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MTL TR 89-44

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Y-Si-Al-O-N GLASS FIBERS

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CERAMICS RESEARCH BRANCH

May 1989

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1. REPORT NUMBER MTL TR 89-44	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Y-Si-Al-O-N GLASS FIBERS		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Final Report
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s) Donald R. Messier, Robert P. Gleisner, and Ronald E. Rich		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army Materials Technology Laboratory Watertown, Massachusetts 02172-0001 SLCMT-EMC		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS D/A Project: 1L16102.AH42
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army Laboratory Command 2800 Powder Mill Road Adelphi, Maryland 20783-1145		12. REPORT DATE May 1989
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 11
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Fiber-reinforced composites Glass fibers Glass Corrosion resistance Oxynitride glass Mechanical properties		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) (SEE REVERSE SIDE)		

Block No. 20

ABSTRACT

The excellent mechanical properties and outstanding water corrosion resistance of Y-Si-Al-O-N glasses indicate that they are attractive candidate materials for forming into high performance glass fibers. Fibers of glasses containing, respectively, 3.2 and 6.6 wt% N were drawn freehand in air, and from glass rods in N₂. Continuous fibers (100-m long) of the former glass were melt-drawn in N₂ while being wound in air outside of the glass-melting furnace. Some fibers had diameters as small as 10 μm, and characterization data show that the fibers retain all of the desirable properties of the bulk glass.

Keywords: continuation front

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INTRODUCTION

It is now well established that the properties of many glasses are markedly improved by the substitution of N for O in the glass structure.¹⁻⁷ Properties that increase with increasing N content include glass transition temperature, viscosity, density, hardness, water corrosion resistance, and, of especial interest, elastic modulus. Reported in the literature are elastic modulus values for Y-Si-Al-O-N (up to 186 GPa),⁸ and for Ca-Si-Al-O-N (135 GPa)⁹ glasses that significantly exceed values obtained for similar oxide glasses and, indeed, are unprecedented for any non-Be glass. In view of the considerable potential for improvement afforded by N substitution, it appeared that oxynitride glasses should have promise for fabrication into fibers with exceptional properties, and the purpose of this investigation was to demonstrate the feasibility of making such fibers.

Interest in the particular system chosen for this investigation came from prior work on the hot pressing of Si₃N₄ indicating that the use of yttria as a sintering aid produces material with good high temperature properties.¹⁰ Jack and his coworkers¹ appear to be the first to recognize that this and other sintering aids produced oxynitride glass phases, and that the glasses could be prepared as separate phases. Subsequent studies of the preparation of, and evidence of the outstanding properties of, glasses in the system Y-Si-Al-O-N were reported by several investigators.^{2-6,8,11-14} Of particular significance, with respect to the potential usefulness of these glasses for fibers, are the high elastic modulus values for bulk glasses reported by Messier and Broz,⁸ and the outstanding hot water corrosion resistance demonstrated by Loehman,³ and by Wald et al.¹³

The present investigation is an outgrowth of earlier work^{8,11,14} on the preparation and properties of Y-Si-Al-O-N glasses. That work emphasized making the materials in significant quantities (100 g). It was intended that this system, while yielding useful materials in its own right, could also serve to demonstrate the feasibility of producing oxynitride glass fibers in any number of systems. Such has indeed proved to be the case, as will be reported in future publications.

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EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Glass Preparation

All of the glasses that were used in this study were pre-melted according to procedures already described.^{11,14} Melting was done in BN-lined graphite crucibles in N₂ at temperatures from 1600°C to 1650°C. The resulting glass disks were subsequently broken into chunks and, if required, ground into powder for forming into glass rods. The coarse glass chunks were used as is for feed stock in melt-drawing experiments. Glass rods were formed by remelting ground glass in BN-lined graphite crucibles. The crucible was lined by coating its interior with BN powder applied as a slurry in acetone. The resulting coating was dried to remove any residual acetone. The glass rods that were obtained were 4 mm to 8 mm in diameter and about 50-mm to 100-mm long. The two glass compositions that were investigated, and to be discussed further below, are given in Table 1.

Table 1. COMPARISON OF Y-Si-Al-O-N GLASS NOMINAL COMPOSITIONS WITH COMPOSITIONS OBTAINED ON BULK GLASSES AND GLASS FIBERS VIA CHEMICAL AND SCANNING ELECTRON MICROSCOPE (SEM) ANALYSES

Specimen	Weight Percent (of Cation Total)			Weight Percent (of Spec. wt)
	Al	Si	Y	N
Nominal "a" Composition	9.3	29.1	61.6	3.2
"a" Chemical Analysis	9.7	26.8	63.5	3.3
"a" Bulk Glass (SEM)	8.7	31.6	59.8	2.7
"a" Fiber No. 11 (SEM)	9.1	27.9	63.0	4.1
"a" Fiber No. 12 (SEM)	8.9	27.7	63.4	3.5
Nominal "b" Composition	18.7	19.5	61.8	6.6
"b" Chemical Analysis	18.4	19.2	62.4	6.4
"b" Bulk Glass (SEM)	18.2	18.6	63.1	9.4
"b" Fiber (SEM)	18.4	17.2	64.4	8.4

Fiber Drawing in Air

Initial fiber drawing attempts involved simply heating abutting pieces of glass in air with an oxyacetylene torch until they partially fused together, and rapidly pulling the pieces apart. The fibers, although relatively easily formed, were variable in length and cross-sectional size and shape.

Fiber Pulling from Rods in N₂

The first fibers that were drawn in N₂ were made in the same furnace (Figure 1) that was subsequently used for drawing from the melt. The procedure involved heating the tips of two abutting glass rods, one of which was fixed and the other of which could be withdrawn to pull a short fiber. One of the rods was held rigidly in a drill chuck, while the other was affixed to a steel rod that could be pulled up through a compression fitting in the top of the apparatus. In order to draw a short (250 mm) fiber, the apparatus was assembled with the tips of the two glass rods abutting in the hot zone, and the assembly heated to the point where the glass softened and the rod tips fused together. The moveable rod was then

quickly withdrawn to form the fiber, the removal of which required disassembly of the apparatus after cooling to room temperature. Because of obvious difficulties, this fiber-drawing method was abandoned in favor of the melt-drawing technique described below.

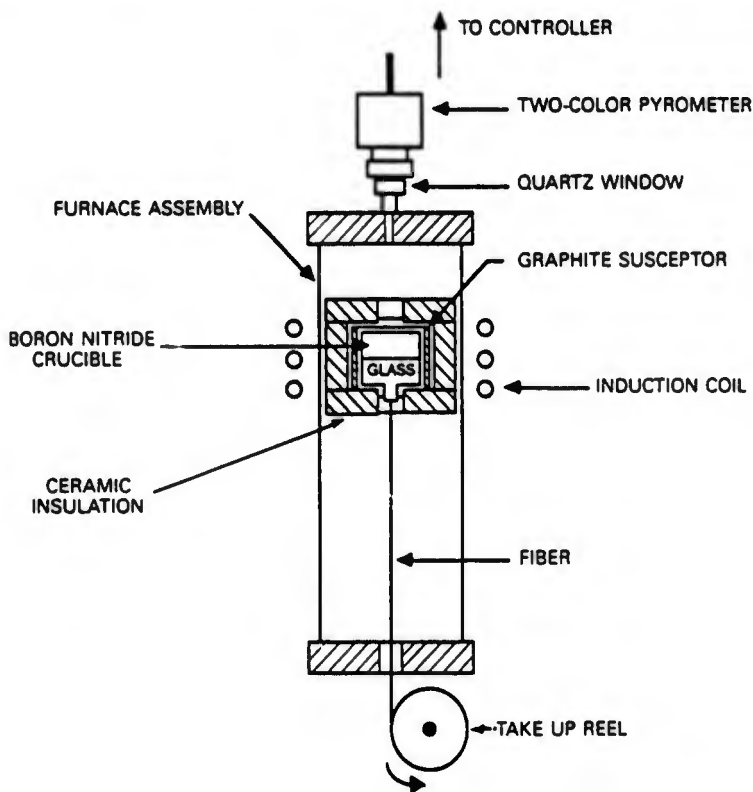


Figure 1. Schematic representation of oxynitride glass fiber-drawing system.

Fiber Drawing from the Melt in N₂

The apparatus used for drawing Y-Si-Al-O-N glass fibers from the melt is illustrated in Figure 1. Earlier experience taught us the necessity for precise temperature programming and control, and the present setup includes a two-color pyrometer* that provides temperature measurement as well as a feedback signal for control by a microprocessor programmer/controller.† The furnace employs a graphite susceptor heated by a 400-MHz induction generator‡ whose power is regulated by a silicon-controlled rectifier.** Insulation is provided by ceramic foam type refractory material[◇] that is easily formed with hand tools. The glass-melting crucible, 30-mm orifice diameter x 50-mm long, is machined from hot-pressed BN.^{◇◇} The nozzle in the bottom of the crucible is 3-mm long with an orifice diameter of 2.8 mm. The fiber is wound on a 100-mm-diameter plastic spool by means of a laboratory motor whose speed is continuously variable from 0 to 3000 rpm. The furnace is enclosed in a vacuum-tight fused silica tube, and the fiber is withdrawn through a slightly loosened compression fitting in the bottom of the furnace tube.

*R Series, Ircon, Skokie, IL.

†Micricon, Research Inc., Minneapolis, MN.

‡Tocco, Ohio Crankshaft Co., Cleveland, OH.

**Barber Colman Co., Rockford, IL.

◇ Zircar Products, Inc., Florida, NY.

◇◇ Carborundum Co., Niagara Falls, NY.

In order to draw a fiber, the crucible is filled with crushed premelted glass, loaded into the furnace, and heated in flowing N_2 to a temperature suitable for fiber drawing. Heating is continued to the point where the glass has melted, and a bead of molten glass has formed at the nozzle tip. For the glasses investigated in this study, that temperature is in the range of $1500^\circ C$ to $1600^\circ C$. At this stage, a fiber is started by inserting an Al_2O_3 thermocouple insulator tube axially through the fitting in the bottom of the furnace to the point at which its tip just touches the molten glass bead. The Al_2O_3 tube is then withdrawn through the fitting, pulling a fiber with it. The tip of the fiber is then attached to the take-up spool, and winding begun. Winding continues until the fiber breaks, or the glass in the crucible has been consumed. Winding times are typically from 5 to 10 minutes, at which time we estimate that 100 m or more of fiber have been drawn. Fiber diameters for different runs have ranged from $30 \mu m$ to $100 \mu m$ with the smallest diameter feasible at present being limited by inadequacies (presently being corrected) in our experimental system.

Characterization

The characterization data reported herein were obtained by various means. Density measurements on bulk specimens were obtained by the usual Archimedes technique, and X-ray diffraction patterns were run on various glass specimens that had been crystallized by heating in N_2 for 2 hours at $1300^\circ C$. Optical photomicrographs were taken with transmitted light on fiber specimens in immersion oil.

Microhardness measurements were done on polished sections with a Knoop indenter and 0.98 N load. The technique used for elastic modulus measurements on bulk specimens has already been discussed.⁸ Modulus values for the air-drawn fibers were obtained from stress-strain curves,¹⁵ and for the N_2 -drawn fibers from sonic velocity measurements.¹⁶

Conventional chemical analyses that were done included cation determination by spectrochemical techniques, and analyses for O and N by the Kjeldahl inert gas fusion technique.¹⁴ Cation analysis in the scanning electron microscope was done by energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX), and N analysis by wavelength dispersive spectroscopy (WDS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Air-Drawn Fibers

Although the Y-Si-Al-O-N glass fibers drawn in air were somewhat crude and misshapen, the results are instructive as to the behavior of the glass when heated in air. Table 2 summarizes the results of chemical analyses for N on several samples of Y-Si-Al-O-N glass corresponding to composition "a" in Table 1. The heating times undergone by the fiber specimens, although not measured exactly, are estimated to be in the range from a few seconds to a minute or so at temperatures near the melting range of the glass. In comparison, heating times for the extensively heated material are estimated to be of the order of 10 minutes or more. The specimens heated for short times retain significant amounts of their original N contents, and decomposition is incomplete even for glass heated extensively in air.

15. ASTM Standard D 3379. *Tensile Strength and Young's Modulus for High-Modulus Single-Filament Materials*. American Society for Testing and Materials, 1975.

16. Dynamic Modulus Tester, PPM-5R, H. M. Morgan Co., Norwood, MA.

Table 2. COMPARISON OF ANALYZED N CONTENTS OF AIR-DRAWN Y-SI-AL-O-N GLASS FIBERS WITH NOMINAL STARTING COMPOSITION AND WITH N ANALYSIS ON BULK GLASS USED FOR FIBER DRAWING

Specimen	Weight Percent N
Nominal Glass Composition	3.20
Bulk Glass	4.12
Air-Drawn Fibers	2.60
Glass Heated Extensively in Air	0.26

Although the fibers that were drawn in air were of poor quality, that such fibers could be produced at all while retaining a significant N content is noteworthy. Rapid thermal decomposition would be expected in air, and the observed result suggests that the heating and drawing rates were so fast as to preclude extensive thermal decomposition during fiber drawing. At any rate, heating the glass with a torch to the high temperature required for drawing was difficult, as was controlling the process. Air drawing was not, therefore, pursued further as a viable means of making oxynitride glass fibers.

Fibers Pulled from Rods in N₂

Numerous problems were encountered in attempting to draw short fibers from glass rods in N₂. The rods that were fabricated were often imperfect and some tended to break at pre-existing cracks when stressed even moderately. The best fiber drawing procedure that could be devised consisted of fusing together the ends of short rods inserted into the hot zone from opposite ends of the furnace, cooling to yield a single rod held at both ends, and reheating to soften the glass enough to stretch the rod into a fiber by pulling from one end. Judging the correct viscosity for pulling, however, proved difficult, and the rods frequently broke from accidentally induced bending stresses. Barring that, the rod often pulled out of the chuck holding it if pulling was started before the glass was soft enough. At the other extreme, heating to too high a temperature for fiber drawing resulted in separation of the two rod halves without any fiber being produced. The temperature problem was compounded by the difficulty of temperature measurement; the presence of the rod interfered with the axial sight path required for optical pyrometry. Despite these difficulties, however, Figure 2 presents evidence that a few good fibers were produced by pulling from rods.

Some of the above mentioned problems with regard to pulling fibers from oxynitride glass rods are almost certainly composition related. For example, the Y-Si-Al-O-N glass that was used had a narrow temperature range in which its viscosity was suitable for fiber drawing. A further problem relates to the necessity of imposing a temperature gradient on the rod during fiber drawing; that gradient caused devitrification to occur in the part of the rod which was in the temperature range (approximately 900°C to 1100°C) where devitrification occurs fairly readily. Our past experience has been that devitrified glass is difficult to remelt, and such devitrification would make it difficult, at best, to pull fibers in a manner that required the rod tip to be fed continuously into the hot zone to furnish additional molten glass to keep the process going. The foregoing problems could probably be minimized or eliminated by suitable modifications of the glass composition, but the investigation of such modifications was beyond the scope of the present study.



Figure 2. Transmitted light optical photomicrograph of parts of short (100-mm long) Y-Si-Al-O-N glass fibers drawn from a glass rod. Fiber quality and uniformity are good, and the small diameter ($10\ \mu\text{m}$) of one fiber indicates that fine fibers can be formed from this glass.

Fibers Melt Drawn in N_2

The experimental setup shown in Figure 1, although similar to arrangements used to make many types of oxide glass fibers,¹⁷ differs in some important respects. A unique feature of the present fiber-drawing process is that a flowing N_2 atmosphere is maintained in the furnace chamber to prevent thermal decomposition of the molten glass¹⁸ while the fiber is wound in the ambient atmosphere. Also unique is the use of a BN crucible. Because of the N_2 atmosphere and corrosiveness of the glass, the noble metals commonly used for oxide glasses would be unsuitable as crucible materials.

Although graphite has proven satisfactory as a susceptor material, it may promote thermal decomposition by making the atmosphere excessively reducing.¹⁸ From that standpoint, a susceptor capable of operating in a more oxidizing environment might be desirable, and other possible susceptor materials are currently being evaluated.

After initial successful attempts at drawing short fibers from molten glass in a BN crucible, the apparatus was configured as shown in Figure 1 for winding continuous fibers. While a number of successful fiber-drawing runs were conducted with Y-Si-Al-O-N glass of composition "a" (Table 1), attempts at drawing continuous fibers of composition "b" were unsuccessful. Although short fibers of the latter composition were produced, the fibers were so stiff, they resisted winding.

Photomicrographs of sections of continuous fibers of composition "a" are shown in Figure 3. Although difficult to see in Figure 3, imperfections found in the fibers typically included occasional transparent crystalline inclusions, metallic Si-rich particles, and elongated axial pores.

17. LOWENSTEIN, K. L. *The Manufacturing Technology of Continuous Glass Fibers*. Glass Science and Technology, Elsevier, Amsterdam-Oxford-New York, v. 6, 1983.

18. MESSIER, D. R., and DEGUIRE, E. J. *Thermal Decomposition in the System Si-Y-Al-O-N*. J. Am. Ceram. Soc., v. 67, no. 9, 1984, p. 602-605.

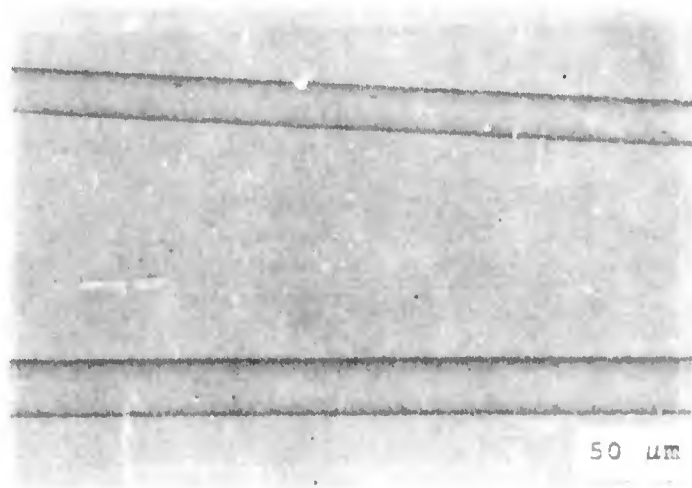


Figure 3. Transmitted light optical photomicrograph of segments of a continuous Y-Si-Al-O-N "a" fiber drawn from the melt.

Composition-related effects such as discussed above regarding pulling fibers from rods also must be considered with respect to drawing fibers from the melt. While continuous fibers were successfully drawn from Y-Si-Al-O-N glass of one composition ("a" in Table 1), the usable temperature range for fiber drawing was very narrow. As already noted, with the higher N composition ("b" in Table 1) it was impossible to make long, continuous fibers with our experimental setup. In both instances, the fiber-forming ability of the glass could probably be improved by modifying the glass compositions with additives that would make the viscosity-temperature characteristics of the glass more suitable for fiber drawing and winding.

Characterization

The results of chemical analyses performed on several bulk glass and fiber specimens are shown in Table 1. All of the cation analyses are in good agreement with each other as well as with the nominal starting composition. The N values obtained by WDS are generally higher than the nominal and Kjeldahl values, but in reasonably good agreement with the latter. The comparison of WDS results presented in Figure 4 illustrates the similarity of spectra on bulk glass and fiber specimens of the same nominal composition. All in all, the chemical analysis results indicate strongly that the chemistry of the fibers is identical to that of the bulk glasses from which they were drawn, confirming that composition changes are negligible during fiber drawing in N₂.

Although the WDS results are considered to be semiquantitative, the good agreement between the WDS and chemical analysis data is encouraging. Furthermore, the adaptability of WDS to small specimens indicates that it should be a very convenient and useful technique for the characterization of oxynitride glass fibers.

Table 3 compares physical property data on fibers with data on bulk glasses. The elastic and microhardness data were obtained as indicated in the previous section. The X-ray diffraction data show the existence of N-containing phases in the crystallized glasses, additional evidence for the presence of N in the fibers, including fibers drawn in air.

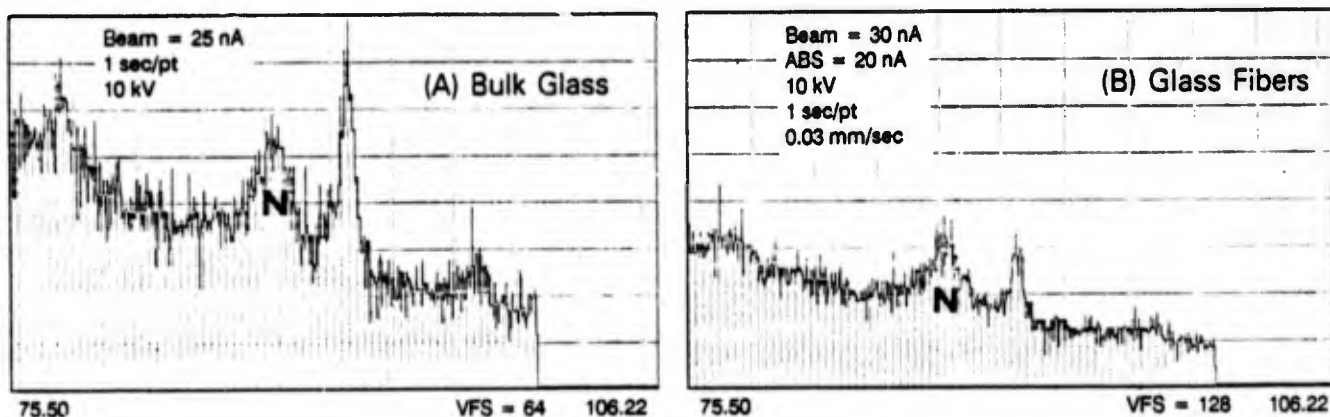


Figure 4. WDS spectra showing N peaks from polished sections of Y-Si-Al-O-N "b" glass and glass fibers. Spectrum of bulk glass (A), is similar to that of fiber (B), indicating that N contents are the same in both.

Table 3. CHARACTERIZATION OF Y-SI-AL-O-N GLASS FIBERS

Composition Designation	"a" Bulk	"a" Fiber (Air)	"a" Fiber (N ₂)	"b" Bulk	"b" Fiber (Air)	"b" Fiber (N ₂)
Nominal wt% N	3.2	3.2	3.2	6.6	6.6	6.6
Bulk Density (kg/m ³)	3720	-	-	3920	-	-
Microhardness (in GPa, Knoop, 0.98 N Load)	9.01	8.82	9.14	10.4	10.6	9.88
Elastic Modulus (GPa)	141	138	135	157	-	146
Phases in Crystallized Glass	Y ₂ Si ₂ O ₇	-	-	Various Oxynitrides & Oxides	YAG, "H," β-Si ₃ N ₄	-

As with the chemical analysis results, the physical properties of the fibers are essentially the same as those of the parent glasses. The measured microhardnesses and elastic moduli of the fibers are a little lower than those of the bulk glasses, a result consistent with literature data comparing the properties of the two forms of glass in other systems.^{19,20} All of the data are also consistent with earlier findings that microhardness and elastic modulus of many glasses increase with the increasing N content.⁷ Although the densities of glasses in the system Y-Si-Al-O-N are rather high, their properties are still impressive on a specific, i.e., property/density, basis. Furthermore, the general effect of N in increasing hardness and stiffness for glasses in many systems suggests that the properties of many glass-fiber compositions could be improved by adding N to them, and further research is currently being pursued along those lines.

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SUMMARY

In summary, the following may be concluded:

1. Y-Si-Al-O-N glass fibers may be drawn in air while retaining a significant portion of their N content providing that the heating and drawing processes are relatively fast.
2. Fibers may be pulled in N₂ from glass rods, demonstrating the potential for producing high quality, small diameter (10 μm) oxynitride glass fibers.
3. Long (100 m), small diameter (30 μm - 40 μm), continuous Y-Si-Al-O-N glass fibers may be drawn from the melt in N₂ and wound on a spool in ambient air.
4. The chemical and physical properties of Y-Si-Al-O-N fibers drawn from the melt in N₂ are the same as those of the as-prepared bulk glass.
5. The stiffness and hardness of Y-Si-Al-O-N glass fibers surpass those of any existing glass fibers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The assistance of Jim Marzik in providing the WDS data is gratefully acknowledged as is that of Gail Meyers in furnishing the EDX analyses.

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Donald R. Messier, Robert P. Gleisner,
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Technical Report MTL TR 89-44, May 1989, 11 pp-
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