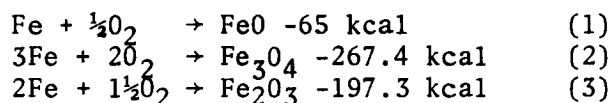


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METALLIC IRON AS A POTENTIAL FUEL FOR PRODUCTION OF HEAT ON THE
LUNAR SURFACE Charles B. Sclar and Jon F. Bauer Dept. of
Geological Sciences, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa. 18015

Metallic iron alloyed with small but variable amounts of nickel and cobalt is an abundant constituent in both the highland and mare regolith (1, 2, 3, 4). Some of the iron occurs as either unlocked (liberated) or partly liberated particles which may be separated relatively easily from the silicate and oxide minerals of the regolith by conventional dry magnetic-concentration methods. The grade and recovery of this potential particulate iron product would, of course, depend on the strength of the magnetic field employed and the degree to which the loose regolith material is divided into size fractions by screening and dry-elutriation procedures prior to magnetic separation.

It is well known that the oxidation of metallic iron to either FeO, Fe₃O₄, or Fe₂O₃ is highly exothermic. The corresponding reactions are:



Enthalpic values related to these equations are given in Table 1. For comparison, the heat of combustion of carbon in oxygen is -94 kcal per mole of CO₂, per mole of carbon, or per mole of oxygen. Inasmuch as the supply of iron from the regolith may be considered to be virtually unlimited, oxygen is the limiting factor in the combustion of iron on the lunar surface. Consequently, the most favorable reaction with respect to the evolution of heat is Fe → FeO (equation 1). Clearly, the evolution of 65 kcal per mole of product (FeO) or per mole of iron when iron reacts with oxygen to yield FeO is not as favorable as the yield of 94 kcal per mole of CO₂ or per mole of carbon from the combustion of carbon. However, if oxygen and not the fuel is the limiting factor, it is important to note that the reaction Fe → FeO results in the evolution of 130 kcal per mole of O₂ whereas the reaction C → CO₂ results in the evolution of only 94 kcal per mole of O₂. This argument, of course, is valid only if reaction rates are sufficiently high at elevated temperature so that the reaction Fe → FeO goes to completion. A hypothetical schematic flowsheet for the iron combustion process on the lunar surface is shown in Figure 1.

Although there are alternative sources of energy on the moon (e.g. solar energy), it appears to us that metallic iron in the lunar regolith constitutes the only easily recoverable mineral that might be utilized as a combustible fuel.

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Table 1. Heats of Combustion of Metallic Iron (ΔH in kcal) at 25°C, 1 atmosphere (5).

<u>Reaction</u>	<u>kcal/mole of product</u>	<u>kcal/mole of Fe</u>	<u>kcal/mole of O₂</u>	<u>Mole of O₂ Required per Mole of Fe</u>
Fe → FeO	-65	-65	-130	0.5
Fe → Fe ₃ O ₄	-267.4	-89	-133.7	0.66
Fe → Fe ₂ O ₃	-197.3	-98.7	-131.5	0.75

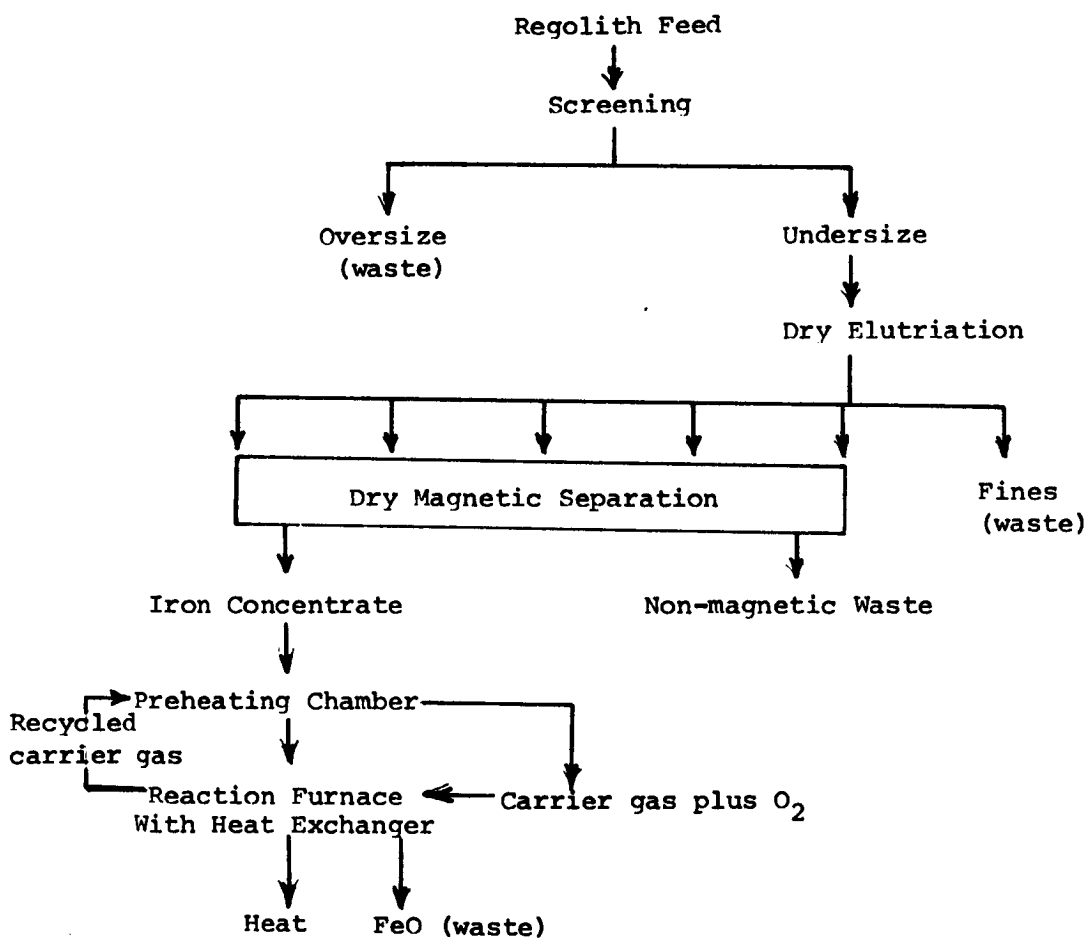


Figure 1. Hypothetical Flowsheet for Iron Combustion Process on Lunar Surface.

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DISCUSSION - (Sclar and Bauer)

SPEAKER 1: In magnetic separation, do you end up with anything besides iron?

SCLAR: No, not if you control the magnetic field strength properly so as to reject all materials with a magnetic susceptibility lower than that of iron, which should be the most magnetic material on the lunar surface.

SPEAKER 1: In our looking at the Moon as a place to do work, one of the big problems is sunlight being available part of the time. This (iron) would form an ideal battery where you wouldn't have to take the mass of the battery from the Earth. You could process the oxygen and the iron from the lunar material, separate them, and use them as battery during lunar night.

SCLAR: Okay, I accept all contributions of oxygen to this scheme. I just thought myself, and my colleague I think agrees, that if this ever came to pass, the first attempt would be with oxygen brought to the Moon. But, if there are alternative sources of oxygen, that would be even better.

SPEAKER 2: I just can't resist remarking that all of that waste that you had indicated there looked very good to me. You know, one man's waste is another man's resource, I guess.

SCLAR: You can look at the FeO as an iron ore but, then you're going to have to reduce it back to iron. It seems sort of silly to have to do that. Might as well keep some of the iron and process it directly.

SPEAKER 2: If you want the nitrogen and things of that kind, we're going to want to select for fines, and that was one of the things that you were throwing away. There may be a lot of compatible operations that could be involved.

SCLAR: Reaction kinetics are obviously the key here and obviously this is something that would have to be checked out on a laboratory scale initially.