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## Standard Guide for Drying Behavior of Spent Nuclear Fuel<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Scope

1.1 This guide discusses three steps in preparing spent nuclear fuel (SNF) for placement in a sealed dry storage system: (1) evaluating the needs for drying the SNF after removal from a water storage pool and prior to placement in dry storage, (2) drying the SNF, and (3) demonstrating that adequate dryness has been achieved.

1.1.1 The guide addresses drying methods and their limitations when applied to the drying of SNF that has been stored in water pools. The guide discusses sources and forms of water that may remain in the SNF, the container, or both after the drying process has been completed. It also discusses the important and potential effects of the drying process and any residual water on fuel integrity and container materials during the dry storage period. The effects of residual water are discussed mechanistically as a function of the container thermal and radiological environment to provide guidance on situations that may require extraordinary drying methods, specialized handling, or other treatments.

1.1.2 The basic issues in drying are: (1) to determine how dry the SNF must be in order to prevent problems with fuel retrievability, container pressurization, or container corrosion during storage, handling, and transfer, and (2) to demonstrate that adequate dryness has been achieved. Achieving adequate dryness may be straightforward for undamaged commercial fuel but complex for any SNF where cladding damage has occurred prior to or during placement and storage at the spent fuel pools. Challenges in achieving adequate dryness may also result from the presence of sludge, CRUD, and any other hydrated compounds. These may be transferred with the SNF to the storage container and may hold water and resist drying.

1.1.3 Units are given in both SI and non-SI units as is industry standard. In some cases, mathematical equivalents are given in parentheses.

1.2 *This standard only discusses SNF drying and does not purport to address all of the handling and safety concerns, if any, associated with the drying process(es). It is the responsi-*

*bility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and to meet regulatory requirements prior to and during use of the standard.*

### 2. Referenced Documents

#### 2.1 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

C859 Terminology Relating to Nuclear Materials

C1174 Practice for Prediction of the Long-Term Behavior of Materials, Including Waste Forms, Used in Engineered Barrier Systems (EBS) for Geological Disposal of High-Level Radioactive Waste

C1562 Guide for Evaluation of Materials Used in Extended Service of Interim Spent Nuclear Fuel Dry Storage Systems

#### 2.2 ANSI/ANS Standards:<sup>3</sup>

ANSI/ANS 8.1-1998 Nuclear Criticality Safety in Operations with Fissionable Materials Outside Reactors

ANSI/ANS-8.7-1998 Nuclear Criticality Safety in the Storage of Fissile Materials

ANSI/ANS-57.9 American National Standard Design Criteria for Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (Dry Type)

2.3 *Government Documents:*<sup>4</sup>The U.S. government documents listed in 2.3 or referenced in this standard guide are included as examples of local regulations and regulatory guidance that, depending on the location of the dry storage site, may be applicable. Users of this standard should adhere to the applicable regulatory documents and regulations and should consider applicable regulatory guidance.

Title 10 on Energy, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 60, 10 CFR 60, U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Disposal of High Level radioactive Wastes in Geologic Repositories

Title 10 on Energy, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 63, 10 CFR 63, U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Disposal of

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

<sup>3</sup> Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

<sup>4</sup> The Code of Federal Regulations is available at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionCfr.action?collectionCode=CFR>. SFST-ISG-1 is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/isg/spent-fuel.html>.

High-Level Radioactive Wastes in Geologic Repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada

Title 10 on Energy, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 71, 10 CFR 71, U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Packaging and Transport of Radioactive Materials

Title 10 on Energy, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 72, 10 CFR 72, U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Licensing Requirements for the Independent Storage of Spent Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Radioactive Waste

Title 10 on Energy, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 961, 10 CFR 961 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Standard Contract for Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel and/or High-Level Radioactive Waste SFST-IST-1, Damaged Fuel

### 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of terms used in this guide but not defined herein, refer to Terminology C859 or Practice C1174.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard*: Refer to SFST-ISG-1 for additional definition details.

3.2.1 *breached spent fuel rod, or failed fuel, n*—spent fuel rod with cladding defects that permit the release of gas from the interior of the fuel rod. A breached spent fuel rod may also have cladding defects sufficiently large to permit the release of fuel particulate. A breach may be limited to a pinhole leak or hairline crack, or may be a gross breach.

3.2.2 *CRUD, n*—in nuclear waste management, deposits on fuel surfaces from corrosion products that circulate in the reactor coolant. Compositions of the deposits reflect materials exposed to coolant and activation products formed during irradiation. Term was originally an acronym for “Chalk River Unidentified Deposits.”

3.2.3 *damaged SNF, n*—in nuclear waste management, any fuel rod of fuel assembly that cannot fulfill its fuel-specific or system-related functions.

3.2.4 *disposal, n*—in nuclear waste management, the emplacement of radioactive materials and wastes in a geologic repository with the intent of leaving them there permanently.

3.2.5 *getter, n*—in nuclear waste management, a material (typically a solid) used to chemically react with certain gases (for example, H<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O vapor) to form a solid compound of low vapor pressure.

3.2.5.1 *Discussion*—Some fuel rod designs include an internal getter to remove residual hydrogen/moisture from the internal rod atmosphere.

3.2.6 *grossly breached spent fuel rod, n*—a subset of breached rods. A breach in spent fuel cladding that is larger than a pinhole leak or a hairline crack and that may permit fuel particulate release.

3.2.7 *independent spent fuel storage installation (ISFSI), n*—a system designed and constructed for the interim storage of spent nuclear fuel and other radioactive materials associated with spent fuel storage.

3.2.8 *intact SNF, n*—any fuel that can fulfill all fuel-specific and system-related functions, and that is not breached. Note

that all intact SNF is undamaged, but not all undamaged SNF is intact, since in most situations, breached spent fuel rods that are not grossly breached will be considered undamaged.

3.2.9 *packaging, or SNF storage container, n*—in nuclear waste management, an assembly of components used to ensure compliance with the applicable requirements for independent storage of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste or for transportation of radioactive materials.

3.2.10 *pinhole leaks or hairline cracks, n*—minor cladding defects that will not permit significant release of particulate matter from the spent fuel rod, and therefore present a minimal concern during fuel handling and retrieval operations. (See discussion of gross defects for size concerns.)

3.2.11 *repository, geologic repository, n*—in nuclear waste management, a disposal site, a permanent location for radioactive wastes.

3.2.12 *spent nuclear fuel (SNF), n*—nuclear fuel that has been irradiated in a nuclear reactor and contains fission products, activation products, actinides, and unreacted fissionable fuel.

3.2.13 *sludge, n*—in nuclear waste management, a slurry or sediment containing nuclear waste materials; a residue, generally radioactive, that has usually been formed from processing operations, corrosion, or other similar reactions.

3.2.14 *undamaged SNF, n*—SNF that can meet all fuel-specific and system-related functions. Undamaged fuel may be breached. Fuel assemblies classified as undamaged SNF may have assembly defects.

3.2.15 *waste package, n*—in nuclear waste management, the waste form and any containers, shielding, packing, and other materials immediately surrounding an individual waste container.

3.2.16 *water, n*—in drying of spent nuclear fuel, refers to the various forms of H<sub>2</sub>O present in the fuel storage container. It is the total amount of moisture (specified by weight, volume, or number of moles) present in a container as a combination of vapor, free or unbound liquid H<sub>2</sub>O, physisorbed H<sub>2</sub>O, chemisorbed H<sub>2</sub>O, and ice. The following specific terms for water are used in this document:

3.2.16.1 *bound water, n*—adsorbed surface layers of water and chemisorbed water.

3.2.16.2 *chemisorbed water, n*—water that is bound to other species by forces whose energy levels approximate those of a chemical bond.

3.2.16.3 *physisorbed water (adsorbed water), n*—water that is physically bound (as an adsorbate, by weak forces) to internal or external surfaces of solid material.

3.2.16.4 *trapped water, n*—unbound water that is physically trapped or contained by surrounding matrix, blocked vent pores, cavities, or by the nearby formations of solids that prevent or slow the escape of water from the waste package.

3.2.16.5 *unbound/free water, n*—water, in the solid, liquid, or vapor state, that is not physically or chemically bound to another species.

#### 4. Significance and Use

4.1 Drying of the SNF and fuel cavity of the SNF container and its internals is needed to prepare for sealed dry storage, transportation, or permanent disposal at a repository. This guide provides technical information for use in determining the forms of water that need to be considered when choosing a drying process. This guide provides information to aid in (a) selecting a drying system, (b) selecting a drying method, and (c) demonstrating that adequate dryness was achieved.

4.2 The considerations affecting drying processes include:

4.2.1 Water remaining on and in commercial, research, and production reactor spent nuclear fuels after removal from wet storage may become an issue when the fuel is sealed in a dry storage system or transport cask. The movement to a dry storage environment typically results in an increase in fuel temperature, which may be sufficient to cause the release of water from the fuel. The water release coupled with the temperature increase in a sealed container may result in container pressurization, corrosion of fuel or assembly structures, or both, that could affect retrieval of the fuel, and container corrosion.

4.2.2 Removal of the water associated with the SNF may be accomplished by a variety of technologies including heating, imposing a vacuum over the system, flushing the system with dry gases, and combinations of these and other similar processes.

4.2.3 Water removal processes are time, temperature, and pressure-dependent. Residual water in some form(s) should be anticipated.

4.2.4 Drying processes may not readily remove the water that was retained in porous materials, capillaries, sludge, CRUD, and as thin wetted surface films. Water trapped within damaged SNF may be especially difficult to remove.

4.2.5 Drying processes may be even less successful in removing bound water from the SNF and associated materials because removal of bound water will only occur when the threshold energy required to break the specific water-material bonds is applied to the system. For spent nuclear fuel this threshold energy may come from the combination of thermal input from decay heat and forced gas flow and from the ionizing radiation itself.

4.2.6 The adequacy of a drying procedure may be evaluated by measuring the response of the system after the drying operation is completed. For example, if a vacuum drying technology is used for water removal, a specific vacuum could be applied to the system, the vacuum pumps turned off, and the time dependence of pressure rebound measured. The rebound response could then be associated with the residual water, especially unbound water, in the system.

4.2.7 Residual water associated with the SNF, CRUD, and sludge inside a sealed package may become available to react with the internal environment, the fuel, and the package materials under dry storage conditions.

4.2.8 Thermal gradients within the container evolve with time, and as a result water vapor will tend to migrate to the cooler portions of the package. Water may condense in these areas. Condensed water will tend to migrate to the physically lower positions under gravity such as the container bottom.

4.2.9 Radiolytic decomposition of hydrated and other water-containing compounds may release moisture, oxygen and hydrogen to the container.

4.2.10 Extended time at temperature, coupled with the presence of ionizing radiation, may provide the energy necessary to release bound or trapped water to the container.

#### 5. Evaluating the Drying Approach

5.1 The proper approach to drying SNF is fuel and system-specific, and thus will depend on fuel type, fuel condition, fuel basket design, and associated materials (such as the neutron absorber in the basket). There is no single correct or even preferred approach. Intact commercial fuel may be dried by one approach, SNF with breached fuel rods by another approach, and research and production reactor fuels by yet another approach. Furthermore, the variables that must be considered in selecting a drying approach for one fuel type may differ significantly from those that are important for another fuel type. For example, hydrogen/hydride behavior should be considered in fuel systems clad with zirconium-based alloys but is not important to aluminum or stainless steel clad SNF. The proper drying approach will minimize the potential for damage of the fuel during the drying operation and subsequent dry storage. Reference (1) provides additional information regarding vacuum drying.

5.1.1 Some forms of fuel degradation, such as cladding pinholes or cracks, may form before or during the dry storage period without violating design or licensing requirements. However, damage such as small cladding cracks or pinholes formed during the dry storage period could cause the fuel to be reclassified as failed fuel for disposal. Fuel is classified at the time of loading, so the drying process should be chosen to balance the risks caused by the presence of water in the container and the risks incurred by removing the water.

5.2 Thermal cycling during drying of commercial light water reactor SNF may affect the hydride morphology in the cladding. Heating the SNF during a drying operation may dissolve precipitated hydrides, and subsequent cooling may result in hydride reprecipitation. The hydride orientation and therefore the properties of the fuel cladding may be affected by the dissolution-reprecipitation process.

5.3 Research reactor and other non-commercial SNF that is not treated or reprocessed may be stored in sealed canisters within regulated dry storage systems. Such dry storage canisters may be expected to contain the SNF through interim storage, transport, and repository packaging. The objectives of drying processes used on this fuel are virtually identical to the drying objectives for commercial fuels and are to:

5.3.1 Preclude geometric reconfiguration of the packaged fuel,

5.3.2 Prevent internal components damage to the canister from over-pressurization or corrosion, and,

5.3.3 Minimize hydrogen generation and material corrosion that present problems during storage, transport, or repository handling operations.

5.4 The selection of the drying methodology for treating fuel for interim dry storage or disposition in a geologic repository will involve many factors including the following:

5.4.1 Irradiation and storage history (for example, the decay heat output and the amount of hydrogen in the cladding),

5.4.2 Nature and degree of fuel damage (for example, quantity of breached rods or rods containing water),

5.4.3 Forms of water in the container (for example, absorbed water)

5.4.4 Degree to which self-heating may contribute to the drying process,

5.4.5 Impact of residual water on corrosion and degradation of the fuel and container material during drying, storage, and disposal,

5.4.6 Mechanisms of water interaction with the fuel and container components, and

5.4.7 Maximum allowable amount of water remaining in the container after drying is completed.

**5.5 Categorization of SNF and Defects for Drying Evaluation**—This standard guide pertains to fuels that contain any cladding breach, such as hairline cracks or holes that may permit water ingress into a fuel element or the release of fuel materials from the fuel element. Such breaches may cause the fuel to be categorized as failed or damaged. Failed fuel may also be categorized as in 10 CFR 961, which separates failed commercial light water reactor fuel into three classes:

- Class F-1 failed fuel has visually observable failure or damage
- Class F-2 failed fuel has “radioactive leakage”
- Class F-3 failed fuel is badly damaged and requires “encapsulation”

Drying treatments may depend on the fuel condition. Each category of damaged or breached fuel rods could require handling/treatment operations that differ from those used for intact fuel. It is important when considering a drying process to be clear about the class of breached fuel rods in the fuels being dried. A given fuel element could be regraded as intact for the purposes of storage or transport performance but as having breached fuel rods for the purposes of geologic repository disposal. The classifications differ because the performance of damaged fuel is typically more predictable over dry storage periods than over geologic time. SNF may be characterized as damaged or undamaged or failed through the use of one or more of the following processes: review of operating records (core history and handling), visual examinations, ultrasonic testing, wet or dry sipping, and eddy current testing.

Fuel type and the presence and type of defects are essential inputs for evaluating drying operations. In order to organize the information in this guide, selected varieties of spent fuels have been placed into categories with a letter designation for consideration. Similarly, the types of defects to be considered are identified with a number designation. The identities of these categories are provided below.

**5.5.1 SNF Group**—The following groups are used to distinguish between SNF types:

- A Commercial oxide fuel in Zr-alloy cladding
- B Carbide or oxide particle fuel with SiC coating (in graphite)
- C Oxide fuel in stainless steel cladding
- D U-ZrH fuel in Zr-alloy or stainless steel cladding
- E Oxide fuel in Al-alloy cladding
- F UAl<sub>x</sub> fuel or U-ZrH fuel in Al-alloy cladding
- G Metal fuel in Zr-alloy, Al-alloy or stainless steel cladding
- H Carbide or oxide particle fuel with only pyrolytic carbon coating
- I Unclad metal or oxide fuel

**5.5.2 Fuel Conditions**—The following Fuel Conditions are designated:

- 1 Fully intact cladding with no known penetrations
- 2 Cladding with small pinholes or hairline cracks that may allow entry/exit of moisture
- 3 Fuel with visible or suspected sludge or coatings that may hold significant water
- 4 Cladding with known large cracks or holes that will allow free entry/exit of moisture
- 5 Fuel with major cladding damage from previous fuel oxidation, exposure to water, or both
- 6 Rubblized fuel that has little or no intact cladding, high surface area, and previous exposure to water (Includes fuel rods or elements that have been sectioned for analysis or study)

**5.6 Forms of Residual Water in SNF Containers**—After drying, residual water in a variety of forms may remain on the fuel, fuel cladding, or internal components of the container. These forms include unbound liquid water, ice formed during drying, physisorbed water, and chemisorbed water.

**5.6.1 Unbound Water**—Unbound water may be present in containers of SNF transferred from a water storage pool. Water retention depends on the condition of the fuel, the container design, and the drying process. Sources of unbound water after vacuum drying may include trapped water and water in capillaries.

**5.6.2 Ice**—Ice formation can be a cause for water retention in SNF containers that have undergone vacuum drying. In vacuum drying the gas pressure is reduced below the vapor pressure of the water to evaporate the liquid phase. The ratio of the heat of vaporization of water (539.6 cal/g) to the specific heat (1 cal/g K) corresponds to a large temperature change; consequently, liquid water may undergo a considerable temperature drop during drying. Since the heat of fusion of water (79.7 cal/g) is relatively small, the energy removed from the liquid by evaporation can cause the remaining water to freeze. Measures may be necessary to prevent the water from freezing in the container or in the vacuum lines. Drying procedures with thermal homogenization steps such as a helium backfill or use of other hot inert gases usually prevent ice formation. It is also important to route vacuum lines to avoid low spots. Throttling of vacuum pumps to slow the rate of vacuum drying may also prevent ice formation. (See [Annex A2](#).)

**5.6.3 Physisorbed Water**—Physisorbed water is found on all external surfaces of the SNF (for example, cladding and assembly hardware) and the container internals (for example container walls, baskets, etc.). Typical water concentrations are about 0.03 to 0.05 g/m<sup>2</sup> per monolayer. The binding force holding the water to the surface is weak and the water layer can be removed at relatively low temperatures (<50°C) by vacuum drying or forced gas dehydration. Cracks, open pores, and corrosion products may hinder evaporation and hold physisorbed water by virtue of additional surfaces. Corrosion products on exposed U plate fuel are notable for retaining physisorbed water.

**5.6.4 Chemisorbed Water**—Chemisorbed water may exist in a hydroxide or hydrate in the native oxides or corrosion products on the fuel, cladding, or container materials. The dehydration of hydroxides or hydrates occurs by the reformation of water molecules, which are released when the thermal energy or energy from ionizing radiation equals or exceeds the bonding energy of the hydrated compound. A number of

uranium oxide hydrates may be formed as a result of uranium or uranium oxide contact with water. Chemisorbed water may also be found in cladding and container materials. Aluminum metal in water forms a number of surface hydroxides such as  $\text{Al}(\text{OH})_3$  (or  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) which begin dehydrating near  $100^\circ\text{C}$  to the form  $\text{AlO}(\text{OH})$  (or  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) which is stable to  $>340^\circ\text{C}$ . Zirconium cladding may also form the hydrated oxides  $\text{ZrO}(\text{OH})_2$  or  $\text{Zr}(\text{OH})_4$  during irradiation. The water content of hydrated zirconium oxides is small, and the water will not be released below  $500^\circ\text{C}$  (2). See Annex A1 for other hydroxides and hydrates formed from water contact with typical fuel and container materials.

### 5.7 Sources of Water:

5.7.1 *General Service Environment for Water Reactor Fuel*—Water surrounds most SNF assemblies until they are placed in a dry storage environment. The fuel is irradiated in water, stored in water pools, and transferred to dry storage containers while the fuel and the container are both under water. The water may cling to the surfaces it contacts, seep into cracks and crevices, and pool in low places in the storage container. Locations for water that should be considered include:

- (1) Regions beneath the assemblies,
- (2) Dash pots in pressurized water reactor guide tubes,
- (3) Water rods in boiling water reactor fuel, and
- (4) Crevices in grid spacers, baskets, and assemblies.
- (5) Neutron absorber.

Additionally, potential impacts of the drying operation itself should be considered. For example, drying operations could cause blistering and delamination in the neutron absorber if water is trapped in the structures.

### 5.7.2 CRUD and Sludge:

5.7.2.1 *CRUD on Commercial SNF*—CRUD deposits on commercial SNF may include corrosion products from reactor coolant system materials or other materials/chemicals from the system inventory. The amount and type of the deposits are dependent on the reactor type, operating fuel duty, and water chemistry. Characteristic CRUD area density for pressurized water reactor fuel is  $<5 \text{ mg/cm}^2$  with an inhomogeneous distribution over the fuel surface, typically deposited on the upper/hotter portions of the fuel rod as a layer averaging less than  $25 \mu\text{m}$  (0.001 in.) but potentially reaching  $100 \mu\text{m}$  (0.004 in.) in thickness (3). CRUD deposits on boiling water reactor fuel average 25 to  $76 \mu\text{m}$  (0.001 to 0.003 in.) in thickness and may reach a thickness of  $250 \mu\text{m}$  (0.010 in.) (3). Depending on CRUD type and fuel pool chemistry, CRUD levels may be reduced during pool storage. The contribution of CRUD to the water content on the surface of commercial SNF is typically small.

5.7.2.2 *Sludge in SNF Operations*—Sludge may accumulate in SNF water storage systems from two primary sources: (1) corrosion of the SNF and other materials in the storage pool, (2) dirt and dust entering from loading doors, ventilating systems, etc. Both sources of sludge are similar in that they may hold significant quantities of water and could get transferred with the fuel into dry storage containers unless the fuel is appropriately cleaned. Sludge is probably not a concern for fuels in SNF Groups A–D that have Fuel Conditions 1 or 2 and

are from well-controlled wet storage systems. However, the quantity and characteristics of the sludge carryover and its impact on drying should be evaluated for fuels in SNF Groups A–D that have Fuel Conditions 3–6 and for SNF Groups E–I, especially those with Fuel Conditions 3–6. Analyses of sludge accumulated from wet storage of damaged metallic uranium fuels (4) showed that a variety of aluminum, iron, and uranium hydrous oxides made up over 90 % of the dry weight of the sludge.

### 5.7.3 Water Associated with Specific Fuel Types:

5.7.3.1 *Commercial SNF, SNF Group A, Fuel Conditions 1–4*—Light water reactor fuel without any through-cladding defects (Fuel Condition 1) will not allow water inside fuel rods. However, even very small pinholes or cracks (Fuel Condition 2) may result in water penetrating the cladding during reactor operations and pool storage, and being held in the fuel-to-cladding gap and the rod plenum after drying. Similar water retention may also occur for Fuel Condition 4. Pressurized water reactor fuel in Fuel Condition 3 may also retain water in guide tubes if (a) the dashpot drain hole is blocked or partially blocked with sludge or CRUD, (b) if the discharge point is elevated above the tube bottom or (c) in some designs if there are spaces such as in the tube-in-tube design. Adequate removal of the residual water will depend primarily on the temperature–pressure conditions at the specific location within the fuel assembly. For example, the water associated with the thimble tube dashpots is at the bottom of the assembly which in most drying scenarios is the cooler region during the drying process. A typical light water reactor rod in Fuel Condition 4 is characterized by a combination of primary and secondary defects. The primary defect is the original penetration, and secondary defects may be located at some distance from it. The secondary defects are normally attributed to local hydride blistering (5). The defects are holes of different sizes that allow water to penetrate and fill the free volume of the rod. The size and location of the defects may retard water removal.

5.7.3.2 *Clad Metallic U Fuels (SNF Groups F and G), Fuel Conditions 1–4*—Clad metallic U and most U allow fuels will not allow water inside intact (Fuel Condition 1) cladding. Vacuum drying of such fuels has been performed for intact Zircaloy-clad fuels from Hanford K-basin (6). Drying tests on unirradiated mock-ups have been performed to demonstrate drying capability for Magnox elements from Sella field water basins as a contingency for dry storage (7). However, water ingress through even the smallest pinholes (Fuel Condition 2 or 4) may have a noticeable effect on metallic U fuel. Even at basin temperatures, water may oxidize U metal sufficiently to rupture or “unzip” fuel cladding (8). If the oxidation processes cause the internal environment to become sufficiently anoxic, hydrogen will be produced, and the U metal will react to form  $\text{UH}_3$ . Exposed surfaces of  $\text{UH}_3$  may react vigorously with residual moisture or air (9).

5.7.3.3 *Mixed Carbide Fuels, SNF Groups B and H*—Mixed carbide fuels encapsulated in pyrolytic carbon, graphite, or both, are designed for gas-cooled reactors and should not be exposed to water. If such fuels become soaked with water for any reason (dry storage mishaps, incursion of water into dry wells, etc.), drying may be quite difficult to absorption of water

in the pores of the graphite or carbon. An aqueous solution can penetrate the graphite matrix of an HTGR fuel element through its open pore system, and under normal conditions a spherical element takes up about 8 mL of solution (10).

5.7.3.4 *Miscellaneous Research and Production Reactor Fuels, SNF Groups C, D, and E*—A wide variety of research reactor fuels have been irradiated. The response of these fuels to water will depend on the fuel composition, cladding alloy, and cladding integrity. Research reactor fuels generally have low decay heat output, which may dictate the use of specialized heating processes to achieve adequate dryness. Dry storage temperatures and radiation levels may be so low that water radiolysis and secondary oxidation reactions are insignificant. However, many of the research and production reactor fuels have been damaged during storage and, therefore, may be difficult to dry. Each group of these should be evaluated separately because of the wide variations in type and condition.

5.8 *SNF Exposure Environments*—The dryness required for a given fuel is often related to the duration of exposure and the radiation, temperature, and water chemistry to which it was exposed during reactor operation and storage. Specific fuels typically have an environmental exposure history that provides input into probable drying requirements. The drying process should reliably establish water vapor pressures levels such that the remaining water is insufficient to cause detrimental chemical reactions during dry storage.

#### 5.8.1 *Commercial Reactor Fuels:*

5.8.1.1 Commercial nuclear fuel is irradiated in a water environment at elevated temperature and pressure. If a breach of the cladding develops while fuel is in-core, the internal gas will be released and water may enter into the fuel rod. Upon removal from the reactor, the fuel is stored in a water basin with the water temperature typically less than 40°C. The water pressure acting on the fuel depends on the depth of the fuel in the basin water. Both the reactor and basin typically have tightly controlled water chemistries that may prevent or at least minimize fuel cladding damage.

5.8.1.2 The heat generated by the SNF during storage drops off predictably as the fission products decay. After a suitable cooling time that is dependent on the fuel burnup, decay heat output, system design, and applicable regulations (11), the SNF may be moved out of basin storage (wet storage) and placed into a dry storage system.

5.8.1.3 The thermal performance of a cask or package can be modeled to determine the expected temperature profile as a function of time (12). Design or regulatory requirements may establish short-term temperature limits for maintaining cladding integrity impacted by creep or by embrittlement, for example. The limits may depend on burnup, cladding design and fuel pressurization. Limits from 250 to 570°C (13) have been suggested. The evaluation of the limits should consider how cladding integrity is affected by hydride dissolution, reprecipitation, and reorientation, creep, delayed, hydride cracking, and thermal annealing of radiation damage. The impact of the hydrogen concentration and morphology on the cladding properties, such as the ductility transition temperature, will affect the temperature limits.

#### 5.8.2 *Research and Non-commercial Reactor Fuels:*

5.8.2.1 Research reactors have irradiation temperatures and pressures that vary widely but are typically lower than those of a commercial power plant. Fuel lifetimes are also quite variable in production and test reactors. Research reactors may operate with little or no change in fuels for many years, and the fuel may be exposed to stagnant water or a humid air environment between operating cycles. Production reactors may provide the opposite extreme as refueling scheduled to provide the optimum isotope abundances, and the total fuel irradiation time may be less than a year.

5.8.2.2 Conditions necessary for successful dry storage of research reactor SNF will depend on the total irradiation, fuel type, and decay heat output. The elimination of reprocessing in the U.S. essentially resulted in placing the vast majority of research and production reactor SNF into extended basin storage and a few dry storage systems. The primary considerations involved with movement of these fuels into interim dry storage include the lack of significant decay heat, the wide range of fuel cladding materials, and the lack of cladding integrity in many fuels. One possible approach to determining the necessary dry storage conditions may include demonstrating that, because of prior damage to the fuel, any anticipated in-storage degradation would not compromise subsequent disposition options.

5.8.2.3 Two primary types of dry storage systems are currently in use for research reactor SNF: Underground well storage and vented storage. Underground well storage and interior facility storage typically operate at temperatures between ambient and 60°C, and the SNF is not sealed in a container because confinement is provided by the well or the facility itself. Exterior cask storage systems may be very similar to those used for commercial SNF even though the decay heat is insufficient to heat the cask significantly. The experience and expertise gained in operating the current dry storage systems for production reactor SNF should be carefully considered if the research reactor SNF is to be transferred to alternative dry storage systems for storage or disposition. The Irradiated Fuel Storage Facility at the Idaho Nuclear Technology and Engineering Center uses a forced ventilation system with high-efficiency particulate air filtration for dry storage of research reactor fuel in unsealed canisters (14).

5.8.2.4 Residual water in vented dry storage systems can evaporate or radiolyze over long times, so water can escape from the system. However, canisters containing cool fuels may also aspirate water from the external atmosphere. Water evaporation and aspiration during “dry” storage may significantly change the overall chemisorbed water content of the SNF, especially if it is badly damaged. Characterization of SNF behavior in such vented systems may provide insight into the probable behavior of SNF in alternative dry storage systems.

5.9 *Potential Effects of Residual Water on SNF and Containers*—Residual water in SNF can be released to the container environment by direct, thermally induced decomposition of the chemically bonded species, vaporization of physisorbed and free water, and radiolytic decomposition. The released water and decomposition products may cause corrosion, pressurization, and possibly embrittlement, although such degradation is not generally anticipated (15).