
The Discovery of Osmium

A man named Smithson Tennant discovered osmium, along with the element iridium, in 1803. Tennant had begun to wonder what the black metallic substance was, which was created every time unrefined platinum was treated with aqua regia (a combination of nitric and hydrochloric acids). Although it was believed by some that the substance was some form of graphite, Tennant began to believe it was something else after trying to alloy it with lead. He suspected it to be a type of metal.

Tennant was able to separate the black powder into two metals, now named Osmium and Iridium, by an alternate action of acid and alkali. Osmium comes from the Greek word “osme,” which means smell. Osmium quickly reacts with oxygen around it to form osmium tetroxide, a toxic gas with a terrible odor.

Source:

“The Discovery of Osmium,” Cary Academy, accessed April 17, 2013, http://web1.caryacademy.org/facultywebs/gray_rushin/StudentProjects/ElementWebSites/osmium/Osmium_discovery.html.