Use of Duplex Stainless Steels in Hydroprocessing Reactor Effluent Air Coolers (REACs)

API TECHNICAL REPORT 932-C
FIRST EDITION, AUGUST 2022

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Contents

Page

1 Executive Summary 1
2 Scope 2
3 Terms, Definitions, and Acronyms 2
3.1 Terms and Definitions 2
3.2 Acronyms 3
4 Introduction 4
4.1 Survey Objectives 4
4.2 Background on the Use of DSS in Petroleum Refinery Hydroprocessing REACs 4
4.3 Summary 6
5 Survey Results and Discussion 6
5.1 Survey 6
5.2 Survey Response Statistics 10
5.3 Fabrication and Design Variables 12
5.4 Operating and Process Variables 16
5.5 In-service Inspection Practices and Findings 25
5.6 Summary of Observations from the Survey Responses 26
6 Assessment of the Likelihood of DSS REAC Systems for SSC 28
6.1 Step 1: Evaluate Effectiveness of Ferrite Control During Fabrication 28
6.2 Step 2: Assign a Likelihood Rating Using the Result from Step 1 and Environmental Severity 30
6.3 Step 3: Adjust the Likelihood Ranking from Step 2 Based on In-service Crack Detection Inspections 32
7 HEAC Failures During High Pressure Hydrogen Tightness Testing 35
8 Conclusions 36
Annex A (informative) Survey Results 38
Bibliography 39

Figures

1 Histogram of Time in Service without Cracking of 2205 DSS REACs in the Survey 11
2 Time to Failure or Identification of Cracking of 2205 DSS in REAC Systems (includes REACs and Piping) 11
3 Design Pressure 12
4 Maximum Header Box Plate Thickness Reported for 28 Cases 13
5 Minimum Header Box Plate Thickness Reported for 28 Cases 13
6 Plate Thicknesses Are Not Strongly Correlated to Design Pressure 14
7 Operating Pressure 17
8 Operating Pressure Versus Design Pressure 17
9 Inlet Temperature for REACs in Survey 18
10 Outlet Temperatures for REACs in Survey 19
11 NH_4HS Concentration for Cases With and Without Weldment Cracking 20
12 Operating Pressure Plotted Versus NH_4HS Concentration for the Cases with Weldment Cracking Reported in the Survey Responses 21
13 Operating Pressure Plotted Versus NH_4HS Concentration for Survey Cases with API RP 932-B Data Included 21
14 Feed N and Sour Water NH4HS Show Some Correlation 22
15 Hydrogen Partial Pressure Responses 22
16 Separator Sour Water Concentration 23

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Contents

Page

17 Plot to Assign Likelihood for SSC with Unfavorable Ferrite Control 30
18 Plot to Assign Likelihood for SSC with Favorable Ferrite Control 31
19 Criteria for Low, Medium, and High Susceptibility to Cracking Shown with Experience Data from Figure 13 32
20 SSC Likelihood with Unfavorable Ferrite Control and with At Least Two Highly Effective In-service Crack Detection Inspections Without Indications Being Identified 34
21 SSC Likelihood with Favorable Ferrite Control and with At Least Two Highly Effective In-service Crack Detection Inspections Without Indications Being Identified 34

Tables

1 API DSS Survey Form 7
2 Summary of Survey Statistics 10
3 Survey Responses Regarding Material of Construction 14
4 Survey Responses Covering Welding and Fabrication 15
5 Summary of Inlet and Outlet Temperatures of REACs 18
6 Inlet and Outlet Temperatures for REACs with Weldment Cracking 18
7 Separator Sour Water pH Range 19
8 pH of Sour Water Reported for Cases with Weldment Cracking 19
9 Sour Water NH_4HS Reported in Survey Responses 20
10 Responses to Process Related Questions 23
11 In-service Inspection Practices and Findings 26
12 Operational and Process Variables Without Correlation to Weldment Cracking 27
13 Operational and Process Variables that May Have Some Correlation to Weldment Cracking 27
14 Worksheet for Assessing Ferrite Control of 2205 DSS REACs 29
15 Likelihood Terminology 31
16 Inspection Effectiveness for SSC of DSS Header Box Weldments 33
17 Slow Strain Rate Tensile Ductility Data on 2507 Flange from Reference 14 36

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Use of Duplex Stainless Steels in REAC Systems

1 Executive Summary

This technical report covers results of a survey of the petroleum refining industry concerning the use of duplex stainless steel (DSS) in hydroprocessing reactor effluent air cooler (REAC) systems. The API Committee on Refining Equipment Subcommittee on Corrosion and Materials (SCCM) commissioned this survey after several industry reports of weldment cracking failures with DSS REAC system components, including REAC header boxes, tube-to-tubesheet welds, and associated piping. REAC component weldment cracking has been addressed in SCCM documents, including API Recommended Practice 932-B and API Technical Report 938-C, in published conference papers, and in a report issued by the Materials Technology Institute (MTI).

Survey results and information from prior studies are used to summarize the weldment cracking issue and to prepare an approach for assessing the likelihood for in-service weldment cracking of DSS REAC system components.

Two types of weldment cracking are discussed:

1) in-service sulfide stress cracking (SSC) at weldments; and

2) hydrogen environment assisted cracking (HEAC) occurring during tightness testing in high-pressure hydrogen.

Most previously reported cases of REAC weldment cracking were from SSC due to elevated ferrite content in welds and heat affected zones (HAZ). An issue with DSS use in REAC environments has been that no effective nondestructive method for measuring ferrite at weld HAZ is available. Ferrite is controlled through control of welding parameters and welding procedure specification development. However, without a nondestructive test method for effectively measuring localized regions of high ferrite at weld HAZ, there is no assurance that high ferrite zones are not present.

This report provides a three-step process for assessing the likelihood of SSC in existing DSS REAC system components. It involves an evaluation of ferrite control during fabrication, a measure of environmental severity, and a consideration of in-service crack detection inspection results. It is suggested that this assessment process be used to prioritize metallurgy upgrades and in-service inspections.

For new hydroprocessing REAC system components, most refining operators are specifying Alloy 825 or Alloy 625 to avoid the risk of weldment cracking with DSS. Also, many refineries are upgrading existing DSS REAC components to Alloy 825 or 625 to avoid weldment cracking. Where DSS remains in service, the following may be evaluated:

— degree of confidence that highly effective crack-detection inspections can be completed and what inspection frequency is required to detect cracks prior to loss of containment;

— accessibility of weldments for inspection that is often limited; this influences the ability to perform highly effective crack-detection inspections;

— effect of surface temperature on inspection quality if crack-detection inspection is to be done while the unit is operating.

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