Aerospace Materials and Manufacturing, MECH-3671

Impact Test of AISI 1018 steel & AA6061-T6 aluminium

25/03/2025

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Abstract:

This experiment aimed to investigate the impact toughness of AISI 1018 steel and AA6061-T6 aluminum at various temperatures ranging from 100°C to -196°C. Using a Charpy impact tester, specimens were subjected to controlled thermal environments before testing. Results showed that aluminum maintained relatively consistent impact energy across temperatures, whereas steel exhibited a sharp decrease in toughness at cryogenic temperatures, demonstrating its ductile-to-brittle transition. These findings highlight the importance of material selection for low-temperature applications.

Introduction:

The ability of materials to withstand impact loads at various temperatures is critical in many engineering applications, including aerospace, automotive, and cryogenic systems. Understanding how materials behave under extreme conditions can guide the selection and design of components that operate safely and reliably.

Two commonly used metals—aluminum and steel—exhibit distinct behaviors when exposed to a wide range of temperatures. While certain aluminum alloys (such as AA6061-T6) are known to retain or even increase their toughness in cryogenic environments, low-carbon steels (like AISI 1018) may experience a ductile-to-brittle transition at sufficiently low temperatures. By performing controlled impact tests at temperatures from 100 °C to −196 °C, it becomes possible to:

1. **Quantify the Impact Toughness**: Direct measurements of absorbed energy reveal the extent to which each material can resist fracture under sudden loading.
2. **Identify Ductile-to-Brittle Transition**: Detecting if and when a material transitions from ductile to brittle behavior provides essential information for predicting potential failures.
3. **Guide Material Selection and Design**: Engineers can use the experimental data to choose materials better suited for specific temperature ranges, ensuring higher safety margins and performance.
4. **Correlate with Literature and Standards**: Comparing measured values with known benchmarks or published data verifies the accuracy of the results and expands the existing body of knowledge.

In summary, this investigation aims to provide a detailed analysis of how temperature extremes affect the impact toughness of AA6061-T6 aluminum and AISI 1018 steel. The outcomes will help in understanding fundamental material responses and in making informed decisions for applications where temperature resilience is paramount.

Theory or Survey of Literature:

1. **Fundamentals of Impact Testing**
   The Charpy V-notch test is one of the most widely used methods for measuring the notch toughness (i.e., the energy absorbed by a specimen during fracture) of metallic materials. Standardized under ASTM E23 (Ref. 1), this test provides a quick comparison of materials' ability to resist sudden loading. The key metric is the energy absorbed by the sample, which reflects its capacity to withstand a rapid fracture event.

2. **Crystal Structure and Temperature Effects**
   - **Face-Centered Cubic (FCC) Metals:** Aluminum and its alloys (e.g., AA6061) have an FCC crystal structure, which generally maintains multiple active slip systems across a wide temperature range (Ref. 2). This helps explain why many aluminum alloys exhibit good ductility at both ambient and cryogenic temperatures. Several studies (Ref. 3) have shown that aluminum's fracture toughness can remain stable or even increase in extremely cold conditions, making it suitable for cryogenic applications.
   - **Body-Centered Cubic (BCC) Metals:** Mild steels such as AISI 1018 possess a BCC crystal structure at room temperature. BCC metals typically have fewer active slip systems at lower temperatures, leading to a ductile-to-brittle transition (Ref. 4). Research has consistently documented a sharp drop in impact toughness of low-carbon steels when subjected to temperatures below a certain threshold, often resulting in brittle fracture (Ref. 5).

3. **Ductile-to-Brittle Transition in Steels**
   The phenomenon of ductile-to-brittle transition in ferritic steels has been extensively studied. The temperature at which this transition occurs can be influenced by factors such as alloying elements, grain size, and heat treatment (Ref. 6). Charpy impact testing is a key technique in characterizing this transition, as it provides clear data on the temperature range over which the material shifts from absorbing significant energy (ductile) to absorbing very little (brittle).

4. **Behavior of Aluminum Alloys at Cryogenic Temperatures**
   Aluminum alloys, particularly those in the 6xxx series (e.g., 6061), have been employed in applications where temperatures can drop to cryogenic levels (Ref. 7).

Their retained ductility and toughness at these low temperatures are attributed to the stable FCC lattice and minimal ductile-to-brittle transition. Previous investigations have shown that 6061-T6 aluminum exhibits only slight variations in impact toughness even at −196 °C (Ref. 8).

5. **Comparisons in Literature**

    - **Mild Steel vs. Aluminum:** Multiple comparative studies have demonstrated that while low-carbon steels maintain high toughness at moderate and elevated temperatures, they can fail catastrophically in cryogenic environments (Ref. 9). In contrast, aluminum alloys tend to show more consistent or even enhanced fracture resistance as temperatures drop.

    - **Practical Implications:** Engineers selecting materials for cryogenic tanks, liquefied natural gas (LNG) systems, or aerospace components often rely on this body of literature to ensure the chosen alloy meets safety and performance requirements (Ref. 10).

In summary, the literature establishes that aluminum alloys (particularly in the 6xxx series) can sustain or improve their impact toughness at cryogenic temperatures due to their FCC crystal structure and associated dislocation mobility. Conversely, BCC steels like AISI 1018 commonly exhibit a marked ductile-to-brittle transition, causing a significant reduction in impact toughness at low temperatures. These findings align closely with the goals of the present study, which aims to experimentally quantify and compare the temperature-dependent impact energy of AA6061-T6 aluminum and AISI 1018 steel.

Experimental Procedures:

AA6061 (Aluminum Alloy)

- **Composition (typical):** Approximately 97.9% Al, 0.8–1.2% Mg, 0.4–0.8% Si, with minor amounts of Fe, Cu, and other elements.
- **Key Properties:**
  - Good strength-to-weight ratio
  - Moderate toughness
  - Excellent corrosion resistance
  - Widely used in structural applications

AISI 1018 (Mild Steel)

- **Composition (typical):** Around 98.81–99.26% Fe, 0.15–0.20% C, up to 0.90% Mn, and trace amounts of other elements (Si, P, S).
- **Key Properties:**
  - Good weldability
  - Relatively high toughness in mild conditions
  - Commonly used in shafts, gears, and general-purpose parts

Both materials were obtained in bar form, then machined into standardized test specimens (Charpy-type samples) with a V-notch to ensure consistent impact testing conditions.

Below is a revised **Equipment** section, incorporating all the specified items and providing a brief description of each:

Equipment

1. **Test Specimens (Hot-Rolled AISI 1018 Steel and AA6061-T6 Aluminum)**
   - Machined into standardized Charpy V-notch samples according to the required dimensions and specifications.

2. **Temperature-Control Containers**
    - **Boiling Water Bath (100 °C):** Used to elevate specimens to the high-temperature condition.
    - **Water + Ice Mixture (0 °C):** Maintains samples at the freezing point.
    - **Water + Salt + Ice Mixture (−10 °C):** Provides a sub-freezing environment for intermediate low-temperature testing.
    - **Liquid Nitrogen (−196 °C):** Achieves cryogenic conditions to test extreme low-temperature impact behavior.
3. **Charpy Tester**
    - A pendulum-style impact testing machine capable of measuring the energy absorbed by a specimen during fracture.
4. **Long Tongs**
    - Utilized to safely transfer and handle specimens from temperature-controlled containers to the impact testing machine without direct contact.
5. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
    - Includes safety glasses, thermal gloves, lab coat, and any other protective gear necessary to ensure safe handling of hot and cryogenic samples.

Procedure

1. Ensure that each sample is kept in the specified conditions listed in Table 1 for a minimum of 10 minutes before conducting the test.

Medium	Temperature (°C)
Boiling water	100
Room Temperature	25
Water + Ice	0
Ice + Salt	-10
Liquid Nitrogen	-196

Table I: Experiment environments

2. With the hammer (pendulum) securely locked in its highest position, position the specimen on the testing machine so that the side opposite the notched face faces the hammer.
3. Adjust the machine’s indicator to the zero position.
4. Confirm that there are no obstructions in the hammer’s (pendulum’s) path.
5. Release the hammer, allowing it to fall under gravity and strike the specimen. If the specimen does not fully absorb the impact energy, the hammer will continue to swing. Once the specimen breaks, the indicator will stop at the highest point reached by the hammer after impact. Record the indicator’s final reading to determine the energy required for the fracture of the sample.

Experimental Results:

I. Raw Data

All measurements were obtained using the Charpy impact testing procedure described previously. Table II lists the raw energy absorption data (in ft·lb) for each specimen of **AA6061-T6 aluminum** and **AISI 1018 steel**, respectively, across five temperature conditions: 100 °C, 25 °C (room temperature), 0 °C, −10 °C, and −196 °C.

Sample	**100°C**	**RT**	**0°C**	**-10°C**	**-196°C**
AA6061 - Aluminium	90	90	80	80	100
	90	90	90	-	125
AISI 1018 - Steel	205	180	195	150	1
	205	190	200	-	1

Table II: Raw Impact Energy Data

II. Averaged Data

Table III shows the mean values calculated from the raw data in Table II. These averages represent the final reported impact energies (in ft·lb) for each material at each temperature.

Sample derived energy(ft.lb) / Temperature (°C)	**100**	**25**	**0**	**-10**	**-196**
AA6061 - Aluminium	90	90	85	80	112.5
AISI 1018 - Steel	205	185	197.5	150	1

Table III: Average Impact Energy for AA6061-T6 Aluminum and AISI 1018 Steel

III. Graphical Representation

To visualize the effect of temperature on impact energy for both materials, the following graph was plotted:

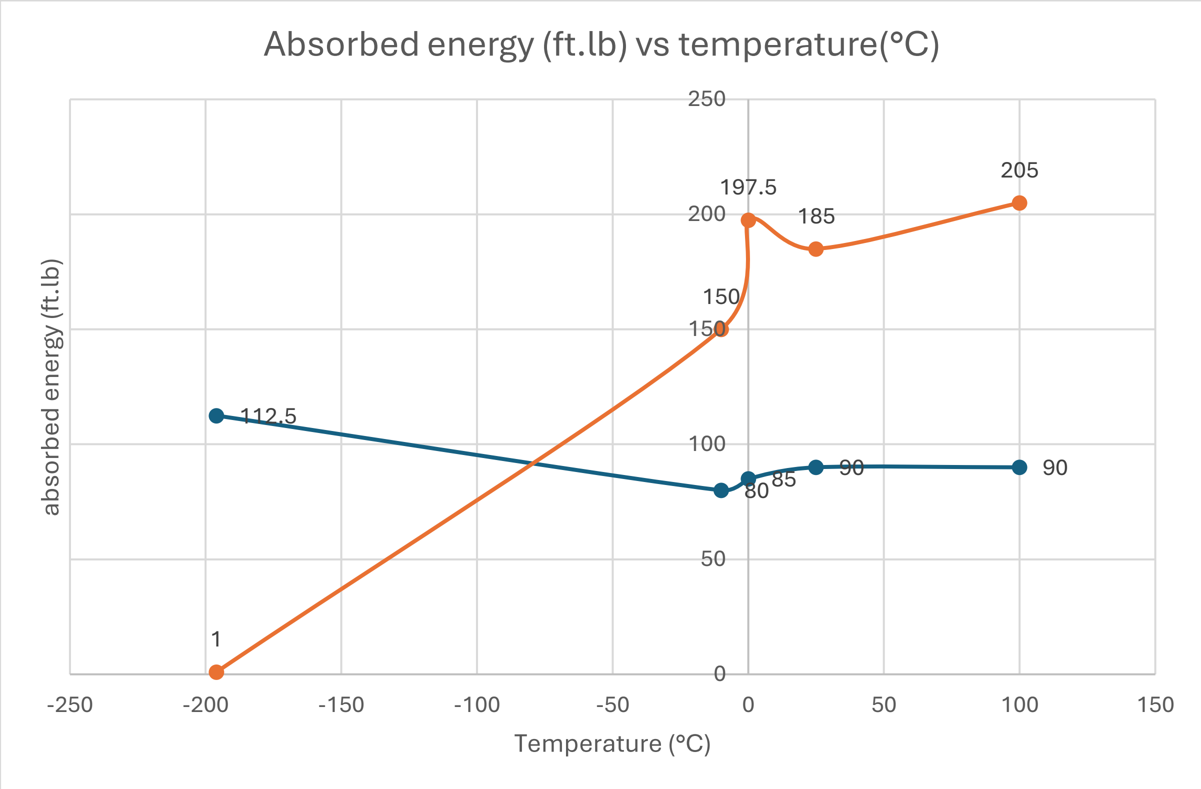

Figure 1: Impact Energy vs Temperature for AA6061-T6 Aluminum and AISI 1018 Steel

In **Figure 1**, the aluminum data show relatively consistent impact energies around 80–90 ft·lb from 100 °C to −10 °C, with an increase to over 100 ft·lb at −196 °C. The steel data remains relatively high (150–205 ft·lb) at temperatures from 100 °C to −10 °C but drop precipitously to 1 ft·lb at −196 °C.

IV. Observations from Raw Data

1. **AA6061-T6 Aluminum**

    - Most readings between 100 °C and −10 °C hover around 80–90 ft·lb.
    - At −196 °C, the impact energy increases significantly (100 and 125 ft·lb in the two measurements).

2. **AISI 1018 Steel**
   - Relatively high impact energy (180–205 ft·lb) at warmer temperatures (100 °C, 25 °C, and 0 °C).
   - At −196 °C, the material absorbs drastically less energy (1 ft·lb), indicating a brittle failure mode.
3. **Consistency and Possible Anomalies**
   - Duplicate measurements generally agree within a few ft·lb for both materials.
   - Any obviously inconsistent or anomalous data points are retained here in the results. A deeper explanation of such data will be addressed in the **Discussion of Results**.

Discussion of Results:

Overall Trends

- **AA6061-T6 Aluminum:** The impact energy remained relatively stable (80–90 ft·lb) from high temperatures (100 °C) down to sub-freezing conditions (−10 °C). Notably, the energy absorption at −196 °C increased to around 112.5 ft·lb on average, suggesting that this aluminum alloy retains (and even slightly enhances) its toughness at extremely low temperatures.
- **AISI 1018 Steel:** The steel exhibited consistently high impact energy (150–205 ft·lb) from 100 °C down to −10 °C, indicating good toughness in these ranges. However, at −196 °C, the impact energy plummeted to approximately 1 ft·lb, a strong indication of brittle behavior at cryogenic temperatures.

Possible Explanations for Observed Behavior

- **Aluminum at Cryogenic Temperatures:** Aluminum alloys, including AA6061-T6, often maintain or improve toughness at very low temperatures due to their face-centered cubic (FCC) crystal structure, which remains ductile over a broad temperature range. This can explain why the measured impact energy did not decrease but instead showed an increase at −196 °C.

- **Steel at Cryogenic Temperatures:** Carbon steels (such as AISI 1018, which has a body-centered cubic (BCC) structure) often undergo a ductile-to-brittle transition at lower temperatures. This results in a steep drop in impact energy once the transition temperature is approached or surpassed, explaining the sudden drop to 1 ft·lb at −196 °C.

Assessment of Data Quality

- **Repeatability:** Each condition was tested with at least two samples, and the measurements were generally consistent. Any small deviations (e.g., 80 ft·lb vs. 90 ft·lb in aluminum samples) are likely due to normal experimental variation in specimen preparation or slight differences in the notch geometry.
- **Potential Anomalies:** One of the most striking differences is the jump in aluminum toughness at −196 °C. While this is consistent with many aluminum alloys' known behavior, it is still an area where further testing could confirm the degree of toughness improvement.
- **Sources of Error:**
    1. **Temperature Uniformity:** Ensuring the specimen core reached the exact test temperature can be challenging. If the sample was not fully equilibrated, the measured impact energy might not precisely reflect the intended temperature.
    2. **Machine Calibration:** Any slight misalignment or calibration drift in the Charpy tester can influence the final energy reading.
    3. **Notch Preparation:** Minor variations in notch dimensions or surface finish can affect fracture initiation and propagation.
    4. **Data Recording:** Human error in reading or recording the dial indicator could introduce small discrepancies in the reported values.

Comparison with Literature

- **Aluminum Alloys:** Previous investigations generally agree that 6000-series aluminum alloys can maintain or increase their toughness at cryogenic temperatures. Literature data often show an absence of a sharp ductile-to-brittle transition, aligning well with the findings here.

- **Low-Carbon Steels:** It is well-documented that mild steels can become brittle at sufficiently low temperatures. Literature commonly reports a significant drop in impact energy as steels approach cryogenic conditions, consistent with the drastic reduction observed in this study.

Interpretation and Realistic Considerations

- **Correctness of Results:** The overall trends (aluminum retaining/improving toughness at low temperatures and steel becoming brittle) match established metallurgical principles.
- **Potential Outliers:** While there are no major outliers, slight fluctuations in aluminum data (e.g., an 80 ft·lb vs. a 90 ft·lb reading at 0 °C or −10 °C) may be due to small variations in test conditions or material microstructure.
- **Engineering Implications:**
    1. **Aluminum** might be a preferable choice for applications requiring good impact resistance at cryogenic temperatures.
    2. **Steel** retains high toughness at moderate and elevated temperatures, but design considerations must account for potential brittleness in cryogenic or near-cryogenic environments.

Conclusions:

1. **AA6061-T6 Aluminum Maintained Consistent Toughness from 100 °C to −10 °C**
    - The measured impact energy ranged between 80 ft·lb and 90 ft·lb across this temperature span.
2. **AA6061-T6 Aluminum Exhibited Higher Impact Energy at Cryogenic Temperature**
    - At −196 °C, the average impact energy increased to 112.5 ft·lb.
3. **AISI 1018 Steel Demonstrated High Toughness at Elevated and Moderate Temperatures**
    - From 100 °C down to −10 °C, its impact energy ranged from 150 ft·lb to 205 ft·lb.
4. **AISI 1018 Steel Became Extremely Brittle at −196 °C**
    - The impact energy plummeted to an average of 1 ft·lb at this cryogenic temperature.
5. **The Ductile-to-Brittle Transition in AISI 1018 Steel Was Clearly Observed**
    - Comparing impact energies from −10 °C (150 ft·lb) to −196 °C (1 ft·lb) confirms a sharp decrease in toughness within this temperature range.

These findings confirm that AA6061-T6 aluminum retains (and even increases) its impact toughness at cryogenic temperatures, while AISI 1018 steel becomes highly brittle when cooled to −196 °C.

Recommendations:

1. **Further Investigation of Steel's Ductile-to-Brittle Transition**
    - Given the significant drop in impact energy of AISI 1018 steel at low temperatures, additional tests should be conducted to pinpoint the exact ductile-to-brittle transition temperature. A more detailed temperature range (e.g., increments of 5°C instead of large gaps) would provide better insight into the transition behavior.
    - Future studies should also investigate the effects of heat treatment and alloying elements on the transition temperature to determine if modifications could improve the low-temperature toughness of steel.
2. **Expanded Testing of Aluminum Alloys**
    - While AA6061-T6 aluminum performed well at all temperatures, it would be beneficial to compare its behavior to other aluminum alloys, such as AA7075 or AA5083, which are commonly used in structural applications.
    - Testing different tempers (e.g., annealed vs. heat-treated conditions) could help identify the best processing conditions for cryogenic applications.
3. **Use of Additional Testing Methods**
    - Complementary mechanical tests, such as tensile and fracture toughness tests at various temperatures, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the material behavior under different loading conditions.
    - Microstructural analysis using scanning electron microscopy (SEM) could be performed to examine fracture surfaces and better understand failure mechanisms at different temperatures.
4. **Improvement of Experimental Conditions**
    - A larger sample size would improve statistical accuracy and help account for variability in material properties.
    - More precise temperature control during testing, such as using a controlled environmental chamber instead of simple liquid baths, could ensure more consistent and accurate temperature exposure for each sample.

5. **Application-Based Testing**
    - Further studies could simulate real-world impact scenarios, such as testing materials under dynamic loading conditions or subjecting them to repeated impact cycles to assess fatigue resistance.
    - Investigating the performance of these materials in structural applications, such as aerospace, automotive, or cryogenic storage tanks, would provide industry-specific insights into material selection and design optimization.

By implementing these recommendations, future experiments could provide deeper insights into the temperature-dependent behavior of steel and aluminum, leading to improved material selection and performance in low-temperature environments.

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