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## JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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## Carbonaceous and nitrogenous disinfection by-product formation in the surface and ground water treatment plants using Yellow River as water source

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#### Abstract

This work investigated the formation of carbonaceous and nitrogenous disinfection by-products (C-DBPs, N-DBPs) upon chlorination of water samples collected from a surface water and a ground water treatment plant (SWTP and GWTP) where the conventional treatment processes, i.e., coagulation, sedimentation, and filtration were employed. Twenty DBPs, including four trihalomethanes, nine haloacetic acids, seven N-DBPs (dichloroacetamide, trichloroacetamide, dichloroacetonitrile, trichloroacetonitrile, bromochloroacetonitrile, dibromoacetonitrile and trichloronitromethane), and eight volatile chlorinated compounds (dichloromethane (DCM), 1,2-dichloroethane, tetrachloroethylene, chlorobenzene, 1,2-dichlorobenzene, 1,4-dichlorobenzene, 1,2,3-trichlorobenzene and 1,2,4trichlorobenzene) were detected in the two WTPs. The concentrations of these contaminants were all below their corresponding maximum contamination levels (MCLs) regulated by the Standards for Drinking Water Quality of China (GB5749-2006) except for DCM (17.1 µg/L detected vs. 20 µg/L MCL). The SWTP had much higher concentrations of DBPs detected in the treated water as well as the DBP formation potentials tested in the filtered water than the GWTP, probably because more precursors (e.g., dissolved organic carbon, dissolved organic nitrogen) were present in the water source of the SWTP.

Key words: carbonaceous disinfection by-products; nitrogenous disinfection by-products; formation potential; free chlorine; water treatment plant

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#### Introduction

Drinking water disinfection (esp. chlorination) results in the formation of disinfection by-products (DBPs) which may cause adverse health effects on human beings. DBPs are mainly formed in the reactions between their precursors present in source water and the disinfectant (esp. chlorine) added during water treatment. Over the past three decades, much more DBP studies have focused on the currently regulated carbonaceous DBPs (C-DBPs) (e.g., trihalomethanes (THMs) and haloacetic acids (HAAs)) (Bellar et al., 1974; Krasner et al., 2006), creating a better understanding of the formation and control of THMs and HAAs in water treatment plants (WTPs) than those of emerging unregulated DBPs, e.g., nitrogenous DBPs (N-DBPs) (Muellner et al., 2007). The concentrations of N-DBPs, including haloacetonitriles (HANs), halonitromethanes (HNMs), and haloacetamides (HAcAms), are generally at a lower level  $(ng/L \text{ to } \mu g/L)$  than those of C-DBPs (Krasner et al., 2006; Chu et al., 2011a), but are more toxic (Plewa et al., 2004, 2008; Muellner et al., 2007).

The levels of DBPs and their precursors in WTPs

provide basic information for health risk assessment, regulation and water treatment process optimization. Since the 1980s, the surveys for DBPs in the treated water of WTPs have been carried out in many countries. Halogenated N-DBPs were detected in some WTPs of the United States, such as HANs, HNMs and HAcAms (Krasner et al., 1989, 2006, 2007a; McGuire et al., 2002; Mitch et al., 2009). Similar surveys were also carried out in Canada (Williams et al., 1995), Australia (Simpson and Hayes, 1998) and Scotland (Goslan et al., 2009). However, these studies mainly focused on HANs, and much less data were reported on HAcAms and HNMs.

Toxicological studies have reported that N-DBPs (e.g., HAcAms and HNMs) show much higher cytotoxicity and genotoxicity than the regulated THMs and HAAs to mammalian cells (Plewa et al., 2004, 2008). Investigating the formation of N-DBPs in WTPs is therefore an urgent task. Chu et al. (2011b) reported the formation of N-DBPs, including HANs, HNMs and HAcAms, in a typical surface water treatment plant (SWTP) located in southern China. However, the surface water quality varies significantly in different regions of China due to significantly different climatic and geographical characteristics. Zhang et al. (2011) investigated the formation potential of 4 THMs and 7 HAAs in 13 source water samples collected from the

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northeast to south China covering four of the seven major water basin areas (Songhua River Basin, Hai River Basin, Yangtze River Basin and Huai River Basin). It was found that the organic compounds in different source waters exhibited different reactivities with chlorine, which probably caused the different characterization for the formation of N-DBPs. However, comprehensive information on the formation of C-DBPs and N-DBPs from source water in Yellow River Basin (e.g., Zhenzhou City) is little known. The Yellow River, with a total length of 5464 km, is the second longest river in China. With artificial pollution (e.g., factory discharges and sewage from fast-expanding cities), the Yellow River is being polluted, which brings great challenges to WTPs along Yellow River. The conventional treatment process could not effectively remove DBP precursors, probably causing the extensive formation of DBPs in drinking water, including C-DBPs and N-DBPs, threatening people's health.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the concentrations of DBPs and the removal efficiency of the precursors (denoted by the DBP formation potentials (FPs)) in two typical WTPs located in Zhengzhou City that use the surface and ground waters from the Yellow River as source water, respectively. For N-DBPs, two HAcAms (dichloroacetamide (DCAcAm) and trichloroacetamide (TCAcAm)), four HANs (dichloroacetonitrile (DCAN), trichloroacetonitrile (TCAN), bromochloroacetonitrile (BCAN) and dibromoacetonitrile (DBAN)) and one HNM (trichloronitromethane (TCNM)) were determined. For C-DBPs, four regulated THMs (chloroform (CF), bromodichloromethane (BDCM), dibromochloromethane (DBCM) and bromoform (BF)), nine HAAs (chloroacetic acid (CAA), dichloroacetic acid (DCAA), trichloroacetic acid (TCAA), bromoacetic acid (BAA), bromochloroacetic acid (BCAA), bromodichloroacetic acid (BDCAA), dibromoacetic acid (DBAA), dibromochloroacetic acid (DBCAA), tribromoacetic acid (TBAA)), and some other volatile chlorinated compounds (e.g., dichloromethane (DCM)) were also measured. It is expected that the survey data would be helpful for DBPs health risk assessment, regulation and water treatment process optimization.

#### 1 Materials and methods

#### 1.1 Chemicals

The standard solutions of the studied DBPs were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (USA), except DCAcAm (98.5%) and TCAcAm (99%) which were supplied from Alfa Aesar (Karlsruhe, Germany). Ethyl acetate, obtained from Fisher Scientific (Waltham, USA), was used to extract DCAcAm and TCAcAm. All other chemicals and reagents were supplied by Sinopharm Chemical Reagent (Shanghai, China) with at least analytical grade purity.

#### 1.2 Sample collection and preparation

Water samples were collected from a SWTP and a ground water treatment plant (GWTP) located in Zhengzhou

City, China, in November 2011. The treatment processes adopted in the SWTP included coagulation (34 mg/L polyaluminium chloride), sedimentation, filtration, and chlorination (3.1 mg/L chlorine), which are prevalent in Chinese WTPs. In contrast, only two treatment processes (i.e., filtration and chlorination) were adopted in the GWTP where about 0.95 mg/L free chlorine was dosed as disinfectant. Although the two plants both use the Yellow River as their water source, the source water of the GWTP (bank-infiltration groundwater) had much better quality than that of the SWTP (surface water). Once collected, the water samples were immediately quenched of disinfectant residuals through addition of about 10 mg/L ascorbic acid. Glacial acetic acid was added to lower the sample pH to 4.8-5.5 for HAN analysis. With regards to HAcAm analysis, the sample pH was adjusted to  $5.0 \pm 0.2$  with glacial acetic acid to inhibit the potential hydrolysis of HAcAms under neutral or basic conditions (Chu et al., 2012). Subsequently, the samples were filtered through a pre-rinsed 0.7-um glass filter membrane (Whatman, UK), and then stored in the refrigerator at 4°C until used. The water quality parameters of influent, and before and after filtration in the two WTPs are compared in Table 1.

#### 1.3 Analysis

The sample pH was measured onsite using a solid selective electrode connected to a multimeter (WTW3410, German). Turbidity was also measured onsite by a turbidimeter (HACH 2100N, USA). Dissolved organic carbon (DOC) and total dissolved nitrogen (TDN) were analyzed by a TOC analyzer coupled with a total nitrogen measurement unit (TOC-VCPH, Shimadzu, Japan). The DON concentration was calculated as the difference between TDN and dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN). DIN including ammonia, nitrate, and nitrite, and free and total chlorine were measured with a portable spectrophotometer (HACH DR2800, USA). UV<sub>254</sub> was measured by a UV/Vis double beam spectrophotometer (Unico4802, USA). The specific UV (SUVA) is the UV absorbance at the 254 nm wavelength divided by the DOC of a water sample, which normalizes the aromatic-biased UV<sub>254</sub> measurement over the overall organic load in the water according to the US EPA method 415.3. SUVA is a good surrogate for aromatic organics (Edzwald and Tobiason, 1999).

THMs, HANs (DCAN, TCAN, BCAN and DBAN), HNM (TCNM) and some other volatile chlorinated DBPs (e.g., DCM) were all analyzed with a purge & trap sample concentrator (eclipse4660, OI, USA) and gas chromatograph/mass spectrometry (GC/MS) (QP2010, Shimadzu, Japan) according to US EPA method 524.2. Nine HAAs were analyzed by a GC (Shimadzu-QP2010, Japan) coupled with an electron capture detector according to US EPA method 552.2. Two HAcAms were analyzed by liquid-liquid extraction and GC/MS detection (Chu et al., 2010). The DBP FP test was conducted with free chlorine following the method of Krasner et al. (2007b). The method detection limits (unit  $\mu$ g/L) were as follows: 0.067 (CF), 0.071 (BDCM), 0.087 (DBCM), 0.085 (BF), 0.11 (DCAN), 0.091 (TCAN), 0.15 (BCAN)

Table 1 V	ater quality	parameters o	f influent	before and	after	filtration	in th	he studied	SWTP	and C	JWTP
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Parameters	SWTP			GWTP			
	Raw water	Before filtration	After filtration	Raw water	Before filtration	After filtration	
Turbidity (NTU)	30.2	1.76	0.14	3.29	0.11	0.12	
pН	8.22	8.12	7.98	7.60	7.69	7.64	
$UV_{254}$ (cm <sup>-1</sup> )	0.035	0.005	0.004	0.005	0.001	0.001	
$NH_4^+-N$ (mg/L)	0.27	< 0.02	< 0.02	0.20	< 0.02	< 0.02	
$NO_3^N$ (mg/L)	2.30	2.81	2.84	0.08	0.16	0.15	
$NO_2^{-}-N (mg/L)$	0.018	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	
DOC (mg/L)	15.6	3.28	2.67	1.76	0.55	0.42	
DON (mg/L)	1.00	0.93	0.84	0.19	0.17	0.15	
SUVA (L/(mg·m))	2.24	1.52	1.50	2.84	1.81	2.38	

DOC: dissolved organic carbon; DON: dissolved organic nitrogen; SUVA: specific UV.

TCNM), 0.26 (DBAN), 0.10 (DCAcAm, TCAcAm), 0.70 (CAA, TBAA), 0.50 (DCAA, TCAA, BAA, BCAA, BDCAA, DBAA, DBCAA), and < 0.10 for eight volatile chlorinated compounds (DCM, 1,2-dichloroethane, tetrachloroethylene, chlorobenzene, 1,2-dichlorobenzene, 1,4-dichlorobenzene, 1,2,3-trichlorobenzene and 1,2,4trichlorobenzene).

#### 2 Results and discussion

#### 2.1 Formation of THMs

Four THMs (i.e., CF, BDCM, DBCM and BF) have recently been listed in the National Standards for Drinking Water Quality of China (GB5749-2006), with maximum contamination levels (MCLs) at 60, 100, 60, and 100  $\mu$ g/L, respectively. Figure 1a shows that the concentrations of the above four THMs and total THM (TTHM) in the finished water of the SWTP were all much higher than those of the GWTP. This can be mainly ascribed to the better source water quality of the GWTP than that of the SWTP. For example, the concentrations of DOC (representing the primary precursors of C-DBPs) were 15.6 and 1.76 mg/L in the raw water of the SWTP and GWTP, respectively (Table 1). Similarly, it was found the THM FPs (representing the precursor levels) in the filtered water (right before chlorination) of the SWTP were also substantially higher than those in the GWTP (Fig. 1b),

which is in agreement with the previous inference. As indicated in Fig. 1b, the concentrations of four THMs in the finished water of both the SWTP and GWTP were lower than their MCLs. However, it should be pointed out that the concentrations of CF and TTHM of the SWTP might exceed their MCLs during the long time delivery of water in the pipelines, as cautioned by their FPs in Fig. 1b.

#### 2.2 Formation of HAAs

The concentrations of nine HAAs in the finished water of the SWTP and GWTP are shown in Fig. 2a. The results indicated that BAA, DBAA, DBCAA, and TBAA were undetectable in the finished water of the SWTP and GWTP, and CAA (0.85 µg/L) was only detected in the SWTP. Similar to THMs, the concentrations of all detected HAA were significantly higher in the SWTP than those in the GWTP. In addition, Fig. 2b shows that the SWTP had notably higher HAA FPs than the GWTP. The MCLs of DCAA and TCAA were regulated as 50 and 100  $\mu$ g/L, respectively, which were both higher than their concentrations detected in the finished water of the two WTPs (Fig. 1a). It is noted that the concentration of THAA might exceed its MCL during the long time delivery of water in the pipelines, as cautioned by its FP in Fig. 2b.

#### 2.3 Formation of N-DBPs

Figure 3 shows the concentrations of N-DBPs in the finished water and their FPs in the filtered water of the





Fig. 2 Nine HAAs and total HAA (THAA) concentrations in the finished water (a) and HAA FPs in the filtered water (b) of the SWTP and GWTP. Error bars represent the standard deviation of triplicate measurements.



Fig. 3 N-DBP concentrations in the finished water (a) and N-DBP FPs in the filtered water (b) of the SWTP and GWTP. Error bars represent the standard deviation of triplicate measurements.

SWTP and GWTP. DCAN, BCAN, TCNM and DCAcAm were all detected in the finished water of the SWTP at a concentration level of 0.3-2.5 µg/L, whereas only DCAN and DCAcAm were detected in the GWTP at a notably decreased concentration level of 0.2-0.5 µg/L. Additionally, the N-DBP FPs in the finished water of the SWTP were also higher than those of the GWTP, which was in accordance with the results of C-DBPs such as THMs (Fig. 1) and HAAs (Fig. 2). The previous observations imply that a portion of the DON plays an essential role in the formation of DCAcAm and DCAN, where that portion is probably watershed-specific, and the presence of DON may act as an indicator (but not predictor per se) of N-DBP FP (Chu et al., 2010). The concentration of DON, which is believed to be the main precursor of N-DBPs (Lee et al., 2007), was much higher in the source water of the SWTP (i.e., 1.00  $\mu$ g/L) than that of the GWTP (i.e., 0.19  $\mu$ g/L). This mainly accounted for the significant difference in the N-DBP concentrations of the two WTPs. A low SUVA value means that the organic matter in water is mostly comprised of non-humics, and has low hydrophobicity and low molecular weights, usually resulting in poor removal of organics (Edzwald and Tobiason, 1999; Roe et al., 2008). The lower SUVA values in the finished water of the SWTP may, to some extent, also explain the higher

concentrations and FPs of N-DBPs in the SWTP.

#### 2.4 Formation of volatile chlorinated compounds

The concentrations of eight chlorinated volatile compounds in the finished water of the two WTPs are shown in Fig. 4. DCM, 1,2-dichloroethane,



**Fig. 4** Chlorinated volatile DBP concentrations in the finished water of the SWTP and GWTP. Error bars represent the standard deviation of triplicate measurements. 1: DOM; 2:1,2-dichloroethane; 3: tetrachloroethylene; 4: chlorobenzene; 5: 1,2-dichlorobenzene; 6: 1,4-dichlorobenzene; 7: 1,2,3-trichlorobenzene; 8: 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene;

tetrachloroethylene, chlorobenzene, 1,2-dichlorobenzene, 1,4-dichlorobenzene, 1,2,3-trichlorobenzene and 1,2,4trichlorobenzene, were all detected in the finished water of the SWTP, whereas only DCM and 1,2-dichloroethane were detected in the finished water of the GWTP. These volatile compounds were undetectable in the filtered water of both the SWTP and GWTP before disinfection, which preliminarily indicated that DCM, 1,2dichloroethane. tetrachloroethylene. chlorobenzene. 1.2-dichlorobenzene, 1.4-dichlorobenzene, 1.2.3trichlorobenzene 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene and were probably formed during chlorination disinfection. Therefore, to better control the concentration of these eight volatile compounds to meet their corresponding MCLs, WTPs should pay more attention to disinfection processes. In the study, with the exception of DCM, the concentrations of the other seven chlorinated volatile compounds were much lower than their corresponding MCLs, i.e., 20, 30, 40, 300, 1000, 300 and 20 µg/L for 1.2-dichloroethane, tetrachloroethylene, chlorobenzene, 1.2-dichlorobenzene, 1.4-dichlorobenzene, and the sum of 1,2,3-trichlorobenzene and 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene, respectively. It is noted that the concentration of DCM  $(17.1 \,\mu g/L)$  in the finished water of the SWTP was close to its MCL (20  $\mu$ g/L). Thus, it is necessary to strengthen the long-term monitoring of DCM in the finished water, and also optimize the treatment processes to reduce its formation.

#### 2.5 Formation of brominated DBPs

The formation of brominated DBPs has attracted more attention because they are generally more toxic than their chlorinated analogues (WHO, 2000). The bromine incorporation factor (BIF) is used as an index to describe the proportion of the DBPs that can be partially or totally brominated. The BIFs for THMs, tri-HAAs (THAAs), di-HAAs (DHAAs), and di-HANs (DHANs) are defined by the following equations:

$$BIF(THMs) = \frac{[BDCM] + 2[DBCM] + 3[BF]}{[CF] + [BDCM] + [DBCM] + [BF]}$$
(1)

 $BIF(THAAs) = \frac{[BDCAA] + 2[DBCAA] + 3[TBAA]}{[TCAA] + [BDCAA] + [DBCAA] + [TBAA]}$ (2)

$$BIF(DHAAs) = \frac{[BCAA] + 2[DBAA]}{[DCAA] + [BCAA] + [DBAA]}$$
(3)

[D.G. 4.1

$$BIF(DHANs) = \frac{[BCAN] + 2[DBAN]}{[DCAN] + [BCAN] + [DBAN]}$$
(4)

As shown in the above Eqs. (1)-(4), the BIF values describe the molar contribution of the brominated THMs, THAAs, DHAAs and DHANs. Depending on the degree of bromine substitution, BIF can range from 0 (no brominated species) to 3 (pure BF and pure TBAA) for THMs and THAAs, and 2 (pure DBAA and DBAN) for DHAAs and DHANs. Figure 5a shows that the calculated BIF values of the selected DBPs were mainly below 0.3, indicating that CF, DCAA, TCAA and DCAN were the dominant species in THMs, DHAAs, THAAs and DHANs, respectively. If one divides BIF by the number of halogens (i.e., 3 in THMs and THAAs; 2 in DHAAs and DHANs), the normalized BIF will range from 0 to 1. The normalized BIFs for THMs, THAAs, DHAAs and DHANs are shown in Fig. 5b. For the SWTP, more brominated DHAAs and DHANs were formed than brominated THMs and THAAs. It was also reported that more bromine was incorporated into DHANs than into THMs in the post-chlorinated and post-chloraminated waters in some previous studies (Chu et al., 2011b; Obolensky and Singer, 2005). For the GWTP, no brominated DHANs were detected, and the normalized BIF of the DHAAs was also higher than those of the THMs and THAAs. Therefore, bromine appeared to be more readily incorporated into dihalogenated, rather than trihalogenated, DBPs in the studied WTPs.

#### **3** Conclusions

The raw water quality plays a crucial role in the formation of DBPs during chlorination after the conventional water treatment processes (i.e., coagulation, sedimentation and filtration). During the sampling period, the concentrations of 4 THMs (CF, BDCM, DBCM, and BF), 9 HAAs (CAA, DCAA, TCAA, BAA, BCAA, BDCAA, DBAA, DBCAA, and TBAA) and some other regulated volatile chlorinated compounds (1,2-dichloroethane, tetrachloroethylene, chlorobenzene, 1,2-dichlorobenzene, 1,4-dichlorobenzene, 1,2,3-trichlorobenzene and 1,2,4-



trichlorobenzene) were all significantly lower than their MCLs. However, some N-DBPs were detected, a few of which had higher concentrations in the studied SWTP than what was reported in some previous studies. The concentration of DCM was found to approach its MCL, which necessitates the long-term monitoring of this compound. In addition, this study seriously cautions that the concentrations of CF, TTHM and THAA in SWTP might exceed their MCLs during the long time delivery of water in the pipelines, as indicated by their FP data. Further study on the risk assessment and long-term monitoring of C-DBPs, N-DBPs and volatile chlorinated compounds should be carried out in China, especially in source water with high precusor loadings.

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