

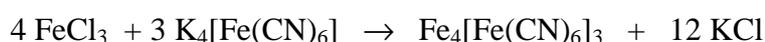
**Problem 11 The Prussian blue**

The Prussian blue is a component of black and bluish inks for printing. The precipitate formed upon the dropwise addition of potassium ferrocyanide to the ferric chloride solution contains 34.9% (mass) of iron.

1. Give a formulae of the precipitate and write the chemical equation.
2. Using the crystal field theory show the *d*-orbital splitting pattern for all Fe atoms in the Prussian blue.
3. What causes the intense color of the pigment?
4. What product initially forms from potassium ferrocyanide and ferric chloride solution in the inverse-mixing-order route? Give the equation.

Solution.

1. Let's write the chemical equation :



where  $\text{Fe}_4[\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6]_3$  is the Prussian blue or Berlin blue.

Problem is that adding drops of ferrocyanide to ferric chloride it could appear the precipitate of the form  $\text{Fe}_4[\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6]_3 \cdot a\text{H}_2\text{O}$  ( $a = 14$  up to  $16$ ) or even  $\text{Fe}_4[\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_{6-x}\text{Cl}_x]_3 \cdot a\text{H}_2\text{O}$ .

In the first case molecular mass is  $859.23 + 18a$  and contains  $390.95$  g Fe.

So,  $a = (39095 - 859.23 \times 34.9) / (18 \times 34.9) = 14.5$ . Not acceptable because **a** is not integer.

For the second case we have molar mass  $859.23 + 35.5x - 26x + 18a$  containing  $390.95$  g Fe.

So, we have  $39095 - 859.23 \times 34.9 = 34.9 \times 9 \times (x + 2a)$  where  $x + 2a = 29$ .

Convenient are  $x = 1$  and  $a = 14$  or  $x = 3$  and  $a = 13$ . Only  $x = 1$  and  $a = 14$  are acceptable.

So the formula of precipitate is  $\text{Fe}_4[\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_5\text{Cl}] \cdot 14 \text{H}_2\text{O}$

2. Let us consider the ion  $\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6^{-4}$ . The electron configuration of  $\text{Fe}^{+2}$  is  $[\text{Ar}]d^{+6}$ .  $\text{CN}^-$  is one of the strongest field ligands, so, we shall have 2 electrons in each  $d_{xy}$ ,  $d_{yz}$ , and  $d_{xz}$  and none in  $d_{x^2-y^2}$  and  $d_z^2$  being occupied only the orbitals of low spin energy, because the difference of energy between these orbitals is too big.

$\text{Fe}^{+3}$  has the configuration  $[\text{Ar}]d^{+5}$

3. In fact this complex absorbs in visible light, in orange region, between  $580$  and  $650$  nm, and we see the complementary color, meaning color blue. Of course this color appears because of this difference of energy between low spin orbitals and high spin orbitals. Cyanide ion is one of the strong field ligand, making the difference of energy between  $d$  orbitals  $xy$ ,  $xz$  and  $yz$  and  $x^2-y^2$  and  $z^2$ . The difference of energy is  $D = h \times \nu$  (frequency) =  $h \times c / \lambda$  (wave length).

4. If we add ferric chloride over potassium ferrocyanide, it forms a white precipitate that will become blue. The reaction is :



and this is normal, because being small quantity of ferric chloride, not all potassium is displaced.

Solution proposed by

Pana Gheorghe - bronze medal at the 1980 IChO Austria/Linz