High-pressure phase transitions in the Co(II) analogue of ZIF-8

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Keywords: X-Ray Crystallography, Zeolitic Imidazolate Frameworks, High-pressure Adsorption

The adsorption properties and structural behaviour of zeolitic imidazolate frameworks (ZIFs) rely upon the interplay of their organic ligands, metal centres and the guest molecules contained within their framework.[1–5] ZIF-8 and its isostructural derivatives with SOD-type topologies, composed of a single metallic centre connected by bi-dentate imidazolate (Im) linkers, are well known to alter their guest-mediated uptake behaviour upon metal or functional group substitution.[2, 3, 6, 7] Replacement of the metal ion can be particularly interesting as it not only impacts the pressure at which SOD-type ZIFs may undergo a “gate-opening” phase transition, whereby the Im linker rotates to allow greater access to the central pore, but may also have implications for catalysis by supplying more active centres.[6, 7] One of the most studied of the SOD-type ZIFs is ZIF-67, a Co-based isostructural equivalent to ZIF-8(Zn).[8–12] However, despite a wide variety of studies utilising ZIF-67 as a catalyst or adsorbent,[10, 12] few studies have examined the structural response of ZIF-67 under applied pressure,[9] and none in a penetrating medium at high pressure.

This study is the first to use high-pressure single crystal X-ray crystallography to probe structural transitions in ZIF-67 during compression in hydrostatic media of a methanol/ethanol mixture, MeOH:EtOH (4:1), and liquid nitrogen (LN2), with the aim of examining the relative compressibility of ZIF-67 against ZIF-8. The results demonstrated that ZIF-67, similarly to ZIF-8(Zn), displayed the prototypical transition to the “gate-opened” high-pressure phase in both mediums, characterised by a change in the angle between the average 2-methylimidazolate (mIm) plane and the [100] plane (denoted θ). Similarly to ZIF-8,[1, 4] ZIF-67 begins with θ of 64.5 to 66.9° in the ambient structures. On conversion to the high-pressure (ZIF-67-HP) phase, the mIm linker is rotated to θ =~89°. In MeOH:EtOH, this occurs at 1.57 GPa and is followed by both a sharp decrease in the unit cell volume (-3.75%) and contraction of the cell axes (-1.01%). In LN2, the transition is noticeable at the lowest measured pressure (0.43 GPa) and is associated with an immediate expansion of the unit cell (+1.2%), followed by continuous contraction by as much as 10.5% by 3.49 GPa. LN2 adsorption was modelled in 6 adsorption sites that fill progressively as pressure increases. Maximum LN2 adsorption site occupancies corresponded to the first observation of a noticeble and fully reversible colour transition in a ZIF crystal on compression, which was not found to occur in alcohol. Despite the presence of a Co$^{2+}$ $d^7$ metal centre, the change in colour could not be linked to any local change in metal or ligand conformation that would suggest spin-crossover but is instead related to super filling of the structure by the N2. This work confirms and elucidates the nature of the guest-mediated gate-opening in both small alcohols and N2 of ZIF-67 at high pressures.