil. Each mount is normally limited to 16 particles. All processing and storage of each particle is performed in a Class-100 clean room.

Preliminary Examination of Particles

Each rinsed particle is examined, before leaving the Class-100 clean room processing area, with a petrographic research microscope equipped with transmitted, reflected and oblique light illuminators. At a magnification of 500X, size, shape, transparency, color, and luster are determined and recorded for each particle.

After optical description, each mount (with uncoated particles) is examined by scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and X-ray energy-dispersive spectrometry (EDS). Secondary-electron imaging of each particle was performed with an ISI SEM at an accelerating voltage of 20 kV. Images are therefore of relatively low contrast and resolution due to deliberate avoidance of conventionally applied conductive coats (carbon or gold-palladium) which might interfere with later elemental analyses of particles. EDS data are collected with the same SEM. Using an accelerating voltage of 20 kV, each particle is raster scanned and its X-ray spectrum recorded over the 0-10 keV range by counting for 100 sec. No system (artifact) peaks of significance appear in the spectra.

Catalog Format

Each page in the main body of the catalog is devoted to one particle and consists of an SEM image, an EDS spectrum, and a brief summary of preliminary examination data obtained by optical microscopy. The unique identification number assigned to the particle appears at the top of the page. Sources of the descriptive data are as follows:

Size

Size (μm) is measured using the original SEM image and its known magnification factor. For an irregularly shaped particle, the minimum dimension in the plane of the field of view is located and determined; then a second (maximum) dimension is measured at a right angle to the first. For a spherical or equidimensional particle, only a single size is recorded.

Shape

Shape is generalized to be spherical (S), equidimensional (E), or irregular (I).

Transparency

Transparency is determined by optical microscopy to be transparent (T), translucent (TL), or opaque (O). Significant variations in transparency within a particle are annotated on the SEM image.

Color

Color is determined by optical microscopy using oblique (fiber optic, quartz halogen) illumination supplemented with normal reflected (tungsten-lamp) illumination.

Luster

Luster is determined by optical microscopy using reflected normal (tungsten lamp) illumination and supplemented with oblique (fiber optic, quartz halogen) illumination. Commonly applied descriptions, adopted from mineralogical usage, include Dull (D), Metallic (M), Submetallic (SM), Subvitreous (SV), and Vitreous (V). Lusters transitional between categories or difficult to identify are indicated accordingly (Dull/Submetallic, etc.).

Type

Type indicates a provisional first order identification of each particle based on its morphology (from SEM image), elemental composition (from EDS spectrum), and optical properties. We emphasize that, for catalog purposes, types are defined for their descriptive and curatorial utility, not as scientific classifications. These tentative categorizations, which reflect judgments based on the collective experience of the CDPET, should not be construed to be firm identifications and should not dissuade any investigator from requesting any given particle for detailed study and more complete identification. The precise identification of each particle in our inventory is beyond the scope and intent of our collection and Curation program. Indeed, the reliable identification and scientific classification of cosmic dust is one of many important research tasks that we hope this catalog will stimulate. We indicate particle "TYPE" only to aid the users of this catalog (especially those new to small particle analysis) in distinguishing possible cosmic dust particles from other particles which are invariably collected during stratospheric dust sampling.

In this catalog, particles are organized according to their type. Categories used in this catalog are defined as follows:

Cosmic

(C or C?)

Interplanetary dust (variety unspecified) or other extraterrestrial material. In the strict sense, "Cosmic Dust" refers only to those particles which have not been modified during passage from interplanetary space to Earth's stratosphere. In this catalog, though, particle type "Cosmic" is used to conveniently group together all particles which are judged to be of extraterrestrial origin, including those that have apparently experienced strong ablational heating or melting.

Type "Cosmic" particles are provisionally identified as those having one of the three following sets of attributes:

a) Irregular to spherical, opaque, dark-colored particles composed mostly of Fe with minor S and/or Ni.
b) Irregular to spherical, translucent to opaque, dark-colored particles containing various proportions of Mg, Si, and Fe with traces of S and/or Ni.
c) Irregular to faceted or blocky, transparent to translucent particles containing mostly Mg, Si, and Fe but with traces S and/or Ni.

Category (a) and (b) particles commonly display either complex, porous aggregate-type morphologies or distinctively spherical shapes and dull to metallic lusters which distinguish them from terrestrial minerals. Their EDS spectra are reminiscent of those exhibited by meteoritic Fe-NiS minerals, or combinations of Fe-Ni-S phases with olivine and/or pyroxene. Category (c) particles display morphologies and EDS spectra which suggest that they are fragments of olivine or pyroxene crystals, neither of which are significant components of stratospheric volcanic ash. Particles which do not fall easily into categories (a), (b), or (c) but which possess some of the same attributes may be classified here as "C?" or "Possibly Cosmic".

Artificial Terrestrial Contamination

(TCA)

Particles included in the "TCA" category are commonly irregular in shape (though a few may be spherical) and may be transparent, translucent, or opaque. Their EDS spectra commonly show Al, Fe, or Si as the principal peaks but with a variety of minor peaks including those of Cd, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Ni, Cu, or Zn, and at abundances that are frequently much greater than those expected in common minerals. However, such compositions are similar to those expected for certain metal alloys.

In some cases, a high intensity (relative to intensities of characteristic X-ray peaks) of continuum radiation occurs in the EDS spectrum, suggesting that low atomic number elements not detectable by the EDS (e.g., H, C, N, O) are abundant in the particle. Such "TCA" particles are tacitly inferred to by synthetic carbon based materials. (This category probably includes particles produced by or derived from aircraft operation or collector hardware, or possibly spacecraft debris. However, some of these particles are worthy of additional research and may represent true extraterrestrial "low-Z" material).

Natural Terrestrial Contamination

(TCN)

"TCN" particles may be transparent to opaque and may exhibit a variety of colors. However, they are commonly irregular in shape and distinctively rich in Si and Al with minor abundances of Na, K, Ca, or Fe. Some Fe-S particles are classified as TCN despite the fact that they may well be extraterrestrial. This action is due to the lack of conclusive investigations regarding these particular particles. Many particles containing only low-Z elements are also classified as TCN for the same reason.

Morphologies and EDS spectra of most "TCN" particles compare favorably with respective properties of silica polymorphs, feldspar, or silicic volcanic glass, three materials that are principal components of stratospheric volcanic ash. In addition, platy or porous aggregate-type particles of light color and Si, Al-rich composition may be silicic clay minerals, common phases in Earth's surface soils. Irregular, reddish Fe-rich particles may also be products of terrestrial rock weathering.

Recognition of these and other phases as "TCN" particles is based mostly on CDPET's collective mineralogical experience and comparison with reference samples. Less commonly, the "TCN" category may include distinctive particles with apparently non-random shapes which are rich in low atomic number elements (as inferred

	from their EDS spectra having high levels of continuum x radiation and relatively small peaks for characteristic X-rays). Those rare particles are distinguished from "TCA" particles by their unusual, organized morphologies and probably represent biological contaminants.
Aluminum or Aluminum Oxide Sphere (AOS)	An AOS particle is transparent, subvitreous, vitreous to metallic in luster, colorless to pale yellow, and at least approximately spherical. However, shape may range from nearly perfect sphericity to pronounced ellipticity and surface texture may range from very smooth to rough. Other spheres or irregularly shaped material may be attached to its surface. Al is the distinctively dominant (or only) peak in its EDS spectrum. A sphere displaying the attributes of an AOS except with major elements in addition to Al may be listed as "AOS?" or "?". Transparent Al rich particles of irregular shape would probably be listed as "TCA". Most AOS particles are products of solid fuel rocket exhausts.

Again, this system for provisional classification of particles is presented only as a first order attempt to distinguish particles which are probably extraterrestrial in origin from those which are probably contaminants. All particles will require careful research examination before they can be satisfactorily identified.

COMMENTS

Comments are included for particles with special features or histories. Any large "cluster" particles, which have broken apart on the collector, have small portions present in the catalog as different "sibling" grains; the comments reflect these relationships. For example, any particle with a cluster number designation in the comments field represents a much larger parent particle remaining on the collection plate, which is also available for allocation in part or in whole.

Sample Requests

Scientists desiring to perform detailed research on particles described in this catalog should apply in writing to:

Curator, Cosmic Dust Program
NASA Johnson Space Center
Code KT
Houston, Texas 77058 U.S.A.
Telephone: (281) 483-5128
FAX: (281) 483-5347

Sample requests should refer to specific particle identification numbers and should describe the research being proposed as well as the qualifications and facilities of the investigator making the request. Publication reprints are frequently useful in sample allocation considerations. Additionally, requests for particles not yet passed through preliminary examination will be considered if the requester can demonstrate a strong need for them. NASA will arrange for a review of the scientific merits of each request and will inform the requester of the results.

Approval of a sample request does not imply or include funding for the proposed research. Questions about NASA funding should be directed to:

Discipline Scientist, Cosmochemistry Program
NASA Headquarters
Code 3V71
Washington, DC 20546 U.S.A.

Although foreign scientists are welcome to request samples, NASA cannot provide funds to be spent outside the U.S.A. by citizens of other countries.

Acknowledgements

The ER-2 flight personnel at NASA Dryden Research Center performed the loading and unloading of the cosmic dust collectors on the ER-2 aircraft and provided flight log data and other critical assistance. The WB-57F flight personnel at NASA Johnson Space Center performed the loading and unloading of the cosmic dust collectors on their aircraft and provided flight log data and other critical assistance.