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Reference

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Metal–Polyhydride Molecules Are Compact Inside a Fullerene Cage

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Abstract: Quantum chemical calculations show that metal–hydride molecules are more compact when they are placed inside a fullerene cage than when they are isolated molecules. The metal–hydrogen bond distance in ZrH₄ becomes 0.15 Å shorter when it is placed inside a C₆₀ cage. Metal–polyhydride molecules with a large number of H atoms such as ScH₁₅ and ZrH₁₆, which are not bound as isolated molecules, are predicted to be bound inside a fullerene cage. It is also shown that two TiH₁₆ clusters are bound inside a bicapped (9,0) carbon nanotube. Possible ways to make metal–hydrides inside C₆₀ and nanotubes are suggested.

Introduction

Metal–hydrides are of considerable interest as potential hydrogen storage systems. A design target of 6.5 weight (wt)% has been regarded as adequate.¹ Species of MHₙ type, with n = 9, as for example ReH₉²⁻, are known experimentally.²,³ We have recently predicted the existence of some MH₁₂ molecules, where M is a group 6 atom, Cr, Mo, and W.⁴ The isoelectronic ions VH₁₂⁻, TiH₁₂²⁻, and MnH₁₂²⁺ also turned out to be stable. In a hypothetical solid Li(VH₁₂), the hydrogen weight percentage would be 17. This study suggested that the number of hydrogen atoms, bound to a metal atom, could be increased from the previously known n = 9 to n = 12. The CrH₁₂ species has six H₂ moieties, while MoH₁₂ and WH₁₂ have four H₂ moieties and four M–H σ bonds. The H–H distance in the H₂ moieties is larger than 0.8 Å in all species, while a calculation on isolated H₂ gives an H–H bond distance of 0.77 Å. These values for the H–H bond distances can be considered a fingerprint of the fact that the H₂ moieties are effectively bound to the central metal.

The possible existence of MHₙ species with n greater than 12 has also been investigated. Examples are TiH₁₄, ZrH₁₄, ScH₁₄, and ZrH₁₆. Calculations indicate that such species have long metal–hydrogen bonds (greater than 2.0 Å). It should be noted that TiH₁₄, ZrH₁₄, and ScH₁₅ fulfill the 18-electron rule, while ZrH₁₆ would be a 20-electron species. ZrH₁₆ turns out not to be stable and, instead, dissociates to ZrH₁₂ and 2H₂. Moreover, TiH₁₄, ZrH₁₄, ScH₁₅, and ZrH₁₆ are not more stable than TiH₄ + 5H₂, ZrH₄ + 5H₂, ScH₃ + 6H₂, and ZrH₄ + 6H₂, respectively. It thus seems unlikely that MHₙ species with n larger than 12 will exist as isolated molecules.

The following question was then posed: is there an alternative way to store hydrogen in its molecular form. A conceptually new route to stabilize hydrogen-rich metal–polyhydride clusters would consist in placing a metal–hydride inside a C₆₀ fullerene cage. The inside sphere of a fullerene is large enough to enclose atoms and small molecules. A variety of endohedral complexes, having metal fragments, noble gases, and atoms inside the cage, have been synthesized and characterized.⁵–¹⁰ Recently, encapsulation of molecular hydrogen into an open-cage fullerene having a 16-membered ring orifice has been investigated.¹¹ Would the C₆₀ cage have the effect of stabilizing the MHₙ cluster or would dissociation or reaction occur? We performed quantum chemical calculations on the supermolecular systems MHₙ+C₆₀. To our knowledge, this is the first study on metal–hydrides inside a fullerene.

A recent paper by Zhao et al.¹² proposes to use transition-metal atoms bound to fullerenes as adsorbents for storage of hydrogen. Compounds such as C₆₀[ScH₂(H₂)₄]₁₂ have the Sc atoms bound externally to the fullerene cage. Here we propose a completely different approach, consisting of placing both the metal and the hydrogen inside the fullerene cage. We report results of a computational study on the species ZrH₄@C₆₀, ScH₁₅@C₆₀, and ZrH₁₆@C₆₀. While ZrH₄ is experimentally known as a single molecule¹³ and has been

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computation for all species at the BP86/DFT level of theory, using equilibrium geometries and harmonic frequencies were computed for Ti, H, and C an all electron, split-valence basis set, contracted to 5s3p2d, 5s3p2d, 2s, 3s2p, respectively, was used. Equilibrium geometries and harmonic frequencies were computed for all species at the BP86/DFT level of theory, using the resolution-of-the-identity (RI) variant available in the TURBOMOLE package\textsuperscript{15–17} to make the calculations feasible. The auxiliary basis set of split-valence plus polarization type, available in the TURBOMOLE library, were used for all atoms. Comparative equilibrium geometry calculations on some selected structures were performed at the second order perturbation theory level with the RI variant, RI-MP2, to check if possible weak interactions between the H atoms and the fullerene cage would imply a substantial rearrangement of the structures. Since the RI-MP2 structure of ZrH\textsubscript{16}@C\textsubscript{60} turned out to be very similar to the BP86 structure, with a slightly shorter Zr–H bond distance at the RI-MP2 level, only BP86 structures will be discussed below. Frequency calculations, on the other hand, were not performed at the RI-MP2 level of theory.

Results

The calculations show that the MH\textsubscript{6} systems have shorter M–H bonds when placed inside the C\textsubscript{60} cage than as isolated molecules. All supersystems turn out to be local minima, having all harmonic frequencies real. The M–H bonds are significantly shorter when the MH\textsubscript{6} species are placed inside the C\textsubscript{60} cage, and the H–H bonds in the H\textsubscript{2} moieties are much longer than in a H\textsubscript{2} isolated molecule.

The M–H and H–H bond distances are reported in Table 1. In general the M–H bond distances become about 0.15 Å shorter when the MH\textsubscript{6} cluster is inside the fullerene than when it is an isolated molecule.

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<tr>
<th>Metal–Polyhydride Molecules</th>
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<td>Table 1. Typical Bond Distances (Å) for the MH\textsubscript{6} Species*</td>
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<td>M–H(0)</td>
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<td>ZrH\textsubscript{4}</td>
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<td>ZrH\textsubscript{4}@C\textsubscript{60}</td>
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<td>ScH\textsubscript{15}</td>
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<td>ZrH\textsubscript{16}</td>
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<td>ZrH\textsubscript{16}@C\textsubscript{60}</td>
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* M–H(0) is the distance between M and a nonbound H atom. M–H(H\textsubscript{2}) is the distance between M and H in a H\textsubscript{2} molecule. H–H is the distance in the H\textsubscript{2} moiety. See Figures 1–3.

ZrH\textsubscript{4} has a tetrahedral structure both as an isolated molecule and in C\textsubscript{60}. The Zr–H bond distance is 1.86 Å in an isolated ZrH\textsubscript{4} molecule and 1.70 Å in ZrH\textsubscript{4}@C\textsubscript{60}. In ZrH\textsubscript{4}@C\textsubscript{60} (Figure 1) the carbon–hydrogen distances vary between 1.69 and 2.63 Å. The infrared spectrum of ZrH\textsubscript{4} in solid argon has been observed by Chertihin and Andrews.\textsuperscript{13} They measured an antisymmetric stretching frequency of 1623.6 cm\textsuperscript{-1}. Our calculation on isolated ZrH\textsubscript{4} gives a value of 1648.4 cm\textsuperscript{-1} in the harmonic approximation. The same mode for ZrH\textsubscript{4}@C\textsubscript{60} is calculated to be 1119.5 cm\textsuperscript{-1}.

Isolated ScH\textsubscript{15} has one Sc–H \( \sigma \) bond (1.86 Å) and seven Sc–H\textsubscript{2} bonds (2.00–2.22 Å). In C\textsubscript{60}, ScH\textsubscript{15} undergoes a significant structural rearrangement: the Sc atom is not at the center of the fullerene cage, surrounded symmetrically by the hydrogen atoms, as one might expect. Instead, the hydrogen atoms are all on one side of the Sc atom, and the Sc–H bonds are in the center of the fullerene cage (Figure 2). The Sc–H \( \sigma \) bond reduces to 1.74 Å and the Sc–H\textsubscript{2} bonds to 1.78–1.89 Å.

As already mentioned, our calculations predict isolated ZrH\textsubscript{16} not to be stable and, instead, exist as ZrH\textsubscript{12} and 2H\textsubscript{2}. ZrH\textsubscript{12} has four Zr–H \( \sigma \) bonds of 1.88 Å and four Zr–H\textsubscript{2} bonds of 2.13 Å. In C\textsubscript{60}, ZrH\textsubscript{16} is bound (Figure 3), and it has two Zr–H \( \sigma \) bonds of 1.75 Å and seven Zr–H\textsubscript{2} bonds of 1.83 Å. The H–H bonds are longer than in an isolated H\textsubscript{2} molecule (0.82 Å compared with 0.77 Å).

ZrH\textsubscript{4}@C\textsubscript{60}, ScH\textsubscript{15}@C\textsubscript{60}, and ZrH\textsubscript{16}@C\textsubscript{60} have all harmonic frequencies real. The calculated values of the frequencies are available upon request.

In all cases, placing the MH\textsubscript{6} cluster inside a fullerene cage leads to a significant shortening of the M–H bond.
distances. The large clusters (ScH₁₅ and ZrH₁₆) change from a M–H nonbonding situation (the M–H bond distances are larger than 2 Å) to a bonding situation (the bond distances are about 1.8 Å). One possible explanation for the structural rearrangement is that the fullerene repels the electrons of the metal–polyhydride cluster and pushes the cluster as far as possible from its surface, i.e., toward the center of the sphere. One may have expected that the metal–hydride cluster would break the fullerene cage, but this does not seem to be the case.

The reason for the polarization of the ScH₁₅ cluster in C₆₀ is not clear to us. One possibility is the formation of a dipole that can interact favorably with the polarizability of the C₆₀ unit. This could be the case if the energy difference between the symmetric and the polarized structure is small. For the isolated clusters the polarized structure (Sće on the side) has a dipole moment of ca. 3.95 D, while the symmetric structure has a dipole moment of 1.87 D.

As previously mentioned, ScH₁₅ is an “18-electron” species, while ZrH₁₆ is a “20-electron” species. Even if the results are not reported here, structural optimization had also been performed for TiH₁₆ at C₆₀ and ZrH₁₄ at C₆₀, as other “18-electron” species, and they also are bound local minima.

Up to now it has been shown that the MHₙ systems here considered are more compact when placed inside a C₆₀ than as isolated molecules. The next step is trying to understand if these systems are energetically stable inside C₆₀. Thermodynamical stability implies these species to be lower in energy than other isomers of the same molecules. In the ZrH₄ case, we considered two other isomers besides the one previously discussed (Figure 1): the first isomer is a Zhao12-style ZrH₄@C₆₀ species, with ZrH₄ attached to the external C₆₀ surface (structure A), and the other isomer has ZrH₄ inside the C₆₀, but close to the C₆₀ internal surface in order that one H atom is van der Waals bonded to C₆₀ (structure B). Both structures A and B are significantly higher in energy (more than 150 kcal/mol) than the original ZrH₄@C₆₀ structure (Figure 1). The optimization of A leads to separated ZrH₄ and C₆₀ fragments, while the optimization of B leads to the original ZrH₄@C₆₀ structure (Figure 1). These results confirm the original ZrH₄@C₆₀ isomer to be a local minimum.

Kinetic stability of these systems, on the other hand, would imply that they are stable with respect to one or more dissociation pathways. Possible ways of forming/dissociating the supermolecular systems were investigated. It seems unfeasible to ‘put’ an already formed metal–hydride inside a fullerene cage. Simple energetic balances (differences between calculated electronic energies) show that the formation of ZrH₄@C₆₀ from ZrH₄ and C₆₀, for example, is highly endothermic and requires about 100 kcal/mol of energy, allowing for both the zero point vibrational energy and the basis set superposition error corrections (less than 2 kcal/mol).

An alternative and, probably more realistic route, would consist of inserting the metal and molecular hydrogen into a fullerene. The formation of the MHₙ species might then occur directly inside C₆₀. The formation of ZrH₄@C₆₀ from a Zr atom, two H₂ molecules, and C₆₀, for example, is about 10 kcal/mol exothermic and thus energetically much more favorable than the above reaction. This energetic balance has been estimated as the difference between the electronic energy of ZrH₄@C₆₀ minus the electronic energy of one Zr atom in its triplet state and the energy of two H₂ molecules, allowing for both the zero point vibrational energy and the basis set superposition error corrections.

We also considered the possibility of forming metal–hydride clusters inside a nanotube, and we studied, as a model example, a system formed by two TiH₁₆ clusters inside a single wall nanotube (9,0) which was closed with two partial fullerenes at the two extremities, C₁₁₄ (Figure 4). The system turned out to be stable with all real harmonic frequencies. One of the TiH₁₆ clusters inside the nanotube evolved to TiH₁₂ + 2H₃, while the other one remained bound. A third TiH₁₆ cluster, on the other hand, does not fit inside C₁₁₄, and some hydrogen atoms bind to the internal surface of C₁₁₄.

**Conclusions**

Quantum chemical calculations have shown that metal–hydride molecules are more compact when they are placed inside a fullerene cage than when they are isolated molecules. Species such as ZrH₄@C₆₀, ScH₁₅@C₆₀, and ZrH₁₆@C₆₀ exist and have very short metal–hydrogen bonding. These results pose several questions. First of all it is important to find a synthetic route to make hydrogen–metal clusters inside the fullerene. It might be possible to insert the metal and molecular hydrogen into a fullerene. The formation of the MHₙ species might then occur directly inside C₆₀. This study indicates that the MHₙ@C₆₀ supersystems require a large amount of energy to be made, but once they are synthesized, they may have a chance to be stable.
An alternative route, probably easier from the synthetic point of view, would be to synthesize the clusters inside nanotubes, instead of fullerenes. The calculations have shown that two TiH$_{16}$ clusters are stable inside a (9,0) bicapped nanotube, C$_{114}$. A general question that we pose is the following: is it possible to make also other species inside a fullerene. Preliminary results indicate that also CH$_4$@C$_{60}$ is stable. Can we make clusters with a larger number of hydrogen atoms? It seems evident from the present study that metal–polyhydride clusters have indeed a chance to exist inside a fullerene cage and a nanotube, and this approach may represent a conceptually new way of synthesizing, stabilizing, and storing metal–polyhydrides.

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