Test Parameter Analysis in Abrasive Water Jet Cutting of Rocklike Materials

A. W. MOMBER†
R. KOVACEVIC‡

This paper contains investigations on the behavior of five artificial rocklike materials subjected to abrasive water jet cutting. The influence of the test parameters, i.e. applied pump pressure, traverse rate and abrasive mass flow rate was investigated, as well as the influence of several material parameters, e.g. compressive strength, Young's modulus, absorbed fracture energy and crack velocity. For the test parameters, it is found that two sets of critical parameters exist. First, there are minimum threshold values which must be exceeded to initiate the material destruction process. Second, critical values for the test parameters exist which should not be exceeded in order to ensure an effective cutting process. Based on statistical calculations it is found that the crack velocities of the materials have the most significant effect on the cutting process. The crack velocity of the material influences the depth of the cut, specific energy, and threshold parameters of the cutting process. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

NOMENCLATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>constants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b_s</td>
<td>cut width</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_1, C_2</td>
<td>constants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d_p</td>
<td>focussing nozzle diameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d_m</td>
<td>average material grain size</td>
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<tr>
<td>E_{dw}</td>
<td>dynamic absorbed energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E_m</td>
<td>target material Young's modulus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E_{ap}</td>
<td>abrasive particle kinetic energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E_{mr}</td>
<td>specific material removal energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E_{dc}</td>
<td>critical destruction energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>depth of cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h_0</td>
<td>maximum depth of cut</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>cut length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>mass of disintegrated material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m_p</td>
<td>abrasive particle mass</td>
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<tr>
<td>m_{mr}</td>
<td>abrasive particle mass flow rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>N_a</td>
<td>machinability number</td>
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<td>p</td>
<td>pump pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P_m</td>
<td>material property</td>
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<td>p_{th}</td>
<td>pump threshold pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>coefficient of regression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t_{ep}</td>
<td>local exposure time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>cutting head traverse rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v_{tr}</td>
<td>target material crack velocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V_r</td>
<td>volume of removed material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v_{ap}</td>
<td>abrasive particle velocity</td>
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<td>v_{apm}</td>
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<td>v_{cr}</td>
<td>critical cutting head traverse rate</td>
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<td>v_{pw}</td>
<td>target material P-wave velocity</td>
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<td>z_a</td>
<td>sound impedance</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

The abrasive water jet (AWJ) is a new innovative tool for cutting rocks and rocklike materials. It can be used for cutting, pre-weakening and drilling of rocks, and for trenching heavily reinforced materials, e.g. steel reinforced concrete. Recent reviews on the capability of the abrasive water jet in the fields of mining and civil engineering are given in refs [1–3].

On the basis of jet generation, the abrasive water jet can generally be categorized as injection AWJ or suspension AWJ. For practical applications, injection AWJ is more commonly used. For this type of jet, the pump pressure ranges between $p = 100$ MPa and $p = 400$ MPa. An injection AWJ is formed by accelerating small abrasive particles (garnet, aluminum oxide, silica carbide) through contact with a high velocity plain water jet. This process is illustrated in Fig. 1. A typical abrasive grain diameter is $d_p = 400$ μm. The plain water jet is formed in an orifice above the abrasive cutting head. The abrasives enter the cutting head at a separate
The abrasive water jet is a streamlike tool, similar to laser and electron beams, which is characterized by an unsteady material removal process. The most pronounced characteristic of AWJ-generated surfaces is the presence of striation marks which transpire below a region of relatively smooth surface finish. It is widely accepted that the striations are a result of the formation of steps on the cutting front. The concept of step formation was introduced in the water jet cutting research by Mohaupt and Burns [4]. It is not clear yet what physical phenomenon may cause the formation of steps and striations in brittle multiphase materials.

Probably the most extensive study on rocks exposed to abrasive water jet cutting was carried out by Helbling [5]. He investigated the influence of several process parameters, e.g. pump pressure, nozzle diameter and traverse rate, as well as the influence of selected material parameters. He found some significant relations between the depth of cut and some material properties, e.g. tensile strength, Young's modulus and fracture toughness. However, the study contains little discussion or interpretation of the experimental results. Also, no attempt was made to find mathematical expressions of the parameter influences on the cutting process. Hashish [6] divided the abrasive water jet cutting process into two stages, “cutting wear” and “deformation wear”. He suggested that the material resistance in the “cutting wear” process is characterized by the material hardness, whereas the “deformation wear” resistance is defined by Young's modulus. This theory is controversially discussed [7] and is questionable for the cases of brittle multiphase materials, e.g. rocks, concretes and minerals. In a more systematic study [8] it was found that the resistance of brittle materials can be characterized by their idealized strain energy,

$$h \propto \frac{2EM}{\sigma_t^2}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

but, interestingly, this relation did not hold for rock materials such as marble and granite. This may be due to the more complex stress–strain behavior of brittle pre-cracked materials. Zeng et al. [9] introduced a so-called “machinability number”, \(N_m\), to describe the resistance of materials against abrasive water jet attack,

$$N_m = A \frac{d_m \sigma_t}{\gamma M EM} + B \frac{1}{\sigma_t}$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

Typical values for rocks and concretes are in the range of \(N_m = 300-600\), whereas metals have values of about \(N_m = 100\). The lower the value of \(N_m\) the higher the material resistance against abrasive water jet cutting. This parameter has to be estimated by reference experiments and therefore it may lead to a correct order of materials according to their abrasive water jet cutting resistance. Nevertheless, the machinability number fails in relation to some physical parameters, such as the average grain size of the target material and their fracture energy.

2. OBJECTIVE AND GENERAL IDEA

The investigation is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the influence of the test parameters, i.e. the applied pump pressure, traverse rate and abrasive mass flow rate on the cutting process. From the practical point of view, these parameters are the most important in abrasive water jet cutting operations. The materials are cut with different parameter combinations and the depth of the generated cut is used to evaluate the parameter impact. Attempts are made to find mathematical equations to quantify the influence of these process parameters.

The second part contains an investigation into the influence of the target material properties on the cutting process. It is based on statistical methods. The relation between the depth of cut, \(h\), as the most important
cutting result and the selected material properties, $P_M$, is defined as a function $\Phi$,

$$\Phi = h(P_M). \quad (3)$$

Here, a specific material property can be substituted for $P_M$. To characterize the function $\Phi$, four types of regressions were selected: linear regression, parabolic regression, polynomial regression and logarithmic regression. The formulas of these regressions are given in Table 1.

To evaluate a certain function $\Phi$ and the correlated material property $P_M$, respectively, the coefficient of regression, $r$, is used,

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (P_{M_i} - \bar{P}_M)(h_i - \bar{h})^2}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (P_{M_i} - \bar{P}_M)^2 \sum_{i=1}^{n} (h_i - \bar{h})^2}}. \quad (4)$$

Here, $h$ is the depth of cut which is selected as the most important target parameter in abrasive water jet cutting. In general, $r$ is between 0 and 1, and the function with the highest $r$-value may be able to characterize the most significant material property.

### 3. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP AND PROCEDURE

#### 3.1. Estimation of the material properties

For the investigation five different concrete mixtures were created and generated. The mechanical properties of these materials were influenced by changing the water-cement ratio, as well as the fineness of the used aggregate grains. After mixing and casting, these mixtures were cured and hardened for 28 days under water. After hardening the cylindrical specimens were tested (Fig. 2). The specimen dimensions were 30.8 cm in length and 15.24 cm in diameter. The compressive strength and Young’s modulus of every mixture were estimated according to ASTM Standards C 39 and C 469. The results of these measurements are given in Table 2.

The stress-strain curves of the investigated materials were approximated by a parabolic function,

$$\sigma(\varepsilon) = A(\varepsilon - \varepsilon^c_r) + \sigma_c. \quad (5)$$

Here, $\sigma_c$ is the ultimate compressive strength, and $\varepsilon^c_r$ is the corresponding strain. The integration of equation (3) between $\varepsilon = 0$ and $\varepsilon = \varepsilon^c_r$ yields the energy which is absorbed during the fracture of a certain volume of the material. Letting $\chi$ represent the dynamic loading during the abrasive water jet attack, which may influence the material behavior, the dynamic absorbed energy is [10],

$$E_{abs} = \chi(\sigma, \sigma_c) \cdot [0.3 \cdot A \cdot \varepsilon^c_r + e_c \cdot \sigma_c]. \quad (6)$$

The estimated values are given in Table 2. The crack velocities of the concrete samples are calculated based on [11]

$$v_{cr} = 0.25 \sqrt{\frac{Y_M}{{\rho}_M}}. \quad (7)$$

#### 3.2. Organization of the cutting experiments

The abrasive water jet cutting unit used for the cutting studies consists of an intensifier pump, abrasive cutting head, abrasive storage and metering system, catcher and CNC-controlled positioning system. The position of the cutting head is controlled using a $x$-$y$-$z$-positioning table.

After cutting, the dimensions of the generated cuts were measured, including depth of cut, cut width and cut length. The volume of the removed material was estimated by filling the kerfs with a fine grained (Mesh #36) material. A summary of 16 cutting experiments under different cutting conditions was carried out for each material (Fig. 3).

Regression analyses were carried out for each test parameter combination and each material property. Considering 16 parameter constellations, five material properties and four regression functions, requires 320 regression calculations. Consequently, 320 $r$-values were obtained to evaluate the influence of the material properties on the abrasive water jet cutting process.

The cutting conditions were changed by varying the test parameters pump pressure, traverse rate and abrasive

### Table 2. Mechanical properties of the used materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>$Y_M$ (GPa)</th>
<th>$\sigma_c$ (MPa)</th>
<th>$E_{abs}$ (MJ/m$^3$)</th>
<th>$v_{cr}$ (m/sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># 1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 2</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 3</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 4</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 5</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>1062</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mass flow rate. The parameter ranges are listed in Table 3.

4. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS AND REGRESSION ANALYSES

4.1. Results of the process parameter variations

The influence of the investigated test parameters, i.e. pump pressure, traverse rate and abrasive mass flow rate, on the depth of cut in the materials is illustrated in Fig. 4.

Figure 4(a) shows the relationship between the applied pump pressure and the depth of cut. Here, three interesting features can be noticed. First, the relation is non-linear with a decreasing progress at higher pump pressures, indicating that the material removal process is less efficient at higher pressure levels. In the first almost linear stage, the depth of cut increases rapidly due to the increasing kinetic energy of the impacting abrasive particles with increasing pump pressure.

\[ E_p = \frac{1}{2} m_p v_p^2, \]  (8)
\[ v_p \propto \sqrt{p}. \]  (8a)

If the pump pressure is increased further, losses due to a poorer mixing efficiency [12], abrasive particle fragmentation [13] and damping effects in the deeper kerfs [14] may reduce the progress of the material removal process. Second, a critical pump pressure, \( p_{thr} \), can be noticed at the intersection of the pump pressure axis and the depth function which describes the minimum pressure required to cut the material. This parameter is usually known as the material “threshold pressure”. It can be seen that this parameter increases with an increase in the material strength properties. The threshold pressure is discussed later in this paper. Finally, it can be seen that material #1 shows a comparatively low resistance against AWJ cutting, whereas the curves of materials #3–#5 are close together. Mathematically, the relations in Fig. 4(a) can be described by,

\[ h(p) = C_1(p - p_{thr})^{C_2}. \]  (9)

Here, \( C_1 < 1 \).

The influence of the traverse rate on the depth of cut is shown in Fig. 4(b). Again, three typical features can be noticed. As the measurement results illustrate, the cutting process is very sensitive to traverse rate changes in the range of small traverse rates. In this range, even small variations in the traverse rate yield significant changes in the depth of cut. For very low traverse rates it can be assumed that the cutting process has some similarities with a piercing process. In particular, damping processes due to an abrasive-water film on the bottom of the generated kerf [14] may play a significant role in determining the material removal process. Therefore, it is assumed that the depth of cut in a material has a constant value, \( h = h_0 \), for very low traverse rates. Finally, for very high traverse rates, the function may cross the \( v \)-axis at a critical traverse rate \( v = v_{thr} \). If this traverse rate is exceeded, almost no material removal will occur because the number of impacting abrasive particles becomes very small and the water may not be able to penetrate the material. These relations can be expressed by,

\[ h(v) = h_0 \left( \frac{-\ln v}{\ln v_{thr}} + 1 \right). \]  (10)

The critical traverse rate, \( v_{thr} \), may be related to the crack velocity in the materials as shown in ref. [15] for plain water jet cutting of concrete. Figure 5 indeed shows a significant relation between the crack velocity of the materials and the threshold traverse rates estimated from equation (10).

The temporal development of the cutting process is alternatively illustrated in Fig. 4(c) where the depth of cut vs the local exposure time is plotted. The local exposure time is given by,

\[ t_{exp} = \frac{d_e}{v}. \]  (11)

It can be assumed that the progress of the exposure time function significantly starts to drop at long exposure times, and that the function may approximate the maximum possible depth, \( h_0 \). Also, it can be seen that a threshold exposure time, \( t_{thr} \), exists which has the same physical meaning as the threshold traverse rate in equation (10).

Figure 4(d) illustrates the influence of the abrasive mass flow rate on the cutting process. For low abrasive mass flow rates (\( m_p < 6 \) g/sec) the depth of cut increases rapidly and almost linearly with an increase in the
abrasive mass flow rate. This may be due to the increased number of impacting abrasive particles which leads to an accelerated material removal process. Nevertheless, for the investigated abrasive mass flow rate range (m,p = 6.12 g/sec to m,p = 19.05 g/sec) the influence of the abrasive mass flow rate on the depth of cut is weak. The reason may be that for the given process condition, including mixing between the water jet and abrasive particles as well as cutting, a critical abrasive mass flow rate exists. Beyond this typical flow rate, the abrasive number is too large for efficient acceleration and cutting. This leads to a loss of efficiency in the mixing chamber as well as in the cut kerf due to friction, damping, particle collision and particle fragmentation. This assumption was recently experimentally supported by acoustic emission measurements on concrete samples subjected to abrasive water jets [16]. Therefore, a further increase in the abrasive mass flow rate will not significantly increase the depth of a cut. A possible mathematical description of the abrasive mass flow rate offers the equation,

$$h(m_p) = h_0 \left[ 1 - e^{-C_1 m_p} \right]$$

(12)

which covers all essential features of the curves plotted in Fig. 4(d), except that for m,p = 0 it may be still possible to cut the material due to the high kinetic energy of the plain water jet.

4.2. Results of the material property variations

The results of the investigations on the influence of the material properties on the abrasive water jet cutting process are summarized in Fig. 6. The relation between the dynamic absorbed energy as given by equation (6) and the depth of cut is shown in Fig. 6(a). As Table 4 shows, this relation can be fitted very reasonably by a parabolic regression

$$h(E_{adg}^p) = C_4 (E_{adg}^p)^2$$

(13)
This relation confirms results which are obtained by using a simplified abrasive water jet process model in ref. [10]. In fact, in a logarithmic expression, equation (13) would fit the results of Matsui et al. [8] very well. Therefore, the bad correlation for rocks in ref. [8] can be overcome by using the real stress-strain curve of these materials and replacing the right part of equation (1) by equation (6). The relation between Young's modulus and the depth of cut in the samples is shown in Fig. 6(b). It is found that this relation can be characterized by a negative second order polynomial,
\[ h(Y_M) = C_6 Y_M^2 + C_7 Y_M + C_8 \]  
which confirms at least equations (1) and (2) which suggest a reduced abrasive water jet cutting performance with an increase in Young's modulus. Figure 6(c) illustrates the influence of the compressive strength on the depth of cut. As shown in Table 4 the results can be fitted reasonably by a parabolic regression
\[ h(\sigma_C) = C_9 \sigma_C^2 + C_{10} \sigma_C + C_{11}. \]  
The relation between the crack velocity and the estimated depths of cut which is shown in Fig. 6(d) can effectively be approximated by a second order polynomial (Table 4),
\[ h(V_{cr}) = C_{11} V_{cr}^2 + C_{12} V_{cr} + C_{13}. \]  
The calculations of the regression coefficients are summarized in Table 4. The table shows the relation between the investigated material properties and the regression coefficients estimated according to equation (4). The single regression coefficient characterizes the coefficient of the regression functions given in equations (13)–(16), whereas the average regression coefficient, \( \tilde{r} \), has to be considered as the average value from all regressions carried out.

The results from this part of the study indicate that the material property parameter crack velocity shows the strongest relation to the kerfing process with an average correlation coefficient of \( \tilde{r} = 0.978 \). This material property may be able to describe the behavior of the concrete materials under the given loading with the highest accuracy. It is followed by Young’s modulus, compressive strength, and absorbed energy.

5. DISCUSSION

The investigations have shown that the crack velocity of the materials may be able to describe their resistance against abrasive water jet cutting. This aspect is not covered by any of the existing abrasive water jet cutting models. The crack velocity can be related to the wave velocity of the materials. As shown in ref. [11] the P-wave velocity \( (v_w) \) of concretes characterizes their maximum possible theoretical crack velocity and is related to the crack velocity by
\[ v_w \geq 4 \cdot v_{cr}. \]  
Using this relation, the measurements confirm results from Hëlling [5] who found a good relation between the wave velocity and depth of cut in rocks cut by abrasive water jets. A linear correlation between the specific energy in plain water jet rock cutting and the P-wave velocities of rocks was observed in ref. [17] which may be discussed later. In the work by Evans et al. [18,19] on ceramics, which may be comparable to the concrete because of their quasi-brittle behavior, it was shown experimentally that a critical threshold velocity of impacting particles must be overcome to introduce damage due to fracture. The relation between this threshold parameter and the P-wave velocity is [19],
\[ v_{p,thr} \geq C \cdot \frac{1 + \frac{v_w \cdot p_M}{\rho_s}}{\frac{z_s}{z_w \cdot \rho_M}}. \]  
This equation has to be solved by iterative methods. A simplification of this equation is given in ref. [18],
\[ v_{p,thr} = \text{const.} \cdot v_w^{0.23}. \]  
The velocity of the solid particles used in an abrasive water jet, \( v_p \), can be expressed by the pump pressure, \( p \). The relation between both parameters is given by equation (8a). The threshold particle velocity, \( v_{p,thr} \), in equation (19) can then be substituted by the threshold pump pressure, \( p_{thr} \). The threshold pressure can simply be estimated experimentally by plotting the applied pump pressure against the depth of cut [Fig. 4(a)]. Figure 7 shows the influence of the materials crack velocities on their threshold pressures as estimated in this study. The results can be fitted very well with equation (19) if \( v_w \) is replaced by equation (17).

A significant relation between the wave velocity and the comminution rate of brittle materials was observed in ref. [20]. Based on assumptions about the physics of material strength, Dahlhoff [21] developed a relation
between the critical energy for material destruction and
the wave velocity,

\[ E_{th} = \text{const} \cdot M \cdot v_w^2. \]  \hspace{1cm} (20)

Here, \( M \) is the mass of the disintegrated material. Writing \( M = V_M \rho_M \), and rearranging equation (20) yields

\[ \frac{E_{th}}{V_M} = E_{spec} = \text{const} \cdot \rho_M \cdot v_w^2. \]  \hspace{1cm} (21)

This equation implies a relation between the absorbed energy during the destruction of a certain material volume and the square of the wave velocity (crack velocity, respectively). This result does not confirm experimental results in ref. [17] where a linear relation between the specific kerfing energy of rocks cut by plain water jets and the wave velocity was found, but, as pointed out in ref. [17], the measurements were not accurately defined at high specific energy levels. Considering this fact, a quadratic relation may not be impossible. For the materials investigated in this study, a second order polynomial can be applied successfully to relate the crack velocity to the specific material removal energy confirming equation (21). A typical example is shown in Fig. 8.

For a constant abrasive water jet energy which may be realized by a constant pump pressure level and assuming \( V_M = h \cdot L \cdot b_w \), equation (21) can be rewritten,

\[ h = \text{const} \cdot \frac{E_{spec}}{b_w \cdot L \cdot v_c^2} = \text{const} \cdot v_c^{-2}. \]  \hspace{1cm} (22)

This solution is identical with a parabolic regression for the crack velocity (Table 1) with the regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Parameter</th>
<th>Linear</th>
<th>Parabola</th>
<th>Polynomial</th>
<th>Logarithm</th>
<th>( f )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absorbed energy</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>0.931</td>
<td>0.974</td>
<td>0.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young's modulus</td>
<td>0.962</td>
<td>0.975</td>
<td>0.991</td>
<td>0.981</td>
<td>0.977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compressive strength</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.966</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack velocity</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.968</td>
<td>0.990</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
polynomial regression considers all depths of cut and the
explained by the restriction that \( V_M = h \cdot L \cdot b \), and
so equation (22) is valid for shallow kerfs and certain
abrasive mass flow rates only. In contrast, the
polynomial regression considers all depths of cut and the
entire test parameter range.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
A systematic study was carried out to investigate the
behavior of artificial rocks against the action of abrasive
water jets. The influence of the test parameters, such as
pump pressure, traverse rate and abrasive mass flow rate
was investigated. The materials are very sensitive to
changes in these parameters at low pump pressures, low
traverse rates and low abrasive mass flow rates. A critical
threshold pump pressure, as well as a critical threshold
trace rate exist which must be exceeded to introduce
an effective cutting process. Generally, each material
seems to be characterized by a maximum “saturation
depth of cut” which will be achieved at very high pump
pressures, low traverse rates and high abrasive mass flow
rates. The influence of the investigated test parameters
on the depth of cut is generally non-linear.

The influences of the compressive strength, Young’s
modulus, absorbed energy and crack velocity were
investigated based on regression coefficient calculations.
It was found that the crack velocities of the materials are
useable parameters to describe the “cutting resistance”
against abrasive water jet cutting. The relation between
the crack velocity and depth of cut can be characterized
by a second order polynomial \((r = 0.99)\) for a wide range
of cutting conditions. Additionally, it seems that the
crack velocity is useful for describing the critical
threshold pump pressure and the specific energy of
abrasive water jet cutting processes in rocklike materials.

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