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Biomass-Derived Activated Carbon: Key to a Greener Hydrogen Economy

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Description

The global transition towards a hydrogen-based economy underscores the need for efficient and sustainable technologies in hydrogen production, storage and gas separation. Traditional hydrogen production methods, such as Steam Methane Reforming (SMR) and coal gasification, have been associated with significant environmental consequences due to their reliance on fossil fuels [1]. To counter these effects, the focus has shifted to greener alternatives, with electrolysis powered by renewable energy emerging as a frontrunner. Electrolysis, a process that generates hydrogen by splitting water molecules, offers a carbon-neutral solution to meet the increasing demand for clean energy [2]. Its only byproducts are water and heat, making it a cornerstone in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating air pollution. However, the transition to a hydrogen-driven economy requires further advancements in hydrogen storage and gas separation technologies to ensure energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Gas separation is integral to numerous industrial and environmental processes, particularly in the chemical and petrochemical sectors [3]. These industries are traditionally characterized by energy-intensive methods, resulting in substantial operational costs and environmental impacts. The adoption of adsorption-based technologies offers a promising avenue to improve material and energy efficiency while minimizing ecological footprints [4].

Hydrogen storage

Efficient hydrogen storage is vital for the widespread adoption of hydrogen as a clean energy carrier. Current methods, including compressed gas, cryogenic liquids and hydride formation, each present distinct advantages and limitations [5]. Among these, solid adsorption methods stand out due to their scalability, safety and environmental benefits. Solid adsorbents like Metal-Organic Frameworks (MOFs), zeolites and carbon-based materials have gained prominence in hydrogen storage research. Activated Carbon (AC), particularly when derived from biomass, has emerged as a sustainable, cost-effective and efficient solution for hydrogen storage and gas separation applications [6]. Activated carbon is a versatile material characterized by its high surface area, porosity and tunable surface chemistry, making it highly effective in adsorption processes. Its affordability and adaptability position it as a vital component in advancing gas separation and storage technologies [7].

Biomass-derived AC, produced from waste materials such as olive cores, rice husks and cashew nut shells, represents a sustainable approach to material synthesis. By transforming agricultural by-products into high-value materials, this method aligns with the principles of sustainable development and promotes circular economies. Cashew nut shells, an abundant agricultural by-product, serve as a renewable and cost-effective raw material for AC synthesis. The annual global production of activated carbon is estimated to reach 100,000 tons, with a substantial portion sourced from agricultural residues and waste materials. Utilizing such waste not only addresses disposal challenges but also creates value-added products for industrial applications [8].

Synthesis and characterization of biomass-derived activated carbon

The potassium hydroxide activation method is a proven technique for synthesizing activated carbon from biomass sources like cashew nut shells. This process integrates waste management with advanced material science, offering dual benefits of environmental mitigation and resource valorization.

Structural and morphological properties: Techniques like Fourier-Transform Infrared (FT-IR) spectroscopy, Raman spectroscopy, Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) and Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA) provide detailed insights into its properties [9].

High adsorption efficiency: Under high-pressure conditions, the material demonstrates significant hydrogen adsorption capabilities, making it suitable for hydrogen storage and gas purification.

Sustainability: The utilization of agricultural waste contributes to reducing environmental footprints and promoting circular economic practices [10].

Conclusion

This study highlights the integration of sustainable waste utilization with advanced hydrogen storage and gas separation technologies. By transforming agricultural by-products into efficient, cost-effective materials, biomass-derived activated carbon demonstrates its potential to address pressing industrial and environmental challenges. The findings prepare for futher further innovations in hydrogen economy infrastructure, reinforcing the critical role of activated carbon in achieving sustainability goals. The transition to a hydrogen-based economy requires continued efforts to develop materials and technologies that optimize efficiency while minimizing environmental impacts. As research progresses, the adoption of biomass-derived activated carbon and similar innovations will play a pivotal role in advancing global sustainability initiatives.

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