

Pyrolysis of biomass

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ETIP Webinar
25 May 2020

What is pyrolysis?

- Biomass is heated in the absence of air or oxygen to decompose or devolatilise the biomass into:
 - **Solid char**
 - **Liquid as bio-oil, or tar and/or pyroligneous liquor**
 - **Gas**
- **Three** products are always produced
- Product yields depend on biomass, vapour and solids residence time, and temperature
- There are several modes of pyrolysis

Pyrolysis modes

<i>Mode</i>	<i>Conditions Wt % products</i>	<i>Liquid</i>	<i>Solid</i>	<i>Gas</i>
Fast	~ 500°C; very short hot vapour residence time (HVRT) <2s; short solids RT	75%	12%	13%
Slow	~ 400°C; long HVRT; very long solids RT	35%	35%	30%
Torre-faction	~ 300°C; long HVRT; long solids RT	Vapours	85% solid	15% gas + vapours
Gasification	~ 800-900°C; short HVRT; short solids RT	1-5% tars	<1% (all burned)	95-99%

Fast pyrolysis products

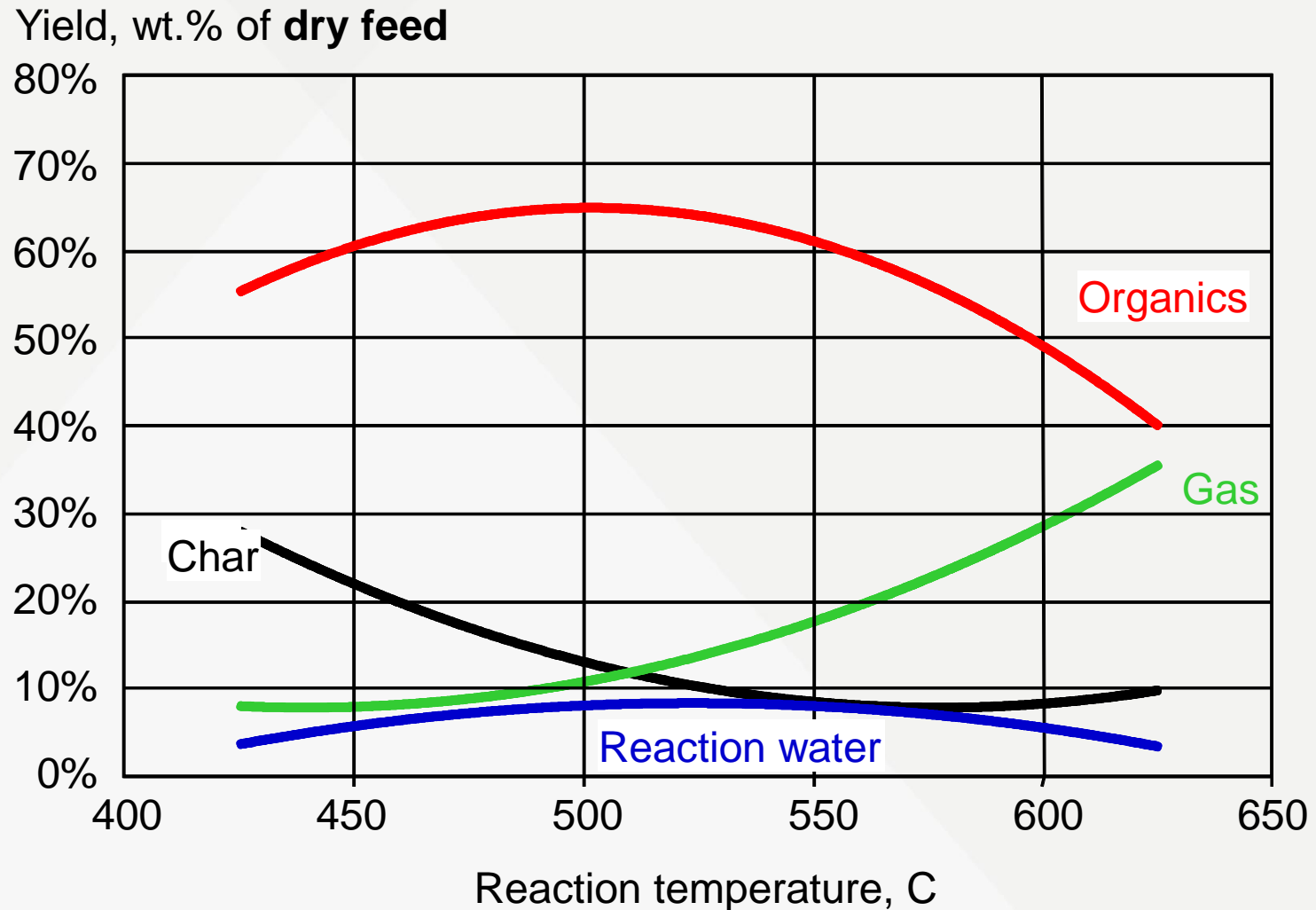
- Fast pyrolysis aims to maximise **liquids**. This is achieved with **very high heating rates** usually requiring very small particle sizes of generally **<3mm in size** and **<10% water**
- **Clean wood** gives the highest liquid yield up to **75 wt.%** on dry biomass feed. This is homogenous i.e. single phase, and low viscosity.
- The **charcoal** forms about 10-15 wt.% of the products. It retains virtually all the **alkali metals**.
- **Bio-oil** is defined by ASTM as the liquid from biomass fast pyrolysis



Fast pyrolysis liquid product

The liquid is homogenous with some unusual properties

Water content	25 %
pH	2.5
Specific gravity	1.20
Elemental analysis	C:56.4 %, H: 6.2 %, O: 37.3 %
HHV as made	17 MJ/kg
Vacuum distillation	Max. 50%



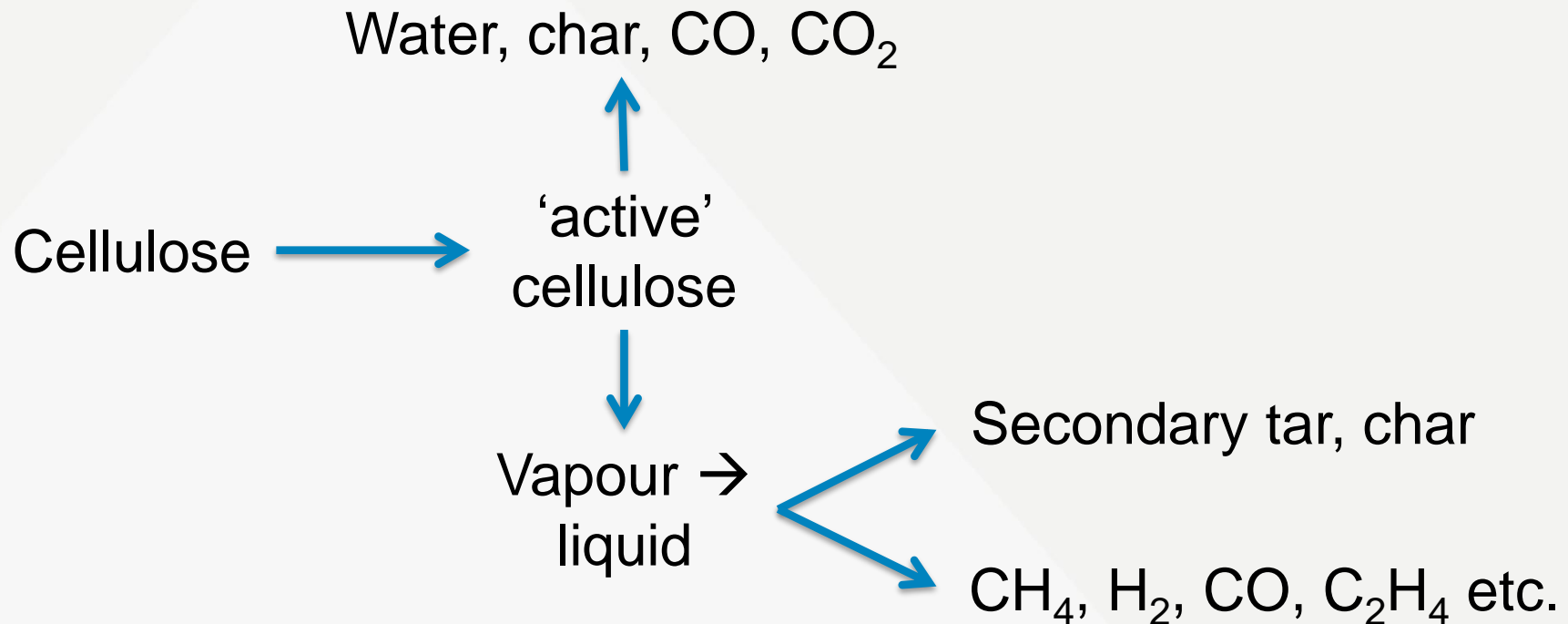
Bio-oil = Organics + Reaction water + Feed water

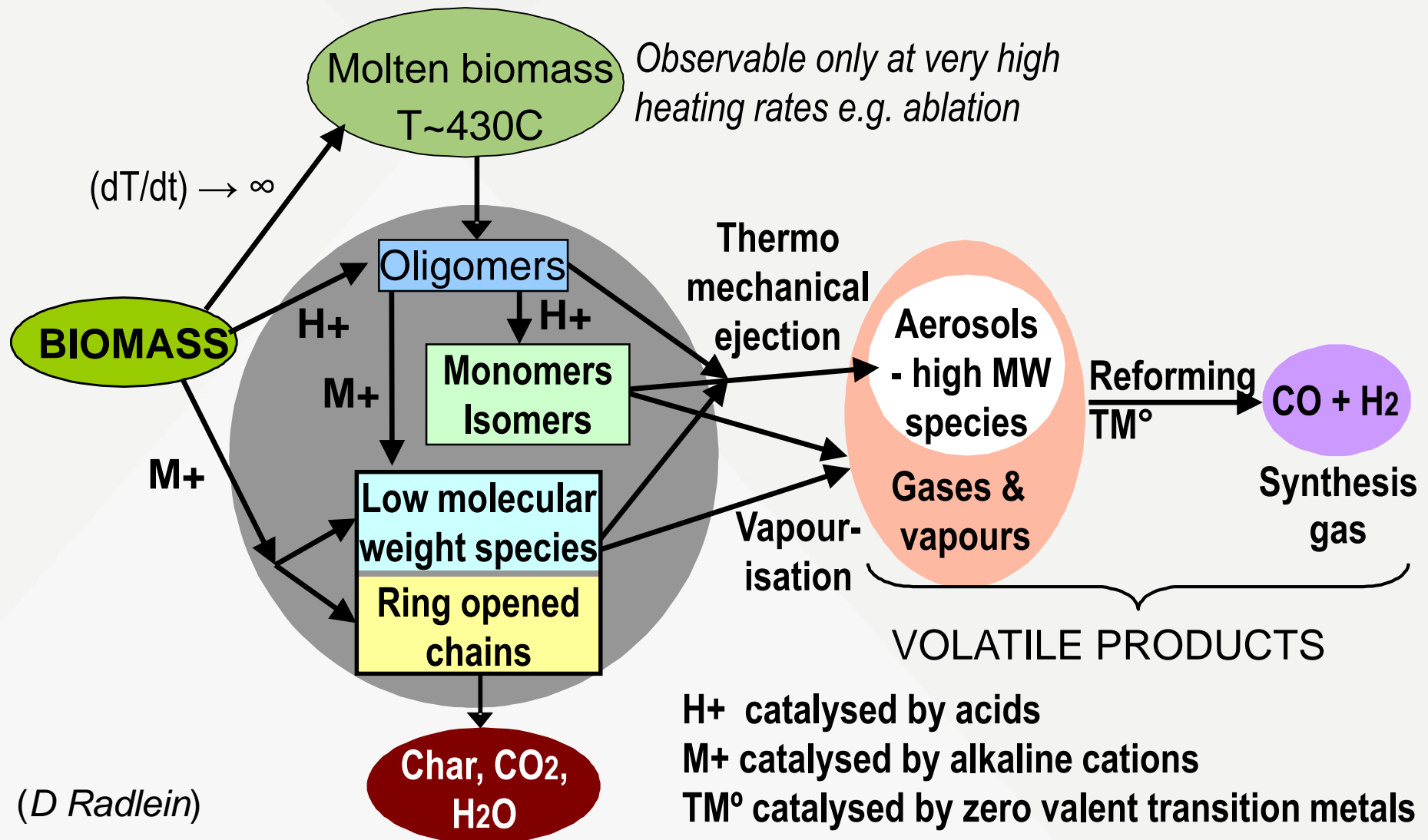
Organics provide the energy in the product and can be converted into chemicals and/or fuels. The organic yield is thus critical.

Fast pyrolysis requires:

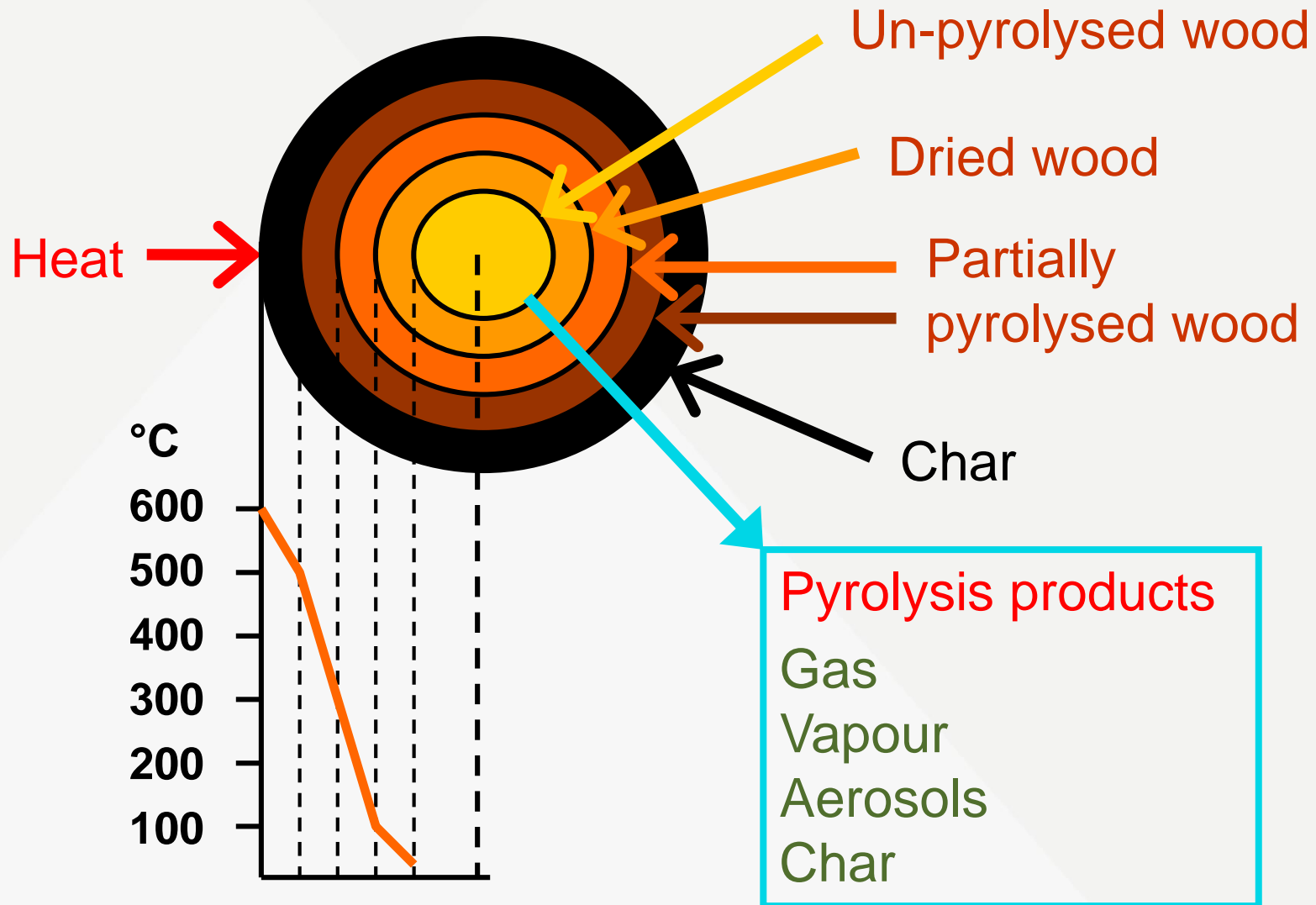
- **High heating rates:** Small particle sizes needed as biomass has low thermal conductivity
- **Dry biomass** (<10wt.% water): Feed moisture goes into bio-oil product plus reaction water
- **Carefully controlled temperature:** ~500°C is optimum temperature for maximising liquid yield
- **Rapid and effective char removal:** Char and alkali metals are catalytic and reduce liquid yield and quality
- **Short hot vapour residence time:** Thermal cracking reduces liquid yield

Many pathways and mechanisms have been proposed
The Broido-Shafizadeh model for cellulose shows typical simplified pathways. This kind of model is widely used for modelling.





Particle pyrolysis



Fast pyrolysis process

Drying

<10%. Feed moisture and reaction water report to bio-oil

Comminution

-2mm (fluid bed), -6 mm (CFB), +10 mm (ablative)

Fast pyrolysis

High heating rate, controlled T, short residence time, rapid cooling

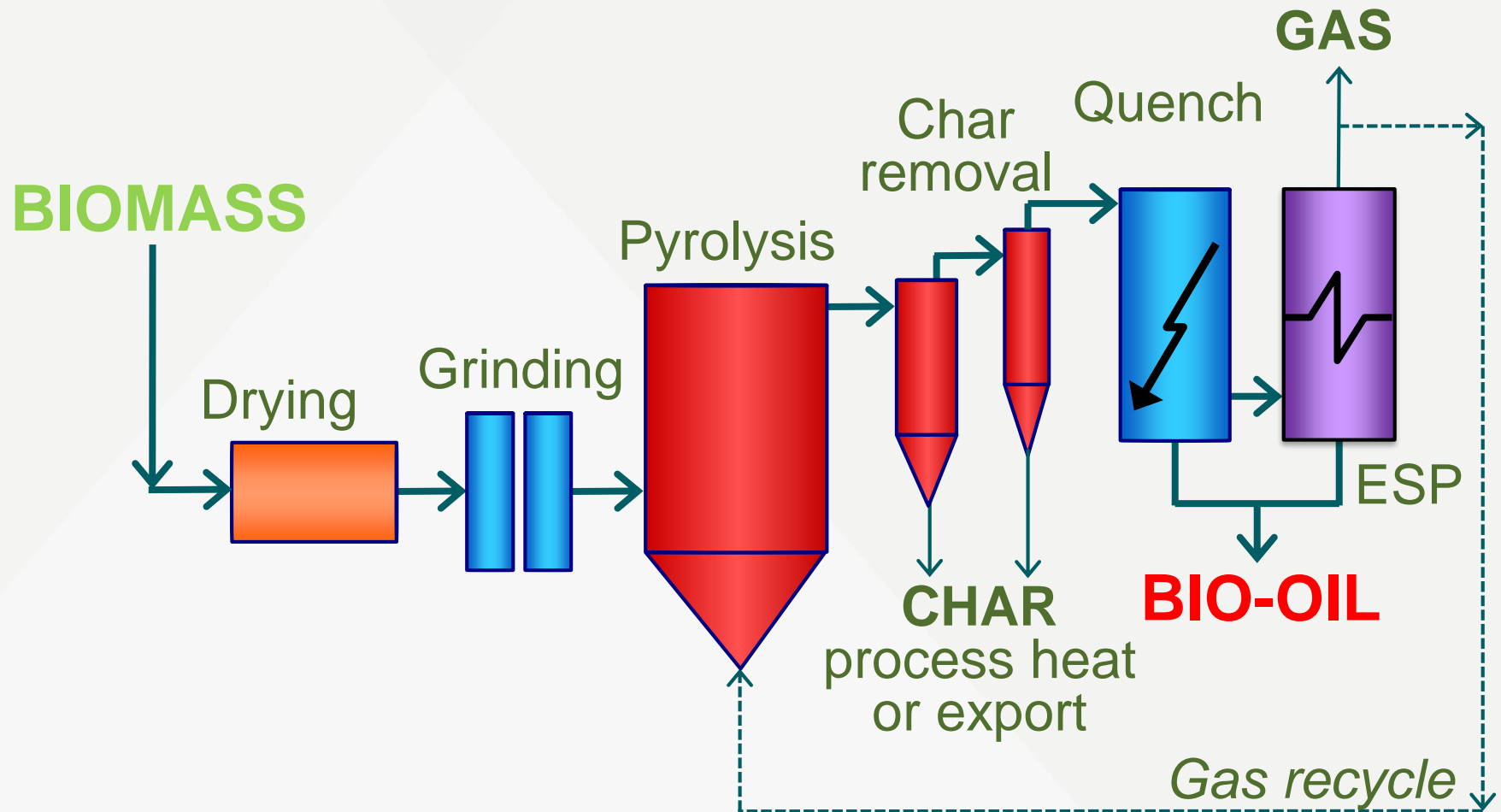
Char separation

Efficient char separation needed

Liquid recovery

Condensation and coalescence.

Conceptual fast pyrolysis system



Fast pyrolysis reactors

Circulating fluid bed

Spouted fluid bed

Transported bed

Ablative

Vortex

Centrifuge

Augur or Screw

Radiative-convective

Entrained flow

Microwave

Moving bed

Fixed bed

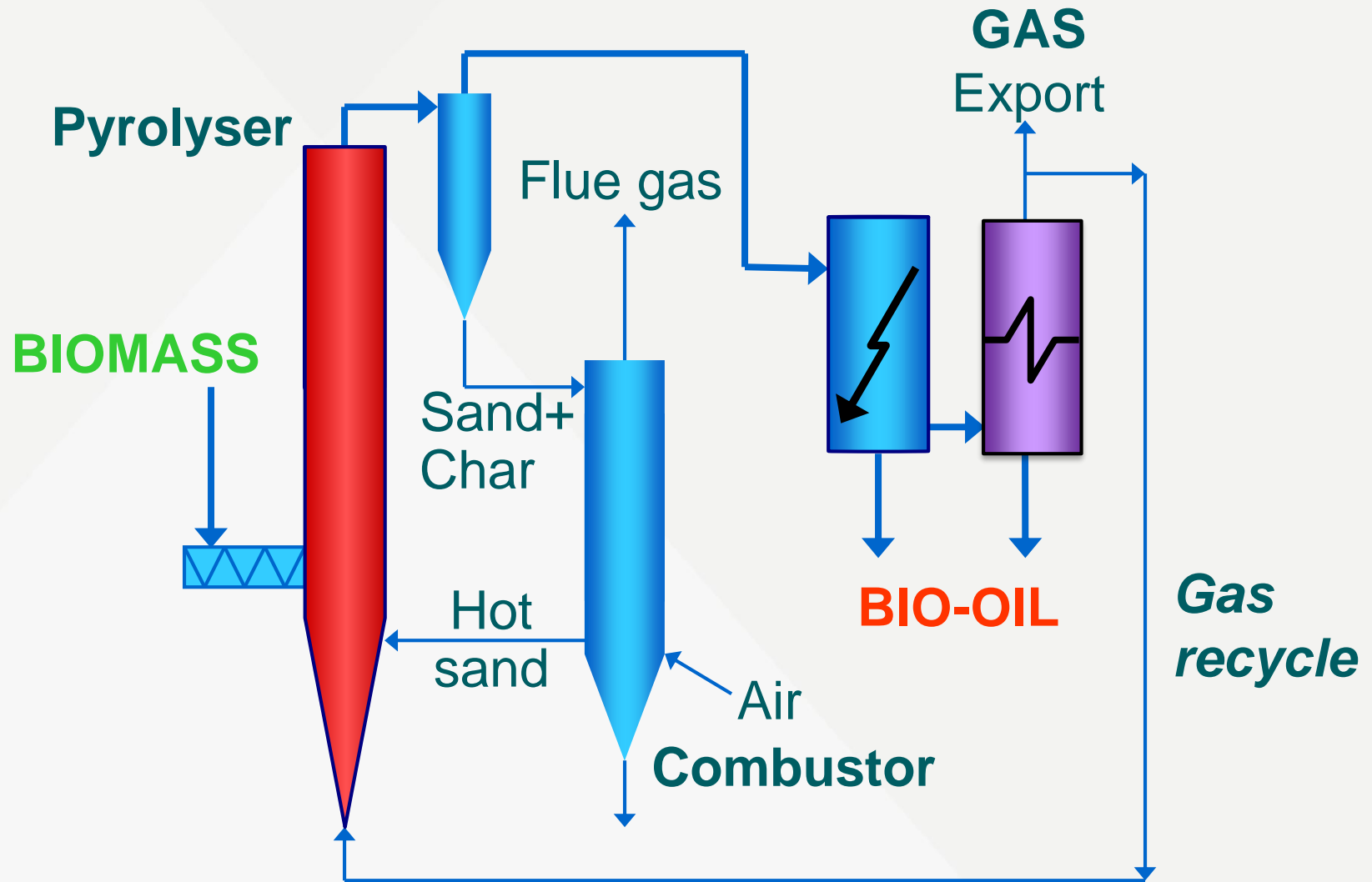
Ceramic ball downflow

Vacuum

Commercial

Research

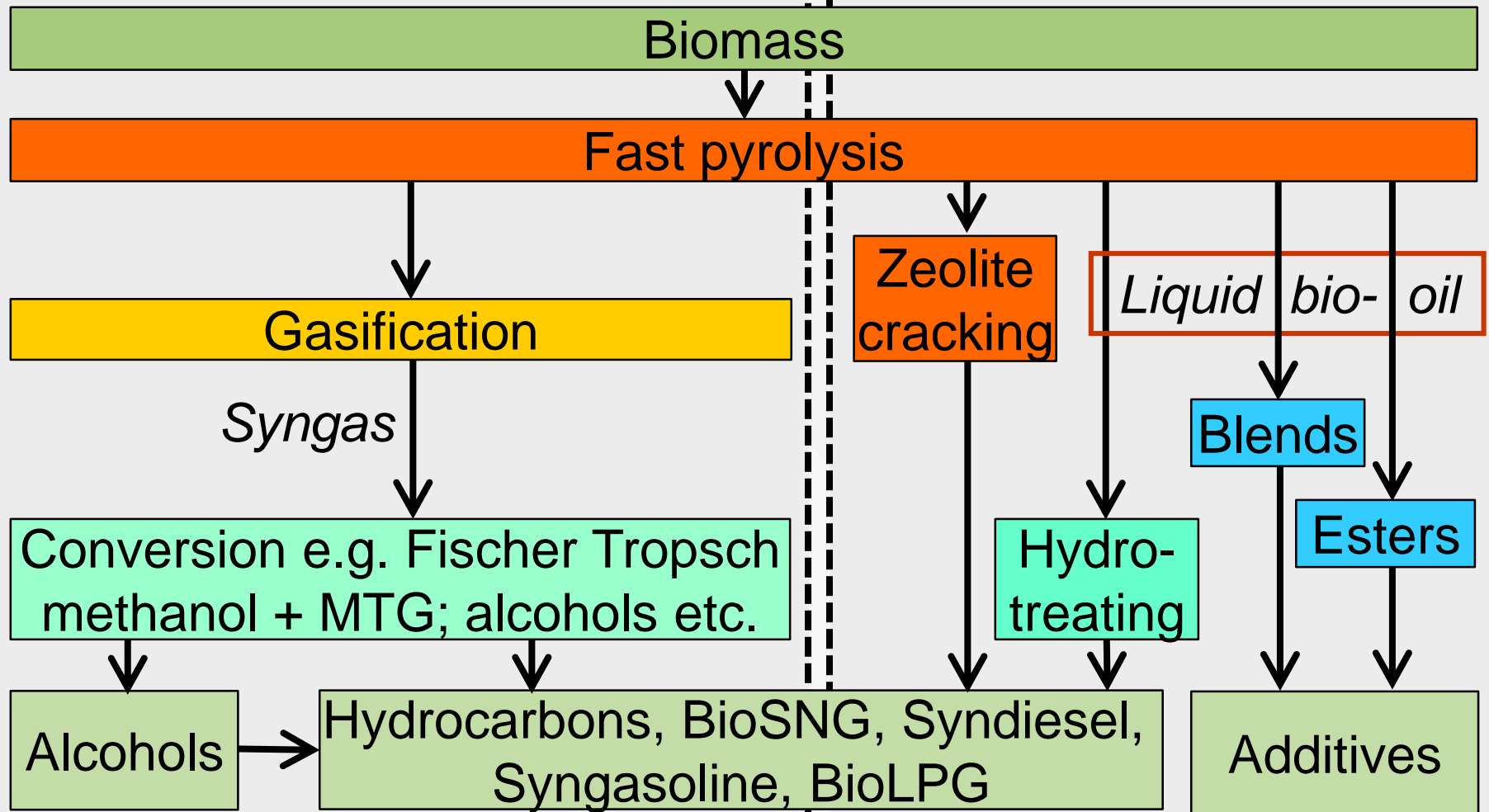
Conceptual CFB/Transported bed reactor



Pyrolysis routes to biofuels

Indirect routes

Direct routes



All biomass contains inorganic materials which act as a catalyst as well as contaminant. Catalysts can also be added to the biomass prior to, during, or after fast pyrolysis.

Natural catalysts and contaminants

- Alkali metals (e.g. K, Ca, Na) as “ash” . **K** is the most active in cracking organics to CO_2 and H_2O and thus reducing liquid yield
- Heavy metals (e.g. Fe) from soil and wastes
- Non-metals (e.g. S, Cl, P) may also be present
- Char (which contains the biomass ash)

Synthetic catalysts for product enhancement

- In-situ
- Close coupled (ex-situ)
- Remote

Bio-oil contains 35-40% oxygen which has to be rejected/removed for production of hydrocarbons

▶ **Hydro-treatment** rejects oxygen as H_2O

- ▶ Liquid processing with **hydrogen** and **high pressure**
- ▶ Projected yield of around 15% naphtha-like product for refining to diesel, using co-produced hydrogen
- ▶ Product fractions can be upgraded
- ▶ Although extensively researched, there is little work now.

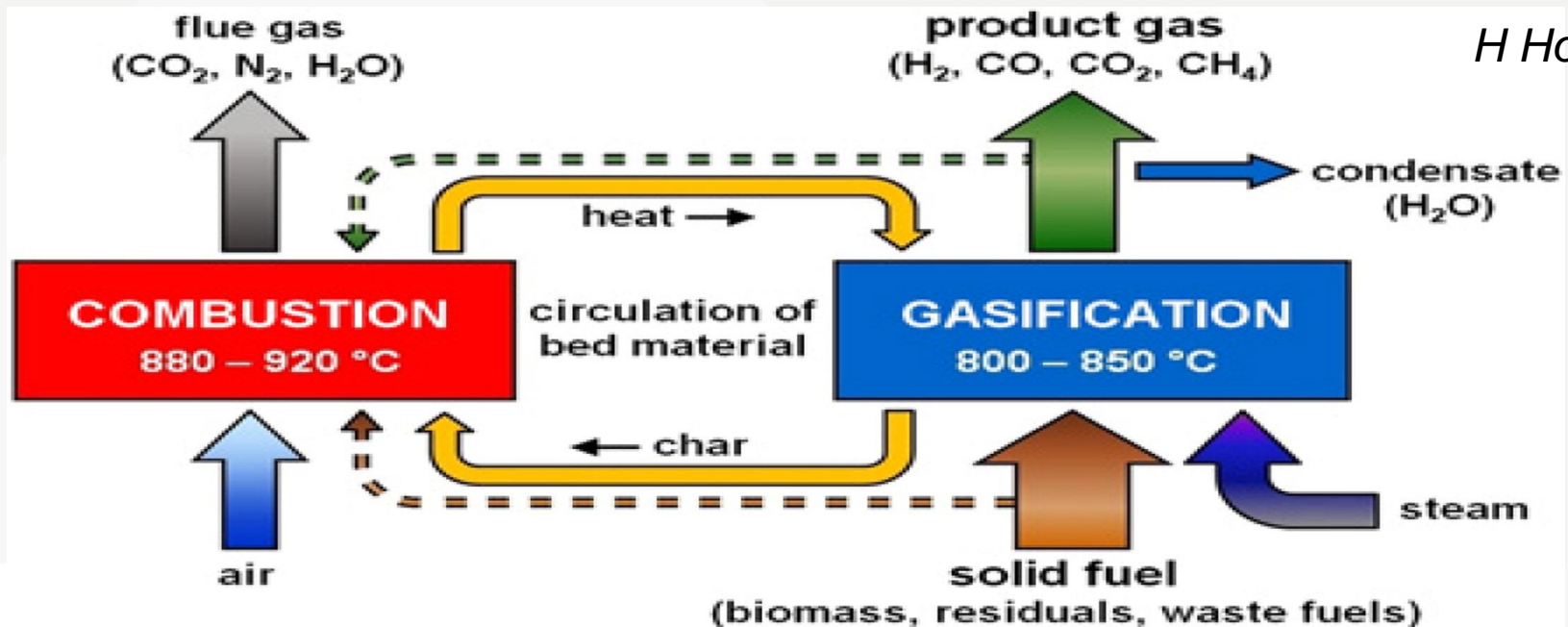
▶ **Zeolite cracking** rejects oxygen as CO_2

- ▶ Close coupled process for upgrading vapours requiring constant **catalyst regeneration**. **No** hydrogen, **no** pressure
- ▶ Projected yield of around 18% aromatics for refining to gasoline or for use as chemicals

- There are a large number of catalysts and **upgrading processes** being researched and developed
- There are a large number of **product quality criteria** to be considered in defining upgrading requirements
- It is important to clearly **understand and define** which property or properties need to be changed and by how much
- The possibility of **modifying the application** to match the upgraded bio-oil characteristics should be considered.
i.e. optimise the overall system.

Pyrolytic gasification

This is high temperature pyrolysis at up to 900°C in the absence of air or oxygen to give a medium HV fuel gas. A dual fluid bed contacts biomass with recirculated hot sand heated by burning char (analogous to the CFB in fast pyrolysis for liquids). Capital cost is higher and carbon efficiency is lower than air blown gasifiers but the gas quality is much higher.



Slow pyrolysis or carbonisation

- Charcoal has been manufactured for thousands of years and is still widely used for cooking and industrially for smelting and for activated charcoal applications.
- Moderate temperatures are required with long residence times.
- In less developed regions, local batch kilns are used, while in more industrialised areas, multiple continuous retorts are used.
- A key feature of slow pyrolysis is the co-production of liquids, both organic and aqueous, which phase separate and if not utilised require disposal.

Continuous retorts & chemical recovery Aston University

The Usine Lambiotte plant shown closed down in 2002. There were 2 retorts and a sophisticated chemicals recovery unit.



Primary distillation



Outputs & revenues from ~95,000 t/y wet wood (2000-2001)

	t/year	€/t	k€/y	%
Charcoal	25,000	Est.100	2,500	31.5
Total pyroligneous liquid	40,000			
Water	30,000			
Organics	10,000			
Acids and alcohols	3,830	452	1,732	21.8
Oils	310	1,258	390	
Fine chemicals	56	49,732	2,785	35.1
Fuel	5,804	90	522	
Total organics	10,000	543	5,429	68.5
Total income			7,929	

- Biochar is charcoal made by slow pyrolysis. It is used as a **soil amendment** for soil health benefits and provides long term carbon sequestration.
- Biochar is a **stable solid**, with a very high carbon content, and can last in soil for thousands of years.
- The **microstructure** of the charcoal provides the features that provide biochar with its unique attributes, such as water retention, and microbial hosting.
- Extensive research has been carried out on attributing char characteristics to crop improvements, especially crop yield.

- This is **low temperature pyrolysis** at around 250-300C. It enhances the properties of the biomass by:
 - Removing water,
 - Reducing hemicellulose,
 - Improving heating value,
 - Improving the friability of the product for grinding in co-processing
- Vapours can either be:
 - Burned to provide some process heat or waste disposal
 - Collected to yield potentially valuable chemicals
- The role of torrefied biomass as a form of biochar is not well understood with unknown life in soil.
- Commercial interest has declined due to poor economics.

Fast pyrolysis: the promise

- Valuable and useful liquid product
- Valuable charcoal by-product where recovery is possible
- High yields – 75% wt. liquid
- High efficiency – 70% energy yield
- No external energy needed
- Minimal emissions
- Useful for
 - Energy carrier
 - Heat
 - Power
 - Chemicals and commodities
 - Transport fuels

Thank you!

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