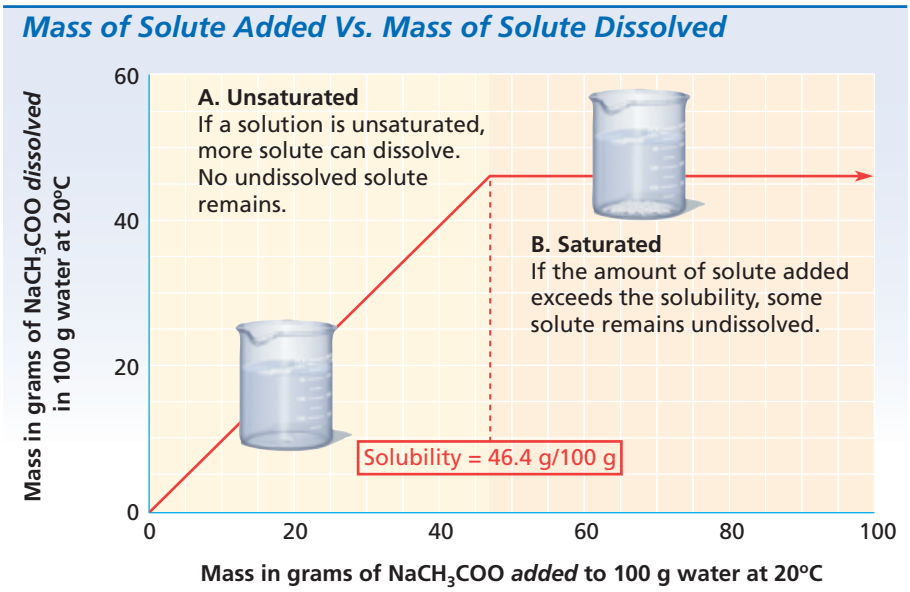

FIGURE 8 The graph shows the range of solute masses that will produce an unsaturated solution. Once the saturation point is exceeded, the system will contain undissolved solute.

Saturated Versus Unsaturated Solutions

A solution that contains the maximum amount of dissolved solute is described as a **saturated solution.** How can you tell that the $NaCH_3COO$ solution pictured in **Figure 8** is saturated? If more sodium acetate is added to the solution, it falls to the bottom and does not dissolve because an equilibrium has been established between ions leaving and entering the solid phase. If more water is added to the saturated solution, then more sodium acetate will dissolve in it. At 20°C, 46.4 g of $NaCH_3COO$ is the maximum amount that will dissolve in 100. g of water. *A solution that contains less solute than a saturated solution under the existing conditions is an* **unsaturated solution.**

Supersaturated Solutions

When a saturated solution of a solute whose solubility increases with temperature is cooled, the excess solute usually comes out of solution, leaving the solution saturated at the lower temperature. But sometimes, if the solution is left to cool undisturbed, the excess solute does not separate and a supersaturated solution is produced. *A* **supersaturated solution** *is a solution that contains more dissolved solute than a saturated solution contains under the same conditions*. A supersaturated solution may remain unchanged for a long time if it is not disturbed, but once crystals begin to form, the process continues until equilibrium is reestablished at the lower temperature. An example of a supersaturated solution is one prepared from a saturated solution of sodium thiosulfate, $Na_2S_2O_3$, or sodium acetate, $NaCH_3COO$. Solute is added to hot water until the solution is saturated, and the hot solution is filtered. The filtrate is left to stand undisturbed as it cools. Dropping a small crystal of the solute into the supersaturated solution ("seeding") or disturbing the solution causes a rapid formation of crystals by the excess solute.