K X-RAY YIELDS, M1 STRENGTH AND THE γ-RAY QUASICONTINUUM IN $^{153}$Ho

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Received 5 October 1984

The presence of highly converted transitions at high spin in the quasicontinuum spectrum of $^{153}$Ho was established from the measurement of K-shell ionization yields. The occurrence of these transitions and the onset of collectivity appear to be correlated. The quasicontinuum γ-ray spectrum was also measured. The X-ray yields cannot be explained solely by internal conversion of transitions with $E_γ > 350$ keV. Other sources are considered.

In the present experiment, the contribution from K-shell internal conversion of the quasicontinuum γ rays to the measured X-ray yield is deduced by subtracting the sum of contributions from conversion of all known discrete transitions. The $^{153}$Ho nucleus is an excellent candidate to render such a measurement meaningful since levels located on the yrast line or in its vicinity have been studied extensively up to a spin of $81/2 \hbar$, and a 229-ns isomer allows very clean selection of the reaction channel [5].

Beams from the Argonne superconducting linac were used to produce $^{153}$Ho via the $^{120}$Sn ($^{37}$Cl, 4n) reaction at 150–175 MeV incident energies. The experimental arrangement consisted of a multiplicity- and time-filter of 16 NaI detectors covering 55% of $4\pi$, two Ge detectors and a 12.7 × 12.7 cm NaI coun-
Events in the Ge and/or large NaI detectors were accepted only if at least three elements of the filter fired in prompt coincidence and at least one element fired in a time interval of 40–500 ns following the reaction. The X-rays and low-energy γ-rays were observed with the first Ge detector (of small volume and high resolution) while the entire spectrum of discrete lines was measured with the other (large-volume coaxial) Ge counter. Both Ge detectors were at 55° with respect to the beam. The large NaI detector was collimated, and was also located at an angle of 55° with respect to both the beam and the large Ge counter. The target-to-detector distance of 26 cm was large enough to discriminate against neutrons by time-of-flight. This NaI counter was used to obtain quasicontinuum spectra and its coincidence rate with the large Ge detector was used to measure the γ-ray multiplicity associated with different discrete lines.

As mentioned above, the contribution to the X-ray yield due to K-conversion in 153Ho was obtained from the intensity of the discrete transitions at six beam energies. Use was made of the well-established multipoleties of ref. [5] (established by means of both angular distribution and conversion coefficient measurements). The open circles in fig. 1a give the resulting number of X-rays per reaction, \( M_{KX} \), as a function of the beam energy or alternatively as a function of the average entry spin \( \langle I \rangle \). The latter quantity was determined from the measured γ-ray multiplicity \( M_{\gamma} \) using the formula \( \langle I \rangle = 1.5 (M_{\gamma} - N_{st}) + 31/2 \), where the factor 1.5 represents the average spin removed by a prompt transition, \( N_{st} \) is the number of statistical γ rays and 31/2 is the spin of the isomer. It is seen that the contribution to \( M_{KX} \) from the discrete transitions grows from a value of \( \approx 0.2 \) at 150 MeV to \( \approx 0.45 \) at 175 MeV, reflecting the increased population of known high spin states, which decay largely via low energy M1 and E2 transitions. At the two lowest beam energies, the ionization due to the discrete lines accounts for most of the measured X-ray multiplicity (full circles in fig. 1a). However, as more angular momentum is added to the nucleus the increase in the measured values of \( M_{KX} \) is much larger than that calculated from the discrete lines, implying the presence of other highly converted transitions populated at spins in excess of 40 \( \hbar \).

The result presented in fig. 1a is in good agreement with a similar measurement performed on the neighboring nucleus 154Er [6], but disagrees with an earlier report on 152Dy [7]. Using the energy dependence of the evaporation residue atomic-charge state distributions, Cormier et al. [8] also reported strongly enhanced internal conversion probabilities at high spin in the nuclei 156,158Er. In all measurements, the enhancement (when observed) is found to occur at a spin value of about 35–40 \( \hbar \) and to persist up to the highest angular momenta observed. The one exception is 156Er, where, after a sharp initial enhancement in the spin range 40–45 \( \hbar \), the internal conversion probability drops for higher angular momenta.

The results of the present work also suggest that the increase in X-ray multiplicity is associated with the on-
set of collectivity at high spin in $^{153}$Ho. Fig. 2 presents unfolded NaI spectra measured at the different beam energies. In these spectra, the discrete lines have been carefully subtracted using intensities extracted from the Ge spectra and measured response functions. A detailed description of the unfolding and subtraction procedures is given in ref. [9]. The spectra have also been divided by the detector efficiency, and the contribution of the statistical $\gamma$-rays obtained from a fit with the usual expression $N_{\text{stat}}(E_{\gamma}) = E_{\gamma}^3 \exp[-E_{\gamma}/T]$ to the spectrum for $E_{\gamma} > 2.2$ MeV has been removed. With increasing angular momentum (fig. 2) a “bump” of transitions develops between 1.0 and 1.6 MeV, similar to those observed in neighboring nuclei [10, 11]. These “bumps” contain mostly transitions of stretched E2 character, and are usually ascribed to the onset of collectivity.

Fig. 1b shows the excess K X-ray multiplicity $\Delta M_{K-X}$ (i.e. the difference between the measured $M_{K-X}$ and the value calculated as arising from known discrete lines). The maximum possible contributions to $\Delta M_{K-X}$ from other components of the $\gamma$-ray spectrum are discussed below, in an attempt to explain the observed excess.

It is worthwhile to note that the transitions in the “E2-bump” do not contribute significantly to $\Delta M_{K-X}$. Even though the $\gamma$-ray intensity between 1.1 and 1.9 MeV increases by a factor of 3.5 from 150 to 175 MeV, the largest contribution to $\Delta M_{K-X}$ is only 0.02. Clearly, significant contributions have to be found in a lower energy part of the spectrum. As mentioned above, several groups [4] have reported dipole radiation at energies roughly half that of the “E2-bump”. This component of the quasicontinuum could add significantly to the X-ray multiplicity if it is of M1 character. In the present work, the $\gamma$-ray intensity for the range $0.35 \leq E_{\gamma} \leq 0.9$ MeV is found to increase by 20% when the average angular momentum increases from 37 to 44 $\hbar$. For higher bombarding energies the intensity remains constant. In view of the similarity between the known properties of $^{153}$Ho and those reported for the adjacent isotones $^{152}$Dy and $^{154}$Er [10, 11] it is then natural to associate this increased $\gamma$-ray intensity with dipole radiation. The lower solid line in fig. 1b represents the contribution to $\Delta M_{K-X}$ calculated under the extreme assumption that the entire quasicontinuum $\gamma$-ray spectrum between 0.35 and 0.9 MeV is of M1 multipolarity. The shaded area surrounding this line shows the estimated uncertainty ($\pm 30\%$) due to the unfolding process and the subtraction of the discrete lines. At the lowest angular momenta, the values calculated in this way exceed the measured ones, indicating that the radiation may be of mixed multipole character, in agreement with measurements using other techniques [4,8,10,11]. However, for the highest angular momenta the computed values still fall well below the measured values; the increase in internal conversion due to transitions in a “dipole bump” can, at best, account for half of the ionization excess. In this way, the present result raises questions about earlier speculations [1,6,8] that the measured ionization probabilities can be accounted for entirely by M1 transitions of energies half that of the collective E2 transitions in the quasicontinuum, at least for nuclei similar to $^{153}$Ho.

The only possible remaining source of highly converted transitions is the lowest energy part of the $\gamma$-ray spectrum where the uncertainties in the unfolding and subtraction procedures are too large to extract reliable information from the NaI spectra. However, at these energies the Ge spectra offer the possibility of looking for very weak $\gamma$-rays whose contribution to the ionization yield can be estimated. Due to the channel selection achieved using the isomeric decay, extremely clean spectra of prompt transitions were
obtained. At the lowest beam energies, all lines seen in the spectra with intensities > 1.2% of the isomer feeding were identified as known transitions in $^{153}$Ho. At the highest beam energies, lines belonging to $^{152}$Dy [produced in the ($^{37}$Cl, p 4n) reaction] also appear in the spectra due to the 60 ns high spin isomer in this nucleus; these lines were subtracted from the spectra and cannot affect the measured $M_{KX}$ since the Dy X-rays are of a different energy. Under the extreme assumption that the few unidentified very weak peaks (i.e. all lines not assigned to $^{153}$Ho or $^{152}$Dy) below 350 keV correspond to M1 transitions in $^{153}$Ho, the additional contribution to $\Delta M_{KX}$ can be calculated. This was added to the previous contribution from the continuum and plotted, together with associated errors, as the upper solid line and hatched region in fig. 1b. As an extreme upper limit, this seems to account for the observed X-ray yields reasonably well; however, it is clear that the general trend of this limit is different from that displayed by the data.

In conclusion, the present analysis provides evidence that low-energy M1 strength occurs at very high spin in $^{153}$Ho. A substantial fraction of this strength is carried through very weak lines with $E_\gamma \leq 350$ keV. Although more precise identification will require further experimental efforts using more refined techniques, it is possible to suggest a plausible explanation for the origin of these transitions using known features of the $\gamma$-decay in nuclei in this region. Investigations of discrete transitions feeding the highest known yrast states [12] combined with measurements of the feeding times into these levels [13] show that the fast, collective cascades responsible for the E2-bump do not persist down to the yrast line. Instead, the line is fed through states similar in nature to those observed on the yrast line. Low-energy M1 transitions may then compete favorably. They occur along the yrast line, and should also be present slightly above it. Thus, any ionization excess might well originate from single-particle transitions representing part of the link between the yrast line and the collective structures. Whether shape changes are also involved in the process remains an interesting speculation.

This research was supported by the US Department of Energy under Contract W-31-109-Eng-38.

References