



THE *p*-BLOCK ELEMENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- appreciate the general trends in the chemistry of *p*-block elements;
- describe the trends in physical and chemical properties of group 13 and 14 elements;
- explain anomalous behaviour of boron and carbon;
- describe allotropic forms of carbon;
- know the chemistry of some important compounds of boron, carbon and silicon;
- list the important uses of group 13 and 14 elements and their compounds.

*The variation in properties of the *p*-block elements due to the influence of *d* and *f* electrons in the inner core of the heavier elements makes their chemistry interesting.*

In *p*-block elements the last electron enters the outermost *p* orbital. As we know that the number of *p* orbitals is three and, therefore, the maximum number of electrons that can be accommodated in a set of *p* orbitals is six. Consequently there are six groups of *p*-block elements in the periodic table numbering from 13 to 18. Boron, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, fluorine and helium head the groups. Their valence shell **electronic configuration is ns^2np^1-6** (except for He). The **inner core** of the electronic configuration may, however, differ. The difference in inner core of elements greatly influences their physical properties (such as atomic and ionic radii, ionisation enthalpy, etc.) as well as chemical properties. Consequently, a lot of variation in properties of elements in a group of *p*-block is observed. The **maximum oxidation state** shown by a *p*-block element is equal to the total number of valence electrons (i.e., the sum of the *s*- and *p*-electrons). Clearly, the number of possible oxidation states increases towards the right of the periodic table. In addition to this so called **group oxidation state**, *p*-block elements may show other oxidation states which normally, but not necessarily, differ from the total number of valence electrons by unit of two. The important oxidation states exhibited by *p*-block elements are shown in Table 11.1. In boron, carbon and nitrogen families the group oxidation state is the most stable state for the lighter elements in the group. However, the oxidation state two unit less than the group oxidation state becomes progressively more stable for the heavier elements in each group. The occurrence of oxidation states two unit less than the group oxidation states are sometime attributed to the '**inert pair effect**'.

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