Air and Water Stable 1-Ethyl-3-methylimidazolium Based Ionic Liquids

John S. Wilkes and Michael J. Zaworotko*†

The Frank J. Seiler Research Laboratory, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado 80840, USA

A series of novel air and water stable low melting salts based upon the 1-ethyl-3-methylimidazolium cation (EtMeim⁺) have been prepared and characterized; two salts, [EtMeim]BF₄ and [EtMeim]MeCO₂, are liquids under ambient conditions.

Alkylpyridinium (Rpy⁺) chloroaluminate based ambient temperature ionic liquids have been known since the 1950s, however, it was the discovery of EtMeim⁺ based chloroaluminate ionic liquids in 1982 that afforded the impetus for a dramatic increase in activity in the area. The latter class of compounds exhibits a wider liquidus range and an electrochemical window of >3.0 V and has therefore become of great interest from both an electrochemical and a synthetic perspective. A considerable drawback of ambient temperature ionic liquids concerns the need to protect rigorously the ionic liquids from moisture and other oxide impurities and the tendency of many substrates to react with halometallates. Use of ambient temperature ionic liquids has therefore thus far been limited to a narrow range of organic substrates, typically those that react desirably with Lewis acids such as Friedel–Crafts substrates. In contrast, there are a plethora of higher melting salts, typically based upon halides, halometallates and more inert anions such as nitrate, sulfate and carbonate, that have been utilized as electrolytes. It occurred to us that were the inertness and facile handling capability of some of the higher melting salts to become feasible under ambient conditions, then the possibilities for applications of ionic liquid media would become greatly enhanced. In this communication we report the preliminary results of a study that has focused upon extending the range of known EtMeim⁺ salts so as to include
anions which would permit more widespread usage of ionic liquids as both electrolytes and reaction media. The following salts† were prepared quantitatively on the benchtop via metathesis of [EtMeim][] and the appropriate silver salt in MeOH or MeOH–H₂O: [EtMeim]NO₃, 1a, m.p. 38 °C; [EtMeim]NO₂, 1b, m.p. 55 °C; [EtMeim]BF₄, 1c, m.p. 15 °C; [EtMeim]MeCO₂, 1d, m.p. ca. −45 °C; [EtMeim]₂SO₄·H₂O, 1e, m.p. 70 °C. With the exception of 1e all salts are hygroscopic but no special precautions are required during synthesis as they may be dried conveniently in a vacuum oven at 80 °C. This is in contrast to higher melting metal based salts which can form thermodynamically stable hydrates that are much more difficult to dehydrate. Crystals of 1b and 1e were obtained via cooling a saturated MeCN–Et₂O solution of the salt whereas 1a was crystallized through slow cooling of the molten salt to room temperature. Compound 1e supercools to at least −20 °C whereas 1d freezes to a glass at −45 °C although it becomes extremely viscous below −20 °C.

The nature of the EtMeim⁺ cation and how it interacts with various anions has previously been explored in both solution and solid phases and via theoretical studies. It is apparent that hydrogen bonding via the hydrogen atom at position 2 of the im ring is a common feature of basic ionic liquids (i.e. mole fraction of AlCl₃ < 1.0) but what influence this has upon the structure and physical properties of melts and solids remains unclear. In order to evaluate how EtMeim⁺ interacts with the anions chosen for this study the X-ray crystal structures of 1a, 1b and 1e were determined. Analysis of the interionic contacts reveals the presence of C–H···O hydrogen bonding in all three compounds, with the hydrogen atom at position 2 exhibiting the strongest interactions. Indeed, the C–H···O distances are at the short end of the range expected for a C–H···O hydrogen bond,¹⁰ being comparable to those exhibited for strong ClCH₂···O hydrogen bonds.¹¹ Cell packing diagrams illustrate that 1b (Fig. 1) exhibits hexagonal close-packing whereas 1a and 1e (Figs. 2 and 3, respectively) pack so that the EtMeim⁺ cations are vertically stacked. A similar stacking of cations was observed in the solid state for [EtMeim][Cl]₁². It is interesting to note that we have not yet encountered similar stacking in related pyridinium or 1,3-

† Satisfactory microanalysis and NMR spectra were obtained for 1a–e.

§ Crystal data for 1a: M = 173.2, monoclinic, P2₁/a, a = 4.540(3), b = 14.810(9), c = 13.445(9) Å, β = 95.74(6)°, U = 899.5(10) Å³, Z = 4, Dₑ = 1.279 Mg m⁻³, µ = 1.0 cm⁻¹, crystal dimensions 0.25 × 0.40 × 0.60 mm. 864 Reflections with I > 3σ(I) converged at R = 0.083 and R' = 0.104.

For 1b: CaH₄N₂O₂, M = 157.2, monoclinic, space group P2₁, a = 7.870(5), b = 6.752(3), c = 8.517(6) Å, β = 114.21(5)°, U = 412.8(4) Å³, Z = 2, Dₑ = 2.126 Mg m⁻³, µ = 0.9 cm⁻¹, crystal dimensions 0.30 × 0.50 × 0.90 mm. 548 Reflections with I > 3σ(I) converged at R = 0.059 and R' = 0.065.

For 1c: C₁₂H₁₇NO₄S, M = 336.4, orthorhombic, space group Pca₂₁ (non standard setting for Pnma), a = 7.474(2), b = 13.023(5), c = 16.894(6) Å, U = 1644.4(10) Å³, Z = 4, Dₑ = 1.359 Mg m⁻³, µ = 2.1 cm⁻¹, crystal dimensions 0.40 × 0.50 × 0.60 mm. 1024 Reflections with I > 2σ(I) converged at R = 0.038 and R' = 0.046.

All the data were measured on a Siemens P3/P3 diffractometer at 20 °C. All computations were conducted using NRCVAX software (E. J. Gabe, Y. Le Page, J.-P. Charland, F. L. Lee and P. S. White, J. Appl. Crystallogr., 1989, 22, 384). Atomic coordinates, bond lengths and angles, and thermal parameters have been deposited at the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre. See Notice to Authors, Issue No. 1.
dimethylimidazolium salts. The C–H⋯O hydrogen bonding in the plane of the ions results in a cross-linked 2D network for 1a, an ion pair in the case of 1b and a 3D network for 1e, which has O–H⋯O hydrogen bonding perpendicular to the plane of the ions. The C–H⋯O hydrogen bonding therefore appears strong enough to preclude normal ionic packing but not strong enough to increase significantly the melting points.

It is clear from this study that EtMeim+ is an ideal candidate for general use in ionic liquids. It is of moderate size (thereby lowering lattice energies), its shape appears to promote cation stacking, it is facile and inexpensive to prepare, chemically and electrochemically robust, and can only engage in the thermodynamically weak C–H⋯X hydrogen bonding. We are presently continuing our investigation of 1a–e in the context of media for electrochemistry and synthesis.

This work was supported by the National Research Council (fellowship to M. J. Z.) and The Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

Received, 18th March 1992; Com. 201440H

References