EFFICIENT HARD MEDAL DEPOSITION FOR HIGH TEMPERATURE APPLICATIONS

THE TASK

Protection against wear is one of the most important applications of thermal spray hard metal coatings. Hard metal coatings based on WC and Cr₃C₂ with various binders (Co, Ni or NiCr) are state-of-the-art. Such coatings are predominantly deposited using high velocity oxygen fuel spray processes (HVOF). An issue in industrial use is the low deposition efficiency of only 35 to 40 percent for HVOF systems using liquid fuel. HVOF guns of the third generation use gaseous fuel and can reach a deposition efficiency of about 60 percent, however at reduced powder feeding rates. One of the reasons for the low deposition efficiency is the non-uniform heating of the powder particles in the flame jet. Moreover, high deposition efficiencies do not automatically lead to high quality coatings.

The development of new applications typically faces technical as well as economic challenges. An example is the need to improve the coating quality at high temperatures while, at the same time, to reduce the coating costs, for instance by increasing the coating efficiency. Furthermore, the correlation between powder properties, spraying process parameters and the resulting tribological properties of the coatings is only partially known.

To address these questions we systematically studied the effects of various feedstock powders on the properties of the resulting coatings and on the deposition efficiency during high velocity oxygen fuel thermal spraying. The studied feedstock powder materials were Cr₃C₂-NiCr and Cr₃C₂-WC-Ni. In addition to the economic parameters the study focused on the wear performance of the coatings at temperatures up to 800 °C.

OUR SOLUTION

After spray drying of the Cr₃C₂-NiCr powders (C1 to C5), they were consolidated by sintering or plasma densification. Due to different manufacturing processes, the powders vary in terms of morphology, porosity and carbide corn size. The Cr₃C₂-WC-Ni powders (W1 and W2) contain Cr₃C₂ carbides but also very fine WC carbides. The binder phase consists mostly of nickel (Fig. 3).

The coatings were produced using two different HVOF processes with liquid (K2) and gaseous fuel (DJ2700), as well as with an HVAF process (M3). Compared to HVOF, the use of the HVAF process is relatively rare, but it has a high potential in terms of the technical performance of the coatings as well as economic considerations. The coating were produced with parameter sets that provide dense coatings and high deposition efficiencies.
RESULTS

Those sprayed coatings which were deposited using liquid fuels (HVOF K2 and HVAF M3) were much denser than those deposited with gaseous fuel (HVOF DJ2700). The carbides remain mostly intact in the coatings (Fig. 4a and 4b), maintaining the same morphology as in the powder. In Cr$_3$C$_2$-NiCr coatings we found Cr$_3$C$_2$ and the binder phase. The finer WC carbide grains from the W1 powder are also visible after spraying (Fig. 4b).

Most of the coatings showed hardness values above 1000 HV0.3. This either meets or exceeds the performance of typically used coatings. The Young's moduli ranged from 150 – 200 GPa, which is an excellent result for Cr$_3$C$_2$-NiCr coatings. The use of finer carbide grains and WC additives has a positive effect on the coatings.

The liquid fuel HVOF and HVAF processes achieved high deposition rates of up to 4 kg h$^{-1}$, which implies substantial time savings for coating production. On the other hand, the gaseous fuel HVOF process implies higher deposition efficiencies (Fig. 5). The WC alloyed powder process achieved a deposition efficiency of 70 percent. For liquid fuel HVOF processes the deposition efficiency could be improved to almost 50 percent when using experimental powders Cr$_3$C$_2$-(WC)-Ni (C5 and W2).

Abrasive wear test results showed that the wear resistance highly depends on the material. The addition of WC leads to an improved wear resistance for all temperatures. The improvement was about 100 percent compared to pure Cr$_3$C$_2$-NiCr coatings. This is especially remarkable for applications at high temperatures and loads since hard metals, which are purely based on WC, typically fail under these conditions. Another important result is the increase of the wear resistance at room temperature after the coatings had been heat treated for 8 h at 800 °C in argon atmosphere. This simple post treatment can significantly broaden the application spectrum of Cr$_3$C$_2$-NiCr coatings.

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