

Enhancing Industrial Wastewater Treatment through Fe₃O₄ Nanoparticles-loaded Activated Charcoal: Design and Optimization for Sustainable Development

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Abstract : This paper reports investigations in the mineralization of industrial wastewater (COD = 3246 mg/L, TOC = 2500 mg/L) using a ternary (ultrasound + Fenton + adsorption) hybrid advanced oxidation process. Fe₃O₄ decorated activated charcoal (Fe₃O₄@AC) nanocomposites (surface area = 538.88 m²/g; adsorption capacity = 294.31 mg/g) were synthesized using co-precipitation. The wastewater treatment process was optimized using central composite statistical design. At optimum conditions, viz. pH = 4.2, H₂O₂ loading = 0.71 M, adsorbent dose = 0.34 g/L, reduction in COD and TOC of wastewater were 94.75% and 89%, respectively. This result is essentially a consequence of synergistic interactions among the adsorption of pollutants onto activated charcoal and surface Fenton reactions induced due to the leaching of Fe²⁺/Fe³⁺ ions from the Fe₃O₄ nanoparticles. Microconvection generated due to sonication assisted faster mass transport (adsorption/desorption) of pollutants between Fe₃O₄@AC nanocomposite and the solution. The net result of this synergism was high interactions and reactions among and radicals and pollutants that resulted in the effective mineralization of wastewater. The Fe₃O₄@AC showed excellent recovery (> 90 wt%) and reusability (> 90% COD removal) in 5 successive cycles of treatment. LC-MS analysis revealed effective (> 50%) degradation of more than 25 significant contaminants (in the form of herbicides and pesticides) after the treatment with ternary hybrid AOP. Similarly, the toxicity analysis test using the seed germination technique revealed ~ 60% reduction in the toxicity of the wastewater after treatment.

Keywords : Fe₃O₄@AC nanocomposite, RSM, COD, LC-MS, Toxicity

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