The Influence of Cu₃(BTC)₂ metal organic framework on the permeability and perm-selectivity of PLLA-MOF mixed matrix membranes

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ABSTRACT: Poly(l-lactic acid) (PLLA) - 20% (w/w) and Cu₃(BTC)₂ metal organic framework (MOF) based mixed matrix membranes (MMMs) were fabricated by a vertical corotating twin screw microcompounder followed by an injection molding process. Water vapor, CO₂, O₂, and selected aroma mass transfer properties of PLLA and PLLA MMMs were evaluated. The CO₂/O₂ perm-selectivity of PLLA (aCO₂/O₂) MMMs increased from 7.6 to 10.3 with the incorporation of 20% Cu₃(BTC)₂ MOF. Gravimetric permeability studies of trans-2-hexenal performed at 23°C and 50% RH indicated that permeability coefficient of PLLA MMMs increased by around 60% as compared to regular PLLA film. However, no changes in mass transfer rates were observed for acetaldehyde. Furthermore, the thermal processing parameters as well as the presence of MOF did not show any significant effect on the molecular weight of the PLLA matrix nor on the crystalline structure of the Cu₃(BTC)₂ MOF, which was confirmed by both gel permeation chromatography and X-ray diffraction studies.

KEYWORDS: biomaterials; composites; membranes; morphology; packaging

INTRODUCTION
Poly(lactic acid) (PLA) has increased its market presence in the packaging and the textile industries due to growing environmental awareness and competitive resin prices. Permeability of various gases, water molecules, and organic compounds play an important role in the selection of polymeric membranes for industrial applications such as separation, bioremediation, and food and medical packaging. PLA is a reasonably good permeability for carbon dioxide (CO₂) and water vapor as compared to traditional petroleum based polymers like poly(vinyl chloride), poly(ethylene terephthalate), and poly(propylene), which can be a positive attribute for respiring products.¹–³ The thermal, mechanical and barrier properties of PLA are significantly affected by its isomeric composition (i.e., PLLA or PDLA content) and crystallinity.⁴–⁶ Tsuji and Tsuruno⁶ reported that PLLA/PDLA blend films with only stereocomplex crystallites had lower water permeability coefficients than PLLA or PDLA polymers alone.

Metal organic frameworks (MOFs), a class of micro-porous materials, have attracted a lot of attention due to their high adsorption properties, catalysis, high surface area, and bactericidal activities.⁷–¹⁰ MOFs can host various molecules in their pores depending on their interaction, pore size, and volume. The host-guest interactions between MOFs and gaseous, water vapors or organic molecules have been credited to: (i) the available metal sites, which interact/coordinate with the gases or water molecules and (ii) organic linkers which can physically adsorb gases due to secondary forces.¹¹–¹³ The ability of a specific MOF to host or interact with particular type gas molecules depends on the various factors such as: type of the organic linkers present in the MOF structure, number of aromatic rings present in the organic linker, and type of the functional groups attached to the organic linkers or metal species. Therefore, for a given application, proper selection of a MOF is key to obtain the desired sorption, selectivity and gas separation.

A membrane can be defined as a physical barrier, which allows selective transport of molecules. The effectiveness of a membrane can be judged from its permeability and selectivity. Along with high selectivity, reasonably good permeable membrane is required...
to achieve high productivity. Permeability coefficient \( P \) of a membrane is dependent on the solubility \( S \) and diffusion \( D \) coefficients and can be mathematically calculated using eq. (1).

\[
P = \frac{D \times S}{A \times t \times \Delta p}
\]

where, \( q \) is amount of the permeant transferred through the membrane, \( l \) is thickness of the membrane, \( A \) is surface area, \( t \) is time, and \( \Delta p \) is the pressure differential between the two sides of the membrane. Selectivity \( (s) \) can be measured by the ratio of the permeability of a gas \( A \) over the permeability coefficient of another gas \( B \).

In this research, copper benzene 1,3,5 tricarboxylate Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF was selected for its ability to interact with CO\(_2\). Membranes with high perm-selectivity for CO\(_2\) gas can be used in various industrial applications, which include capturing greenhouse gases, separating CO\(_2\)/CH\(_4\) to obtain high calorific methane for gas, etc. In packaging, these membranes can be used to selectively remove gases or aromatic molecules and to maintain optimum concentration of CO\(_2\), organic compounds, or other gases in the headspace of a package, which can impact the package performance.

Kusgen et al.\(^{15}\) characterized Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF using water adsorption. They suggested that water adsorption follows two steps: (i) axial coordination of the water molecules to the polar hydrophilic copper sites and (ii) filling of non-polar hydrophobic sites due to organic linkers at higher pressure. Castillo et al.\(^{16}\) studied the interaction of various hydrocarbons, gaseous, and water molecules using Monte Carlo molecular simulation, found that Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF has strong adsorption and affinity toward water molecules compared with other gaseous molecules in the following order CO\(_2\) > O\(_2\) > N\(_2\). This indicates that during an application water molecules will compete with other gases for available sites. Supronowicz et al.\(^{17}\) calculated the adsorption energies of H\(_2\)O, CO\(_2\), and O\(_2\) among other gaseous molecules, using \( ab \) initio density functional theory. The adsorption enthalpies for H\(_2\)O, CO\(_2\), and O\(_2\) calculated in this study were -53.8, -20.1, and -5.7 kJ/mol, respectively. The higher water adsorption enthalpy can be supported by the formation of a reversible coordinate bond between the free metal sites and the water molecules. These studies have also highlighted the existence of good Van der Waals interactions between Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF and CO\(_2\) molecules.\(^{15-17}\)

Mixed matrix membranes (MMMs) generally consist of a continuous polymeric matrix and filler that can enhance the performance of the polymeric membranes. It has been demonstrated that the presence of mesoporous or microporous fillers such as zeolites,\(^{18,19}\) carbon molecular sieves,\(^{20}\) and MOFs\(^{21,22}\) can increase the gas permeability and enhance the separation properties of these polymeric matrices. However, MOFs have been the focus in the last decade for their ease of synthesis, high surface area, gas selectivity, and adsorption.\(^{23}\) The hybrid organic-inorganic compositions of the MOFs renders them good candidates for polymer based MMMs since such hybrid compounds can offer defect free MMMs with good thermal stability.\(^{24-26}\)

In previous studies,\(^{24,27}\) we demonstrated that PLLA and Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF have strong interfacial interactions. We have also established that using melt extrusion we can prepare defect free PLLA-Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF composites.\(^{27}\) The purpose of this study is to understand the effect of Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF on the H\(_2\)O, CO\(_2\), O\(_2\), trans-2-hexenal, and acetaldehyde mass transfer and perm-selectivity in the PLLA matrix for potential use of MMMs in industrial applications such as gas separation and packaging. Organic aroma compounds such as trans-2-hexenal and acetaldehyde generally exist in fresh produce and their presence is related to the freshness and acceptance of the food product. For this reason, the mass transfer properties of PLLA-Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF based MMMs for various gases and vapors have been evaluated.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Materials**

Poly(\(\ell\)-lactic acid) (PLLA) grade 4043 D with 98% \(\ell\)-lactide content was provided by NatureWorks LLC (Minnetonka, MN). PLLA resin has an average molecular weight (M\(_a\)), number average molecular weight (M\(_n\)), and polydispersity index (M\(_w\)/M\(_n\)) of 11 kDa, 84 kDa, and 1.3, respectively. Basolite\(^{TM}\) C 300 MOF [Cu\(_3\)BTC\(_2\)] with a surface area ranging from 1500 to 2100 m\(^2\) g\(^{-1}\) and particle size varying between 5 and 30 \(\mu\)m was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO). Trans-2-hexenal (purity \(\geq 95\%)\) was supplied by SAFC. Acetaldehyde [purity \(\geq 99\%)\] was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich Corp (St. Louis, MO). Acetaldehyde and trans-2-hexenal were both stored at 5°C prior use.

**Fabrication of the PLLA-Mof Membranes**

PLLA resin was dried for 4 h at 80°C and Basolite\(^{TM}\) C 300 MOF was activated at 200°C and 4 kPa (30 mmHg) for 24 h using a vacuum oven. PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF composite samples were processed using a vertical corotating twin-screw microcompounder (DSM Research, Geleen, The Netherlands) attached to an injection molder. The extruder has 150 mm long screws with length to diameter ratio of 18 and a barrel volume of 15 cm\(^3\). The material was processed at 190°C using 5 min cycle time at \(\sim 1\) MPa (140 psi) injection pressure. The transfer cylinder and mold temperatures were set at 195 and 65°C, respectively. X-Ray diffraction (XRD) discs of PLLA and PLLA-20% activated MOF composites were prepared and stored in a desiccator at room conditions of 23 \(\pm 0.1\)°C.

The injection molded samples were then compressed into films at 170°C and \(\sim 1.0\) MPa for 5 min using a PHI 30 ton compression molding machine (City of industry, CA) equipped with 12 \(\times 12\) in plate.

**Surface Area and Pore Volume Measurement**

Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF specimens were examined using a Nova 2200 (Quantachrome Instruments, Boynton Beach, FL) gas sorption analyzer with N\(_2\) gas. The porous material Cu\(_3\)(BTC)\(_2\) was activated by placing \(\sim 5\) mg in the outgassing station for 24 h at 200°C (heating rate of 10°C/min) under vacuum 0.1333 kPa (1 torr). After activation, the samples were loaded in the physisorption station. The sorption isotherm at \(-195.85\)°C (77.3 K) was determined for relative pressure \(P/P_0\) varying from 10\(^{-6}\) to 1.
to 0.99 followed by desorption to 0.05 \( P/P_0 \). The surface area was determined using the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (RET) method and obtained from very small relative pressure \( P/P_0 < 0.05 \). The total pore volume was calculated using eq. (2).

\[
V_p = \frac{W_a}{\rho_l} \tag{2}
\]

where, \( V_p \) is the total pore volume, \( W_a \) the adsorbed amount (grams of nitrogen to specimen amount in grams), and \( \rho_l \) the density of nitrogen.

**Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)**

Cu\(_4\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF and PLLA-20% MOF composite samples were sputter gold coated to avoid any charging on these materials. The SEM images of MOF particles were captured using JEOL JSM 6400 SEM equipped with tungsten filament at 12 kV accelerating voltage. The morphology of the composites was analyzed using Philips Quanta 200 ESEM operated in low vacuum mode at a chamber pressure of 90 Pa and acceleration voltage of 10 kV accelerating voltage.

**X-Ray Diffraction**

XRD analysis was performed on XRD discs of PLLA, Cu\(_4\)(BTC)\(_2\) MOF, and PLLA-20% MOF stored at 23\(^\circ\)C and 0% RH with N\(_2\) gas having 0% RH as a carrier at a flow rate of 100 sccm. The data was collected using a modified ASTM D3985-05 using a Permatran® 2/21 (MOCON, Minneapolis, MN) at 23\(^\circ\)C and 0% RH using 100% CO\(_2\). N\(_2\) was used as a carrier gas at a flow rate of 100 sccm. The data points were collected every 30 min until stable saturated state was achieved. The transmission rate of film ranging from 4 to 6 mil thickness was measured using an aluminum mask with 3.14 cm\(^2\) area. The average value of last 10 stable points in steady state was used to calculate the permeability values using eq. (3). The data were analyzed for at least three samples.

**Mass Transfer Properties**

**Carbon Dioxide Transmission Rate (CO\(_2\)TR).** CO\(_2\)TR of the PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF were measured as per ASTM F2476-05 using a Permatran® 4/41 (MOCON, Minneapolis, MN) at 23\(^\circ\)C and 0% RH using 100% CO\(_2\). N\(_2\) was used as a carrier gas at a flow rate of 50 sccm. The data points were collected every 30 min until stable saturated state was achieved. The transmission rate of film ranging from 4 to 6 mil thickness was measured using an aluminum mask with 3.14 cm\(^2\) area. The average value of the last 10 stable points in steady state was used to calculate the permeability values using eq. (3). The data were analyzed for at least three samples.

**Aroma Permeability Coefficient.** Due to the volatile nature of acetaldehyde (C\(_2\)H\(_4\)O) and its low boiling point, the permeation was measured at 0% RH in a cooling chamber (PTC-1 Temperature Cabinet, NA) at 10.0 ± 0.25\(^\circ\)C with controller device (Sable System International, NA). The quasi-isostatic permeation experiment was simulated by placing a 4 mL vial filed with 300 \( \mu \)L of acetaldehyde and sealed with polypropylene (PP) screw holder with PLLA or PLLA-20% MOF membranes inside a 2 L glass jar as shown in Figure 1. The PP screw cap exposed 0.5 cm\(^2\) surface area of the film. Acetaldehyde was allowed to adsorb, and diffuse through, the PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF from the 4 mL vial to the 2 L glass jar. Accumulation of acetaldehyde was measured by drawing 25 \( \mu \)L gas from the headspace of the glass jar and injected it in a gas chromatography (GC; Hewlett Packard GC 6890, CA), at 15 min, 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 24, 36, 48, 60, and 72 h for each replicate.

A calibration curve was constructed prior this study by injecting acetaldehyde from the jar using a Pressure-Lok syringe from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MOA) ranging from 1 to 300 \( \mu \)L repeated in three replicates after incubation for 24 and 72 h at 10\(^\circ\)C. The injection temperature was 40\(^\circ\)C, the cycle was conducted at 40 to 240\(^\circ\)C. The initial time was 2 min and the heating ramp was 10\(^\circ\)C min\(^{-1}\). The gas flow was 30 mL min\(^{-1}\).

The aroma vapor transmission rate of trans-2-hexenal (C\(_6\)H\(_{10}\)O) was measured using a modified ASTM E-96 cup method at 23 ± 0.1\(^\circ\)C, 50 ± 2% RH and partial pressure difference of 1.436 kPa. The aroma vapor permeability coefficients of the PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF were calculated from the
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Surface Area and Pore Volume Measurement

The nitrogen sorption isotherms for the Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF are shown in Figure 2. The sharp uptake of the N$_2$ gas by the MOF at low relative pressure is an indication of a highly porous structure. The BET surface area, pore size and pore volume of the Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF are summarized in Table I. The Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF has an average BET surface area of 1777 m$^2$ g$^{-1}$, a total pore volume of 0.77 cm$^3$ g$^{-1}$, and average pore radius of 0.866 nm. The activation energy of the MOF particle was calculated using eq. (5) with $n$ value (set to 1 based on the adsorption isotherm and the expected activation energy$^{29}$) using Dubinin-Astakhov method. The activation energy was measured to be 44.11 kJ mol$^{-1}$, which is similar to what has been reported.$^{30}$ The high activation energy may be attributed to the formation of coordinate bonds between the metal sites and oxygen atoms present in the water molecules.

$$W = W_o e^{-\frac{A T_b (P/P_o)^n}{E}}$$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

where,

$W =$ weight adsorbed at $P/P_o$ and $T$

$W_o =$ total weight adsorbed

$E =$ characteristic energy

$n =$ noninteger value (typically between 1 and 3)

Figure 2 shows a type I sorption-desorption isotherm, as classified by the international union of pure and applied chemistry. The high adsorption and almost saturated state observed at low relative pressure supports the nanoporous nature of the MOF. The pore volume in this study was calculated at relative pressure of 0.99. BET surface area, pore size, and the pore volume was close to the previously reported values for Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF$^{31,32}$ and the average surface area that was specified by the supplier 1500–2100 m$^2$ g$^{-1}$. The pore radius was in range taking the three-dimensional and interior cavity into consideration of 9 x 9 Å.$^{31}$

Scanning Electron Microscopy

Figure 3(a-d) shows SEM images of Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF and PLLA-20% MOF. Permeability and selectivity of the membranes are strongly influenced by the matrix-filler interface. Any microvoids present in the membranes can negatively impact the perm-selectivity due to their nonselective nature. Traditional inorganic compounds used for the fabrication of the MMMs cause generation of micro void at the interface. Natural compatibility exists between MOF particles and polymers because of their hybrid organic-inorganic composition.$^{21,22,33}$ SEM studies showed defect free PLLA-MOF interface. Our past study,$^{27}$ also, demonstrated strong interfacial interactions between PLLA matrix and Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF particles as observed in the microscopic and rheological studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surface area BET (m$^2$ g$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>Total pore volume (cm$^3$ g$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>Average pore radius (Å)</th>
<th>Adsorption energy (kJ mol$^{-1}$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$</td>
<td>1777 ± 338</td>
<td>0.77 ± 0.14</td>
<td>8.66 ± 0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44.11 ± 17.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. (a) SEM images of Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF scale size 20 μm. (b) SEM image of Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF scale size 5 μm. (c) SEM image of PLLA-20% Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF scale size 10 μm. (d) SEM image of PLLA-20% Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF scale size 50 μm. (e). SEM image of PLLA-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF scale size 20 μm. (f) SEM image of PLLA-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF scale size 10 μm.

X-Ray Diffraction

Diffractograms of PLLA, Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF, and PLLA-20% Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF composite are represented in Figure 4. The diffraction pattern of PLLA-20% MOF, (Figure 4) shows a wide background peak, which is associated with the amorphous PLLA structure and narrow peaks, which are characteristic of the crystalline Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF. It can be observed from the diffractograms that MOF crystals present in the PLLA matrix diffracted the X rays at same 2θ angles as observed in the activated Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF alone. It indicates that the MOF crystals retained their inherent FCC crystal structure after thermal exposure during the extrusion and injection molding processes. In our previous study,$^{24}$ we reported in detail the effect of various processing parameters on the stability of the MOF crystals during the PLLA-MOF membrane fabrication and their effect on the final properties of the membranes. It was observed that activated MOF crystals when melt processed with PLLA retained their crystal structure. However, if there are adsorbed water molecules present in the MOF, the MOF crystal structure can deteriorate during the melt processing and compounding, which can negatively impact the selectivity and gas separation properties of PLLA-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF based MMMs. Detailed analysis of the effect of water on the thermal stability of PLLA-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF is reported elsewhere.$^{24}$
In this study, we used 20% w/w Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF for the fabrication of membranes, as indicated in Figure 5(e). The percentage was carefully chosen based on previous studies\textsuperscript{21,24,36} It was observed that with the addition of 20% Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF in the PLLA matrix, CO$_2$ permeability coefficient increased by around 38% as compared with PLLA. This may be attributed to the favorable quadrupole-quadrupole interactions between the Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF and CO$_2$\textsuperscript{16,17,22,37,38}. Torrisi et al.\textsuperscript{37,38} reported that the aromatic organic linkers (benzene tri carboxylate) present in the Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF can interact with CO$_2$ due to strong quadrupole-quadrupole interactions. Basu et al.\textsuperscript{22} studied CO$_2$/CH$_4$ and CO$_2$/N$_2$ gas separations using polyimide-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF based MMMs. They reported an increase in the relative CO$_2$ permeance of membrane with increase in the Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF loading in the polymer. The authors further attributed this increase to the strong quadrupole moment of CO$_2$ and poor electrostatic interactions of N$_2$ and CH$_4$ molecules with the Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF.

To predict the permeability of MMMs Maxwell and Maxwell Wagner Sillars (MWS) models have been extensively used.\textsuperscript{39} The Maxwell model assumes spherical shaped particles for calculating the mass transfer properties of MMMs. The model is represented in eq. (6).

$$P_{MMM} = P_c \left[ \frac{P_d + 2P_f - 2\Phi_f (P_c - P_d)}{P_d + 2P_f + \Phi_f (P_c - P_d)} \right]$$  \hspace{1cm} (6)$$

The MWS model improves on the Maxwell model taking into account the shape factor of the filler particles for calculation of mass transfer [eq. (7)].

$$P_{MMM} = P_c \left[ \frac{nP_d + (1-n)P_f + (1-n)(P_d - P_f)\Phi_f}{nP_d + (1-n)P_f - n(P_d - P_f)\Phi_f} \right]$$  \hspace{1cm} (7)$$

where, $P_{MMM}$ is the permeability of MMM, $P_c$, $P_d$, and $P_f$ are permeabilities of the continuous phase and dispersed phase, $\Phi_f$ is the concentration of filler and $n$ is the shape factor.

Both the experimental and theoretical CO$_2$ permeability coefficients for PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF MMMs are summarized in Table II. For calculation purposes the CO$_2$/CH$_4$ and CO$_2$/N$_2$ gas separations using polyimide-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF crystals was utilized from a previously reported study\textsuperscript{31} and MOF particles were assumed as an oblate spheroid with $n$ equal to 1 for MWS model. According to the MWS model, CO$_2$ permeability of PLLA-20% Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF increased by almost 89% as compared with the PLLA alone. However, a 38% increase in the CO$_2$ permeability coefficient of the PLLA with the addition of 20% Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF was measured. This difference between the measured and the calculated permeability can be attributed to densely packed interface of PLLA around the MOF as a result of the strong interfacial interactions between PLLA and the MOF [Figure 5(d)]. This is supported by the increase in crystallinity of PLLA from 2.5 to 11.1% with the addition of 20% MOF. In rheological studies, secondary plateau or terminal shoulder observed at low frequencies in PLLA-20% MOF in $G''$ plots indicate three directional network formation supporting strong interfacial interactions between MOF and PLLA and densely packed interface. Detailed analysis of DSC and rheological studies was reported elsewhere.\textsuperscript{27} The irregular shape of the MOF particles; as observed in Figure 3(a); may be another reason for low measured permeability as compared with the model prediction.

The oxygen permeability coefficient and CO$_2$/O$_2$ perm-selectivity ($\alpha_{CO2/O2}$) of PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF are presented in Table
III, there was no statistically significant difference in the oxygen permeability coefficients of PLLA and PLLA-Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF based MMMs, which can be ascribed to poor van der Waals interactions of O$_2$ molecules with Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF. Supronowicz et al. studied that total interaction energies ($\Delta E_{\text{int}}$) of CO$_2$ and O$_2$ molecules on the under coordinated Cu$^{2+}$ centers of Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF as per hybrid B3lyP density functional theory. They observed that the $\Delta E_{\text{int}}$ of O$_2$ and CO$_2$ molecules are $\sim$9.6 and $\sim$27.0 kJ mol$^{-1}$, respectively. Davydovskaya et al. studied Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF for sensing and detection of various aldehydes in various atmospheric conditions and concluded that oxygen does not interfere with the detection of aldehydes supporting in turn the hypothesis of poor interactions that exist between MOF and oxygen molecules. The perm-selectivity of PLLA (\%/CO$_2$/O$_2$) improved from 7.6 to 10.3 with the addition of 20% MOF crystals. The increased perm-selectivity can be attributed to the favorable interactions between MOF crystals and CO$_2$ over O$_2$.

Water vapor permeability coefficients of PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF are summarized in Table III. The presence of MOF did not affect the water permeability coefficients of PLLA. Strong coordinate bond type interactions and high interaction energy (>$40$ kJ mol$^{-1}$) of H$_2$O molecules with Cu$_3$(BTC)$_2$ MOF did not facilitate permeability of the water molecules.

Aroma Permeability Coefficient. Acetaldehyde and trans-2-hexenal considered in this work are made up of a polar functional group consisting of trigonal planar carbon double bond oxygen with an organic chain length of 1.5 and 6.3 Å. Acetaldehyde and trans-2-hexenal have logarithm of octanol water coefficient (Log $P$) of $-0.8$ and $1.58$, respectively. A Negative Log $P$ value is an indication of the hydrophilic nature of acetaldehyde whereas the positive value correlates to the hydrophobicity of trans-2-hexenal. The permeability coefficients for trans-2-hexenal and acetaldehyde are represented in Table III. Similar permeability coefficient values of both these compounds have been reported previously. Lee et al. reported the solubility coefficients of trans-2-hexenal and acetaldehyde as 55.89 and 19.5 kg m$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ Pa$^{-1}$, respectively. We observed a 60% increase in the trans-2-hexenal permeability coefficient with the addition of 20% MOF to the PLLA matrix. However, no change in the mass transfer of acetaldehyde was observed in PLLA-20% MOF matrix as compared to neat PLLA films. The difference in mass transfer rates of the two aldehydes may be explained by: (i) the influence of the existing

![Figure 5. Interfacial morphologies of MMMs](image)

**Table II.** Theoretical and Experimental CO$_2$ Permeability Coefficient of PLLA and PLLA-20% MoF Composites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Permeability coefficient $\times 10^{-18}$ (kg m m$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ Pa$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>Theoretical predictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimentally observed</td>
<td>Maxwell model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLLA</td>
<td>45.54 ± 2.72$^a$</td>
<td>45.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLLA-20% MOF</td>
<td>63.03 ± 1.86$^b$</td>
<td>167.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values in the same column with same lower case superscript alphabets are not statistically significantly different at $\alpha = 0.05$. 

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[1] Figure 5. Interfacial morphologies of MMMs (a) Ideal morphology. (b) Interfacial voids. (c) Dilated packed zone around interface. (d) Densely packed zone around interface. (e) Plugged MOF. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at wileyonlinelibrary.com.]
Table III. Trans-2-Hexenal, Acetaldehyde, H₂O, CO₂, O₂ Permeability Coefficients, and CO₂/O₂ Permselectivity of PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF Composites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permeability coefficient × 10⁻¹⁴ (kg m⁻² s⁻¹ Pa⁻¹)</th>
<th>Permeability coefficient × 10⁻¹⁸ (kg m⁻² s⁻¹ Pa⁻¹)</th>
<th>Permselectivity xCO₂/O₂</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trans-2-hexenal</td>
<td>Acetaldehyde</td>
<td>H₂O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLLA</td>
<td>29.21 ± 1.56ᵃ</td>
<td>15.3 ± 3.93ᵃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLLA-20% MOF</td>
<td>46.99 ± 2.36ᵇ</td>
<td>15.4 ± 0.80ᵃ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values in the same column with same lower case superscript alphabets are not statistically significantly different at α = 0.05.

environmental conditions during testing (relative humidity and temperature); (ii) the effect of the carbon chain length attached to the aldehyde functional group; and (iii) the aldehyde’s polarity and geometry. Moreover, the increase in the trans-2-hexenal permeability coefficient may also be attributed to a physisorption type interaction between trans-2-hexenal and Cu₃BTC₂ MOF occurring under favorable humidity conditions (50% RH).⁴⁰ Davydovskaya et al.⁴⁰ studied the sensing of various aldehydes with different chain length using work function based Cu₃BTC₂ sensor. They observed that in the case of pentanal the sensing capability of Cu₃BTC₂ sensor improved with increasing humidity from 28 to 42% RH. However, no further improvement in signal was observed with any additional increase in humidity beyond 42%. This indicates that humidity plays a very important role in the interaction of aldehydes with Cu₃BTC₂ MOF. Although the exact mechanism is still not well understood, the difference in the behavior of mass transfer properties of PLLA-20% Cu₃BTC₂ MOF MMMs toward acetaldehyde and trans-2-hexanal may be attributed to the fact that the acetaldehyde mass transfer was studied using GC studies conducted using a jar in which film is exposed to a controlled environment free of humidity, thus isolating the membranes from environmental humidity. However, in the tran-2-hexanal studies, the films were exposed to 23°C and 50% RH.

In addition, the polar group attached to two carbons and four hydrogens in acetaldehyde is more dominant in the overall structure as compared to trans-2-hexanal in which the polar group is attached to six carbon atoms. Dominant polar structure and small molecular size of acetaldehyde may have helped in chelation/complex formation between the oxygen atom of acetaldehyde with the unsaturated copper sites present in the Cu₃(BTC)₂ MOF under dry atmospheric conditions as shown in Figure 6. The stronger chemisorption interaction contributes to the binding of the organic or gaseous molecule to the Cu metal site. Once these open metal sites are occupied by the chemisorbed acetaldehyde, it is hard to remove these molecules from these pore sites and the MOF will not abet the mass transfer/permeability of these organic or gaseous molecule species.

**Gel Permeation Chromatography**

The molecular weight (Mₙ) and molecular weight distribution (MWD) can have significant impact on the mass transfer properties of the polymeric materials and composites. In order to understand the effect of MOF particles on any possible changes in the molecular weight GPC studies were performed. Chromatography studies indicate that PLLA retained its molecular structure and molecular weight after the thermal exposure during extrusion processing with MOF. There was no significant difference in the number average molecular weight of PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF. Although there is a statistical difference in the weight average molecular weight of the PLLA and PLLA-20% MOF samples, the difference is minimal and could be associated with the material variation in the molecular weight of resin supplied by the manufacturer. Mₙ and MWD did not affect the mass transfer properties of the MMMs in this study (Table IV).

This study demonstrated that the MOF particles can influence the mass transfer rate of various gases and volatile compounds which has implications for various applications including food.

![Figure 6. Chemisorption of acetaldehyde in Cu₃(BTC)₂ MOF structure after dehydration, dark gray; Cu atoms, light gray; carbon, red; oxygen atom, and hydrogen atoms omitted. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at wileyonlinelibrary.com.]](image-url)
packaging. Future work will concentrate on assessing additional mass transfer properties of the PLA MOF membranes and determining the migration/release of cooper from the developed membranes.

CONCLUSIONS

According to this study, it was observed that the CO₂/O₂ perm-selectivity (SCO₂/SO₂2) of PLLA films increases with the addition of 20% (w/w) Cu₃(BTC)₂ MOF. The increased carbon dioxide and trans-2-hexenal permeabilities can be associated with strong physisorption (quadrupole-quadrupole) type interaction between the gas molecules and the MOF. Aromatic or water molecules with ability to chemically coordinate on the metal sites in the MOF did not show any changes in the mass transfer properties. The presence of nanoporous MOF crystals in the polymeric matrices can significantly influence the barrier properties of certain gases and organic aromatic compounds; depending on the nature of interactions with these molecules; providing a gamut of opportunities in fields, such as gas separation, energy and packaging.

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REFERENCES


