

Quantum Chemical and Master Equation Study of $\text{OH} + \text{CH}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CHO}$ Reaction Rates in Supercritical CO_2 Environment

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Abstract. We investigated the reaction rates of $\text{OH} + \text{CH}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CHO}$ at CO_2 pressures of up to 1000 atm with and without CO_2 molecule included in reactive complex. Both mechanisms begin with formation of the hydrogen bonded pre-reactive complexes. Our *ab initio* calculations indicate a possibility of catalytic effect, predicting activation barrier that one order of magnitude lower when CO_2 molecule is involved. To verify this effect, we use the Rice-Ramsperger-Kassel-Marcus theory (RRKM) and solve unimolecular master equations in the steady-state approximation. We assume the equilibrium between pre-reactive complexes and reactants and compare the bimolecular reaction rates for the two mechanisms. The catalyzed reaction mechanism is found to be faster at higher CO_2 pressures and lower temperatures, when pre-reactive complexes have non-negligible concentration. Therefore, this catalytic effect may be important for this reactive process in room temperature supercritical CO_2 solvent, but is unlikely to play a role during oxy-combustion.

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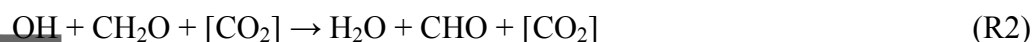
1. Introduction.

In oxy-combustion technology the nitrogen is removed from the air, and oxygen is diluted with excess CO₂.¹ This can prevent the formation of nitrogen oxide pollutants, and simplify carbon sequestration by flue gas separation.¹⁻² Another advantage of oxy-combustion is the ability of CO₂ to form a supercritical fluid with high thermal expansion coefficient, increasing the efficiency of the turbine.³⁻⁴ Combustion kinetics may alter at large concentrations of CO₂, and theoretical chemistry can assist in studying these effects.⁵⁻⁸ In the first paper of this series we investigated the effect of CO₂ on the CO + OH reactive system and found a lower activation energy pathway in which CO₂ participated covalently.⁹ In the following papers, we reported lowering of the activation barrier of seven other combustion reactions via van der Waals (vdW) interactions with CO₂.^{10,11} In order to obtain a better description of these vdW interactions, we used a higher theory level (CBS-QM11) and refined the reaction pathways.^{9, 12} Next, we applied Master Equation solver to obtain rate constants for the OH + CO → H + CO₂ reaction with and without additional CO₂ molecule.¹³

In this contribution, we investigate the rate of another reaction R1:



and focus on the effects of carbon dioxide on the reaction mechanism:



Formaldehyde CH₂O is formed as intermediate during combustion, and removed by reacting with OH and other radicals. The reaction R1 is very important in combustion chemistry, as was shown by the number of studies.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Zabarnick *et al.*¹⁶ obtained experimental kinetics data over the temperature range 296-576 K for this reaction using laser photolysis to produce OH from hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) and laser-induced fluorescence to measure OH

concentration. More recently, Sivakumaran *et al.*¹⁷ obtained experimental kinetics data using on-line optical absorption measurements of the formaldehyde concentration at a lower temperature range of 202–399 K, while Vasudevan *et al.*¹⁸ investigated the higher temperature range 934–1670 K using a shock tube with t-C₄H₉OOH and trioxane as the precursors of OH and CH₂O.

Several theoretical studies of reaction R1 had been published as well. Li *et al.*¹⁴ predicted potential energy surface for this reaction using the multicoefficient G3s (MCG3/3) method and found a barrier of 0.21 kcal/mol. They also computed rate constants at 300 to 3000 K using variational transition state theory with small-curvature tunneling correction. Zhao *et al.*¹⁵ reported potential energy surface with a barrier of 5.3 kcal/mol for R1 at MP4(SDTQ)/6-311++G(3df,3pd) theory level. Ali and Barker¹⁹ reported a potential energy surface for R1 reaction using CCSD(T)/aug-cc-pVTZ//CCSD(T)/aug-cc-pVTZ theory level, and found an activation barrier of 3.5 kcal/mol. They also carried out rate calculations at the temperature interval of 200–400 K using canonical transition state theory with Eckart asymmetric tunneling corrections. More recently, Masunov *et al.* also found critical points on the potential energy surface for R1 and one competing reaction at M11/6-311G**+GD3 theory level with zero-point energy (ZPE) correction.¹¹ They calculated activation barrier to be 4.3 kcal/mol. In this work, we will refine that result using higher theory level CBS-QM11, introduced earlier.^{9, 12} Finally, Xu *et al.*²⁰ predicted R1 reaction rates by fitting the minimum energy pathway to a Morse potential using three different methods. Their Method 1 was CCSD(T)/6-311+G(3df,2p)//CCSD/6-311++G(d,p) theory level and used multiple reflections correction, Method 2 was CCSD(T)/6-311+G(3df,2p)//B3LYP/6-311+G(3df,2p) theory level with multiple reflections, and Method 3 was CCSD(T)/6-311+G(3df,2p)//CCSD/6-311++G(d,p) theory level without multiple reflections. The barrier found using Methods 1

and 3 was 2.6 kcal/mol, with 2.2 kcal/mol for Method 2. We will consider their results in more details in Section 3. Xu *et al.* accounted for the effect of multiple reflections above the shallow well corresponding to van der Waals (vdW) complexes on the rate of reaction, as was proposed by Hirschfelder and Wigner²¹ and formalized by Miller²². To account for this effect on the individual rate constant, the probability of the reaction flux passing through was calculated as follows:

$$P_{b \leftarrow a} = \frac{P_{b \leftarrow x} P_{x \leftarrow a}}{P_{b \leftarrow x} + P_{a \leftarrow x} - P_{b \leftarrow x} P_{a \leftarrow x}} = \frac{(N_2/N_x)(N_1/N_a)}{(N_2/N_x) + (N_1/N_x) - (N_2/N_x)(N_1/N_x)}$$

Here, the probabilities of vdW complex (x) forming from reactants, this complex decaying back to the reactants (a), and to the products (b) are represented by $P_{x \leftarrow a}$, $P_{a \leftarrow x}$, and $P_{b \leftarrow x}$, respectively, and N_1 , N_2 , and N_x denote flux integrals through dividing surfaces. In this work we used an alternative approach, where pre-reactive vdW complex (PRC) is assumed to be in equilibrium with reactants, and will show this to be a viable approximation.

First, we calculated accurate activation energies for R1 and R2, based on minimum energy pathway (MEP) described previously at DFT+vdW theory level,¹¹ and confirmed the additional CO₂ molecule reduces the activation barrier by stabilizing the transition state more than pre-reactive complex. Next, we predicted reaction rate constants for R1 and R2 at a wide range of temperatures and pressures using master equation formalism. Once obtained, these rates are compared in order to find specific conditions where the catalytic effect of CO₂ takes place.

2. Computational Details.

2.1 Potential Energy Surface.

Gaussian 2009 was used for quantum chemical calculations,²³ and MOLDEN was used to visualize the results.²⁴ Density Functional Theory (DFT) was shown to be useful in several areas of chemistry,²⁵⁻²⁹ providing the best accuracy to computational cost ratio.³⁰⁻³³ In this work all geometry optimizations and zero point energy (ZPE) calculations were performed using M11 density functional,³⁴ Grimme's 3-body dispersion correction (GD3),³⁵ and 6-311G(d,p) basis set.³⁶ Thereafter, we will call this theory level M11D3. The energies of selected critical points (products, reactants, and transition states) were refined at M11D3 geometries with CBS-M11 model chemistry.³⁷⁻³⁸ This composite approach is an improvement over the well-known CBS-QB3.³⁹ The example of input file for the method CBS-M11 is shown in Supporting Information.

2.2. Rate Constants Calculations.

R1 and R2 both begin via the formation of pre-reactive complexes (PRC) of the initial reagents. The reactions proceed from PRC to the products via unimolecular isomerization. Density of states, equilibrium constants, and microscopic rate coefficients were calculated using TSTRATE, a modified version of the UNIMOL program,⁴⁰ included in GPOP program suite.⁴¹ Tunneling effects were taken into account using implementation of asymmetric Eckart potential.⁴² SSUMES program suite was used to solve the steady-state unimolecular master equations based on the Rice-Ramsperger-Kassel-Marcus theory (RRKM).⁴³ The energy grain

size used was set to default value of 100 cm^{-1} , which typically gives converged results for combustion reactions.⁴⁴ Collisional energy transfer probability was estimated using exponential-down model.⁴⁵ Collision frequency was estimated by assuming the Lennard-Jones (LJ) potential. The LJ parameters for R1 reactive system were taken to be identical to those of CO_2 ($\sigma = 3.94 \text{ \AA}$ and $\varepsilon/k_B = 201 \text{ K}$). This choice was determined by the fact that CO_2 and PC28 contain three heavy atoms in linear or nearly linear configuration. For R2 reactive system we used LJ parameters equal to that of benzene ($\sigma = 4.70 \text{ \AA}$ and $\varepsilon/k_B = 284 \text{ K}$). Both C_6H_6 and PC128 contain six heavy atoms in the planar or nearly planar hexagonal arrangement. This collision model was used to successfully describe pressure dependence on reactive system of a similar size in the past.¹³ The buffer gas used was CO_2 in both cases. The pressure dependent rate constants were calculated by solving the energy grained, multiple-well master equation for the reactions R1 and R2. The truncation threshold was set to 50 energy grains. Moderate variations (5-100) in this truncation threshold did not have a sizable effect on the outcome.

3. Results and Discussion.

3.1 OH + CH_2O Reactive System.

As shown in Fig. 1, reaction R1 begins with formation of hydrogen bonded pre-reactive complex PRC28 (-2.9 kcal/mol below the initial reactants). This complex is formed with no barrier and is presumed to be in equilibrium with the reactants.



PRC28 isomerizes to the product complex PC28 over TS28 with 3.04 kcal/mol barrier:



The product complex can then (1) dissociate into the products:



or (3) isomerize back to PRC28 via TS28.



The equilibrium constant for PRC28 formation (R3) can be defined as follows:

$$K_{\text{PRC28}} = [\text{PRC28}] / [\text{OH}] [\text{CH}_2\text{O}] \quad (1)$$

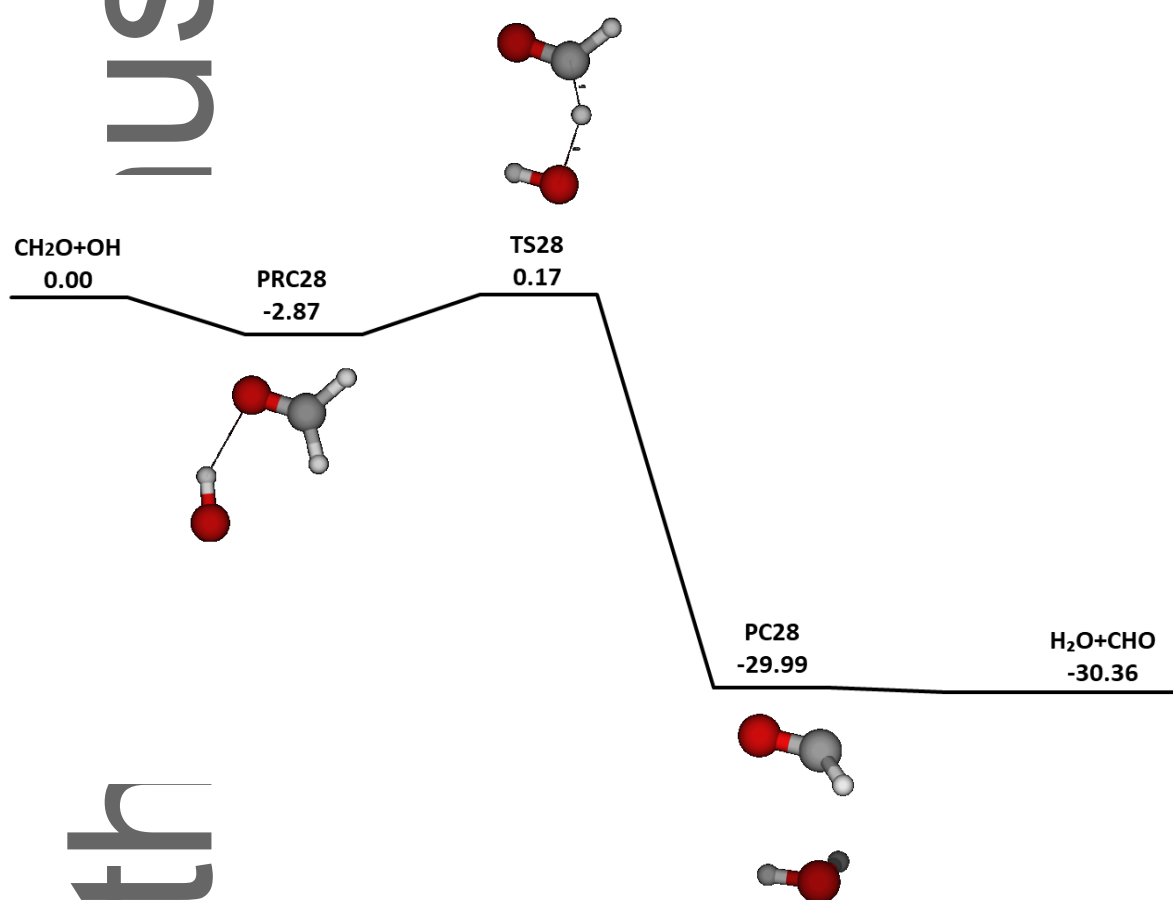


Figure 1. CBS-QM11 potential energy surface for reaction R1 (ZPE included).

The equilibrium constant for PRC formation as well as the high-pressure limit for the R4 (TS28 unimolecular rate k_{28}^{∞}) was computed as a function of T. Next, the pressure

dependence was taken into account by means of branching fractions for all the intermediates in steady state approximation. The unimolecular rate coefficient k_{28} was calculated by multiplying k_{28}^{∞} and the forward reaction branching fraction. The rate for reaction R1 is

$$\text{rate R1} = k_1 [\text{OH}][\text{CH}_2\text{O}] = k_{28} [\text{PRC28}] \quad (2)$$

and bimolecular rate constant was therefore obtained as

$$k_1 = k_{28} K_{\text{PRC}} \quad (3)$$

The calculated temperature dependence is compared to theoretical and experimental data in Fig. 2.

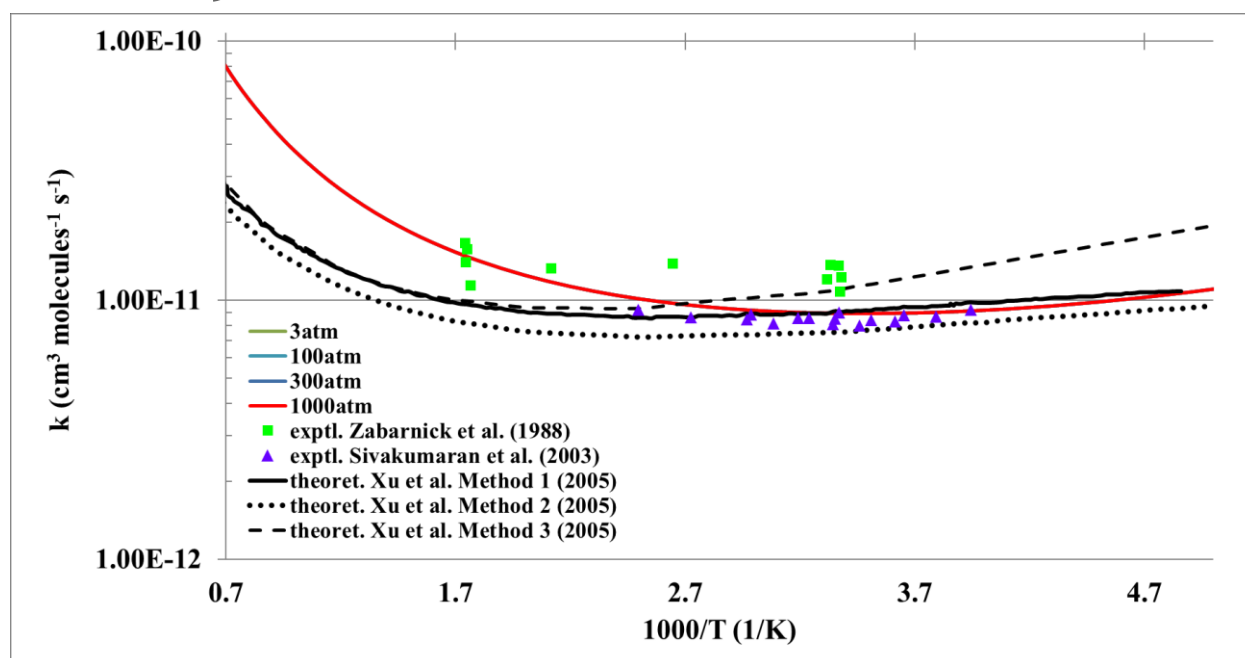


Figure 2. Bimolecular rate constants for reaction R1, calculated at 3, 100, 300, and 1000 atm. All pressure sets are plotted, but overlap. The experimental data are shown for comparison (green squares from Ref.¹⁶, purple triangles from Ref.¹⁷). Black lines illustrate predictions from Ref.²⁰. See text for details.

One can see from Fig. 2, that predicted rate constants agree well with experimental data. The predicted trend is consistent with that of Xu *et al.*²⁰ at lower temperatures. Our results are in better agreement with the Methods 1 and 2, that include correction for multiple reflections above potential well of pre-reactive complex. This indicates that our approach is a

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viable alternative for multiple reflection correction to the rate constant of a bimolecular reaction. Deviations of the Method 3 are consistent with conclusions by Hirschfelder and Wigner,²¹ who argued this effect is only important at low temperatures. It is worth noting that reaction **R1** is found not to be pressure dependent.

3.2 OH + CH₂O Reactive System with CO₂.

Previously, we found two possible mechanisms for **R2** reaction:¹¹ one included several steps with the extra CO₂ molecule covalently bound in the transition states and intermediates, and the other one involved a hydrogen transfer from CH₂O to OH to form water, with TS stabilized by vdW complex formation with extra CO₂ molecule. The activation barrier for former mechanism was found to be 30.2 kcal/mol at M11D3+ZPE, whereas the barrier for the latter was found to be 0.8 kcal/mol. Therefore, we will only consider the second mechanism here.

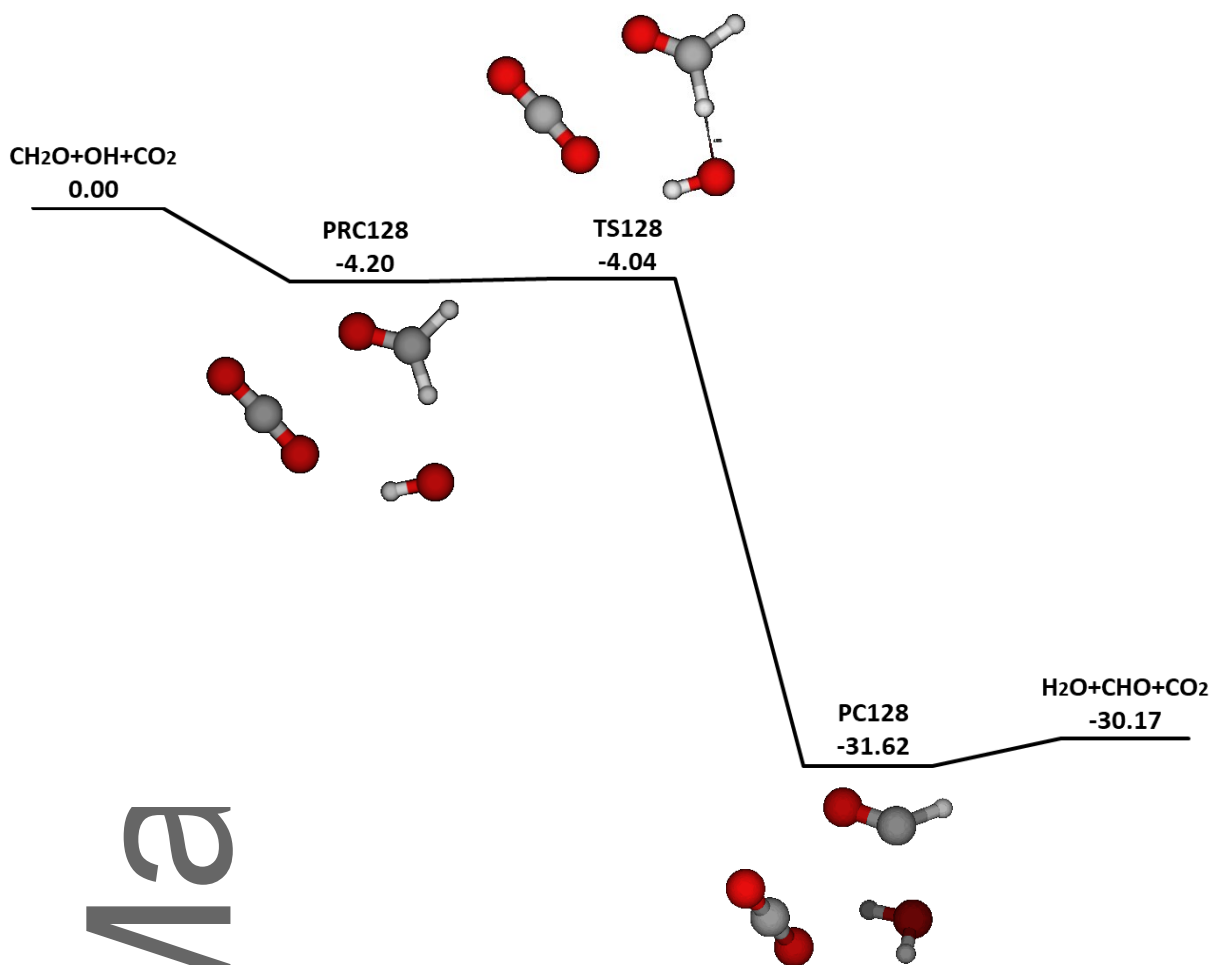
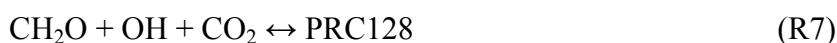
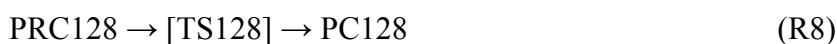


Figure 3. CBS-QM11 potential energy surface for reaction R2 (ZPE included).

The mechanism involving spectator CO_2 is illustrated in **Fig. 3** and can be summarized as follows. First, pre-reactive complex PRC128 (-4.2 kcal/mol) is formed:



PRC128 and the reactants are again assumed to be in equilibrium. This complex then isomerizes via TS128 with 0.16 kcal/mol barrier into the product complex:



The product complex PC128 can then dissociate into products:



or isomerize back to PRC128:



The activation barrier for R2 is lower than that of R1, due to the fact that vdW complex formation stabilizes the transition state more than it does for PRC. The high-pressure limit for unimolecular rate constant k_{128}^∞ and the equilibrium constant for PRC formation K_{PRC128} were found as functions of T. Equilibrium constant for PRC formation K_{PRC128} is defined as:

$$K_{\text{PRC128}} = [\text{PRC128}] / [\text{OH}] [\text{CH}_2\text{O}] [\text{CO}_2] \quad (4)$$

The pressure dependent constant k_{128} was calculated by multiplying k_{128}^∞ with the forward reaction branching fraction. The rate for the overall reaction R2 is:

$$\text{rate R2} = k_2 [\text{OH}] [\text{CH}_2\text{O}] = k_{128} [\text{PRC128}] \quad (5)$$

so that bimolecular rate constant k_2 can be expressed as:

$$k_2 = k_{128} K_{\text{PRC128}} [\text{CO}_2] \quad (6)$$

Concentration of CO_2 was obtained from the pressure and temperature using NIST database of real gases.⁴⁶ The bimolecular rate constant k_2 was calculated in this procedure for several pressure levels and plotted in **Fig. 4** together with k_1 . From this figure one can see that R2 rate exceeds R1 rate only at higher pressures and lower temperatures (below 313K at 1000 atm and below 303K at 300 atm). Apparently, at these conditions ternary pre-reactive complex is present in sufficient concentrations for the catalytic mechanism to compete. Similar conclusions were made when considering the catalysis of atmospheric reactions by the water molecules.⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸

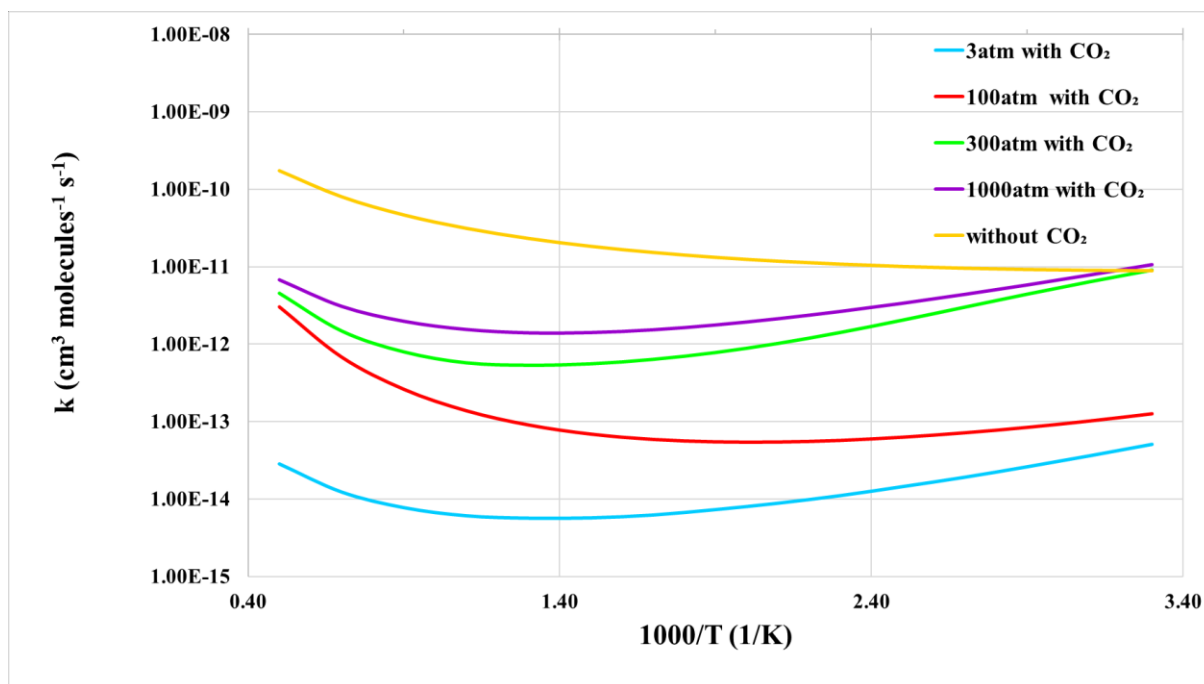


Figure 4. Bimolecular rate constants, calculated at a range of temperatures for reactions R1 (without CO₂) and R2 (with CO₂).

4. Conclusions

We found potential energy surface for OH + CH₂O → H₂O + CHO reaction with (R2) and without (R1) additional CO₂ molecule using *ab initio* CBS-QM11 theory level. The activation barrier without CO₂ present was 3.04 kcal/mol, but with CO₂ it was lowered to 0.16 kcal/mol. Based on this reduction in activation barrier, we suggested a catalytic effect of CO₂ on this important combustion reaction is possible. We then predicted rate constants for R1 and R2 in a supercritical CO₂ environment. Investigation of the reaction mechanisms was carried out using the steady-state master equation analyses based on the Rice-Ramsperger-Kassel-Marcus theory. We found that at higher CO₂ pressures (300 atm) and lower temperatures (below 313 K) the reaction R2 becomes faster than reaction R1, due to the fact that pre-reactive complexes are present at sufficient concentrations. These findings are consistent with our previous work on autocatalytic effects in the OH + CO → H + CO₂

reaction.¹³ The effect of carbon dioxide on OH+CH₂O reaction would be important in liquid CO₂ at room temperature, but not for oxy-combustion processes.

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