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TRANSESTERIFICATION OF TRIMETHYLPHOSPHATE CATALYZED BY SODIUM ALKOXIDES

Sayed Mojtaba Moosavi^{1*}, Shokofe Aghabevgi², and Mir Abdullah S. Sadjadi².

1 Chemistry Department, Imam Hossein University, Tehran, Iran

2 Islamic Azad University, Science & Research Campus, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

The transesterification process of trimethylphosphate with ethanol and isopropanol is examined. It is found that the reaction does not proceed in the absence of base even at temperatures up to 100°C, whereas in the presence of sodium alkoxide as a catalyst it takes place at room temperature leading to a mixture of mono-, bi-, tri-substituted esters as well as the minor by-products resulting from the nucleophilic attack of the alkoxide ion on the alkyl groups of the starting ester. The substitution extent is dependent on the relative concentration of the reactants, the temperature, the solvent, and the amount of the catalyst used.

Keywords: Ttansesterification; trimethylphosphate; sodium alkoxides; mixed trialkylphosphates; ethanol; isopropanol

INTRODUCTION

Since a direct synthesis of phosphate esters from alcohols and appropriate oxychlorides of phosphorus is unsatisfactory or impossible, transesterification of phosphate esters with appropriate alcohols seems to be
an alternative way to produce the desired an alternative way to produce the desired trialkylphosphates. Generally, such reactions are facilitated by increased electrophilic nature of substituents in the initial ester; an opposite effect is caused by similar groups in the alkyl group of the attacking alcohol. In general, it may be assumed that an ion does not displace a more basic group from a phosphoryl group at a measurable rate in a solvolytic medium, and consequently the number of anions which can displace alkoxy groups from esters is very limited.¹

These considerations suggest strongly that only the most basic anions, such as alkoxides, can remove the alkoxy groups from phosphorus esters at an appropriate rate by attack at the phosphorus atom. The reactions of a wide variety of nucleophiles with trimethylphosphate have previously been
examined. Small nucleophiles such as nucleophiles such as hydroxide², alkoxides³⁻⁴, and enolates⁵, yield products arising from nucleophilic attack at phosphorus.

^{*} Corresponding author: Address correspondence to S. M. Moosavi, Chemistry Department, Imam Hossein University, P.O.Box 16575-347, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: smmoosavi21@yahoo.com

The Reaction Conditions

The transesterification process may be carried out by mixing together the alcohol and the phosphate and heating the mixture in the presence of an appropriate quantity of the catalyst at an elevated temperature usually in the range 40 to 100°C until the desired degree of reaction has occurred. Increasing the reaction temperature may result in the formation of a larger amount of by-products. The temperature at which any particular transesterification is carried out will be selected so as to balance the desire to increase the rate of the reaction by increasing the reaction temperature and the desire to reduce by-product formation. The reaction is preferably carried out under an inert atmosphere and under unhydrous conditions so as to reduce the amount of by-product formation. It will be obvious that the stoicheiometry of the reactions can be adjusted so that the final transesterified products meet one's desired specifications.

The Solvent Effect

From a chemical vantage point, the presence of a proper solvent can favorably affect the products' distribution and the rate of the reaction. The solvent effect on the rate of transesterification of

para-nitrophenyl diethylphosphate has already been investigated by Bel'skii and co-workers.⁶

The Reactivity of Alcohols

Alcohols differ in reactivity in transesterification reactions. It is seen that in the alcoholysis of carboxylic acid esters the substitution of any group for a hydrogen of alkyl radical in alcohol results in reduction in reactivity and the simple secondary alcohols show lower reactivity than the primary alcohols. 7

Side Reactions

In base-catalyzed transesterification reactions, specially in high temperature, hydrolysis takes place if moisture is present in the system. The hydrolysis products can also be produced in unhydrous conditions as suggested by Runavot and co-workers.8

Synthesis of Mixed Esters

The partial transesterification of the phosphorus

esters produces a product comprising a mixture of esters which may in itself be useful. They may for example be useful as plasticizers and flame retardants for plastics and resins, as additives for fuels and lubricants, as lubricating oils, as functional fluids, as heat stabilizers, as antioxidants, as ore flotation agents, as metal plating additives, and as chemical intermediates useful in the production of agrochemicals and pharmaceuticals.

The synthesis of mixed alkylphosphates continues to be an important goal. There have been several reports on synthesis of mixed alkylphosphates.⁹⁻¹² The reactants may be mixed in a wide range of proportions depending particularly upon the degree of reaction which is desired. The progress of the transesterification process may be monitored and controlled so as to produce a product comprising the desired mixture of esters. The reaction may be controlled by varying the amount of the catalyst, the quantity of the reactants, the duration of the reaction, and lowering the temperature of the reaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 31P NMR chemical shifts of the reactants and the products of trimethylphosphate/aicohol reactions are given in Table 1. The shifts for trimethylphosphate (TMP), triethylphosphate (TEP), and triisopropyl phosphate (TIP) ¹ were obtained from authentic samples of these, esters. Dimethyl ethylphosphate (DMEP) is the product from ethanolysis of TMP and is readily identified in the 31P spectra from the time dependence of its concentration during the ethanolysis reaction. Diethyl methylphosphate (DEMP) resulted from ethanolysis of DMEP can also be identified from the chemical shifts' pattern since it appears 'exactly at the same distance to DMEP as the distance between TMP and DMEP. The hydrolysis products such as dimethyl hydrogen phosphate, ethyl methyl hydrogen phosphate, and diethyl hydrogen phosphate show the same pattern moving to downfield as the size of the alkyl groups decreases although the chemical shifts are pH dependent moving to downfield as the pH of the solution decreases. The same trend was observed for chemical shifts of the transesterification products and the hydrolysis products in reaction of TMP with isopropanol.

Compound	Formula	Abbreviation	ªδ
Trimethylphosphate	(MeO) ₃ PO	TMP	3.58
Dimethyl ethylphosphate	(MeO) ₂ (EtO)PO	DMEP	2.45
Diethyl methylphosphate	(EtO) ₂ (MeO)PO	DEMP	1.32
Triethylphosphate	(EtO) ₃ PO	TEP	0.19
Dimethyl isopropylphosphate	$(MeO)2(i-PrO)PO$	DMIP	1.9
Diisopropyl methylphosphate	$(i-PrO)2(MeO)PO$	DIMP	0.4
Triisopropylphosphate	$(i-PrO)3PO$	TIP	-1.05

Table 1. 31P chemical shifts of the initial and the product trialkylphosphates

^achemical shifts measured relative to external 85% $H_3PO_4(T=27^{\circ}C)$

The studies on the transesterification reaction between TMP and selected primary and secondary alcohols (ethanol and isopropanol) revealed that TMP reacted with isopropanol at a considerably lower rate than with ethanol as seen in Table 2 comparing the extent of conversion of TMP to substituted products.

The lower rate at which the reaction takes place in the case of isopropanol can only be explained by the steric effect of the isopropyl group. The increased steric effect, on the other hand, will bring about a lower rate of P-0 bond formation and in this manner a lower rate of the transesterification process. As expected the reaction proceeded smoothly with the formation of mono-substituted products. Smaller yields of di-, and tri-substituted products were also obtained as well as the hydrolysis products changing in quantity based on the reaction conditions.

The molar TMP to alcohol ratio is considered as a key factor in controlling the products' composition. Less than one equivalent of alcohol led to production of the mono-substituted ester as the major product while increasing the alcohol to phosphate ratio resulted in faster rate of conversion and production of more substituted phosphates (Table 3).

The results of the transesterification reaction of TMP with ethanol and isopropanol at different temperatures (Table 4) showed that in higher temperatures the risk of by-product formation notably increases.

To elucidate the effect of alkoxide concentration on the reaction, a series of experiments were performed (Table 5). It was found that, in general, the transesterification reaction of **TMP** was not started by heating at 100°C for extended periods of time in neutral alcohol solutions and in the absence of the alkoxides. It was noted that the amount of sodium alkoxide catalyst used to catalyze the reaction has an effect on the composition of the mixed ester and particularly the amount of TMP that remains in the final product. The rates of transesterification reactions were proportional to the concentrations of the catalyst, the rates being higher, the higher the concentration.

A considerable difference in reaction rate and in product distribution was observed when polar aprotic solvents such as dioxane and THF were added to alcohol/phosphate ester mixtures. To make a direct comparison between the data obtained in presence and absence of dioxane, the data reflecting the effect of solvent are shown in Table 6. The difference may be attributed to the proton affinity of the solvent.

The reaction mechanism may be assumed to involve alternating addition of alkoxide ion to the phosphorus atom resulting in a pentacoordinate ionic intermediate formation followed by elimination of the alkoxide ion from the intermediate to form either the original or a

different trialkylphosphate : RO \RO 0- RO—P=0 + R,0 - --e- i:"..p/ / R0/ -N OR / OR:'''*. RO (R0)2(R10)P0 + RO (R0)3P0 + R10

The primary step in the reaction is necessary but insufficient to achieve transesterification of the Phosphate. As shown above, the intermediate can break down in two ways. An equilibrium is established in the alcoholysis of any phosphate with any alcohol:

$$
(RO)_3PO + R_1O = (RO)_3(R_1O)PO = (RO)_2(R_1O)PO + RO
$$

Transesterification will take place if the equilibrium is displaced to the right, i.e. if an alkoxyl of the original phosphate, not the alkoxyl of the alcohol taken for the transesterification, splits off from the intermediate. Thus the second step in the reaction, cleavage of the intermediate, plays the decisive part in the process of transesterification, and probably determines not only the direction but also the rate of the reaction.

Which alcohol will be eliminated from the intermediate depends directly on the electrophilic character of the alkoxy groups involved. It is obvious that the more electrophilic an alkoxyl the more preferentially will it be eliminated. The slower reaction in case of secondary and tertiary alcohols may be attributed to the negative effect of the bulky groups in formation of the pentavalent intermediates.

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Table 2. Relative reactivities of ethanol and isopropanol in transesterification reaction with TMP

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Exp. No.	ROH	Ratio TMP/ROH	Na	Solvent	T (min)	T (°C)	Product Yields (mol%)					
			$(mol\%)$				TMP	mono-substituted	di -substituted	tri-substituted	by-products	
10	EtOH	1:2	15	\bullet	300	40	24.42	39.14	9.27	\bullet	27.16	
	11	Ħ	Ħ		†	100	15.08	32.70	11.44	0.6	40.15	
11	†	Ħ	Ħ	\blacksquare	1440	40	24.12	39.29	10.05	0.47	26.05	
12	₩.	\mathbf{H}	†	\blacksquare	†	100	10.22	28.79	12.55	0.8	47.63	

Table 4. The temperature dependence of the product distribution in transesterification reaction of TMP

Table 5. The effect of the alkoxide concentration on transesterification reaction of TMP

Exp. No.	ROH	Ratio TMP/ROH	Na $(mol\%)$	Solvent	(min)	$(^{\circ}\mathrm{C})$	Product Yields (mol%)				
							TMP	mono- substituted	di -substituted	tri -substituted	by-products
13	EtOH	1:2		\blacksquare	1440	100	85.06	10.22	\bullet	\blacksquare	4.72
12	Ħ.	$^{\prime\prime}$	15	\blacksquare	11	$\pmb{\mathfrak{m}}$	10.22	28.79	12.55	0.8	47.63
8	i-PrOH	1:1		\blacksquare	300	40	92.60	1.80	\blacksquare	\sim	5.60
14	\mathbf{H}	H.	14	$\overline{}$	Ħ	11	86.20	6.29	\blacksquare	\sim	7.50

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Table 6. The solvent effect on transesterification reaction of TMP

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EXPERIMENTAL

Analytical grade reagents were used throughout except where otherwise specified. Trimethylphosphate (Aldrich,>99%), dioxane (Aldrich, AR) ,and dimethyl sulfoxide (Aldrich, AR) were dried over 4A molecular sieves prior to use. Sodium alkoxides were freshly generated by desolving sodium metal in the corresponding alcohols. $31P{H}NMR$ spectra were recorded using a Bruker 250 MHz fourier transform spectrometer. $3^{j}P$ chemical shifts are reported relative to external 85% H3PO4. Peak heights for each species observed were assumed to be proportional to concentration. The fraction of the substrate unreacted and the products was then calculated from their contribution to the total concentration of $\frac{3I_{\text{P}}}{I}$ containing compounds in solution.

Transesterification of trimethylphosphate. General Procedure.

Predetermined amounts of an appropriate alcohol and trimethylphosphate were placed into a three neck round-bottom flask previously flushed with dry nitrogen, and equipped with an efficient stirrer, N2 inlet, and a reflux condenser. The reaction temperature was controlled by a silicon oil bath within 0.5°C. 2m1 samples of the reaction mixture were collected at the given time intervals,

quenched by diluted HC1 solution, dissolved in dimethyl sulfoxide, and finally analyzed by 31_P MNR spectroscopy to determine the composition of the reaction mixture.

Transesterification of TMP with ethanol and isopropanol

The transesterification reactions of trimethylphosphate with ethanol and isopropanol were carried out by the general procedure mentioned above using different compositions of the reactants, in absence and presence of different concentrations of the alkoxides (sodium ethoxide and sodium isopropoxide), in absence and presence of dioxane as a selected dipolar aprotic solvent, and at different temperature ranging from

14 up to 100 °C. All the experiments were carried out in 0.05 molar scales.

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