

Developments in Corrosion Detection Techniques for Reinforced Concrete Structures

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Abstract

Objectives: In the era of the smart cities no infrastructure activity is possible without reinforced concrete structures and these structures face Corrosion of reinforcement. Every year there is a loss of billions required for repair and maintenance necessary for maintaining the performance of the infrastructure. Corrosion of the RCC rebar is responsible for the reduction of load carrying capacity of the structure. So detection of the corrosion is very important for further loss of any type. **Methods/Analysis:** For the corrosion detection in RCC structure it is very important to know about philosophy of the corrosion occurrence. In the current work various corrosion detection techniques were discussed including surface potential technique, radiography, vibrating wire and electrical strain gauges, Hough transform optical fiber sensors and embedded corrosion Instrument. All these methods are studied on the basis of the progressive detection criteria and the merits and the demerits of each method. **Findings:** On the basis of the review areas required improvement in environment corrosion interaction philosophy, simulation of acceleration rate of corrosion of steel, studies related to the transport of chlorides and carbonation process, corrosion cracking behaviour. **Novelty/Improvements:** This paper outlines the corrosion detection techniques on the progressive methods of the corrosion detection and points out the areas of improvement in detection philosophy.

Keywords: Corrosion, Detection Technique, RCC, Reinforced Concrete, Steel

1. Introduction

Modern construction has been inconceivable without the reinforced cement concrete. Reinforced concrete has been found as an economical and robust material in civil engineering structures. However, influence of the external condition of environment such as acid rain, chloride ingress¹, loading fatigue, and carbonization have coinciding damaging effects on concrete. As a result concrete get deteriorated and steel gets corroded. Corrosion is defined as the undesirable deterioration of a metal or an alloy caused by its interaction with the environment that adversely affects the properties of the metal/alloy, which should otherwise be preserved. Due to presence of alkaline environment which is provided by concrete and passivity of bars reinforcements were always believed to be “non-corrodible” but with the passage of

time, chlorides ingress into concrete and reinforcement cover decreases and reinforcement steel becomes prone to corrosion damage. Corrosion is an unavoidable process it cannot be stopped; it can only be slowed down or prevented. Presently, corrosion of steel has become a serious problem worldwide, especially for structures exposed to weather². To avoid the loss of serviceability life of structure and structural collapse repairing or replacement is required, which is leading to very high repair cost, sometime even above the initial construction cost³. Corrosion can be prevented by using inhibitors or removing oxygen from the surrounding of metal⁴.

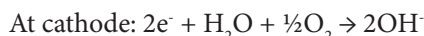
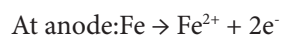
Reinforced concrete structures are very huge, so same steel bar can be subjected to different kind of corrosion at different ends. Corrosion of steel is closely related to concrete and environmental factors. Change in any one factor would affect each other and would certainly change

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the whole equation, thus changing the corrosion behavior of steel. For example any change in temperature would increase concentration of chloride ions and moisture content inside concrete depends not only on moisture available in air but also depends on temperature cycle during day and night⁵. Thus we can see effect of environmental factors on corrosion of steel is very complicated. Thus it is needed to carefully study all the factors affecting corrosion and also the interaction among these factors needs to be investigated. Lack of appropriate techniques to study and monitor the corrosion process have made this research area more difficult.

2. Corrosion Phenomenon

Corrosion of steel bars starts after removal of passivity later which was formed over bars due to alkaline environment provided by concrete⁶. Depassivation occurs due to ingress of carbon dioxide into concrete which causes carbonation of concrete and also due to chloride penetration. Chlorides first attack passivating layer and remove it and then anode and cathode sites are formed, bars acts as anode from which steel gets corroded and concrete around bars acts as cathode at which corrosion products gets deposited. Chemical reactions occurring during corrosion of steel can be shown as in Figure 1.



Equations leading to development of ferric oxide or rust are as:

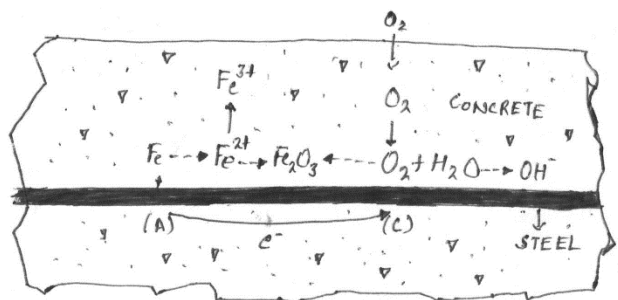
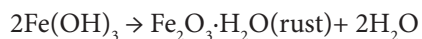
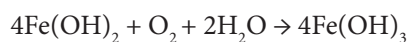
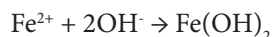


Figure1. Anode and cathode reaction during corrosion of steel¹⁰.

Marine structures are exposed to sea water which have high amount of chlorides so adequate cover need to be given during reinforced cement concrete construction⁷. Cracking of concrete due to inadequate construction procedures should be avoided which if not prevented will allow oxygen⁸ and water to ingress into concrete and reach steel bars and start corrosion during the early stage of a structure. Temperature⁹ also plays an important role in corrosion, as the temperature increases reaction rate increases.

3. Damages caused in RCC due to Corrosion

Corrosion of steel is a worldwide problem. More than half of the structures are corroded and on other structures billions of dollars need to be spent for their repairs. Table 1 given lists estimates of loss due to corrosion prepared worldwide.

4. Corrosion Monitoring Techniques

4.1 Surface Potential Technique

During the process of corrosion of bars, anode and cathode sites are developed and between these sites transfer of electrons takes place. Thus current develops across these two points in concrete which can be measured by measuring the potential drop in concrete. This technique is a non-destructive method for testing the possibility of corrosion of reinforcements in concrete. In this technique surface potential of concrete helps us in identifying the possible cathode and anode regions and thus detecting the possibility of corrosion. Here two reference electrodes are taken and are placed symmetrical on the surface of concrete, one electrode is kept fixed and other electrode is moved across the structure as shown in Figure 2. The potential of moving electrode at different points is measured against fixed point by using a high impedance voltmeter. A positive reading will indicate a possible place of corrosion i.e. anode. More is the potential difference between fixed and movable electrode more severe is the corrosion¹⁷.

One of the main advantages of this technique is that the reference electrodes need not to be directly attached to the reinforcements thus any structure can be checked for corrosion at any point of its life just by measuring potential¹⁸.

Table1. Damage and economic loss due to corrosion of steel

Event	Damage	Economic Loss	Reference
Estimate in USA	Corrosion damage of Highway bridges	\$ 90 -150billion	Federal highway Administration (2001) ¹¹
Estimate in USA	Cost of repairing bridge deck, substructures, car park	\$200-450 billion	Transportation Research Board(2001) ¹²
Estimate in UK	Corrosion damage of trunk and motorway bridges in England Wales	GBP 616.5 million	Wallband(2011) ¹³
Estimate in UK	Annual cost of repairs to concrete structures	GBP 500 million	Rosenberg (1997) ¹⁴
Berlin Congress hall collapse	Total Destruction due to collapse	-	Ise (2002)
Post tensioned bridge collapse in Wales	Total destruction due to collapse	-	Woodward(1995) ¹⁵
Multi-storey parking structure collapse in Minnesota	Total destruction due to collapse	-	Heidersbach(2001) ¹⁶

4.2 Radiography

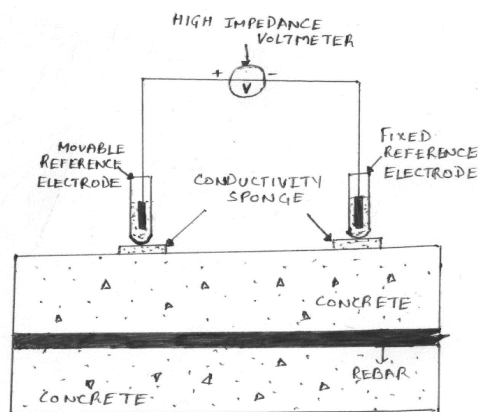
Radiography technique is a very reliable method of non-destructive testing method for assessing the quality of reinforced cement concrete. It is based on the principle that with the help of a photon generator first photon are generated and later these photons are transformed into visible light with the help of fluorescent-metallic converter, so that a visible image can be obtained of damaged RCC from which defects such as corrosion of reinforcement, cracks can be located. Location of exact defect place and type of defect helps us in taking preventive measure more efficiently. Radiography methods are of two types, one is based on X-rays and other is based on Y-rays. These rays are electromagnetic rays which can penetrate the body of concrete and depending on the density, voids these rays attenuate from their fixed path which indicating a kind of damage within RCC which can't be found out using visual inspection. These radiations are highly dangerous so precautionary measures need to be taken while operating them¹⁹.

4.3 Vibrating Wire and Electrical Strain Gauges

Conventional devices such as vibrating wire and electrical strain gauges have adequate strain measuring capability and have been successfully used in structural health monitoring because of their long term durability. These devices are embedded into concrete to measure stress variations within concrete. Due to corrosion of steel bars corrosion products gets deposited on bars because of which concrete begins to swell and cracks develop and as a result stresses are produced. Stresses can also be calculated when the modulus of elasticity, creep and thermal effects. Thus stresses identification will help in identifying the possible place of corrosion of steel and delamination in concrete.

4.4 Hough Transform

Hough proposed efficient method for detecting lines in an image based on this several algorithms have been developed to detect different shapes such as a line, circle etc.²⁰. Hough transform is a circle detection technique which can automatically detect a corrosion pit in a microscopic image. In this technology all points in an input image is first converted into a parameter space which is represented by a 2D array having same size as of input image. Local extremes values in the array which represent corrosion pits are located using a maxima searching algorithm²¹.

**Figure 2.** Schematic representation of SP measurement.

4.5 Optical Fiber Sensors

Nowadays, optical fiber sensors are very popular for assessing the health of the structure where strain measurement is not required. These sensors are based on intensity. These days these sensors have been used in structural health monitoring to detect corrosion, cracks, strain and displacement. In recent few years there has been numerous studies on application of optical fiber sensor in structure monitoring, these studies include many optical fibers such as fiber optic Bragg grating²², fiber optic spectroscopy²³ and intensity based optical sensor. Recently plastic optical fiber is been used mostly for monitoring structures because of their low cost, easily usable and their high resistivity to fracture²⁴.

4.6 Embedded Corrosion Instrument

The Embedded Corrosion Instrument (ECI) is an electronic corrosion sensor which provides early warning of conditions that cause damage to steel reinforcement. ECI works by monitoring five key factors causing corrosion and transfer information over digital network about real time condition of the structure. By monitoring five key factors in corrosion, and by communicating these through a digital network, the ECI provides comprehensive, real-time information on structural conditions. Five key factors of corrosion which are being monitored are –open circuit potential, linear polarization resistance, resistivity, chloride ion concentration and temperature. Thus it helps users to act before complete failure of the structure and save cost on huge repairs. ECI is a Non-Destructive Evaluation (NDE) device, it collects and delivers all data without requiring investigators to destroy samples, without visiting the site, and also without interrupting usage of structure. ECI transfers data over digital network so they are not interfered by radio waves, power lines and electromagnetic waves. Multiple ECI can be connected to a single data logger, thus saving huge amount of money in any structural monitoring project²⁵. The ECI are specially designed to monitor flood control channel, dams, erosion control structures, bridges etc.

5. Discussion and Future Recommendation

Development in the field of material science and engineering technology always impact the methods of reducing or preventing corrosion of reinforcement. In

future there will be new corrosion resistant materials which will be developed and also efficient methods to control corrosion of reinforcement in structures might be developed and as long as metallic material is used in reinforced concrete structures corrosion can't be avoided only it can be reduced to negligible extent and thus increasing the durability of the structures. New materials developed in future will have new type of issues related to corrosion which need to be studied in detail and efficiency of new technology introduced for corrosion detection should also be compared with previous technology to find out the accuracy of corrosion detection.

First step towards finding a solution is to understand that why a problem is occurring and then next step is to solve the problem. Presently there are many issues related to corrosion of reinforcements in structures which still need to be solved by scientists. There is an urgent need to carry out the research in the following direction:

- 1) Basic mechanism of corrosion of steel need to be intensively studied. Basic process involved and reaction occurring during this process consequently leading to corrosion of steel should be understood and then only most effective methods could be developed to slow down the rate of reaction and thus preventing corrosion.
- 2) Environmental factors such as temperature²⁶, moisture²⁷ etc. affecting corrosion and their interaction with each other need to be intensively studied so that more accurately corrosion rate can be determined. Since these factors can't be completely avoided only they can be reduced to a certain extent such as by providing cover.
- 3) Simulation in laboratory and acceleration rate of corrosion of steel in reinforced concrete need to be researched. Improvements need to be made for acceleration tests and laboratory simulation.
- 4) Studies related to the transport of chlorides and carbonation process need to be intensively studied and even the relationship between developments of corrosion products which leads to cracking need to be deeply studied to know the progressive failure of concrete occurring due to corrosion of steel.
- 5) New methods for monitoring corrosion of steel based on computer simulation need to be developed which would consider effect of environmental factors into account besides basic factors such as temperature, moisture, chlorides and their interaction with one another.

6. Conclusion

Here few available corrosion detection techniques available have been reviewed to find out their advantages and disadvantages. With the developments of sensor and microprocessor controlling systems which can be integrated with the structure for monitoring of real time corrosion. Thus cost of monitoring has been considerably reduced. This real time monitoring of structures will help in condition monitoring of the structure and also help in predicting accurate life of the structure. Sensors located at interior and at surface of a structure are most effective in monitoring long term durability of concrete.

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