



1 Pilot-scale co-rotating twin-screw-extruder.

2 Twin-screw extruder in operation.

3 Starch-based materials produced by reactive extrusion.

REACTIVE EXTRUSION

CONTINUOUS POLYMER PRODUCTION / MODIFICATION USING CO-ROTATING TWIN-SCREW EXTRUDERS

Reactive extrusion is continuous, chemical polymer modification or polymer synthesis in an extruder. It enables polymer-analogous reactions to be carried out without the use of a solvent. It also allows polymers to be further processed, mixed with other polymers (blended) or introduced directly into the component in an injection molding process, directly after modification.

Fraunhofer Institute for Chemical Technology ICT

Joseph-von-Fraunhofer-Strasse 7
76327 Pfinztal (Berghausen)
Germany

Contact

Simon Kemmerling
Phone +49 721 4640-774
simon.kemmerling@ict.fraunhofer.de

Aleksandra Buczko
Phone +49 721 4640-361
aleksandra.buczko@ict.fraunhofer.de

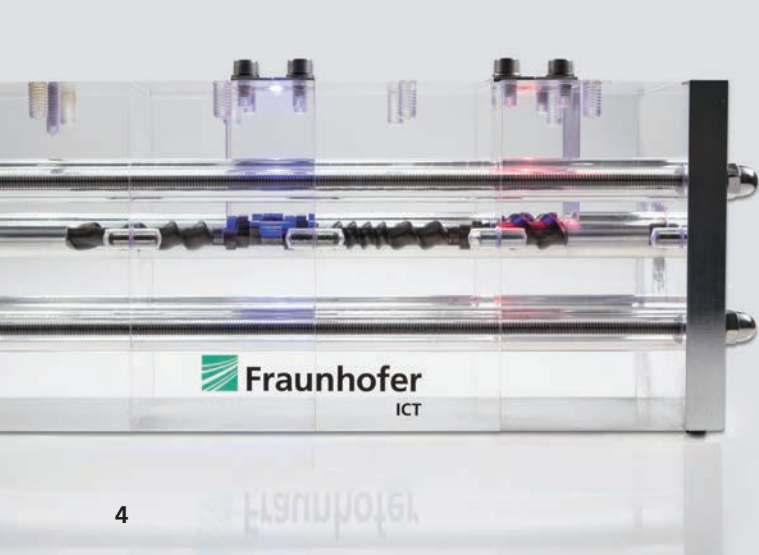
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Advantages of reactive extrusion

- Cost savings through elimination of solvent
- Handling of higher viscosities up to 10^6 Pa·s
- Optimal mixing and heat transfer conditions through adjustment of screw and barrel design
- Cost and energy savings due to fewer processing steps
- Improved material properties, as exposure to thermal stress is minimized

Reactive extrusion: experience and applications at Fraunhofer ICT

- 1) Bulk polymerization from a monomer / low-molecular-weight prepolymer:
→ e.g. ring-opening polymerization of PLA, polycondensation of PGA, repolymerization of PET oligomers, step-growth polymerization of TPU
- 2) Functionalization and grafting reactions through linking of monomers / oligomers to polymer backbone
→ e.g. radical grafting of anhydride onto polymers



- 3) Interchain copolymerization between two or more polymers with copolymer formation
→ e.g. modification of thermoplastic starch by copolymerization with anhydride-grafted biopolymers
- 4) Coupling or branching with poly-functional coupling agent to increase the length of the homopolymer chain
→ e.g. PET chain extension with difunctional anhydride
- 5) Degradation reactions decreasing the molecular weight of the polymer
→ e.g. degradation of PET with ethylene glycol, devulcanization of rubber

Equipment available at Fraunhofer ICT

- Mini-scale extruder (batch compounder):
 - twin-screw with backflow channel
 - capacity of 6-10 g
- Lab-scale extruders (limited flexibility):
 - screw diameter of 12-16 mm
 - throughput below 2 kg/h
- Pilot-scale extruders (tailored process setup):
 - screw diameter of 18, 27, and 32 mm
 - processing length 36-60 L/D
 - throughput of 0.2-100 kg/h depending on the processed material
- Flexible dosing for granules, powders, fibers, liquids & gases (supercritical) in a wide range of throughputs
- Vacuum technology
- Downstream equipment for pelletizing, shaping, foaming

Online analytics

Besides standard techniques, at Fraunhofer ICT on-line viscometry and multi-position online NIR technologies are also available for the effective characterization of reactive extrusion. Especially for reactions involving a large change in viscosity, on-line viscometry is a versatile measurement to evaluate the process efficiency. In the early stage of research, multi-position NIR analysis generates a very detailed process understanding, including information about where reactions or side reactions occur in the extruder. At a later stage, NIR can be utilized for tracking the quantity of a selected additive or for a quick and simple quality control of the produced material.

Our offer

- Adjustment of the reaction system and the formulation, with all necessary safety precautions
- Optimization of process control
- Analysis and quantification of the reaction, and characterization of the materials
- Development of the process chain from material selection and dosing to material processing and certification

4 *Transparent extruder – demonstration of spectroscopic measurements.*

5 *Screw elements from laboratory to industrial scale.*