Covalent Organic Frameworks as Exceptional Hydrogen Storage Materials

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Metal-organic frameworks (MOFs)1,2 have emerged as promising hydrogen storage materials. The flexibility with which MOFs can be designed and their structural diversity have led to materials with ultrahigh porosity and exceptional H2 uptake capacities.2a,b Recently, covalent organic frameworks (COFs) have been synthesized and structurally characterized.3 Here the organic building units are held together by strong covalent bonds (C-C, C-O, B-O, and Si-C) rather than metal ions to produce materials with high porosity (3472 m2/g for COF-102 and 4210 m2/g for COF-103) and low crystal density (0.17 g/cm3 for COF-108).3d These characteristics make COFs excellent candidates for storage of H2. Here, we report theoretical studies on prototypical COFs that predict up to 10% excess H2 storage capacity in COF-105 at 77 K. We find excellent agreement with experimental H2 loading data for COF-5, the one case for which we have been able to measure H2 storage capacity under conditions in which we are confident to attain optimal activation (full evacuation of the pores). COF-1 and -5 are crystalline two-dimensional structures, while COF-102, -103, -105, and -108 have three-dimensional structures (Figure 1).3a,d

To predict the H2 binding isotherm for these COFs as a function of temperature and pressure, we carried out grand canonical Monte Carlo (GCMC) simulations using the experimental COF structures from refs 3a and 3d. The force fields (FF) used in the GCMC simulation to describe the interactions between H2 and COFs were derived from ab initio second-order Møller–Plesset (MP2) calculations using quadruple-ζ QZVPP basis set and basis set superposition error correction. These ab initio parameters are expected to be quite accurate [see Supporting Information (SI)].

Figure 2 shows the predicted H2 uptake at 77 K, which are compared to experimental values for COF-5. Here the gravimetric excess is calculated as the total amount of gas contained in the pores minus the amount of gas that would be present in the pores in the absence of gas–solid intermolecular forces.4 For COF-5 the theory (which was done prior to experiment) is in excellent agreement with experiment (3.3 vs 3.4 wt % at 50 bar), indicating that the theory can be used to identify the most promising materials for subsequent experiments. It is important to appreciate that meaningful comparison of theoretical and experimental results for COFs can only be done when measurements of H2 uptake are done on samples known to have been optimally activated as we have confirmed for COF-5. Finding the right conditions for activation and complete removal of guests is a painstaking and time-consuming process. Because the theory predicts excellent performance for COF-105 and -108, we plan to focus such experiments on these systems.

We predict that the hydrogen storage capacity in the three-dimensional COFs (COF-102, -103, -105, and -108) is 2.5–3 times higher than that in two-dimensional COFs (COF-1 and -5) because of higher surface area and free volume (see Table S2). The highest predicted excess H2 uptakes at 77 K are 10.0 wt % at 80 bar for COF-105, and 10.0 wt % at 100 bar for COF-108. These values dramatically outperform representative MOFs whose H2 uptakes (7.0 wt % for MOF-1771c and 7.1 wt % for MOF-51j) were the highest measured. Thus 3-D COFs are most promising new candidates in the quest for practical H2 storage materials.

Specifically, we predict that COF-1 has a maximum H2 uptake of 3.8 wt % at 70 bar, COF-5 has 3.4 wt % at 80 bar, COF-102 has 8.8 wt % at 80 bar, and COF-103 has 9.1 wt % at 100 bar, all at 77 K. For a pressure of 0.1 bar COF-1 shows the highest excess H2 uptake (1.7 wt % of H2 at 0.1 bar) which compares to 0.1 wt % for COF-5, 0.5 wt % for COF-102, 0.6 wt % for COF-103, 0.6 wt % for COF-105, and 0.9 wt % for COF-108 under the same conditions.

From the total adsorption isotherms at 77 K, we find COF-108 has the highest H2 uptake primarily because of its highest free volume, with a maximum value of 18.9 wt % at 100 bar. This is followed by COF-105 (18.3 wt %), COF-103 (11.3 wt %), COF-

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Figure 1. Molecular structures of building units (a) and crystal structures of COFs (b–g). Hydrogen atoms are omitted for clarity. Carbon, boron, oxygen, and silicon atoms are represented as gray, orange, red, and blue spheres, respectively.

Figure 2. H2 adsorption isotherms for COFs in gravimetric unit (wt %) at 77 K. Excess H2 is on the left and total H2 is on the right. Filled and open symbols represent simulation and experimental results, respectively.

10.1021/ja803247y CCC: $40.75 © 2008 American Chemical Society
After submission of this paper other reports of simulations\(^7\) for gas uptake in COFs have appeared on line. These studies used empirical force fields, but, ref 7a found an \( \text{H}_2 \) uptake of 10.5 wt % in COF-105 at 55 bar and 77 K, which compares well to the values we find of 9.4 wt % at 50 bar and 9.7 wt % at 60 bar (at 77 K) using our QM based FF.

Our GCMC simulations of COFs based on FF from accurate ab initio QM calculations predict \( \text{H}_2 \) adsorption isotherms for COFs that agree well with the one known experimental case, validating the computational methodology. Using this theory, we predict that the best COF systems for hydrogen storage are COF-105 and COF-108, each of which lead to a maximum excess \( \text{H}_2 \) uptakes of 10.0 wt % at 77 K. This is highest value reported for associative \( \text{H}_2 \) storage of any material. In terms of total \( \text{H}_2 \) uptake, the best is COF-108 with 18.9 wt % at 77 K. The best for volumetric uptake is COF-102, which can store 40.4 g/L of \( \text{H}_2 \). These results suggest COF systems as most promising materials for hydrogen storage. These results suggest that to further increase the maximum \( \text{H}_2 \) uptake in COFs one should increase both their surface area and free volume. To obtain high \( \text{H}_2 \) uptake at 300 K, we suggest doping with electropositive elements (such as Li, Na, K, and maybe Cu, Ag, and Au\(^\text{20}\)) to increase \( \text{H}_2 \) binding energy.

Acknowledgment. Partial support was provided by DOE (DE-FG01-04ER04042 to W.A.G., DE-FG02-06ER15813 to O.M.Y.). The computer facilities of the Materials and Process Simulation Center were supported by ONR-DURIP and ARO-DURIP.

Supporting Information Available: Tables of the \( \text{H}_2 \) adsorption (total and excess) isotherms for COFs at 77 K and \( \text{H}_2 \) adsorption sites in COFs at 77 K is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

References


(6) It is noticeable that adsorption sites for COF-5 are only “edge” of organic links due to their AA stacking sequence as like b-BN, while COF-1 and 3D-COFs can use face moieties of organic links, which could lead to a shape similar to that of the isotherm.