

# TOWARDS A GREEN PRODUCTION OF CHLORINE DIOXIDE BY CONVERGENT PAIRED ELECTROSYNTHESIS

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## ABSTRACT

As a proof-of-concept, we show that the clean, potent bleaching and disinfecting agent  $\text{ClO}_2$  can be produced simultaneously at both electrodes of an electrochemical cell by the anodic oxidation of  $\text{ClO}_2^-$  ions and the cathodic reduction of  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  ions in a convergent paired electrosynthesis. This novel approach may lead to important savings in the economy and energy of its production and byproduct reduction.

**KEYWORDS:** Chlorine dioxide, simultaneous electrosynthesis, paired electrosynthesis, paired electrochemical processes

## INTRODUCTION

In the vast majority of electrochemical processes, the desired reaction occurs at one of the electrodes, yet the complementary reaction is not productive. The products of the latter should not interfere with the starting materials, intermediates or products [1]. In fact, the current at the counter electrode is most frequently used to decompose the solvent. In some cases, this last reaction serves the purpose of producing a desired pH in the solution by decomposition of water (production of  $\text{H}^+$  or  $\text{OH}^-$  and the concomitant formation of  $\text{O}_2$  or  $\text{H}_2$ , respectively), although this may translate into energy waste. Several organic and inorganic synthetic processes have been designed to avoid such a waste [2-4]. Besides savings in the economy and energy, benefits of designing and using simultaneous processes also include a reduced use of fossil fuels for producing electricity combined with decrease in pollution. The production of useful substances also avoids the need for waste disposal.

Selected examples of simultaneous processes for environmentally oriented applications are summarized below:

a) Simultaneous removal of copper and chemical oxygen demand [5], as well as reduction of Cu, Ag or Cd ions and oxidation of  $\text{CN}^-$  ions [6]

b) Simultaneous production of high-purity  $\text{H}_2$  gas and solid S from  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  either through a direct or an indirect process [7-17]

c) Removal of  $\text{SO}_2$  by anodic oxidation and the simultaneous water reduction producing  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$  and  $\text{H}_2$ , respectively [18, 19]

d) Simultaneous production of  $\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in a flow reactor equipped with a proton exchange membrane. This avoids the need for two separate cells to produce these chemicals, whereby  $\text{O}_3$  and waste  $\text{H}_2$  would be produced in the first one, and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  and waste  $\text{O}_2$  in the second [20].

e) The production of  $\text{Fe}^{2+}$  at the anode and reduction of  $\text{O}_2$  at the cathode of a cell to produce  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ . A mixture of  $\text{Fe}^{2+}$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  is known as *Fenton's reagent* which yields  $\cdot\text{OH}$  radicals (known to be very powerful oxidizers) and  $\text{OH}^-$  ions. These ions produce iron hydroxides that form a three-dimensional gel capable of adsorbing a plethora of pollutants, thus producing a decontamination effect [21].

f) An interesting variation of the above process involves the use of boron-doped diamond electrodes whereby hydroxyl radicals can be generated simultaneously by anodic and cathodic processes in order to destroy persistent organics [22, 23].

With this background in mind, we tested the possibility of electrochemically producing a disinfecting agent in a simultaneous fashion. Useful chemical disinfectants have one or more of the following characteristics [24]:

- Deactivate microorganisms strongly, and are also relatively toxic to humans and animals
- Undergo active interaction (normally oxidation or addition) with organic matter and inorganic reducing agents
- Dissolve adequately in aqueous media (except the dihalogens due to their non-polar nature)
- Can penetrate surfaces and cell membranes
- Deodorize well or moderately well

Since chlorine dioxide ( $\text{ClO}_2$ ) has most of these characteristics, we tested it for the purpose of the present study. It can act as an extremely effective biocide, disinfectant and oxidizer under appropriate conditions, and its oxidizing and disinfecting properties remain essentially constant over a

wide pH range [25]. The paper and pulp industry utilize it as a bleaching agent and alternative to chlorine for water treatment because it does not undergo hydrolysis in water, but is active, even against some chlorine-resistant pathogens, and does not react with ammonia. In addition,  $\text{ClO}_2$  disinfection by-products (DBPs) are substantially fewer than those produced by chlorine. In fact, contrary to  $\text{Cl}_2$ , the  $\text{ClO}_2$  does not react with humic substances to generate toxic species, such as carcinogenic trihalomethane compounds during water disinfection processes.  $\text{ClO}_2$  is unable to react with unsaturated bonds in natural organic matter (NOM) on account of its different reaction mechanism (i.e.,  $\text{ClO}_2$  directly oxidizes organic matter by electrophilic abstraction rather than by the substitution and oxidation pathway of chlorine) [24]. It is also used for taste and odor reduction, algal growth control, as well as for iron and manganese removal by oxidizing them to produce insoluble compounds that can be eliminated easily from an aqueous medium.  $\text{ClO}_2$  has been used to disinfect public buildings in the US after terrorist attacks involving liberation of anthrax spores.

Many of the chemical reactions utilized in producing  $\text{ClO}_2$  have been discussed and illustrated in our publications elsewhere [24-27]. The main strategies involving electrochemical steps can be grouped as shown below.

## 1. Anodic processes:

### 1.1 Electrolysis of a $\text{Cl}^-$ solution to produce:

1.1.1  $\text{ClO}_2$  [28]

1.1.2  $\text{ClO}_2 + \text{Cl}_2$  [29, 30]

1.1.3  $\text{ClO}_3^-$ , followed by chemical comproportionation with  $\text{Cl}^-$  to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [31-35]

1.1.4  $\text{Cl}_2$ , followed by chemical comproportionation with  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [36-38]

1.1.5  $\text{Cl}_2$ , followed by chemical disproportionation with  $\text{ClO}^-$  to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [39]

1.1.6  $\text{Cl}_2$  that oxidizes  $\text{ClO}_2^-$  to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [40]

### 1.2 Electrolysis of a $\text{ClO}_2^-$ solution to produce $\text{ClO}_2$ using a cation exchange membrane (CEM) [41]

### 1.3 Electrolysis of $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ to produce:

1.3.1  $\text{H}^+$  ions that are fed through a CEM (cation exchange membrane) into an ion exchange compartment to acidify a  $\text{ClO}_2^-$  solution to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [42]

1.3.2  $\text{H}^+$  ions that are fed through a solid electrolyte to acidify a  $\text{ClO}_2^-$  solution to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [43]

1.3.3  $\text{H}^+$  ions that are fed through a CEM into a compartment containing  $\text{Cl}^-$ . This acidified solution is sent to a non-electrochemical step to comproportionate with  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  and produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [44].

## 2. Cathodic processes:

2.1 Electrolysis of a  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  solution to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [45, 46]. The  $\text{H}^+$  produced at the anode can be fed through a CEM into the catholyte to acidify the  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  solution in order to facilitate its reduction to  $\text{ClO}_2$ . The  $\text{Cl}_2$  byproduct is separated and re-fed into the cathode to provide more  $\text{Cl}^-$  for the reaction [47].

2.2 Electrolysis of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  to produce  $\text{H}_2$  that reacts with  $\text{Cl}_2$  to yield  $\text{HCl}$ . Then, this  $\text{HCl}$  comproportionates with  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  to produce  $\text{ClO}_2$  [48, 49].

For our present purpose, we built on the above concepts - namely that  $\text{ClO}_2$  can be obtained separately from the cathodic reduction of  $\text{Cl(V)}$  and the anodic oxidation of  $\text{Cl(III)}$ . Thus, the aim of the present study was to show a proof-of-concept that  $\text{ClO}_2$  can be produced simultaneously at both electrodes. This novel, unusual type of process is also termed *convergent paired electrosynthesis* [1]. To the best of our knowledge, this approach has not been attempted before.

## Experimental procedure

The strategy for the simultaneous electrochemical production of  $\text{ClO}_2$  firstly focused on finding the appropriate experimental conditions to oxidize  $\text{ClO}_2^-$  ions, to reduce  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  ions individually, and then to combine both processes. The individual production reactions were performed in a cell composed of two 10-ml vial compartments separated by a cation exchange membrane, CEM (see Fig. 1). The simultaneous production was carried out in a cell composed of two 10-ml glass beakers connected through an ion exchange bridge (as discussed below). The potential for each individual process was selected on the basis of earlier reports and standard potential tables [50, 51], and undesirable reactions (e.g., the reduction of  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  to  $\text{Cl}^-$ ) can thus be minimized [52]. Regulated potentials and currents were applied with an AMEL potentiostat/galvanostat (model 2049). All the potentials in the present study were referred to  $\text{Ag/AgCl}$ , and all experiments were run in duplicate or triplicate.

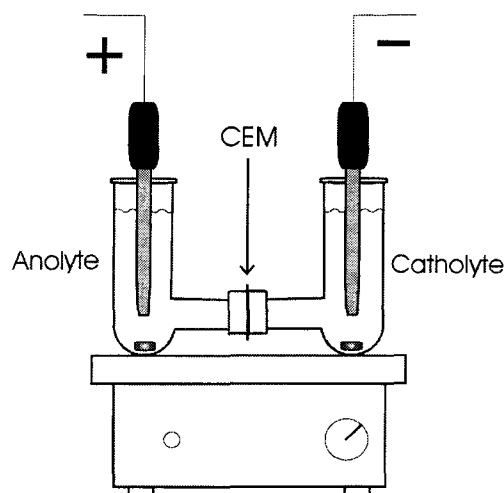


FIGURE 1 - Experimental set-up (reference electrode (not shown) can be placed at either side depending on the specific requirements).

## Reagents and Materials

$\text{NaCl}$  (J.T. Baker, analytical reagent),  $\text{NaClO}_2$  (Aldrich, 80% pure),  $\text{NaClO}_3$  (Sigma, analytical reagent), concentrated  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$  (J.T. Baker, 96% pure), cation exchange resin, CER (Rohm and Haas, Amberlite Iruno), cation exchange membrane, CEM (Nafion 417, Aldrich), anion exchange

membrane (The Electrosynthesis Co.), graphite rods (Steadler Mars HB, 2 mm in diameter, used as working and counter electrodes), Ag/AgCl reference electrode (BAS, Bioanalytical Systems), phosphate buffer pH 7 (Aldrich).

Specific conditions are indicated below:

**a) Individual process for the anodic production of ClO<sub>2</sub>**

*Anolyte:* 5 ml of 0.1 M NaClO<sub>2</sub>

*Catholyte:* 5 ml of a saturated NaCl solution

The reaction was performed under a potential of 0.7–0.9 V vs. Ag/AgCl, measured at the working electrode. Reaction times varied from 10 to 65 min. The solution was stirred at 5-min intervals.

**b) Individual process for the cathodic production of ClO<sub>2</sub>**

*Anolyte:* 5 ml of a saturated NaCl solution

*Catholyte:* 1.5 ml of 3 M NaClO<sub>3</sub>, 0.1 ml of 0.1 M NaCl, 2 ml of concentrated H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, and 3 ml of a 0.001–0.003 M ClO<sub>2</sub> solution, prepared chemically in advance by acidification of a ClO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> solution [25]

The reaction was performed under a potential of 0.5 V vs. Ag/AgCl, measured at the working electrode. Reaction times varied from 20 to 120 min.

**c) Simultaneous electrochemical production of ClO<sub>2</sub>**

*Anolyte:* 6 ml of 3 M NaClO<sub>2</sub>, 2 ml of a saturated phosphate buffer (pH = 7).

*Catholyte:* 1.5 mL of 3 M NaClO<sub>3</sub>, 0.1 ml of 0.1 M NaCl, 4.4 ml of a 0.001–0.003 M ClO<sub>2</sub> solution, prepared chemically in advance by acidification of a ClO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> solution (see above), 2 ml of concentrated H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>.

The reaction was performed under a potential of 0.5 V vs. Ag/AgCl, measured at the cathode. Reaction times varied between 60–120 min. Two 10-ml glass beakers were used (instead of the 10-ml vials employed in the individual ClO<sub>2</sub> preparations). They were connected through a 7 cm tall, 0.4 mm ID glass U-tube packed with Amberlite CER, and they had both ends covered with anion exchange membranes (held in place by small rubber bands). This U-tube/ion exchange system was designed to prevent migration of H<sup>+</sup> from the inherently acidic catholyte towards the anode. Such H<sup>+</sup> ions are known to facilitate the generation of HClO<sub>2</sub>, which can then decompose to produce ClO<sub>2</sub>. This situation would produce erroneous (i.e., high) yields compared to those obtained from a purely electrochemical production, and was thus avoided. Furthermore, to prevent the pH in the anolyte from being drastically affected by this or other unexpected phenomena, we added a small amount of phosphate buffer as described above.

**Analytical technique**

The quantification of aqueous ClO<sub>2</sub> may be a complicated task since other possible chlorinated species present (e.g., Cl<sub>2</sub>, ClO<sup>-</sup>, ClO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>, and ClO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>) can mask some of its analytically useful properties (e.g., redox potential, oxidizing ability, and optical absorbance) [53]. Therefore, we selected the standard method of amperometric titration [54]. Here, a fixed potential is applied between two electrodes

and the response current is monitored as a function of the concentration of specific redox species. Successive titrations permit the selective analysis of each chlorinated species. In spite of its time-consuming characteristics, the high selectiveness of the method warrants its use for the present application. Due to the possible co-production of chlorine gas, the analytes of interest for our present purposes were Cl<sub>2</sub> and ClO<sub>2</sub> (see below).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the parameters for the individual productions as described above, we obtained the following ClO<sub>2</sub> chemical yields after 1 h of reaction. These are calculated on the basis of the amount of ClO<sub>2</sub> achieved as compared to the initial amount of reagent at the anode or cathode (i.e., ClO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> or ClO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, respectively; a) anodic: 12% (at 0.73 V), 9% (at 0.90 V), and b) cathodic: 0.3%). Once we succeeded in producing ClO<sub>2</sub> with each individual process, we proceeded to test the simultaneous process. The ClO<sub>2</sub> yields thus obtained are given in Table 1. Also listed are the results of a blank test performed in the absence of an applied potential so as to evaluate a possible parasitic parallel chemical pathway for the production of ClO<sub>2</sub> that could alter the electrochemical results. These results clearly indicate that ClO<sub>2</sub> was electrochemically obtained at both sides of the electrochemical cell.

**TABLE 1 - Experimental results of the simultaneous process (chemical yield is calculated as moles of product/moles of reagent x 100).**

Medium	g/L (average)	mmol (average)	Chemical yield (%)
<b>Anolyte</b>			
Cl <sub>2</sub>			
60 min	0.04	0.0045	0.03
100 min	11	1.3	7.1
120 min	0.2	0.02	0.1
ClO <sub>2</sub>			
60 min	5	0.6	3.3
100 min	9	1.0	5.8
120 min	11	1.3	7.0
<b>Catholyte</b>			
Cl <sub>2</sub>			
60 min	0.2	0.02	0.45
100 min	0.09	0.008	0.2
120 min	0.02	0.002	0.05
ClO <sub>2</sub>			
60 min	0.3	0.03	0.6
100 min	0.45	0.04	0.95
120 min	0.5	0.05	1.1
<b>Blank test</b>			
Cl <sub>2</sub>			
60 min	0.3	0.04	0.8
100 min	0.06	0.007	0.15
120 min	0.06	0.006	0.1
ClO <sub>2</sub>			
60 min	0.04	0.004	0.1
100 min	0.08	0.01	0.2
120 min	0.03	0.003	0.07

The yield of the blank test, albeit measurable, was not of significance so as to mask the electrochemical yields. Hydrogen ions are inherently produced at the anode and - as discussed earlier - are known to produce chlorous acid ( $\text{HClO}_2$ ) that can disproportionate to yield  $\text{ClO}_2$ . Further efforts would be required in order to separate this contribution from the pure electron-transfer phenomenon.

We have initiated experiments to take advantage of LeChatelier's principle by removing the  $\text{ClO}_2$  product from the final solution with the aid of an inert gas stream. Preliminary results using this approach in a commercial filter press-type cell are promising.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have demonstrated for the first time that  $\text{ClO}_2$  can be produced simultaneously at the anode and cathode of an electrochemical cell by the respective oxidation or reduction of  $\text{ClO}_2^-$  and  $\text{ClO}_3^-$  ions in a simultaneous, convergent paired electrosynthesis. Even though small yields were obtained under our experimental conditions (ca. 8%), higher yields can undoubtedly be achieved by parameter optimization (e.g., temperature, time, volume per unit area, electrode materials and separation, and flow/mass transfer conditions).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding from CONACYT and the Universidad Iberoamericana is gratefully acknowledged as well as helpful discussions with Ruben Vasquez-Medrano and Arturo Fre-goso-Infante. Elizabeth Garcia-Pintor and Samuel Macias provided experimental assistance. This paper is dedicated to Dr. Michael Tausch (University of Wuppertal, Germany) on occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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Received: October 14, 2008

Revised: February 17, 2009

Accepted: April 24, 2009

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