

Chemistry of Halogens: Applications and Environmental Considerations

Drogo Burton*

Department of Chemistry, São Paulo State University, Botucatu, Brazil

Commentary

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***For Correspondence:**

Drogo Burton, Department of Chemistry, São Paulo State University, Botucatu, Brazil

E-mail: drogo.burt15@gmail.com

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DESCRIPTION

Halogens are a group of highly reactive elements found in seventeenth group of the periodic table. Comprised of fluorine, chlorine, bromine, iodine, astatine, and tennessine, these elements possess unique chemical properties and play significant roles in various industrial and biological applications. Halogens exhibit similar chemical behaviours due to their seven valence electrons and a strong inclination to acquire one more electron. This electron configuration contributes to their high reactivity and ability to form compounds known as halides. While fluorine is the most reactive halogen, astatine demonstrates some metallic properties. The reactivity of halogens increases as we move down the group from fluorine to astatine. Fluorine is the most electronegative element, readily capturing electrons from other elements to achieve stability. Chlorine, the most well-known halogen, is commonly used for water purification and in chemical processes due to its disinfectant properties. Bromine finds applications in flame retardants and pesticides, while iodine is used as an antiseptic. Astatine, although rare and highly radioactive, exhibits similar chemical behaviours to other halogens.

The position in the periodic table, along with their electron configuration, determines their chemical properties. The visual representation of the periodic table highlights the location of the halogens and their relationship to other elements. Halogens and their compounds have various practical applications across industries. Sodium chloride, a halide compound, is commonly known as table salt and is widely used in cooking. In the chlor-alkali industry, halogens play a crucial role in the production of chlorine, caustic soda, and hydrogen. Fluorides are added to water supplies for dental health purposes, as they help prevent tooth decay. Bromine is utilized in flame retardants, while iodine is an essential component of antiseptics and is used in medical settings.

While halogens find extensive applications, their release into the environment can have detrimental effects. Halogens, especially chlorine and bromine, have been linked to the depletion of the ozone layer when released in large quantities. It is essential to handle and dispose of halogens and their compounds responsibly to minimize environmental impact. Halogens, including fluorine, chlorine, bromine, iodine, and astatine, have a wide range of practical applications in various industries. These elements possess unique properties that make them useful in many different fields.

Chlorine is widely used in water treatment to kill bacteria, viruses, and other harmful microorganisms. It is added to drinking water and swimming pools to ensure water safety and prevent the spread of waterborne diseases. Iodine is an essential element in the production of pharmaceuticals. It is used as an antiseptic and disinfectant in the form of iodine tincture or iodophors. Iodine compounds are also used in thyroid medications to treat thyroid disorders. Fluorine is used in the production of high-performance plastics, such as teflon. Teflon is known for its non-stick properties, resistance to chemicals, and high-temperature stability. It is used in various applications, including cookware, electrical insulation, and lubricants.

Bromine compounds, such as silver bromide, are used in traditional photography as light-sensitive materials. These compounds are coated on photographic film or paper and react with light to produce images. Halon gases, which contain bromine, are used in fire extinguishers. Halons are highly effective in suppressing fires as they interfere with the chemical reactions that sustain combustion. However, due to their ozone-depleting properties, the use of halon fire extinguishers is being phased out.

Chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons, which contain chlorine and fluorine, were previously used as refrigerants. However, their use has been restricted due to their harmful impact on the ozone layer. They have been replaced by more environmentally friendly alternatives, such as hydrofluorocarbons. Iodine is used in medical imaging techniques such as X-rays and CT scans. Iodine-based contrast agents are injected into the body to enhance the visibility of blood vessels, organs, and tissues during imaging procedures.

The unique properties and reactivity of these elements make them valuable in various industries, contributing to advancements in technology, healthcare, and everyday products. However, it is important to handle and dispose of halogens responsibly to minimize their negative impact on the environment. Halogens, with their distinctive properties and reactivity, hold immense significance in various fields. From water purification and tooth decay prevention to industrial production and medical applications, halogens and their compounds continue to play a vital role in our daily lives. Understanding their physical and chemical properties, as well as their impact on the environment, allows us to harness their benefits while minimizing potential risks.