

Electricity in organic reactions tested

Methods to save energy and improved ways to effect certain organic reactions are being developed by a group of A&M scientists.

Dr. Philip C. Scholl is the head of a group of chemists who are carrying out organic reactions using electricity.

"More simply the change of one organic molecule to another," Scholl explained.

"Industry for years has used electrochemical reactions in inorganic chemistry, for instance the production of aluminum from bauxite, chlorine from salt water and most kinds of metal plating," he pointed out. "Now we want to extend this method to organic materials. An example would be the change of alcohol to esters which are organic compounds that are used in producing the smell for flavoring and per-

fumes.

"Principally we're interested in studying the reactions of oxygen containing molecules," he noted.

"More specifically, we will use electricity on specific molecules to produce intermediates (transitional stage in a chemical reaction) which are known or suspected intermediates in other (non-electrochemical) organic reactions. We'll then determine to what extent electrolytic methods can be used in synthetic production.

"If successful, such processes would provide synthetic methods which are much more efficient in energy use," Scholl added.

"It won't happen today or tomorrow, but the idea is, if one can use electricity to cause reactions that previously needed a chemical reagent, considerable energy could be saved," he pointed out.

"Electricity may be considered a reagent, and as such it has a number of advantages over chemical reagents," he continued. "Chemical

reagents are bulky and involve transportation and handling problems. Some reagents, like sulfuric acid, which are used in commercial chemical processes can't be dumped down drains and are difficult to dispose of. This is very important today with the growing concern for the environment."

"Furthermore, electricity used in our process is still relatively cheap," Scholl continued.

He said this factor alone would make it the "reagent of choice" in

many organic reactions, especially in large scale industrial processes.

"We are first attacking reactions which are presently carried out photochemically (using light) since these reactions waste a lot of energy. Both the conversion of electrical energy to light and the utilization of light to effect chemical change are wasteful processes. Obviously it would be advantageous to use electrical energy directly to cause the desired chemical change."

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Geology lab heads west on field trip

A 12-vehicle caravan with 22 intrepid geology students and instructors led by Prof. Karl Koenig left A&M this week for the Geology Department's annual field camp in West Texas.

The summer camps began well before World War II. After the war, the camps were at Brady where they were aided by then mayor and later president of TAMU, General Earl Rudder. The camp now operates with headquarters at Sul Ross University in Alpine.

The group will spend five days in the central mineral region at Llano. There are exposed some of the oldest rocks in existence. The Precambrian rocks are in a depression cut by streams into the center of Edwards Plateau.

They will continue Sunday to Alpine to study the Glass Mountains, Marathon Basin and areas in the Davis Mountains. In the Glass Mountains, the Permian area comes to the surface.

They will look at a series of folded and broken rock in the "tuff and flow" country south of Alpine.

"The six hours of credit," explained geology professor Dr. Melvin Schroeder, "is the crucial point in their education. Now they have to find out if they're geologists. The students will discover if they can see what the rocks are telling them."

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