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**Lab: Making Slime through Cross-linking Process**

**Introduction:**
Cross-linking is a process that bonds two or more polymer chains together decreasing a material’s elasticity and making it more rigid. Charles Goodyear discovered vulcanization in 1839, a process that changed the elastic rubber to improve its strength. Vulcanization occurs when sulfur is added to rubber causing them to cross-link and harden. Without the cross-link with sulfur, rubber remains a soft and easily deforms. Thanks to his discovery, we are able to use vulcanized rubber and use it in many industries including making automobile tires.

In today’s lab, you will experience cross-linking and observe how it changes polymers’ physical properties. You will be working with polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) and borax (sodium tetraborate) to create poly(vinyl alcohol) borate gel commonly known as “slime”. Figure 1 illustrates how one linear PVA chain attached to another PVA chain by adding borax (Na2B4O7). Boron allowed cross-linking to happen, a process that connect or bond two polymer chains together through covalent bonds. This bridge between the PVA chains holds the molecule, making it stiff, stronger and more viscous, reducing its flow rate. Slime exhibits some unusual properties, exhibiting both properties from liquid phase as well as solid phase. This is referred to as a non-Newtonian fluid that dilates or expands depending on the amount of stress placed on it.

**Figure 1**: Cross-link PVA and borax yielding slime

**Objectives:**

* Understand cross-linking and how it effects polymers’ property
* Explore basic qualitative polymer properties
* Observe polymerization reaction process

**Materials:**25ml graduated cylinder (PVA only) wooden stirrer 4% wt. PVA solution
10ml graduated cylinder (Borax only) cup 4% wt. Borax solution

**Safety Precautions:**1) Wear goggles at all times. PVA and Borax could burn your eyes.
2) Take care to keep the chemicals and the Slime away from your clothes or cloth may produce permanent stains. Pick up immediately if pieces fell on the table top or the ground.
3) Do not dispose of anything down the drain to prevent clogs from occuring

**Pre-lab:**
a) Define polymer in your own words
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b) PVA is an abbreviation that stands for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

c) The 25ml graduated cylinder is use for only which solution? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

d) How many milliliters of PVA do you need? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

e) What are the safety precautions for this lab?
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f) Can you take the polymer home? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

g) Define cross-link.
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-Teacher’s approval \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (cannot start without signature)

**Procedure:**1. Read the lab and answer the following pre-lab questions (must be approved before you can start getting lab materials)
2. Use the “25ml graduated cylinder” to get 25ml of 4% PVA solution
3. Use the “10ml graduated cylinder” to get 5ml of 4% borax solution
4. Add PVA solution into the cup first (if you want color polymer then place one drop of food color in the cup) start stirring with the wooden stirrer when you add the Borax solution into the same cup
5. Observe the polymerization reaction
6. Once it completes the slime is safe to handle with your hands (observe and record its properties)

*Clean Up Procedure:*
1. Do not rinse the graduated cylinders
2. Return your slime to me
3. Dispose of the wooden stirrer as well as the cup in the trash can

**Data and Analysis**1.Describe the reaction rate for this polymerization reaction to occur.
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2. Describe the properties of slime and how it feels in your hands
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3. What are the physical properties that changed as a result of the addition of sodium borate solution to the polyvinyl alcohol solution?
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4. Describe the chemistry that allowed the two liquids to change its physical property (hint Figure 1).
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5. Describe what happen when you pull the Slime apart rapidly?
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6. Describe what happen when you stretch it and pull the Slime apart really slowly?
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7. Describe what happen when you gently apply pressure to the slime when it’s between the palms of your hands?

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8. Describe what happen when you roll a piece of Slime into a ball and drop it about 1 foot above the table?

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9. What happen if you let the slime sit on your table for 1 minute?
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10. Is slime a liquid or solid? Explain your reasons.

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11. What is a non-Newtonian liquid? (you might have to use google to answer this question)
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12. What do you think will happen if someone mistakenly used the same graduated cylinder to get both the borax solution and the PVA solution?
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13. What do you think will happen if you repeat the experiment but adding more sodium tetraborate to your cup (your thoughts only)?
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14. Draw the structure for a vinyl alcohol molecule.



15. Find and circle the repeating monomer subunit in the polyvinyl alcohol molecule.

16. What will happen to the "strength" and "flexibility" of the polymers as the number of cross-linkers increase?

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17. A "branched polymer" is formed when small chains attached along the body of the main long polymer chain. Draw a branched polymer structure.

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**Conclusion:**

Write a paragraph summarizing the physical properties of slime. Explain the role of cross-linking in slime. Explain the difference between polymerization reaction and cross-linking.

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