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Abstract
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Keywords
MAGNESIUM FILMS, HYDRIDE, STORAGE, DEPOSITION, SURFACES, SORPTION, NI, PD

Comments
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Hydrogenation of Mg film and Mg nanoblade array on Ti coated Si substrates

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The hydrogenation of Mg film and Mg nanoblade array fabricated on Ti coated Si substrates has been studied and compared. The nanoblades start to absorb hydrogen at a temperature between 250 and 300 °C, which is much lower than 350 °C for Mg film. However, the saturated total hydrogen uptake in nanoblades is less than half of that in the film, resulting from MgO formation by air exposure. The nanoblade morphology with large surface area and small hydrogen diffusion length, and the catalytic effect of Ti layer, are two main reasons for the nanoblade hydrogenation behavior. © 2008 American Institute of Physics. [DOI: 10.1063/1.3003880]

Magnesium has attracted extensive research attention in the development of future solid state H-storage materials due to its lightweight, low cost, and high reversible H-storage capacity of 7.6 wt % in MgH2.1–3 However, its high thermodynamic stability and sluggish reaction kinetics limit its practical applications.4–6 Such limitations could be improved by making Mg nanostructures with large surface-to-volume ratios to enhance surface reactivity. Currently the Mg nanostructures are mainly fabricated via ball milling,2–4 and the resulting materials are a micrometer-sized powder with nanometer-sized grains. Mg thin film provides an ideal alternative to powder since it can be formed in a controlled environment (high vacuum).7,8 However, the grain aggregation in powder and the relatively dense characteristic of film limit the surface area increment and H-sorption activity. Recently, by using an oblique angle deposition (OAD) technique based on physical vapor deposition, both Tang et al. and He et al. have demonstrated that Mg forms nanobrade array and the structure of the nanoblades can be tailored by a geometric shadowing effect and doping.9–11 This tunable nanobrade structure provides an excellent opportunity to study the interaction of hydrogen with different intrinsic Mg nanostructures, and it is expected that the hydrogen sorption performance could be improved by the unique morphology of the nanoblades. In order to confirm this speculation, the hydrogenation behaviors of a dense Mg film and a porous Mg nanoblade array were studied and compared in this letter.

Both the Mg thin film and the nanoblade array were fabricated by a unique, custom designed electron-beam evaporation system (Pascal Technology) equipped with a glovebox to prevent the sample from exposing to air during the postdeposition sample transfer. The details on the experimental setup was described elsewhere.12 The chamber base pressure was 10−7 Torr. A layer of 200-nm-thick Ti film was first evaporated onto the Si substrates using the vapor incidence angle α=10° with respect to the substrate normal. This Ti layer was used as a diffusion barrier to prevent Mg alloying with Si.13 Then, either a Mg film or a Mg nanoblade array was deposited on the Ti layer by near-normal (α=10°) or OAD (α=80°) deposition, with a 4 μm thickness reading by a quartz crystal microbalance. Both the thin film (labeled as “A”) and the nanoblade array (labeled as “B”) samples were cut into 0.5×0.5 in.2 pieces and were hydrogenated together in a PCT (pressure-composition isotherms) Sievert’s-type apparatus (HyEnergy, PCT Pro-2000) under 20 bar H-pressure for 2000 min at T=200, 250, 300, and 350 °C, respectively. These hydrogenated samples are labeled as “A200”, “A250”, “A300”, and “A350” for thin film samples, and “B200”, “B250”, “B300”, and “B350” for nanoblade samples.

The morphologies of the as-deposited and hydrogenated thin film and nanoblade samples were investigated by a field-emission scanning electron microscopy (SEM) (FEI Inspect F), and the representative SEM images are shown in Fig. 1. As shown in the inset of Fig. 1(a), the surface of the as-deposited Mg film consists of piles of nanoflakes, overlapping with one another, while the cross-sectional SEM [Fig. 1(a)] reveals a typical columnar structure of Mg film with ~4.0 μm thickness. The as-deposited OAD sample [Fig. 1(d)] shows a well-aligned nanobrade array structure0,7 with a height of ~7.1 μm and a blade thickness of ~160 nm. In both Figs. 1(a) and 1(d), a thin layer of dense Ti film is also visible between the Mg layer and Si substrate. After hydrogenation at T=300 °C, almost no morphology change is observed for the Mg film as shown in Fig. 1(b), but the morphology of the nanobrade sample changes significantly (no change at T=250 °C), and both the nanobrade height and thickness increase to ~7.3 μm and 220 nm [Fig. 1(e)], corresponding to a volume expansion of ~41%. When the hydrogenation temperature reaches 350 °C, visible coalescence appears in the thin film [Fig. 1(e)], the flake-like surface becomes a surface with aggregated particles, and the film thickness increases to ~6.2 μm. This corresponds to ~55% volume expansion. In addition, most of the Ti nanobrade layer still remains between Mg layer and substrate, and only a small quantity of Mg2Si defects are formed progressively

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through the pinholes in the Ti film (not shown). Under the same condition, the nanoblades become longer (≈7.7 μm) and thicker (≈250 nm) with a volume expansion of ≈69%, and no Mg2Si defects are observed.

The changes in the chemical and crystalline structures in the hydrogenation process were investigated by the grazing angle x-ray diffraction (XRD) (PANalytical X’Pert PRO MRD). For the as-deposited film and nanoblade samples, the dominant XRD peaks are from Mg, but the preferred crystal orientations are different, as shown in Figs. 2(a) and 2(e). For the thin film sample, even at $T=200$ °C, a trace amount of Mg2Si alloy starts to form [Fig. 2(b)]. This trace of Mg2Si coexists with Mg even at $T=300$ °C [Fig. 2(c)]. However, when $T$ increases to 350 °C, the sample is dominated by a tetragonal MgH2 [Fig. 2(d)], although traces of Mg2Si, Mg, and/or TiH2 are also detectable. This significant change implies that Mg thin film starts to hydrogenate at near $T=350$ °C, which is consistent with other reports.7,15 For the nanoblade sample, at $T=200$ °C, no detectable change is observed in the XRD pattern compared to that of the as-deposited sample. At $T=250$ °C, MgO, cubic TiH1.5, and possible MgH2 start to form [Fig. 2(f)]. When hydrogenated at $T=300$ °C [Fig. 2(g)], distinguishable but small amount of MgH2 is visible. The MgO peak increases significantly, and the Ti seems to change entirely into tetragonal TiH2. When the temperature goes up to 350 °C, the MgH2 composition increases substantially, so is the MgO. However a small amount of Mg still remains in the sample. Compared to the hydrogenation behavior of thin film sample, the nanoblade sample starts to hydrogenate at a lower temperature (250 or 300 °C versus 350 °C).

To further understand the hydrogenated samples, the relative hydrogen depth profiles in both the film and nanoblade samples were measured using a forward recoil spectrometry (FRES) with a National Electrosatstics Corporation (NEC) minitandem ion accelerator.16 The energy-resolved counts of H atoms recoiled from the sample by a 3.0 MeV He2+ beam carry H-depth profile information with higher and lower energy signals corresponding to the H concentrations near surface and deeper beneath the surface. The H counts were converted to H weight percentage by assuming that the H content near the film surface, namely, in the FRES energy range of 800–1130 keV, of fully hydrogenated Mg film sample (A350) is 7.6 wt %.

FIG. 1. Typical cross-sectional view SEM images of Mg films (A, A300, and A350) and nanoblades (B, B300, and B350) before and after hydrogenation at various temperatures. Their corresponding top view images are shown in the insets.

FIG. 2. (Color online) Typical XRD patterns of Mg films (A, A200, A300, and A350) and nanoblades (B, B250, B300, and B350) before and after hydrogenation at various temperatures.
larged H-profiles reveal a small amount of H enrichment at the sample surface possibly due to the water vapor adsorbed on the sample surface. However, at $T=350^\circ C$, a significant amount of H through the entire Mg film is detected. This agrees well with the SEM and XRD results. The H concentration decreases gradually from the Mg surface to Mg/Ti interface, which may be caused by the formation of Mg$_2$Si near the Si substrate. For the nanoblade sample, at $T=200^\circ C$, a noticeable amount of H is present through the nanoblade array near the Si substrate. For the nanoblade sample, at $T=350^\circ C$, the H concentration could be contributed by the TiH$_{1.5}$ and MgH$_2$ samples. The H concentration decreases gradually from the Mg surface to Mg/Ti interface, which may result from the formation of MgO in nanoblade samples. For the nanoblade sample, at $T=250^\circ C$, a nonuniform H profile develops with significant H uptake occurring deep inside the nanoblades. From the XRD result, such a high content could be contributed by the TiH$_{1.5}$ and MgH$_2$ near the interface between Mg and Ti, and the formation of the metal hydrides could be the result of the Ti catalytic dissociating hydrogen molecules. At $T=300^\circ C$, significant H concentration occurs not only deep inside the nanoblades but also on the surface, which reveals that the Mg nanoblades themselves start to absorb H from the surface. When $T$ increases to $350^\circ C$, hydrogen almost distributes uniformly across the length of the nanoblades, and the shape of the H profile is similar to that of the thin film. However, the saturated surface H concentration is only $\sim 3.3$ wt %, which is much less than 7.6 wt % of the film sample. By integrating the H concentration in the energy ranging from 250 to 1250 keV, the temperature dependent hydrogen content in the thin film and nanoblade samples can be estimated and plotted in Fig. 4. It clearly shows that the activation of H absorption occurs between 250 and 300 $^\circ C$ for the nanoblade sample and between 300 and 350 $^\circ C$ for the thin film sample. However the saturated total H absorption in porous nanoblades is less than half of that in the film, and this difference may result from the formation of MgO in nanoblade samples.

The significant improvement of the hydrogenation thermodynamics for intrinsic Mg nanoblade sample may be due to the following reasons: (1) the nanoblade sample provides more surface area for H interacting with Mg and it may contain more distorted (active) Mg bonds; (2) the hydrogenation process is a volume expansion process, as demonstrated by the SEM images. Although there are nanovoids or cracks inside the thin film, in general, it only provides one direction to expand the volume; the nanoblade array, with proper separation, has almost three degrees of freedom for the volume expansion; (3) the hydrogenation process is mainly governed by the H diffusion and reaction. The diffusion length of H in nanoblades is determined by the thickness of the blades since H atoms have access to all around the nanoblades. For the H diffusion in a thin film, it is determined not only by the diffusion in Mg but also the thickness of MgH$_2$ layer because this layer can slow down the H diffusion significantly; (4) since the Ti layer is buried under the Mg film, it only acts as a diffusion barrier during hydrogenation; for the nanoblade sample, due to the limited surface coverage of Mg nanoblades on Ti thin film, the Ti layer cannot only act as the diffusion barrier but also serve as a catalyst to help H$_2$ dissociation. However, the porous structure of Mg nanoblade array makes it easy to trap H$_2$O and O$_2$ that could prevent a thorough hydrogenation of the sample. This disadvantage can be improved by carefully controlling the sample transfer and treatment environment.

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13. Our recent study shows that at a moderate hydrogenation temperature, such as 200 $^\circ C$ or lower, Mg has already started to react with the Si substrate to form a stable Mg$_2$Si alloy, which reduces the amount of Mg converted to MgH$_2$ and strongly affects the H-storage reversibility and cycling performance.
17. The transfer of samples from Georgia to Pennsylvania for FRES measurements was under ambient condition.