CHROMIUM(VI) HANDBOOK

chromium, Cr: $[\text{Ar}]4s^13d^5$

$\text{Cr(VI)} + 3e^- \rightarrow \text{Cr(III)}$

Written by
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CHROMIUM(VI) HANDBOOK
Preface

The purpose of this book is to evaluate the history and characteristics of chromium(VI) in the environment, in industry, and in society. The book was created by the Independent Environmental Technical Evaluation Group (IETEG), a volunteer research organization located in Northern California. It was created in 1997 to present objective scientific and engineering information about controversial environmental issues as a foundation for rational discussion and policy development. The IETEG’s first project was *MTBE: Effects on Soil and Groundwater Resources* (CRC Press, 2000).

Chromium(VI) has been a controversial contaminant for a variety of reasons. This project was started in early 2001 to objectively evaluate the Cr(VI) issues. The IETEG’s membership is multidisciplinary, including geologists, engineers, toxicologists, lawyers, regulators, and others working for environmental consulting and contracting companies, environmental equipment and product manufacturers, water companies, law firms, and academia. These environmental professionals are specialists in the assessment and remediation of soil, groundwater, and air, the complexities of environmental compliance, legal and regulatory issues, and the design of wastewater processing equipment. Given the level of misinformation on Cr(VI), this book was compiled to help facilitate a rational approach to the assessment and remediation of Cr(VI) contamination in the environment. The IETEG hopes that the book will contribute to maintaining the quality of our drinking water supplies contaminated by Cr(VI), the settlement and resolution of legal issues relating to Cr(VI), and the development of regulatory policies designed on scientifically based information.
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# Table of Contents

1. **Overview of Chromium(VI) in the Environment: Background and History** ................................................................. 1  
   *James A. Jacobs and Stephen M. Testa*

2. **Chemistry, Geochemistry, and Geology of Chromium and Chromium Compounds** ............................................. 23  
   *William E. Motzer*

3. **Naturally Occurring Chromium(VI) in Groundwater** .......... 93  
   *Martin G. Steinpress, Tarrah D. Henrie, Veronica Simion, Chet Auckly, and Jeannette V. Weber*

4. **Sources of Chromium Contamination in Soil and Groundwater** ................................................................. 143  
   *Stephen M. Testa*

5. **The Transport and Fate of Chromium(VI) in the Environment** ................................................................. 165  
   *Frederick T. Stanin*

6. **Toxicity and Health Effects of Chromium (All Oxidation States)** ................................................................. 215  
   *Jacques Guertin*

7. **Chromium Sampling and Analysis** ................................................. 235  
   *James A. Jacobs, William E. Motzer, David W. Abbott, and Jacques Guertin*

8. **Treatment Technologies for Chromium(VI)** ................................. 275  
   *Elisabeth L. Hawley, Rula A. Deeb, Michael C. Kavanaugh, and James A. Jacobs*

9. **Bench Tests** ..................................................................................... 311  
   *Jim E. Szecsody, John S. Fruchter, Vince R. Vermeul, Mark D. Williams, Brooks J. Devary, Angus McGrath, Daniel Oberle, David Schroder, John McInnes, Chris Maxwell, Sarah Middleton Williams, Craig S. Criddle, and Michael J. Dybas*
10. **Case Studies** ......................................................... 357  
   James A. Jacobs, J.M.V. Rouse, Stephen M. Testa, Ralph O. Howard, Jr.,  
   David Bohan, David Wierzbicki, Jason Peery, Anna Willett,  
   Steve Koenigsberg, John F. Horst, Suthan S. Suthersan,  
   Lucas A. Hellerich, Matthew A. Panciera, Gregory M. Dobbs,  
   Nikolaos P. Nikolaidis, and Barth F. Smets

11. **Chromium(VI) Waste Stream Processing** ...................... 465  
   Andrew Hyatt, James A. Hart, Stephen Brown, Mark Simon,  
   Nicolas Latuzt, James A. Jacobs, and Jacques Guertin

12. **Chromium: Policy and Regulations** ............................. 491  
   Elisabeth L. Hawley and James A. Jacobs

13. **Chromium(VI) as the Basis for a Toxic**  
    Tort: A Legal Perspective .................................................. 523  
    Tod I. Zuckerman

14. **The Future; Emerging Mitigation**  
    and Remediation Technologies ............................................ 565  
    Stephen M. Testa, James F. Begley, James A. Jacobs, and Jacques Guertin

Appendix A ........................................................................ 575

Appendix B ........................................................................ 583

Appendix C ........................................................................ 637

Appendix D ........................................................................ 691

Appendix E ........................................................................ 697

Appendix F ........................................................................ 751

Appendix G ........................................................................ 755

Index .................................................................................. 761
1

Overview of Chromium(VI) in the Environment: Background and History

James A. Jacobs and Stephen M. Testa

CONTENTS
1.1 Purpose ......................................................... 2
1.2 Introduction to the Chromium(VI) Problem .......................... 3
  1.2.1 Exposure Pathways ........................................... 3
  1.2.2 Physical and Chemical Characteristics ......................... 4
  1.2.3 Analytical Methods ............................................ 5
  1.2.4 Remediation Overview .......................................... 6
  1.2.5 Regulatory Concentrations ..................................... 6
  1.2.6 Health ................................................................ 7
1.3 Historical Perspective ............................................. 7
1.4 Origin and Properties ............................................. 14
1.5 Production and Use of Chromium .................................. 14
  1.5.1 Chromium Production Methods ......................... 14
  1.5.2 World Production .............................................. 15
  1.5.3 Resources ....................................................... 15
  1.5.4 Consumption ................................................... 15
  1.5.5 Economics ...................................................... 16
  1.5.6 Chromium Substitutes ......................................... 16
  1.5.7 Uses ............................................................ 16
    1.5.7.1 Paint ..................................................... 17
    1.5.7.2 Stainless Steel .......................................... 17
    1.5.7.3 Furnace Linings ......................................... 17
    1.5.7.4 Tanning and Dying Processes ....................... 17
    1.5.7.5 Photography ............................................. 17
    1.5.7.6 Specialized Steels ..................................... 18
  1.5.8 Chromium Processing and Alloys ............................ 18
  1.5.9 Chromium Isolation .......................................... 19
1.1 Purpose

Chromium (Cr) is one of the world’s most strategic and critical materials having a wide range of uses in the metals and chemical industries. Alloys containing Cr enhance metal resistance to impact, corrosion, and oxidation. In addition, Cr is used primarily in stainless steel and noniron alloy production for plating metals, development of pigments, leather processing, and production of catalysts, surface treatments, and in refractories. Cr occurs in various oxidation states, of which chromium(VI) [Cr(VI)] is a suspected carcinogen and a potential soil, surface water, and groundwater contaminant. Cr(VI) may also occur in the natural environment, but human-caused Cr(VI) contamination has recently been the focus of much scientific discussion, regulatory concern, and legal posturing.

Owing to the many industrial uses of Cr(VI) with an active industrial base, California and other urbanized states have sites with significant Cr(VI) contamination. Drinking water supply wells and water sources are affected by Cr(VI). Common to many Cr(VI) sites are the questions that continue to arise regarding the safety of the drinking water supply. As with most environmental challenges, questions of science compete with emotional and political responses and financial interests. There is still uncertainty regarding what daily dose of Cr(VI) is considered toxic and what ingestion concentration of Cr(VI) is acceptable.

To define the current state of technical knowledge of Cr(VI), the Groundwater Resources Association of California (www.grac.org) presented a Cr(VI) symposium in Glendale, California on January 25, 2001. At this symposium, national experts discussed the science, regulatory policies, and legal issues associated with this controversial pollutant. Based on disagreement on even the most basic of scientific points, such as safe levels of Cr(VI) to consume, it became apparent that Cr(VI) is a topic of both great importance and widespread debate.

The Independent Environmental Technical Evaluation Group (IETEG), a volunteer research organization located in Point Richmond, California, was created in 1997 to objectively review scientific and engineering information concerning controversial environmental issues. The IETEG’s first project was *MTBE: Effects on Soil and Groundwater Resources*, a CRC Press book published in 2000. The next (and current) project was started in early 2001 to objectively evaluate Cr(VI) issues. The IETEG group is multidisciplinary and includes geologists, engineers, toxicologists, lawyers, regulators, and others performing environmental consulting, contracting, environmental equipment, design and
manufacturing. Others work for, water purveyors, law firms, regulatory agencies and academia. Some of these environmental professionals are specialists in the assessment and cleanup of soil, groundwater, and air. The authors work on environmental compliance, legal and regulatory issues, or the design of water treatment equipment. Given the level of misinformation on Cr(VI), this book was prepared to help facilitate a rational approach to protect the quality of drinking water supplies that may contain Cr(VI).

1.2 Introduction to the Chromium(VI) Problem

Each contaminant has a unique set of characteristics and issues that must be evaluated to proceed with more detailed remediation efforts or developing public policy. These factors include persistence in groundwater, taste and odor thresholds, health risk, transport and fate, current laboratory analytical methods and detection limits, groundwater remediation, and regulatory issues. For Cr(VI), each of these factors will be evaluated in more detail below and in this handbook’s chapters.

1.2.1 Exposure Pathways

For some, a significant health concern is the possible adverse effects of human ingestion of Cr(VI) in drinking contaminated groundwater or surface water. This exposure risk is still being debated within the scientific community. Dermal contact through bathing or washing in Cr(VI)-contaminated water is another exposure pathway. A common form of Cr(VI) is a chromate, a compound containing the chromate ion, \( \text{CrO}_4^{2-} \), such as potassium chromate \( \text{K}_2\text{CrO}_4 \). \( \text{CrO}_4^{2-} \) can enter the bloodstream through breaks in the skin. \( \text{CrO}_4^{2-} \) blood poisoning occurs when \( \text{CrO}_4^{2-} \) destroys red corpuscles. Inhalation is also an important human exposure pathway; however, it is less likely to be associated with exposure to Cr(VI)-contaminated soils and groundwater and more likely associated with industrial processes such as welding, cutting, heating of Cr alloys, and work-related practices which create Cr(VI) fumes and airborne dust. Even dental technologists are at risk of Cr(VI) inhalation disorders (pneumoconiosis) from breathing dust from chromium-cobalt-molybdenum (Cr-Co-Ino) based dental constructions (Selden et al., 1995). Local exhaust ventilation can significantly reduce the inhalation hazard. Inhaling mists while showering with Cr(VI) contaminated water is also a common exposure pathway.

For dermal exposure, chromated copper arsenate (CCA) pressure-treated lumber is ubiquitous in residential areas. This green-colored pressure-treated lumber is used for building residential decks, picnic tables, swing sets, and other play structures. Since January 1, 2004, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has banned the use of CCA-treated lumber for new residential use. The exception for residential use
will be permanent wood foundations. The USEPA is not banning the use of millions of CCA-treated wood products already in backyards and parks, however more affluent communities and school & districts have already removed CCA-treated play structures. CCA-treated wood is still be available for industrial and agricultural uses. With low pH rain or fruit juice (orange juice and lemon juice), the Cr can be leached off the wood surface. For those concerned about this possibility, coating that play set or picnic table with an appropriate penetrating oil every two years will minimize the potential for leaching and adverse dermal contact (Morrison, 2004).

1.2.2 Physical and Chemical Characteristics
Chromium is rarely found as a free metal in nature. A clean surface of Cr metal reacts strongly with the atmospheric oxygen (Kohl, 1967). However, the reaction stops quickly owing to the formation of a strong, dense, and nonporous Cr(III) oxide (Cr$_2$O$_3$) surface layer, which is estimated to be one to three formula units thick. Chromium oxide passivates the metal from any further reaction with oxygen. This is why Cr does not corrode and why it retains its metallic sheen.

Chromium(III) oxide is among the ten most abundant compounds in the Earth’s crust. Cr, a solid at room temperature, generally reacts with halogen gases (such as fluorine) at temperatures of 400°C and pressures of 200 atm to 300 atm. Cr also reacts with the other halogen gases such as chlorine, bromine, and iodine to form a variety of brightly colored compounds. Cr metal dissolves in dilute hydrochloric acid and sulfuric acid. Cr does not appear to react with nitric acid, most likely owing to passivation by surface chromium oxides. Many of the Cr compounds are toxic.

Chromium is one of the chief ingredients in mineral and metallic colors, being responsible for the color of some gem stones. Among the gem stones colored by Cr are emeralds, ruby, alexandrite, chrome garnet, and some sapphires.

Chromium’s physical and chemical characteristics remained largely a laboratory curiosity for about hundred years from 1800 to 1900. Small amounts were used to harden steel alloys and its numerous compounds were used in many different industries. A rapid increase in Cr use occurred between 1915 and 1930, when Cr became a leading industrial metal, along with iron (Fe), copper (Cu), aluminum (Al), tin (Sn), lead (Pb), and nickel (Ni). The reason for the long delay between its discovery date and industrial use was its high resistance to heat and chemicals. Extracting Cr from its ores by early methods was costly and difficult. Cr’s useful properties such as brittleness, toughness, and resistance to corrosion made it difficult to work with. Cr’s brittleness is probably caused by oxide impurities.

With a variety of characteristics and uses, Cr(VI) has entered subsurface soil, surface water, and groundwater. Sampling in California and other states has shown that Cr(VI) can exist as CrO$_4^{2-}$ and dichromate (Cr$_2$O$_7^{2-}$) in groundwater. The oxidation number of Cr in groundwater is governed by
Overview of Chromium(VI) in the Environment

pH and Eh. Cr(VI) can exist naturally in groundwater that has been unaffected by local industrial activity. At least one hypothesis indicates that naturally occurring fluoride forms a soluble complex with Cr(III)-bearing minerals, after which the dissolved Cr(III) comes in contact with manganese(IV) dioxide (MnO₂) containing aquifer material, causing oxidation to Cr(VI). Cr(VI) in groundwater can be reduced to Cr(III) at low pH and under reducing conditions.

Cr(VI) is rapidly reduced to usually insoluble Cr(III) when Fe(II) or manganese(II) [Mn(II)] occur in reduced groundwater. There have been several examples of this immobilization phenomenon, both in industrial situations in the U.S. and at a Cr chemicals plant in Poland. Recent work on isotopic ratios of Cr(VI) may prove useful in evaluating the source or distance traveled and whether Cr(VI) is natural or anthropogenic in origin.

Cr(III) is a stable oxidation state and slowly reacts to form complexes. Because of its low kinetic energy potential, Cr(III) is not a strong oxidizer and it appears that the stomach’s acidity is enough to keep the Cr in the Cr(III) state. Cr(VI) is not as stable as Cr(III) because it is a strong oxidizing agent, is fast reacting, and likely forms complexes. As with many toxic substances, exposure to metals by inhalation poses the greatest risk. However, for Cr(VI) to be inhaled, a person must be exposed to Cr fumes or airborne dust in industrial processes such as cutting or welding Cr metals or to Cr(VI) in airborne dust or water droplets. Some scientists suggest that Cr(VI) can cause cancer even when inhaled as an aerosol by showering in Cr(VI)-contaminated water. Disagreements still exist over the safe limits of Cr(VI) ingested as drinking water. There remains a debate by experts about the absorption potential that Cr(VI) might have in the stomach’s acid environment. There does not appear to be a perceptible odor or taste that Cr in any form imparts to drinking water.

1.2.3 Analytical Methods

The investigation of a groundwater resource impacted with Cr(VI) requires analysis of groundwater for both Cr(VI) and total Cr. Total Cr can be detected by atomic absorption (AA) spectroscopy and other instrumental methods. Cr(III) and Cr(VI) can be detected by ion chromatography. Cr(VI) can also be detected by titration with a standard mixture of Na₂S₂O₄ and I₂ (American Public Health Association, 1989).

Analytical methods used include the USEPA method for drinking water, EPA 218.6. The equivalent method for wastewater (used for contaminated groundwater as well) is SW 7196A or SW 7199. Method SW 7199 is the more sensitive method, with a low detection limit of 0.02 µg/L [or parts per billion (ppb)] of Cr(VI). This method uses ion chromatography to estimate Cr(VI). Total Cr is analyzed using inductively coupled plasma-mass spectroscopy (ICP–MS) using methods SW 6010 or SW 6020. While analyzing for Cr, it is important to account for interferences from sulfide (S²⁻), vanadium (V), Mo, and organic carbon to ensure the accuracy of analytical data (Winter, 2004).
1.2.4 Remediation Overview

For in situ remediation of soil and groundwater, a variety of geochemical fixation or anaerobic biological treatment methods have been designed which make use of Cr’s ability to change the oxidation state of the oxidized, toxic, and highly mobile nature of Cr(VI) and convert it into the more stable, nontoxic, and immobile Cr(III). Cr(III) ultimately precipitates out as Cr(III) hydroxide [Cr(OH)_3]. In these technologies, Cr is generally not removed from the environment, but becomes less toxic and immobile. Many treatment methods use sulfur-based reductants; anaerobic biodegradation enhancements use carbon-sources such as lactic acid, molasses, cheese whey, or corn syrup. Permeable reactive barriers use elemental iron [Fe(0)] technologies to create a reducing environment. These in situ technologies use period redox (or Eh) reactions with either biological or chemical processes to reduce Cr(VI) to Cr(III).

A variety of technologies (known as pump and treat) are used in the extraction and treatment of surface water or groundwater. Once on the surface, water containing Cr(VI) can be reduced by Fe(II) compounds followed by several procedures including alkaline precipitation, ion exchange with regenerant treatment, or disposal. Electrochemical reduction is another method used where Cr(VI) reduction is followed by alkaline precipitation in which Fe(II) forms electrochemically, instead of being added as a purchased chemical; acidic reduction of the Cr at pH < 3.0 with sulfur dioxide, sodium sulfite, sodium bisulfite, or sodium metabisulfite completes the conversion to Cr(III). If reduction with a sulfite compound is used, there is a greater potential for incomplete conversion of Cr(VI) to Cr(III). Consequently, these reactions must be monitored carefully to ensure complete conversion to Cr(III).

1.2.5 Regulatory Concentrations

Chromium is listed as number 16 in the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Priority List of Hazardous Substances (ATSDR, 199a). Cr(VI) has been found in at least 304 of the 1,591 current or former USEPA National Priority List Superfund Sites (ATSDR, 2000). Neither the federal or state governments limits Cr(VI) concentration in water, but both regulate total Cr. The USEPA Drinking Water Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for total Cr is 100 µg/L. California limits total Cr in drinking water to 50 µg/L. Total Cr for contaminated site generic soil screening levels is 390 mg/kg for ingestion, 270 mg/kg for inhalation, and 2.0 mg/kg for migration to groundwater (USEPA, 1996).

The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) initially recommended a public health goal (PHG) of 2.5 µg/L for total Cr and 0.02 µg/L for Cr(VI). The OEHHA has since rescinded the PHG and the state is working to establish a Cr(VI) MCL (California Department of Health Services, 2002). For airborne Cr(VI), the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), regulates worker’s exposure to Cr(VI) and other toxic compounds. OSHA exposure limits for Cr compounds vary with potential work activities.
1.2.6 Health

Although the elemental Cr and Cr(VI) can have adverse human health effects, normal mammalian metabolism requires minute amounts of Cr as an essential trace element. In addition to insulin, Cr is responsible for reducing blood glucose levels and is used to control certain cases of diabetes. Cr has also been used to reduce blood cholesterol by lowering the concentration of the unhealthy, low-density lipoproteins (LDL) in the blood. Cr is supplied in a variety of foods such as broccoli, Brewer's yeast, liver, cheese, whole grain breads, and cereals. Some claims have been made that Cr aids in muscle development. Chromium picolinate, a highly soluble form of Cr, is used in dietary supplements for body builders.

Cr(III) is an essential nutrient that helps the body use sugar protein, and fut. The minimum human raily Cr requirement for optimal health is unknown, but a daily ingestion of 50 µg/L to 200 µg/L is estimated to be safe and adequate according to the ASTDR (1989).

1.3 Historical Perspective

The history of Cr began over 200 years ago. Four Siberian Beresof gold mines had been worked for gold, copper, silver, and lead since 1752. In 1761, Johann Gottlob Lehmann obtained samples of an orange-red mineral that he termed "Siberian red lead," while visiting the Beresof mines located on the eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains. Upon his return to St. Petersburg in 1766, analysis showed that the samples contained lead "mineralized with a selenium spar and Fe particles." This mineral turned out to be crocoisite or crocoite, a lead chromate (PbCrO₄) (Figure 1.1). Lehmann described the mineral in a letter to the well known naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc comte de Buffon (1707 to 1788). Lehmann also observed that the mineral produced an emerald-green solution when dissolved in hydrochloric acid (HCl). Lehmann died the following year when a retort containing arsenic burst upon heating.

In 1770, Peter Simon Pallas also visited the Beresof mines and noted:

> a very remarkable red lead mineral which has never been found in any other mine. When pulverized, it gives a handsome yellow guhr which could be used in miniature painting ....

In spite of its rarity and difficulty in obtaining samples from the Beresof mines, the use of Siberian red lead as a paint pigment was mined both as a collector's item and for the painting industry as a paint pigment. A bright yellow made from crocoite rapidly became a fashionable color for carriages of the nobility in both France and England.

As a boy in Normandy, Louis-Nicholas Vauquelin (1763 to 1829) was fascinated with chemistry and mineral specimens. His father was a farm laborer who provided for his son's education. Progressing through school
Chromium(VI) Handbook

rapidly, at the age of 14 he became a dishwasher and assistant in an apothecary. He eventually went to Paris with a letter of introduction and worked for several apothecary shops. One pharmacy was owned by his cousin, Antoine-François comte de Fourcroy (1755 to 1809). Upon hearing of Vauquelin’s interest in chemistry, Fourcroy hired his younger cousin as his assistant. Vauquelin continued to learn physics, chemistry, and philosophy while assisting Fourcroy with chemistry and teaching Fourcroy’s students. With the onset of the French Revolution, Vauquelin left Paris in 1793, served as a pharmacist in a military hospital, and then returned to teach chemistry at the Central School of Public Works which later became the Ecole Polytechnique. In 1797, Vauquelin, a professor of chemistry and assaying at the School of Mines in Paris, received samples of the crocoite ore.

Vauquelin noted the beauty and scarcity of this Cr ore (Figure 1.2). He noted its value equal to that of gold, and in an attempt to address several contradictory chemical analyses, he set out to determine the correct chemical composition of crocoite. Vauquelin boiled one part of pulverized crocoite with two parts of standard potash ($K_2CO_3$), which resulted in a yellow-colored solution. The solution formed a red precipitate with a mercury salt and a yellow precipitate with lead. Adding HCl turned the solution green. In 1798, he was able to precipitate lead with HCl, dried the green solid, and then heated it for 0.5 h in a charcoal crucible with charcoal dust. The charcoal was used as a reducing agent. Upon cooling, he observed a mass of metallic needles with a mass of about half of that of the original. He thus discovered through subsequent analysis via heating $Cr_2O_3$ with charcoal that crocoite was combined with an oxide of an unknown metal. Noting the many colors produced by the compounds, Fourcroy and Abbé
René-Just Haüy (1743 to 1822) suggested the name Cr from the Greek word χρῶμα (chroma) meaning color, reflecting the brilliant hues of reds, yellows, and greens of its compounds. With further research, Vauquelin analyzed an emerald from Peru and discovered that the lustrous green color was related to trace amounts of Cr. Vauquelin went on to determine that the red color of rubies was also related to trace amounts of Cr. Vauquelin later became an inspector of mines and professor of assaying at the School of Mines (Figure 1.3).

In 1798, the German chemists Louwitz and Klaproth (the latter along with Vauquelin and Fourcroy were the top chemists of their times) shortly thereafter independently identified Cr in rocks located further north of the Beresof mines as a major component of the heavy black mineral later named chromite (FeCr$_2$O$_4$). In 1799, another German chemist Tassaert identified the same mineral from a small deposit in the Var region of southeastern France. This mineral was to be identified as Cr–Fe spinel and now known as chromite.
Chromium is found in various minerals. However, FeCr$_2$O$_4$ is the sole source of Cr used commercially. From 1797 until 1827, FeCr$_2$O$_4$ was primarily produced for chemical use and was derived from the Ural Mountains of Russia, the principal source for world supply at this time. About 1808, the supply of Cr from the Ural Mountains greatly supported a growing paint industry and resulted in a Cr chemical factory being set up in Manchester, England. Russia did not dominate the market for long, however.

With the discovery of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ in Maryland in 1827, followed by subsequent discoveries in Pennsylvania and Virginia, the U.S. became the principal supplier for what would be considered a limited world demand (Morning et al., 1980). In 1808 or 1810, an English gardener named Henfrey discovered what he thought was Cr ore in some black rocks on or near the summer estate of Jesse Tyson in the Bare Hills situated northwest of Baltimore, Maryland (Abbott, 1965). These rocks, were shown to Isaac Tyson who confirmed their identification, and subsequent analysis showed them to be rich in Cr(III) ore (Figure 1.4).

Isaac Tyson, Jr. (1792 to 1861) was considered one of the best “practical chemists,” and his main success was in establishing the Cr chemicals
industry in America (Gould, 1985). Along with Howard Sims, a member of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, Tyson established a plant in Baltimore, Maryland, which was incorporated in 1823 and by 1833 became known as the Baltimore Chemical Company. In 1827, Tyson was granted a patent for making copperas (iron sulfate). Besides exporting FeCr₂O₄, Tyson also attempted to manufacture chrome yellow and other chrome colors. Encountering technical difficulties and a highly competitive market, Tyson turned to the increasing demand for the manufacturing of Cr₂O₇²⁻.

Between 1828 and 1850, the Baltimore Chemical Company supplied most of the Cr ore consumed by the world, with the remainder being supplied from serpentine deposits and platinum washings in the Urals. Tyson eventually succeeded in developing a commercially viable process for the manufacturing of Cr compounds in 1845. He applied to Yale for a technical expert, and William Phipps Blake (1829 to 1910) was sent.

This was a historic step since Blake was a young chemistry student at the newly established Sheffield Scientific School. Blake would become the first professional chemist to be employed in industry in the U.S. (Abbott, 1965). Blake eventually graduated from Sheffield Scientific School where he served as assistant professor at New York College. In 1853, Blake accepted the position
Blake provided technical expertise regarding Cr. Blake became renowned as a mineralogist, geologist, and mining engineer.

of geologist and mineralogist for the Williamson party of the Pacific Railroad Survey. On that survey, Blake was to ascertain a practical railroad route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, notably in southern California (Testa et al., 2002). Blake went on to a prestigious career as a mineralogist, geologist, and mining engineer and eventually served as the third territorial geologist of Arizona (Dill, 1991) (Figure 1.5). Blake also developed an early version of a decimal book classification system, which was later copied in large part by the American librarian Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey (1851 to 1931).

When Tyson died in 1861, the Baltimore Chrome Works was left to two of his sons; in 1902 it was acquired by the Kalion Chemical Company of Philadelphia and in 1906 acquired by the Henry Bower Chemical and Manufacturing Company, which merged with Mutual Chemical Company. Later, Allied Chemical and Dye Company acquired Mutual Chemical Company in 1954.

Tyson’s monopoly on the world’s FeCr$_2$O$_4$ ore industry continued until 1850, when exports began to decline. Reflecting newly discovered FeCr$_2$O$_4$ deposits near Bursa in Turkey in 1848, and with the depletion of the deposits in Maryland around 1860, relatively large Turkish deposits were developed in 1860. Since the 1860s, production of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ ore has been primarily in the Eastern Hemisphere from over 20 countries, with only a few with large reserves. FeCr$_2$O$_4$ ore was discovered in California in 1873, and from 1886 until 1893 California was the only state to produce this commodity; however, 2000 to
4000 metric tons of ore from Turkey was annually imported to the U.S., most of it being manufactured in Baltimore, Maryland (Glenn, 1893).

Mining of FeCr₂O₄ ore commenced in India and Southern Africa around 1906. Although paint pigments remained the main application, other applications were being found. Kochin introduced the use of potassium dichromate (K₂Cr₂O₇) as a mordant in the dyeing industry in 1820. Commercial use of Cr salts was introduced in leather tanning in 1884. First used as a refractory in France in 1879, its actual use started in Britain in 1886.

The first patent for the use of Cr in steel was issued in 1865. However, large-scale use of Cr had to wait until development of the aluminothermic method in the early 1900s and when the electric arc furnace could smelt FeCr₂O₄ into the master alloy, ferrochromium. Although Cr provided brilliance and shine, its true importance came with the development of stainless steel, because it is Cr that makes the steel shiny and stainless. Stainless steels were developed from the initial work of Brearly and Sheffield in 1913. Stainless steels containing 12% or more Cr, together with Fe and Ni, titanium (Ti), or Mn (commonly with 18% Cr, 8% Ni, 74% Fe) are extensively used in fabricating vessels for corrosive fluids and in a wide range of industrial and domestic appliances. New or less costly corrosion-resistant steels, such as type 304 or 3 CR 12, are finding increasing application in mining and construction.

In the 1920s, the process of electroplating was developed. Electroplating utilizes an electric current to bond Cr atoms with atoms of the original surface, creating a bond between the metals so strong that it will remain intact even when subjected to extreme force. Electroplating soon thereafter became a standard requirement for engine and machinery parts subjected to high loads, corrosion, and wear from friction. During the 1940s, plating production was important during the war effort with the production of hard chrome, a process that puts new life into many types of engine components. The first engine cylinders were restored using electroplated hard Cr during this period.

During the 1960s and 1970s, new federal engine emission standards generated improvements to reduce the amount of lube oil consumed by diesel fuels. New finishing techniques were thus developed and applied to engines for the rail, gas transmission, marine, and stationary power industries. Primary developments during the 1980s pertained to more specialized finishes to reduce oil consumption, resistance to abrasion, ring seating, and controlled percent of load bearing surface and porosity.

1.4 Origin and Properties

Chromium metal is shiny and silvery in color, as well as hard and brittle. It has a high melting point (1857.0°C) and boiling point (2672.0°C). Oxidation states from -2 to +6 are known, however, the most stable oxidation state is +3.
The natural isotopes for Cr are $^{50}$Cr (4.3%), $^{52}$Cr (83.8%), $^{53}$Cr (9.6%), and $^{54}$Cr (2.4%).

The abundance of Cr in the universe and on Earth varies considerably. Cr is found in the universe at 15 parts per million (ppm) by mass, in the sun at 20 ppm, and in carbonaceous meteorites at 3.1 parts per thousand by mass. Crustal rocks on the earth contain an average of 140 ppm of Cr, seawater contains 0.6 ppb, stream water has 1 ppb, and humans have 30 ppb Cr by mass.

Chromite, also called iron(II)-Cr(III) oxide (FeCr$_2$O$_4$), is the principal ore of Cr. FeCr$_2$O$_4$ is a weakly magnetic, Fe-black, brownish black to silvery white metal. FeCr$_2$O$_4$ is of igneous origin and forms in peridotite of plutonic rocks. FeCr$_2$O$_4$ occurs exclusively in mafic and ultramafic rocks as a crystal accumulated in the early stages of magmatic crystallization. FeCr$_2$O$_4$ has also been identified in serpentinites, which may be developed through hydrothermal alteration of a peridotite. Uvarovite, the Cr garnet, is commonly associated in the field with FeCr$_2$O$_4$. The Moh’s hardness of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ is 5.5 and the specific gravity is 4.3 to 5.0 and because of these physical characteristics of FeCr$_2$O$_4$, the metal is occasionally concentrated in placer deposits.

1.5 Production and Use of Chromium

The primary uses of Cr relate to the production of nonferrous alloys, ornamental plating of metal, and creation of green-colored glass. Prior to the development of hard rigid plastics, automobile fenders and hubcaps were frequently chrome-plated from the 1920s through the 1980s. The aircraft industry used Cr for anodizing aluminum. Cr has been used as a catalyst for particular chemical reactions. Oxidizing agents such as K$_2$Cr$_2$O$_7$, and other Cr$_2$O$_7^{2-}$ compounds, are used in quantitative analysis.

1.5.1 Chromium Production Methods

Chromite is the most commercially useful of the Cr ores. Cr is produced in two forms: ferrochrome and Cr metal produced by the reduction of Cr$_2$O$_3$.

Ferrochrome is produced by the reduction of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ with coke in an electric arc furnace. Using ferrosilicon instead of coke as the reductant can produce a low-carbon ferrochrome. This is a popular Fe-Cr alloy used directly as an additive to produce stainless and hard Cr-steels.

The reduction of chrome ochre (Cr$_2$O$_3$) produces Cr metal. This is obtained by oxidation of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ (by air) in molten alkali to yield sodium chromate (Na$_2$CrO$_4$), which is leached out with water, precipitated, and then reduced to the Cr(III) oxide using carbon. The oxide can be reduced by aluminum in the aluminothermic process:

$$\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3 + 2\text{Al} \rightarrow 2\text{Cr} + \text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$$
The chrome oxide can also be reduced using silicon:

\[ 2\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3 + 3\text{Si} \rightarrow 4\text{Cr} + 3\text{SiO}_2 \]

Chrome ochre (\(\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3\)) can be dissolved in sulfuric acid (\(\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4\)) to yield the common electrolyte solution used in the production of decorative and protective Cr plating. Sodium chromate (\(\text{Na}_2\text{CrO}_4\)) produced in the isolation of Cr is itself the basis for the manufacture of all industrially produced Cr chemicals.

### 1.5.2 World Production

Chromite world mine production was estimated at a gross mass of 13 million metric tons in 2002 (Papp, 2003). Cr ore is mined in over 20 countries, but 81% of the production is concentrated in four countries: South Africa accounts for 49% of the world total and 32% of the world total is accounted for by Kazakhstan, India, and to a lesser extent, Turkey. FeCr$_2$O$_4$ ore is found in Brazil and Cuba, the only countries in FeCr$_2$O$_4$ production in the Western Hemisphere. The largest U.S. Cr resource is in the Stillwater Complex in Montana. The U.S. base is estimated to be about 7 million metric tons (Papp, 2003).

### 1.5.3 Resources

Approximately 95% of the worldwide Cr resources are concentrated in southern South Africa. According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), worldwide resources exceed 12 billion metric tons of shipping-grade FeCr$_2$O$_4$, enough to meet demand for centuries (Papp, 2003). Remaining resources are located in the Independent States (former USSR), the Philippines, and selected other countries.

### 1.5.4 Consumption

In 1998, ferrochrome accounted for approximately 85% of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ consumption. Remaining FeCr$_2$O$_4$ consumption includes Cr chemicals at 8%, foundry applications for 5%, and refractories for 2%. About 12% of the world Cr production is consumed by the U.S., in the form of FeCr$_2$O$_4$ ore, Cr ferroalloys, Cr metal, and Cr chemicals (Papp, 2003).

### 1.5.5 Economics

Prices for the ferrochrome industry are highly cyclic and have been unstable in recent years. During the most recent price reductions for Cr at $0.77/kg to $1.10/kg for high-carbon, charge grade ferrochromium, integrated producers consolidated and expansions were accomplished through process improvements. The largest market for Cr metal is in superalloys for aircraft and industrial gas turbines. At this time, production capacity for Cr metal exceeds
demand and when prices exceed the benchmark of US $5,000 per metric ton, low-cost producers from the Independent States in central Asia and China increase production to meet Western market demands (Roskill Co., 2002). According to the USGS, Cr contained in recycled stainless steel scrap accounted for 37% of the apparent consumption in 2002 (Papp, 2003).

1.5.6 Chromium Substitutes

According to the USGS, FeCr$_2$O$_4$ ore has no substitute in the production of ferrochromium, Cr chemicals, or FeCr$_2$O$_4$ refractories. Cr has no substitutes in stainless steels, which is the largest use for FeCr$_2$O$_4$ or in superalloys.

1.5.7 Uses

Chromium is a strategic metal of the twentieth century but it is also used in dozens of industrial processes (Table 1.1) creating thousands of consumer products. Cr is used in the manufacturing of stainless steel, numerous alloys, Cr plating, pigments, catalysts, dye, tanning, wood impregnation, refractory bricks, magnetic tapes, and more. Until the early 1900s, FeCr$_2$O$_4$ was used mainly in the manufacturing of chemicals. In the early 1900s, FeCr$_2$O$_4$ became widely used in the manufacturing of metallurgical and refractory products, notably in stainless steels and basic refractory bricks (Morning et al., 1980). Refractory bricks and shapes formed of Cr are useful owing to the high melting temperature of Cr, moderate thermal expansion, and the general stability of the Cr crystalline structure. Cr steels have no substitute when

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<tr>
<td>Chromium Use</td>
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<td>Antifouling pigments</td>
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<td>Dental constructions</td>
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<td>Drilling muds</td>
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<td>Electroplating (decorative finishes, hard-wearing surfaces)</td>
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<td>Flexible printing</td>
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<td>Fungicides</td>
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<td>Gas absorbers</td>
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<td>Harden steel (armor plating, armor piercing projectiles)</td>
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combined high-temperature rigidity and resistance to tarnish and abrasion are required as in the case of roller bearings or in the aerospace and machine tool industries.

1.5.7.1 Paint
Chromium compounds are used in paint pigments. Chromates of barium (Ba), lead (Pb), and zinc (Zn) give us the pigments of lemon Cr, Cr yellow, Cr red, Cr orange, zinc yellow, and zinc green. Cr green is used in the making of green glass. Cr chemicals enhance the colors of fabrics and are used to achieve the brightly colored Cr-based paints for automobiles and buildings.

1.5.7.2 Stainless Steel
As an alloy, Cr has been referred to as the “guardian metal.” With as little as 10% Cr, an alloy made with steel or Fe protects these materials from corrosion, yielding the stainless steel and rustless Fe which are common household items, such as stainless steel knives, ball bearings, watch cases, and chrome front and rear vehicle bumpers. The ball bearings of chrome steel have been subject to more than 1,000,000 lb/in.² or 6.895 × 10⁹ Pa (N/m²).

1.5.7.3 Furnace Linings
Chromium plating has replaced Ni-plating owing to Cr’s superior hardness and resistance to chemical action. Heat-resistant Cr oxides are used for high-temperature applications, such as the bricks used in lining furnaces.

1.5.7.4 Tanning and Dying Processes
Chromium alum and chromic acid are used in the tanning and dyeing processes.

1.5.7.5 Photography
When K₂Cr₂O₇ is mixed with water and the solution is dried and exposed to light, it becomes solid again. This property is applied to the manufacture of waterproof glues and in photography and photoengravings. Photochemicals containing CrO₇²⁻ compounds are toxic.

1.5.7.6 Specialized Steels
Characterized as bright, hard, and tarnish resistant, these attributes have enhanced various ferroalloys. Most importantly, Cr-based steels support modern industry. The shift from paints and electroplating industries to Cr-hardened and corrosion-resistant steels occurred concurrent with evolving metallurgical technology with the introduction of more energy- and cost-effective processes that could utilize low-grade ores.