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Waste-to-Energy Conversion Using Advanced Thermochemical Processes for Sustainable Urban Development

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Abstract: Rapid urbanization has led to a dramatic increase in municipal solid waste generation, posing significant environmental and public health challenges. Traditional waste disposal methods, such as landfilling and open burning, contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, soil contamination, and air pollution. Waste-to-energy technologies have emerged as sustainable alternatives that convert waste materials into useful forms of energy, thereby addressing waste management and energy generation simultaneously. This study investigates advanced thermochemical conversion processes, including pyrolysis, gasification, and plasma arc technology, for efficient waste-to-energy conversion. The research integrates process modeling, energy analysis, and environmental impact assessment to evaluate the feasibility and performance of these technologies. The results demonstrate that thermochemical processes can achieve high energy recovery efficiency while reducing environmental impact. The study highlights the role of waste-to-energy systems in sustainable urban development and emphasizes the need for technological innovation and policy support to promote their adoption.

Keywords: Waste-to-Energy, Thermochemical Conversion, Pyrolysis, Gasification, Urban Sustainability

1. Introduction

Urbanization has significantly increased the generation of municipal solid waste, creating major challenges for waste management systems worldwide. Rapid population growth and changing consumption patterns have resulted in large volumes of waste that require efficient and sustainable disposal methods. Conventional approaches, such as landfilling and incineration, are associated with environmental issues, including greenhouse gas emissions, groundwater contamination, and air pollution [1].

Waste-to-energy technologies offer a promising solution by converting waste into usable energy forms such as electricity, heat, and fuel. These technologies not only reduce the volume of waste but also contribute to energy generation, supporting sustainable urban development. Among various waste-to-energy methods, thermochemical conversion processes have gained attention due to their efficiency and versatility [2].

Thermochemical processes involve the conversion of organic materials into energy through high-temperature reactions in controlled environments. These processes include pyrolysis, gasification, and plasma arc technology, each offering unique advantages in terms of efficiency and environmental impact.

2. Urban Waste Challenges and Resource Potential

Municipal solid waste consists of a heterogeneous mixture of organic and inorganic materials, including food waste, plastics, paper, and metals. The composition of waste varies depending on factors such as population density, economic activity, and lifestyle.

The organic fraction of waste represents a significant energy resource that can be harnessed through thermochemical conversion. By converting waste into energy, cities can reduce their reliance on fossil fuels and decrease environmental pollution [3].

Effective waste management requires the integration of advanced technologies capable of handling diverse waste streams and maximizing resource recovery.

3. Literature Review

Thermochemical conversion technologies have been extensively studied for their potential in waste-to-energy applications. Pyrolysis, which involves the thermal decomposition of organic materials in the absence of oxygen, produces bio-oil, syngas, and char [4]. Gasification, on the other hand, converts waste into syngas through partial oxidation at high temperatures.

Plasma arc technology is an advanced method that uses extremely high temperatures to break down waste into its elemental components, producing syngas and inert slag [5]. These technologies offer higher efficiency and lower emissions compared to traditional incineration methods.

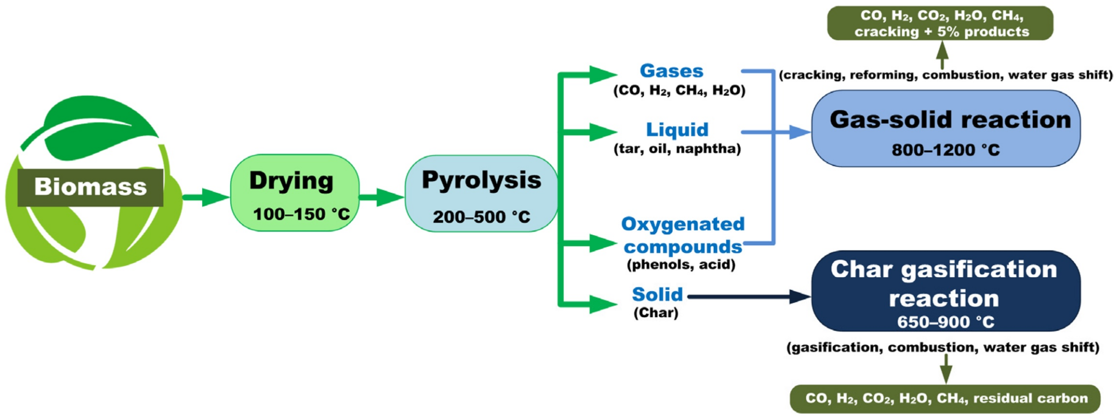
Recent research has focused on improving process efficiency and reducing environmental impact through advanced reactor designs and catalysts [6].

4. Thermochemical Conversion Technologies

Pyrolysis is a widely used thermochemical process that converts organic waste into valuable products such as bio-oil and syngas. The process operates at moderate temperatures and does not require oxygen, making it suitable for various waste types.

Gasification involves the partial oxidation of waste materials to produce syngas, a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen. Syngas can be used for power generation or as a feedstock for chemical production [4].

Plasma arc technology operates at extremely high temperatures, enabling the complete breakdown of waste materials. This process produces a clean syngas and a vitrified slag that can be used in construction [5].



Fig

5. Methodology

The study employs process modeling and simulation to evaluate the performance of thermochemical conversion technologies. Data on waste composition, energy content, and process parameters are used to develop models for pyrolysis, gasification, and plasma arc systems.

Energy analysis is conducted to determine the efficiency of each process, while environmental impact assessment evaluates emissions and waste reduction. The models are validated using data from existing waste-to-energy facilities.

6. Results and Analysis

The results indicate that thermochemical processes can achieve high energy recovery efficiency, with gasification showing the highest efficiency among the methods studied [4]. Pyrolysis produces valuable byproducts such as bio-oil, which can be used as an alternative fuel.

Plasma arc technology demonstrates superior performance in terms of waste reduction and environmental impact, producing minimal emissions and inert byproducts [5]. The integration of these technologies into urban waste management systems can significantly reduce landfill usage and greenhouse gas emissions.

7. Discussion

The findings highlight the potential of thermochemical conversion technologies in addressing urban waste challenges. By converting waste into energy, these technologies contribute to resource efficiency and environmental sustainability.

However, challenges such as high capital costs, technical complexity, and public acceptance must be addressed. The successful implementation of waste-to-energy systems requires supportive policies and investment in infrastructure.

8. Environmental and Economic Implications

Waste-to-energy systems offer significant environmental benefits, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions and decreased reliance on landfills. They also provide economic advantages by generating energy and creating employment opportunities.

The integration of these systems into urban infrastructure can support sustainable development and improve the quality of life in cities.

9. Future Scope

Future research should focus on improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of thermochemical conversion technologies. The development of advanced catalysts and reactor designs can enhance performance and reduce emissions.

The integration of waste-to-energy systems with renewable energy sources can further improve sustainability. Additionally, public awareness and policy support are essential for promoting adoption.

10. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of advanced thermochemical processes in waste-to-energy conversion for sustainable urban development. The findings highlight the potential of these technologies to reduce waste, generate energy, and mitigate environmental impact. Continued research and innovation are essential for overcoming challenges and achieving large-scale implementation.

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