CARBON MONOXIDE AND CARBON DIOXIDE IN CLOSED-TYPE POWER TRANSFORMERS

SUMMARY

Gases carbon monoxide (CO) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) are formed in transformers in larger quantities as a product of degradation of cellulose, than by oxidation of oil.

In transformers with closed-type breathing system, without any indication of failure or fault, it was observed that the concentrations of CO are higher than the typical values according to IEC 60599 and CO₂/CO ratios lower than 3 frequently have been found.

This paper presents results of laboratory investigation of some influence parameters on formation gases CO and CO₂.

The typical values for CO as well scheme concerning their ratios need to be revised in standard IEC 60599. The criteria need to be established separately for closed type transformers.

Key words: carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, cellulose, mineral oil

1. INTRODUCTION

Thermal and electrical overstresses in power transformers decompose insulating materials oil and paper and generate gases, which dissolve in the oil. Characteristic gases are: hydrogen, methane, ethane, ethylene, acetylene, carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂). They are determined by the standardized laboratory method, gas chromatography analysis of the gases dissolved in oil [1]. Based on their quantity and ratio, the condition of transformer insulation system is estimated.

The gases carbon monoxide (CO) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) are formed in large amounts as a product of cellulose degradation processes, depending strongly on temperature, water and oxygen contents. The polymeric chains of cellulotic (paper) insulation are thermally less stable than the hydrocarbon bonds in oil, and are therefore decomposed at lower temperature.

Apart from that, carbon gases are formed in a transformer in lesser amounts as a product of oil degradation. In some cases carbon gases can be formed as a degradation product of some other organic materials (paints, rubber, plastic materials, glues etc.).

In transformers with closed-type breathing system oxygen content in oil is lower than in air saturated oil. It means that at the same temperature more carbon monoxide will be produced and
concentration will grow faster than in oil in open-breathing system transformers, because the membrane
does not allow the release of produced gases to air.

According to IEC interpretation [2] of DGA, the assumed initial transformer failure is diagnosed
primarily on the basis of the given hydrogen to hydrocarbon ratios. CO and CO₂ are auxiliary indicators
for the condition of cellulose insulation, and the CO₂/CO ratios between 3 and 10 are considered to be
typical for normal cellulose degradation.

IEC 60599, Table A2 specifies the range of 90% typical CO and CO₂ concentration values
observed in power transformers, from about 25 electrical networks worldwide and including more than
20000 transformers. Typical values apply to both open-breathing and hermetically sealed (close-type)
transformers. Typical concentrations should be primarily considered as initial guidelines for diagnosis of
transformer condition when no other experience is available.

It is recommended that the 90% typical values should be used only for orientation, in the case if
there are no data of one’s own.

Permanently increased concentrations of CO and CO₂, although not accompanied by increased
contents of other gaseous products of oil degradation, can cause concern to transformer users, because
they interpret such data solely as a result of accelerated cellulose degradation – what means a shortening
of transformer life.

The condition of 26 closed-type power transformers installed in Croatia, with 1-10 years of service
without any registered stress or fault inception ("healthy transformers") was investigated.

Laboratory tests were carried out to determine the impact of materials (oil and paper) as well
content of residual air on the development of CO and CO₂ gases in closed-type power transformers.

2. FORMATION OF CO AND CO₂

Gases are the first products of the insulating oil and paper materials (cellulose) degradation in normal
aging of insulating system as well as in rapid degradation due to increased electrical and thermal stresses.

Mineral insulating oils are made of a blend of different hydrocarbon molecules containing CH₃, CH₂ and
CH chemical groups linked together by carbon-carbon molecular bonds. Scission of some of the C-H and C-C
bonds may occur as a result of electrical and thermal faults, with the formation of small unstable fragments, in
radical or ionic forms which recombine, through complex reactions, into gas molecules such as hydrogen (H₂),
methane (CH₄), ethane (C₂H₆), ethylene (C₂H₄), acetylene (C₂H₂), carbon monoxide (CO) and carbon dioxide
(CO₂). Formed gases dissolve in oil and distribute throughout the oil volume by circulation and diffusion.

Solid insulation in electrical equipment is largely made of cellulose in the form of electrotechnical
paper (Kraft paper) and pressboard. The polymeric chains of solid cellulosic insulation contains a large
number of anhydroglucose rings, and weak C-O molecular bonds and glycosidic bonds which are
thermally less stable than the hydrocarbon bonds in mineral oil, and which decompose at lower
temperatures. Significant polymer chain scission occurs at temperatures higher than 105 °C, with
complete decomposition and carbonization above 300 °C. Carbon monoxide and dioxide as well as water
are the final products of cellulose degradation. Furanic compounds are intermediary products of cellulose
degradation, they can be analysed according to IEC 61198 [3] and used to confirm cellulose degradation.

In individual power transformers, CO and CO₂ concentrations can be permanently or temporarily
increased depending on various possible parameters:

- influence of design (air-breathing or closed-type transformers, mass ratio oil/cellulose,
winding design, cooling system),
- influence of mineral oil and solid insulation quality,
- influence of processing (bad removal of moisture and oxygen in factory, moisture ingress at surface
of oil immersed cellulose during assembling of bushings, absorption of air during shipment and bad
removal during evacuation in the field due to "oil corks" which do not dissolve at low temperatures),
- influence of transformer loading (operating temperatures)

It is important to take into account all these variables when determining the origin and cause of
content increase of these gases.
The rate of CO and CO₂ generation is exponentially dependent on temperature, and directly on volume of the material.

### 3. CLOSED-TYPE POWER TRANSFORMERS INSTALLED IN CROATIA

Analysis of the condition of 26 closed-type power transformers installed in Croatia was made and presented separately for 5 closed-type generator transformers and 21 closed-type transmission transformers.

#### 3.1. Generator transformers

These 5 generator transformers are located in Hydro Plants, in service from 5 to 10 years, and normally run at 100 % load except when the power station is shut down. The results of the latest dissolved gas analysis for closed-type generator transformers are shown in the table I.

#### Graphical presentation of the CO gas formation in closed-type generator transformers during their normal operation is given in figure 1.
In all five generator transformers, already after 1-4 years of operation, CO gas concentration is significantly higher than the range of normal values given in IEC 60599 Tbl. A2 (400 - 600 µL/L) and the normal values according the IEEE Std C57.104 Tbl. 1 (350 µL/L).

Graphical presentation of the CO₂ gas formation in closed-type generator transformers during their normal operation is given in figure 2.

![Graphical presentation of CO₂ gas formation in closed-type generator transformers](image)

Figure 2 - Formation of CO₂ in closed-type generator transformers

At all generator transformers the value of CO₂ concentration is within the normal range according to IEC 60599 Tbl. A2 (3800 -14 000 µL/L), while the normal value of CO₂ by the IEEE Std C57.104 Tbl. 1 (2500 µL/L) is exceeded after approximately 5 years of normal operation.

The measured water content in the oil for all generator transformers is lower than 10 mg/kg.

3.2. Closed-type transmission transformers

These 21 closed-type transmission transformers are in operation from 1-10 years and normally loaded. The range of characteristic gas values, µL/L (ppm) and ratio CO₂/CO for transmission power transformers are shown in the table II.

Table II - Range of gas values, µL/L (ppm) and ratio CO₂/CO for transmission power transformers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAS, µL/L (ppm)</th>
<th>Rate of transformer/ Type of cooling / number of units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hydrogen, H₂</td>
<td>5-20/20 MVA 110 kV ONAN/ONAF 7 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methane, CH₄</td>
<td>2-8/40 MVA 110 kV ONAF, ONAN 6 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acetylene, C₂H₂</td>
<td>0/63 MVA 110 kV ONAF 2 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethylene, C₂H₄</td>
<td>0/100 MVA 110 kV ONAF 1 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethane, C₂H₆</td>
<td>0/≥300 MVA 420 kV OFAF 5 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>148-1197/337-2853/20 MVA 110 kV ONAN/ONAF 7 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO₂</td>
<td>761-1457/1274-4652/40 MVA 110 kV ONAF 6 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxygen</td>
<td>7117-19444/337-2853/100 MVA 110 kV ONAF 2 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrogen</td>
<td>31850-63613/77117-19444/≥300 MVA 420 kV OFAF 5 units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The measured water content in the oil for all transmission transformers is lower than 10 mg/kg.

According to IEC 60599, the ratio CO₂/CO < 3 indicates a possible accelerated degradation of cellulose. In closed-type transformers, due to lack of oxygen, the thermodynamic balance is shifted towards generation of CO, so a lower ratio CO₂/CO is frequently found.

For 15 closed-type transmission power transformers (with OLTC) the ratio CO₂/CO is lower than 3, and 1 of the 21 transformers has ratio higher than 10. Only 5 of them typical CO₂/CO ratios are between 3 and 10 which corresponds to normal degradation of cellulose.

Accelerated degradation of cellulose can be confirmed by increase of furan content in oil. Furan content in oil was analysed in all the closed-type transmission transformers. It was found to be low, what means that there are no indications of accelerated cellulose degradation.

4. LABORATORY TESTINGS

Laboratory tests were carried out to investigate the impact of the main isolation materials oil and paper, as well as the residual air in oil, on formation of CO and CO₂ gases.

4.1. Influence of oil and paper on CO and CO₂ formation

Kraft paper and pressboard were subjected to thermal degradation testing in an oven at 115 °C. All samples were tested separately, in degassed inhibited mineral oil (total gas content between 1.5% and 2.0%). Residual oxygen content was 4000-4500 µL/L, CO < 5 µL/L and CO₂ 65 – 75 µL/L. Kraft paper and pressboard to mineral oil ratio was 1 g in 50 mL of oil. Tests were performed in gas tight syringes.

As expected, thermal degradation of mineral oil and Kraft paper resulted in significant increase of CO concentration.

Gassing of mineral oil at higher temperatures is well known and it has been shown that different mineral oils can generate different amounts of CO and CO₂ [5].

CO generation from mineral oil and Kraft paper was linear through the testing period and it was more intensive from Kraft paper.

CO generation from pressboard was significant after 48 hours of testing, but it did not increase during testing period. After 360 hours, the pressboard had minor influence on CO generation. Influence of mineral oil, Kraft paper and pressboard on CO generation is presented in figure 3.

![Figure 3 - CO generation from mineral oil, Kraft paper and pressboard at 115 °C](image)

Kraft paper, as well as pressboard, had the similar impact on the generation of CO₂. The impact of mineral oil is insignificant, as shown in figure 4. The CO₂ gas amount generated from Pressboard decreased after 360 hours of testing (possible gas leaking from syringes).
4.2. Influence of residual air on CO and CO₂ formation

The impact of oil degassing on CO and CO₂ formation was investigated. New degassed mineral oils with different total content of residual air in the oil (0.5%, 1.5% and 2.0%), were subjected to thermal degradation testing in a oven at 70°C. The development of emissions of CO and CO₂, after 168 and 336 hours of test, was monitored.

As presented in figure 5, oil with more residual air (2.0% TGC) had higher impact on concentrations of CO and CO₂ than oil with less residual air (0.5% TGC).

It is important to degas the oil and transformer during the manufacturing process of transformer to the lowest possible amount of residual gas. The total content of gas in oil in closed-type transformers should be kept low during the operation, and if it is higher than 5% it is necessary to degas the oil, to prevent the increased development of CO.
5. CONCLUSION

Carbon monoxide and dioxide as well as water are the final products of cellulose degradation. Except cellulose, and in lesser extent mineral oil, the auxiliary materials (paints, rubber, plastic materials, glues etc.) also have the impact on CO and CO₂ generation.

Laboratory testing show the influence of residual air (total gas content) in oil on formation of CO and CO₂. Better degassing assures lower concentrations of these two gases. In transformers with closed-type breathing system oxygen content in oil is lower than in air saturated oil, so the equilibrium is shifted towards CO production. Besides that, the membrane does not allow the release of produced gases to air, so increase of the gases during operation is higher.

Because of presented facts it can be concluded that in normal operating closed-type transformers, CO can be present in greater concentration and CO₂ in some lower concentration than in transformers with open breathing system (lower ratio CO₂/CO).

It is important to distinguish the normal values for CO and CO₂ concentration for closed-type and open breathing system transformers. The typical values for CO as well scheme concerning their ratios need to be revised in standard IEC 60599. The criteria need to be established separately for closed type transformers as particular category of equipment.

REFERENCES