

Coating Evaporated MAPI Thin Films with Organic Molecules: Improved Stability at High Temperature and Implementation in High-Efficiency Solar Cells

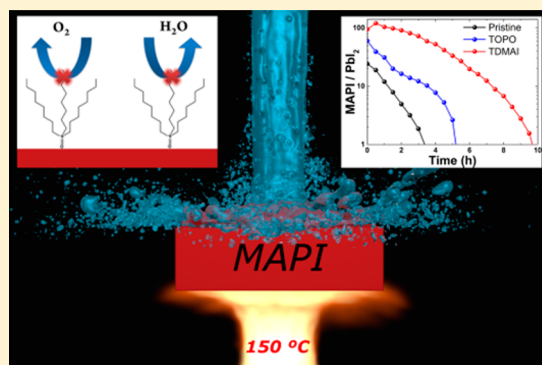
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S Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Methylammonium lead iodide (MAPI) has proven to be an exceptional light-absorber for single-junction thin-film solar cells. Nonetheless, degradation induced by environmental agents (air, moisture, heat) limits the stability of this hybrid perovskite. Here, we demonstrate that coating evaporated MAPI thin films with different hydrophobic molecules leads to a significant improvement in their stability. We especially investigated the degradation of MAPI and the subsequent formation of PbI_2 at 150 °C by in situ XRD analysis and showed that this transformation is remarkably slowed down in films coated with trioctyl phosphine oxide and tridodecyl methylammonium iodide. This enhances the processability of such films, which is an important aspect for the fabrication of thin-film devices. Eventually, we demonstrate that such protected films can be implemented in single-junction n-i-p solar cells without any loss in the device efficiency.



As widely reported in the past few years, methylammonium lead iodide ($\text{CH}_3\text{NH}_3\text{PbI}_3$; MAPI) is an excellent material for single-junction solar cells and other optoelectronic devices.^{1–4} The outstanding performances of these devices can be linked to several photophysical properties of perovskites, such as their high absorption coefficient, narrow bandgap, and high charge diffusion lengths,^{5,6} together with the ease of fabrication and low cost of precursors.⁷ Nonetheless, the widespread use of MAPI is currently severely hindered by its well-known instability. Indeed, oxygen, water (moisture), and heat among other factors are known to lead to a fast degradation of MAPI thin films.^{8,9} In order to mitigate this instability, one possible approach is to alter the material composition, as already demonstrated in many reports. These modifications include the partial substitution of I^- anions with Br^- anions,¹⁰ the partial or total substitution of MA cations with other organic or inorganic monovalent cations such as formamidinium ($\text{CH}(\text{NH}_2)_2^+$; FA), cesium (Cs^+), or rubidium (Rb^+),^{11–13} or the incorporation of 2D perovskites.^{14–18} These substitutions can lead to rather complex formulations comprising up to seven different ions whose relative amounts

need to be well controlled.¹⁹ Furthermore, bromide-based and 2D perovskites have a higher bandgap than their 3D iodide counterparts, which is not beneficial for photovoltaic (PV) applications.^{14–18} Hence, it is critical to explore new ways of enhancing the stability of MAPI films without necessarily altering their overall composition. Because degradation often initiates at the surface of the films through its exposure to external species (e.g., moisture),²⁰ one possible strategy is to chemically modify the perovskite surface with different organic molecules. Yang et al.²¹ showed that coating the surface of solution-processed MAPI thin films with different hydrophobic molecules leads to an increased stability in a high-moisture environment at room temperature. The same approach has recently been developed by Wang et al.,²² while deQuilettes et al.²³ found that surface modification with Lewis base molecules leads to efficient passivation of the nonradiative surface trap states. Huang et al. also noticed an increase of initial efficiency

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64 as well as stability in single-junction solar cells with a similar
 65 method.²⁴ A critical aspect to consider for the widespread
 66 implementation of MAPI in thin-film devices is its stability at
 67 high temperature (>100 °C). Although this may seem
 68 irrelevant for typical operation conditions, it is important to
 69 evaluate the stability at high temperature in view of the
 70 fabrication of optoelectronic devices. Indeed, the typical
 71 fabrication processes of thin-film devices require the deposition
 72 of several additional layers on top of the active (perovskite) film
 73 such as charge extracting layers, electrodes, or encapsulation
 74 materials. Depending on the process and the material, these
 75 further depositions may require temperatures well above 100
 76 °C. In this Letter, we have coated vacuum-deposited MAPI thin
 77 films with trioctyl phosphine oxide (TOPO) and tridodecyl
 78 methylammonium iodide (TDMAI), adapting reported proto-
 79 cols by deQuilletes et al.²³ and Yang et al.,²¹ respectively. We
 80 demonstrate in both cases the presence of ultrathin layers of
 81 TOPO and TDMAI through direct chemical characterization
 82 by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). Then, we show by
 83 in situ X-ray diffraction (XRD) that the so-coated films have a
 84 drastically enhanced stability in air at 150 °C. Eventually, we
 85 demonstrate that the presence of these layers is not
 86 incompatible with the good operation of PV devices. As a
 87 proof-of-principle, we fabricate single-junction solar cells with
 88 pristine and coated MAPI in n-i-p configurations that show
 89 promising efficiency and stability.²⁵

90 MAPI thin films were prepared by dual-source vacuum
 91 deposition on glass substrates, as explained in the [experimental](#)
 92 [section](#). Then, the films were coated either with TDMAI or
 93 TOPO. Adapting reported protocols,^{21,23} TDMAI-coated
 94 samples were realized by fully immersing the MAPI thin films
 95 in a 25 mM solution in isopropanol, while the TOPO-coated
 96 samples were prepared by a single spin-coating step of a 25 mM
 97 TOPO solution in toluene (see the [Supporting Information](#) for
 98 more details).

99 [Figure 1a](#) shows wide XPS spectra of pristine and TDMAI-
 100 coated films. Although TDMAI does not have any distinctive

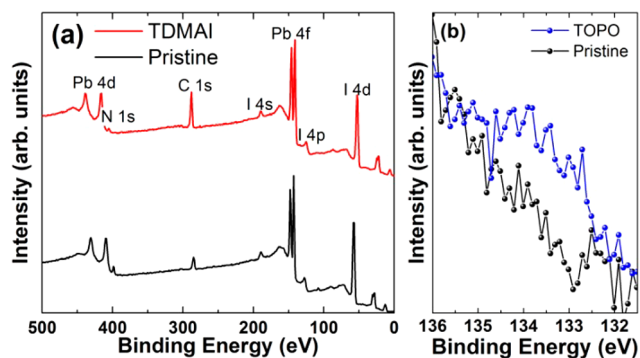


Figure 1. XPS characterization of pristine MAPI films as well as films coated with TDMAI and TOPO. (a) Wide scans of pristine and TDMAI samples and (b) narrow scans of the P 2p region of pristine and TOPO samples (see [Figure S1](#) for XPS characterization of a sample with a thicker layer of TOPO).

101 chemical element other than the ones present already in the
 102 MAPI film, XPS reveals an increase in the carbon content of the
 103 film surface after functionalization (the C:Pb ratio increases by
 104 a factor of >3), which proves the attachment of TDMAI
 105 molecules to the surface. [Figure 1b](#) shows XPS narrow scans of
 106 the region corresponding to 2p orbitals from phosphorus (P

2p). The increase in signal is evident proof of the presence of
 TOPO (see [Figure S1](#) for XPS characterization of a film coated
 with a 50 mM solution of TOPO). Yet, the signal remains very
 low, which is expected for a thin layer. This is important in
 order to allow charge tunneling with electron or hole transport
 layers in solar cells and, generally speaking, to allow the use of
 such coated films in optoelectronic devices. Next, the stability
 of pristine and coated films at 150 °C was evaluated by in situ
 XRD measurements ([Figure 2](#)). As mentioned before, thermal

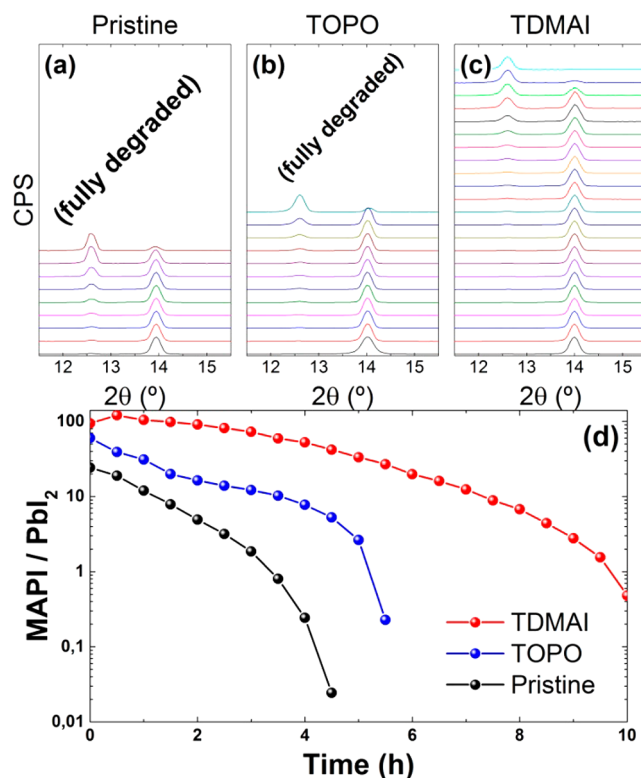


Figure 2. XRD characterization of sample degradation at 150 °C. (a–d) Diffraction patterns of pristine (a) and coated (b,c) films over time. Initial scan at the bottom, 30 min between each scan. (d) Intensity ratio between the main perovskite and PbI_2 peaks ($2\theta = 14.0$ and 12.6° , respectively), computed from panels (a–c).

annealing above 100 °C is a common step in many thin-film
 fabrication procedures (atomic layer deposition, sputtering,
 etc.); hence, it is technologically relevant to evaluate the
 stability of the thin films at such a temperature.

[Figure 2a–c](#) presents the XRD patterns over time of pristine
 and treated films at a fixed temperature of 150 °C, in the range
 $2\theta = 12–15^\circ$. This allows one to evidence the loss of MAPI
 (vanishing of the peak at $2\theta = 14.0^\circ$)²⁶ and the subsequent rise
 of PbI_2 (rise of the peak at $2\theta = 12.6^\circ$). In order to have
 semiquantitative analysis of the degradation, we computed the
 intensity ratio of MAPI and PbI_2 main peaks ($2\theta = 14.0$ and
 12.6°), which is proportional to the relative amount of both
 species in the sample. This ratio is plotted in [Figure 2d](#). The
 initial MAPI/ PbI_2 ratio is not infinite because from the very
 first scan a slight contribution from PbI_2 is already observed.
 This is very common in perovskite films and can be due either
 to impurities during the synthesis/deposition or even to a slight
 degradation already occurring during exposure of the samples
 to air prior to the first analysis. In any case, the initial fraction of
 PbI_2 is low, as can be seen from [Figure 2](#). This fraction

136 increases over time for all samples, though not at the same
137 pace. Indeed, treated samples are significantly more stable.

138 As an arbitrary measure, we may consider the time t_{10} by
139 which the PbI_2 peak has reached an intensity equal to 10% of
140 the main perovskite peak. As can be seen in Figure 2d, t_{10} goes
141 from less than 2 h for pristine MAPI to 4 h for TOPO-treated
142 films and to 8 h for TDMAI-treated ones. This reveals that
143 coated MAPI films can withstand high temperature much better
144 than pristine ones. In other terms, surface coating with organic
145 molecules allows the film to be processed at temperatures
146 above 100 °C for longer times, during which the deposition of
147 further materials or hot encapsulation of devices can take place.
148 This stability test at high temperature can also be seen as an
149 accelerated test of the degradation that occurs already at room
150 temperature. Indeed, at room temperature, pristine films were
151 found to be quickly degraded ($t_{10} < 2$ weeks), while coated
152 ones were not significantly altered even after 3 weeks (see
153 Figure S2). These results suggest a combined contribution from
154 the coating molecule's head group and alkyl chains to the
155 enhanced stability of the film. Indeed, as previously suggested
156 by others,²¹ the hydrophobic nature of the alkyl chains present
157 on both TDMAI and TOPO may block moisture-derived
158 degradation. However, the fact that TDMAI-coated samples are
159 more stable than TOPO-coated ones suggests that the higher
160 affinity of the MAI head group (which can perfectly fit in the
161 MAPI structure) in contrast with the P=O group of TOPO
162 (which is not known to specifically bind to MAPI) may also
163 play an important role. More detailed investigations on these
164 fundamental aspects are however needed to draw unambiguous
165 conclusions.

166 We fabricated different solar cells with pristine and treated
167 MAPI. Although TDMAI yielded the highest material stability
168 (Figure 2), we were not able to fabricate efficient and
169 reproducible devices with it. Two reasons may explain this
170 evidence: either the TDMAI layer was too thick (which would
171 also explain the highest stability) and did not allow charge
172 transfer in the device or the process induced other negative
173 consequences in the film such as the occurrence of pinholes
174 that lead to short circuits. The first hypothesis is not in
175 accordance with our XPS analysis, which reveals a strong signal
176 for lead (Figure 1a) and suggests that the MAPI film is not
177 covered by a thick (>5 nm) uniform insulating layer. On the
178 other hand, because the coating process, adapted from Yang et
179 al.,²¹ is based on full immersion of the film in a fairly polar
180 solvent (isopropanol), which might partially degrade the
181 perovskite, the second hypothesis seems more plausible.

182 In contrast, we were able to fabricate solar cells with TOPO-
183 coated MAPI films. Indeed, although TOPO is insulating,
184 charge extraction by tunneling through an insulating layer can
185 be achieved if the layer is thin enough, as also observed by
186 others.^{24,27} The TOPO layer thickness can be estimated by the
187 intensity drop of I 3d and Pb 4f XPS peaks (see Figure S3).
188 Indeed, as MAPI is covered by an organic layer, photoelectrons
189 from the underlying lead and iodine atoms will be absorbed
190 following Beer–Lambert law. Hence, the intensity of the peaks
191 (or rather peak areas) will decrease as follows: $A_{\text{TOPO}}(X) =$
192 $A_{\text{pristine}}(X)e^{-\lambda/d}$, where $A_{\text{TOPO}}(X)$ and $A_{\text{pristine}}(X)$ are the area
193 corresponding to XPS peak X (in this case I 3d and Pb 4f) in
194 the presence or absence of TOPO, λ is the inelastic mean free
195 path of photoelectrons in the TOPO layer, and d is the
196 thickness of the layer. If we assume $\lambda = 3$ nm as a common
197 value for organic material,²⁸ then we obtain $d = \lambda \times \ln(A_{\text{pristine}}(I$
198 $3d)/A_{\text{TOPO}}(I 3d)) = 0.5$ nm (considering iodine peaks) or $d = \lambda$

$\times \ln(A_{\text{pristine}}(\text{Pb } 4f)/A_{\text{TOPO}}(\text{Pb } 4f)) = 0.6$ nm (considering lead
199 peaks). Both values are close to and consistent with a single
200 monolayer of TOPO. As we will show hereafter, this monolayer
201 of TOPO does not degrade the device performance (Figure 3).
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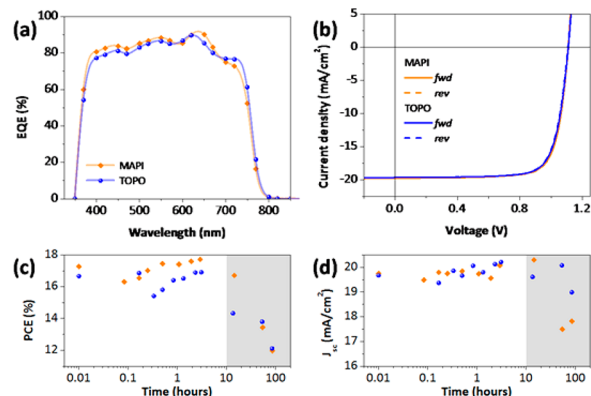


Figure 3. (a) EQE spectra and (b) J – V curves under illumination for solar cells with pristine MAPI (orange squares) and MAPI functionalized with TOPO (blue spheres). (c) Efficiency and (d) photocurrent of the same cells recorded over time during air exposure and without any encapsulation. See Figure S5 for more statistics on TOPO samples.

In contrast, when a more concentrated solution of TOPO is
203 used, resulting in a slightly thicker layer (see Figure S1), the
204 device performs significantly worse (see Figure S4). This
205 highlights the critical importance of the coating layer thickness.
206 The cells were prepared with vacuum-deposited MAPI in the
207 n – i – p configuration, avoiding the use of doped transport layers
208 in order to be able to test their stability in air without
209 encapsulation. For this purpose, we coated the indium tin oxide
210 (ITO)/glass substrates with a bilayer of TiO_2 nanoparticles (50
211 nm) in combination with a thin (10 nm) C60 film in contact
212 with MAPI. The fullerene layer was introduced in order to
213 reduce carrier recombination at the TiO_2 electron transport
214 layer.¹³ After deposition of the perovskite, a double hole
215 transport layer composed of N,N',N'',N''' -tetra([1,1'-
216 biphenyl]-4-yl)-[1,1':4',1''-terphenyl]-4,4''-diamine (TaTm, 10
217 nm) and MoO_3 (10 nm) was sublimated onto the MAPI, and
218 the device was finished with a gold electrode (100 nm). Figure
219 3a shows the external quantum efficiency (EQE) spectra for
220 solar cells with and without the TOPO layer. Their spectral
221 response was fairly similar (small differences are due to batch-
222 to-batch variations) and above 80% over all of the visible
223 spectrum. This resulted in a short-circuit current density of 19.7
224 mA/cm^2 for both devices. The current density versus voltage
225 (J – V) curves recorded under 1 sun illumination (Figure 3b)
226 were practically identical in the presence of TOPO, suggesting
227 that charge transport and recombination are substantially
228 unaltered by its presence. Also, the J – V curves recorded in
229 forward (fwd) and reverse (rev) are virtually hysteresis-free.
230 The open-circuit voltage (V_{oc}) was as high as 1100 mV, and we
231 noted only a small reduction in the fill factor (from 78.8 to
232 77.1%) upon TOPO treatment. The resulting power
233 conversion efficiency (PCE) was 17.2% for the solar cell
234 using pristine MAPI and 16.7% for the one with TOPO-
235 modified perovskite.
236

We tested the stability of the cells in air without any
237 encapsulation, measuring the J – V curves over time. We
238 observed a first drop in the efficiency followed by a slow
239

240 recovery during the first 10 h (Figure 3c), after which the
241 device performance started to drop. While the PCE of the
242 devices decreased in a similar manner independently of the use
243 of the TOPO layer, we observed how the cells with TOPO-
244 modified MAPI retained the photocurrent for a much longer
245 time (Figure 3d), with a slower decrease as compared to the
246 pristine MAPI cells. As the photocurrent is mainly determined
247 by the rate of carrier generation within the perovskite, this
248 might indicate that the presence of TOPO can alleviate the
249 perovskite degradation when incorporated in a working device,
250 in analogy with the results presented for simple perovskite films
251 (Figure 2).

252 In summary, we have shown that surface coating with organic
253 molecules can greatly enhance the stability of pure MAPI thin
254 films at high temperature, as well as room temperature. This
255 methodology is promising for enhancing both the processability
256 window of the material and the long-term operational stability.
257 Indeed, we have shown that efficient solar cells could be
258 fabricated with functionalized MAPI thin films. While the
259 photocurrent was observed to be maintained for a longer time
260 during air exposure of the cells, further developments,
261 optimizing the choice of organic molecules and the deposition
262 method, should allow one to enhance the stability while
263 minimizing efficiency losses. Furthermore, a deeper study on
264 halide perovskite surface functionalization would certainly shed
265 more light on the binding mechanisms of different molecules
266 on perovskites.

267 ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

268 ● Supporting Information

269 The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the
270 ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/acseenergy-
271 lett.8b00193.

272 Experimental details, XPS of samples with different
273 amounts of TOPO, XRD of samples aged at room
274 temperature, and J - V curves of devices based on
275 different amounts of TOPO (PDF)

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285 Notes

286 The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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