

Independent report: Graphene and its use in nuclear decommissioning

Background

Graphene is a relatively new material, first isolated from bulk graphite in 2004 (Figure 1). Since then, developments in graphene based technology have been rapid in a number of sectors. However, developments within the nuclear sector have been slow. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) has identified graphene technology as a potentially promising area that could offer some benefits to the NDA in delivering its mission. The NDA is aware of some of the novel properties of graphene and its compounds that could enable the use of these new materials in a wide range of applications. This project aims to raise awareness across the NDA estate, regarding the properties and potential opportunities for using graphene and related materials in nuclear decommissioning

Summary

An initial review of the chemical and physical properties of graphene was undertaken and resulted in the production of the publishable report "Summary of Graphene (and Related Compounds) Chemical and Physical Properties" [1]. This report was intended to be used as a reference point for the NDA, and the NDA estate for graphene related information.

Following this, a broad review of international graphene related information was undertaken. This involved researching a number of nuclear and non-nuclear graphene projects being undertaken in Europe, Asia and the United States. The review identified over 800 graphene projects and/or publications, which were then assessed to determine whether they could be relevant to the nuclear decommissioning industry.

In parallel to the graphene review, the NDA Research and Development (R&D) technical baseline document [] was reviewed to identify the NDA's R&D requirements. Once these requirements were fully understood, an activity was undertaken to assess the requirements against the graphene research identified in the previous stage.

The key opportunities identified for using graphene [3], included:

- Advanced Materials – Graphene doped advanced polymers, cements, ceramics and glasses could be utilised in the conditioning/immobilisation of nuclear wastes. Composite conditioning materials could provide improved mechanical, thermal and leaching characteristics. Composites could also potentially be used in construction of modern devices or buildings/facilities to offer improved mechanical properties.
- Radionuclide Remediation and Adsorbents – Graphene oxide can adsorb nuclides and hence be used in aqueous effluent treatment for the removal

of radionuclides. These materials could be further functionalised to incorporate ligands to improve selectivity;

- Membranes – Graphene oxides ability to separate hydrogen isotopes could potentially be used to selectively remove tritium from waste streams. Moreover, graphene oxide membranes could be applied to filters and other parts of effluent systems to minimise radionuclide build-up and fouling. This in turn could prolong the life of effluent systems and reduce overall secondary waste arisings. Also, future waste containers could potentially incorporate graphene based membranes to minimise release of radionuclides;
- Sensors – Molecular detection sensors for utilisation in numerous roles, such as monitoring gaseous species that could indicate corrosion, or inform on the humidity and environmental status of storage facilities;
- Radiation Detectors – Graphene based field effect transistors have been developed for radiation detection. These components could support the development of small, inexpensive and low-powered devices that offer exceptional sensitivity to X-rays, gamma-rays, and neutrons;
- Gas Storage – Projects focusing on the development of novel carbon structures for use in hydrogen cells are being undertaken and may have applications in capturing tritium. This could be applicable to waste treatment to selectively remove radioactive gases. Alternatively, graphene based structures could be incorporated into waste packages to minimise the release of gaseous radionuclides;
- Energy and Energy Storage – Projects focusing on the use of graphene within charge collecting materials in batteries and other advanced energy storage devices may be applicable in the development of devices intended for remote operations. Improved battery/power performance may benefit remotely operated vehicles and portable detection devices used in decommissioning and remediation applications.

To provide a balanced assessment, the potential limitations in graphene's use were also assessed and included: cost, scale-up manufacture, environmental safety impacts, regulatory concerns, lack of standardisation and radiation tolerance. However, the significance of these limitations will depend on the application graphene is intended for and whether further research is able to resolve the limitations.

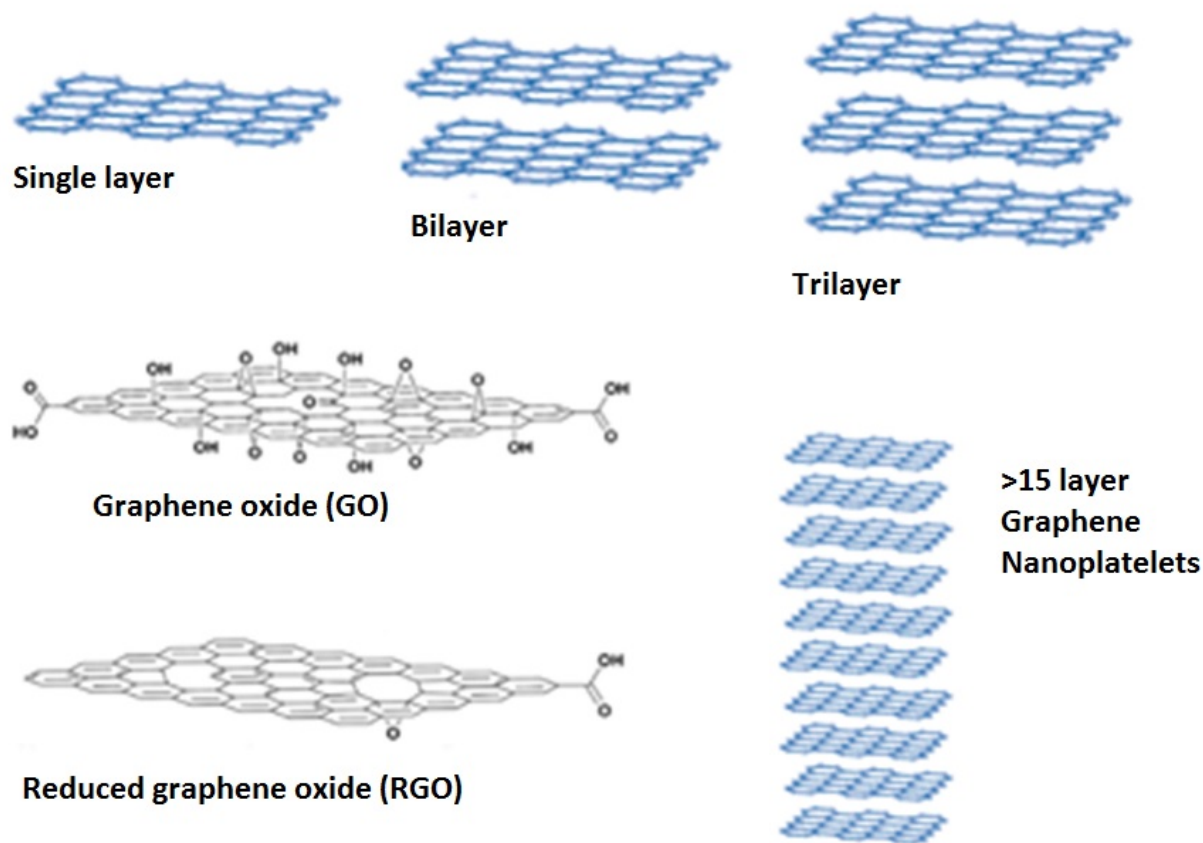


Figure 1: Common types of graphene materials

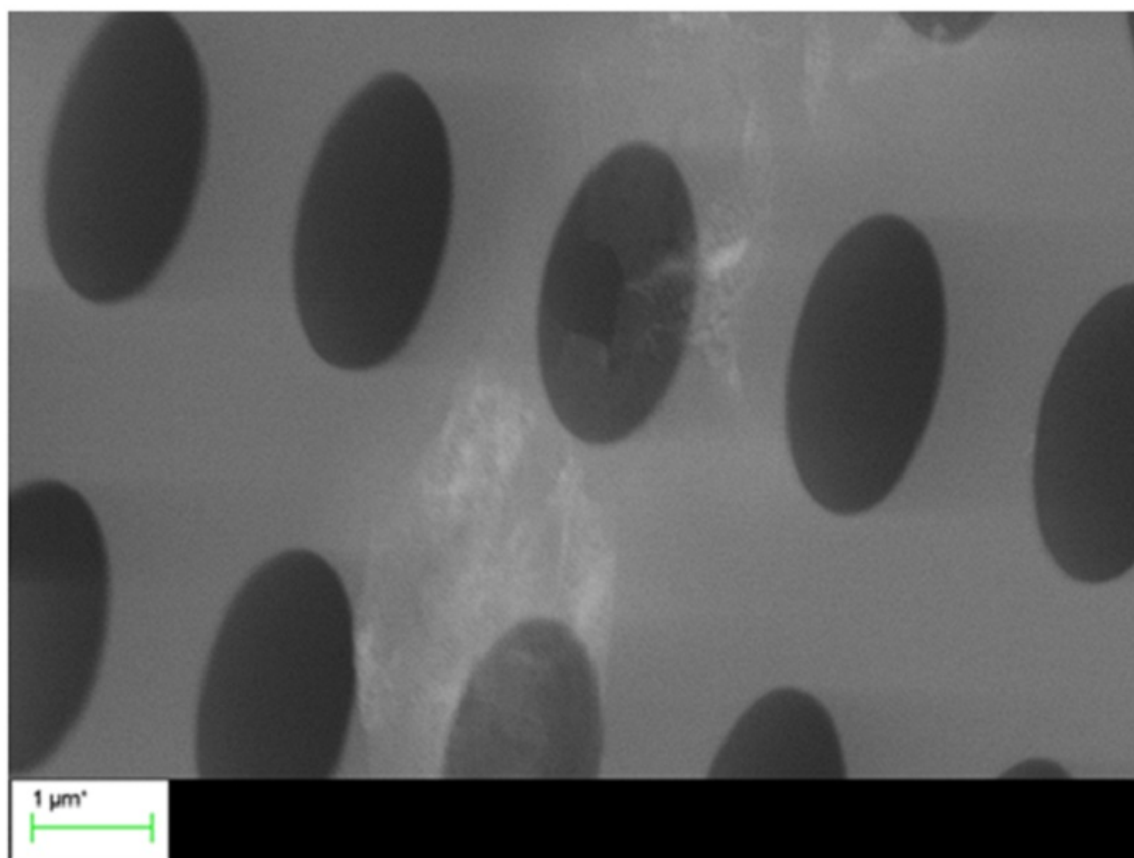


Figure 2: Scanning electron microscopy image of a graphene membrane transferred on a Si₃N₄ [Courtesy of Professor Sergey Kubatkin, Chalmers University]

1. P. Davies, A. Tzalenchuk, P. Wiper and S. Walton, Summary of Graphene (and Related Compounds) Chemical and Physical Properties, NS4145-500-001, Issue 1, November 2016
 2. NDA, Research & Development Technical Baseline, Issue 1, October 2016
 3. P. Davies, S. Walton, A. Tzalenchuk, and P. Wiper, The Potential Applications of Graphene (and Related Compounds) Relevant to the NDA Decommissioning Needs, NS4145-500-001, Issue 1, March 2017
-

Notice: DL2 3TJ, Lloyds Animal Feeds (Piercebridge) Limited: environmental permit issued

The Environment Agency publish permits that they issue under the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED).

This decision includes the permit and decision document for:

- Operator name: Lloyds Animal Feeds (Piercebridge) Limited
 - Installation name: Piercebridge Mill
 - Permit number: EPR/YP3433DB/A001
-

Notice: LN11 9RA, Egdon Resources U.K. Limited: environmental permit issued

The Environment Agency publish oil and gas mining waste and radioactive substances activity permits.

This decision includes the permits and decision documents for:

Mining waste

- Operator name: Egdon Resources U.K. Limited
- Facility name: Biscathorpe Wellsite
- Permit number: EPR/DB3104UH/A001

Radioactive substances activity

- Operator name: Egdon Resources U.K. Limited
- Facility name: Biscathorpe Wellsite

- Permit number: EPR/NB3398DP/A001
-

[Press release: Environment Agency minded to approve application at Horse Hill](#)

The application is for a bespoke environmental permit to drill a new well, drill a side track to the existing well and to carry out flow testing. Horse Hill Developments Limited have also applied for a Standard Rules Permit to store oil on site. In deciding whether or not to issue the permits, the Environment Agency will take into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements.

Before the Environment Agency grants the bespoke environmental permit there will be a further consultation period, which closes on 4 August 2017, to allow people to comment on the application.

[Further information on the bespoke application, a copy of our draft decision document and details of how to comment.](#)

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

An environmental permit sets out stringent conditions that a site must adhere to. We will not issue an environmental permit for a site if we consider that activities taking place will cause significant pollution to the environment or harm to human health.

Although we are minded to approve the application for the bespoke permit we are still in the determination process and a final decision has not yet been made. We want to hear from the public and understand peoples' views on the application. Everybody has the chance to see what the bespoke permit may look like and to raise any additional concerns before we make any final decision.

- [How you can participate in decisions on applications for environmental permits](#)
 - [Information on the environmental permits and permissions you need for onshore oil and gas operations in England](#)
-

News story: Joint Nature Conservation Committee Chair reappointed

Professor Chris Gilligan will join the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) from 1 June 2017 for three years.

All appointments to the JNCC are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. The appointment complies with the Governance Code on Public Appointments. There is a requirement for appointees' political activity, if significant) to be declared. Prof Gilligan has not declared any significant political activity during the past five years.

The JNCC was established in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) as a non-departmental public body. The JNCC advises the UK Government and Devolved Administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on UK-wide and international nature conservation. Remuneration is £40,000 per annum based on a time commitment of 104 days.

Professor Gilligan is Professor of Mathematical Biology at the University of Cambridge, where he recently completed a four year term as Head, School of Biological Sciences. He has chaired a number of complex bodies and recently chaired Defra's Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Taskforce. He is currently a Trustee of the Natural History Museum.

Professor Gilligan's current research is focused on establishing and testing a theoretical framework that identifies the mechanisms that control invasion, persistence, scaling and variability of epidemics within changing agricultural and natural landscapes.