



Plume-based  
analysis of vehicle  
fleet air pollutant  
emissions

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# Plume-based analysis of vehicle fleet air pollutant emissions and the contribution from high emitters

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## Abstract

An automated identification and integration method has been developed to investigate in-use vehicle emissions under real-world conditions. This technique was applied to high time resolution air pollutant measurements of in-use vehicle emissions performed under real-world conditions at a near-road monitoring station in Toronto, Canada during four seasons, through month-long campaigns in 2013–2014. Based on carbon dioxide measurements, over 100 000 vehicle-related plumes were automatically identified and fuel-based emission factors for nitrogen oxides; carbon monoxide; particle number, black carbon; benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylenes (BTEX); and methanol were determined for each plume. Thus the automated identification enabled the measurement of an unprecedented number of plumes and pollutants over an extended duration. Emission factors for volatile organic compounds were also measured roadside for the first time using a proton transfer reaction time-of-flight mass spectrometer; this instrument provided the time resolution required for the plume capture technique. Mean emission factors were characteristic of the light-duty gasoline dominated vehicle fleet present at the measurement site, with mean black carbon and particle number emission factors of  $35 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$  and  $7.7 \times 10^{14} \text{ kg}^{-1}$ , respectively. The use of the plume-by-plume analysis enabled isolation of vehicle emissions, and the elucidation of co-emitted pollutants from similar vehicle types, variability of emissions across the fleet, and the relative contribution from heavy emitters. It was found that a small proportion of the fleet (< 25 %) contributed significantly to total fleet emissions; 95, 93, 76, and 75 % for black carbon, carbon monoxide, BTEX, and particle number, respectively. Emission factors of a single pollutant may help classify a vehicle as a high emitter. However, regulatory strategies to more efficiently target multi-pollutants mixtures may be better developed by considering the co-emitted pollutants as well.

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## 1 Introduction

On-road motor vehicles are one of the largest contributors to air pollution in urban environments (Franco et al., 2013) and thus may be a major source underlying the 3.7 million deaths per year related to air quality in 2012 worldwide (WHO, 2014). Further, traffic-related air pollution is associated with cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and lung cancer (Laden et al., 2006; Kampa and Castanas, 2008; HEI, 2010). Vehicle emissions contain a vast number of pollutants, some with toxicological relevance such as fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), ultrafine particles (UFPs, < 100 nm diameter), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) including their secondary transformation to tropospheric ozone and particulate matter (Seinfeld and Pandis, 2006; HEI, 2010). Other pollutants such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and black carbon (BC) have associated negative impacts on global climate (Sims et al., 2014). A major challenge in quantifying and modelling vehicle emissions is their highly variable and evolving nature, dependent on many factors including vehicle type, age, and operating conditions such as fuel type, engine lubricating oil, wear of parts and installed emission control technologies (HEI, 2010; Franco et al., 2013). In order to better assess the impact of vehicle emissions on local and global air quality, emissions must be more consistently and representatively quantified and characterized.

To date, many approaches have been employed to quantify vehicle emissions. Top-down approaches such as emissions models (e.g., MOVES, MOBILE, EMFAC) are necessary to produce national inventories for vehicle emissions (EC, 2008; USEPA, 2013), but their accuracy and representativeness depend on emission factors (EFs) produced by bottom-up approaches such as engine dynamometer and real-world emissions studies (Gertler, 2005; Franco et al., 2013). Although engine dynamometer studies provide highly accurate measurements of tailpipe emissions in controlled laboratory conditions, they have two main limitations: (1) not being fully representative of real-world emissions (e.g., driving behaviour, ambient effects on emissions pre- and post-tailpipe, wear and age of vehicles in the in-use fleet) and (2) small vehicle sam-

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control of the automated identification algorithm and the defined effective detection limit for the CO<sub>2</sub> signal. A fuel-based carbon balance method was used to calculate EFs (Eq. 1), similar to previous studies (Hansen and Rosen, 1990; Kirchstetter et al., 1999; Ban-Weiss et al., 2010; Dallmann et al., 2012),

$$EF_P = \left( \frac{\Delta[P]}{\Delta[\text{CO}_2] + \Delta[\text{CO}]} \right) w_C \quad (1)$$

where EF<sub>P</sub> is the fuel-based emission factor of pollutant *P* (in g or particle number) per kg of fuel burned assuming ambient conditions (i.e. 25 °C, 101.325 kPa) represented by the background-subtracted integrated amount of carbon combustion products ΔCO<sub>2</sub> and ΔCO (in kg C m<sup>-3</sup>), and w<sub>C</sub> = 0.86 the carbon weight fraction for a gasoline dominated fleet (Ban-Weiss et al., 2010). This background level is determined as the minimum level at the beginning or end of the plume period.

Effective sensitivity for each instrument was determined based on the “noise” in the background calculated as the difference between the maximum and minimum signal during multiple non-vehicle influenced stable ambient periods verified by video footage. An EF detection limit (EF<sub>DL</sub>) was set for each pollutant based on the instrument sensitivities (Table 1). Emission factors calculated from captured plumes, those that had detectable CO<sub>2</sub>, but pollutant signals lower than the instrument sensitivity were classified as below detection limit (BDL) EFs. In order to calculate the fleet mean EF for a given pollutant, the BDL EFs were included in calculating the mean and were either (1) set as zero or (2) calculated assuming the experimentally established EF detection limit. This constrained the possible fleet mean by giving a lower and upper limit based on the sensitivity of the instrumentation. Further information on the data analysis techniques and validation are provided in the Supplement.

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HDV values (Dallmann et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2009; Park et al., 2011; Dallmann et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2012; Bishop et al., 2011). The fleet mean EFs estimated by the US EPA are a good comparison for emission model results, which for  $\text{NO}_x$  are 3.4 and 7.1  $\text{g kg}^{-1}$ , and for CO are 46 and 2  $\text{g kg}^{-1}$  for LDVs and HDVs, respectively (USEPA, 2008a, b). In comparison with US EPA LDV CO EFs, the fleet mean CO EF in this study was lower by a factor of 2.7. This implies that large discrepancies may arise between models that use the US EPA CO EFs as compared to “full fleet” real-world values, such as those determined for the fleet in this study. In contrast, the US EPA fleet mean  $\text{NO}_x$  EF for LDVs is quite comparable to the fleet mean EF calculated from this study with only a 23 % difference.

The fleet mean PN EF in this study is closer to the range of EFs reported for LDVs than for HDVs; however, there is large inter-study variability for PN EFs depending on many factors such as site, drive conditions, and measurement technique (Kalafut-Pettibone et al., 2011; Hudda et al., 2013; Park et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2010; Geller et al., 2005). The fleet mean BC EF is at the lower end of the range reported in other studies for LDVs and well below those for HDVs (Geller et al., 2005; Westerdahl et al., 2009; Park et al., 2011; Hudda et al., 2013; Dallmann et al., 2013; Liggio et al., 2012). Similar to PN EFs reported from previous studies, there is considerable inter-study variability in previously reported BC EFs, which in part may be due to the assumed mass absorption cross-section values used to convert optical to mass measurements. The BTEX mean EFs were at the lower end of those previously reported (Gentner et al., 2013; Kristensson et al., 2004; Araizaga et al., 2013; Hwa et al., 2002; Ho et al., 2009), but are comparable to BTEX EFs reported by Gentner et al. (2013) and Araizaga et al. (2013). Unfortunately, there are no nationwide US or Canadian fleet mean EFs for PN, BC, or speciated BTEX available for comparison; thus the EF values reported here arguably represent the most up-to-date comprehensive reference point for emission of these pollutants, at least for the Canadian vehicle fleet.

### 3.3 Distribution of emission factors

The EFs from the measureable fleet are highly skewed and follow a lognormal distribution. This has been observed previously in vehicle emissions measurements (Stephens, 1994; Lawson et al., 1990; Bishop et al., 1996; Jimenez et al., 2000; Barth et al., 1999; Wenzel et al., 2000; Schwartz, 2000) and more recently in real-world EF studies (Kuhns et al., 2004; Bishop et al., 2011; Dallmann et al., 2012; Hudda et al., 2013). This arises because the majority of the fleet is characterised by relatively low emissions while the small portion of older poorly tuned vehicles have disproportionately high emissions. The associations between specific vehicle model year and type with this distribution have been extensively studied in the past, however, this study aims to directly quantify this skewed distribution from measurements of the passing vehicle fleet.

#### 3.3.1 Total emissions associated with the top emitters

Although it is known that the lognormal distribution of vehicle emissions is typically the result of a small number of older poorly tuned vehicles that emit disproportionately compared to the fleet, it is important to quantify this effect within the local vehicle fleet. The percent contribution of emissions categorized from the top 5, 10, and 25 % of emitters was calculated for each pollutant (Fig. 4). For CO, BC, CH<sub>3</sub>OH, and C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>8</sub>, the top 5 % of emitters contributed more than 40 % of the emissions and were the most disproportionately emitted of all the measured pollutants. In contrast, NO<sub>x</sub>, and C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>6</sub> exhibited a lower contribution from the top emitters, although over 50 % of the emissions still came from 25 % of the vehicles. Specifically, for CO, BC, and CH<sub>3</sub>OH, 25 % of vehicles produced greater than 90 % of the emissions while for BTEX and PN, 25 % of vehicles produced greater than 70 %. The number of vehicles that contributed to a single detectable plume varied, thus strictly speaking Fig. 4 represents a summary of detectable exhaust plumes rather than individual vehicles. Furthermore, the BDL EFs used to calculate the percent contributions were given a zero value and this

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emission factors, the magnitude of emissions of other pollutant species for the same vehicles can also be determined. This contribution for other pollutants can then be matched for those vehicles that exceeded the NO<sub>x</sub> and CO limits. For example, the 6 % of high NO<sub>x</sub> EF plumes that exceeded the Drive Clean limit also contribute 20 % of PN, 16 % of BC, and 8 % of CO and BTEX emissions respectively (Fig. 5a). In contrast, the highest 10 % of CO EF plumes exceeding the Drive Clean limit had higher contributions of BTEX (21 %) and relatively lower contributions for PN (13 %) and BC (14 %) (Fig. 5b). This reiterates the findings from the individual plume analysis, indicating that more stringent enforcing of CO limits may also help decrease BTEX, whereas targeting high NO<sub>x</sub> emitting vehicles may also decrease PN and BC significantly.

A disproportionate contribution of NO<sub>x</sub> and CO emission from a small number of vehicle plumes indicates the effectiveness of local emissions regulation as well as good infiltration of new well-tuned vehicles into the vehicle fleet; however, there is room for improvement in terms of removal of the higher emitters. Previous studies have benefited greatly from single vehicle information, and have shown trends in EFs with increasing model year (Jimenez et al., 2000; Kuhns et al., 2004; Bishop et al., 2011; Wenzel et al., 2000). Although this study only had limited visual information for identifying individual vehicles, capturing a high sample size of plumes allowed both for the quantification of the fleet distribution of emissions and the investigation of relationships between pollutants. It is important to note that this comparison with the Drive Clean limits is approximate as it includes HDVs, which follow different standards, and various drive states including stop-and-go and acceleration that may result in higher emissions of pollutants (Barth et al., 1999; Kuhns et al., 2004; Bishop and Stedman, 2008; Kean et al., 2003). The impact of stop-and-go traffic on real-world emissions are increased in urban environments where traffic lights and high density traffic dominate, therefore it is important to include variable drive conditions in real-world analyses. Additionally, some of these “higher emitting” vehicles may not be high emitters under cruise conditions and as Drive Clean only tests at steady-state cruise speeds, these vehicles may potentially pass emissions testing.

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## 4 Summary and conclusions

In this study an automated plume identification algorithm and emission factor calculation was validated and applied to near-road measurements in Toronto, Ontario. The analysis includes four months of measurements over a wide range of environmental conditions, and provides an updated snapshot of emissions from the local vehicle fleet. With a growing number of near-road monitoring networks being implemented, similar methods can be employed with pre-existing sites and instrumentation allowing for long term measurements to isolate and quantify vehicle emissions. The automation of the plume identification coupled with high time resolution measurements greatly improves the sample size and quality of the EF data in this study. Despite not capturing every passing vehicle, the high number of plumes sampled allowed for an in-depth analysis and characterisation of emissions from a representative variety of vehicles. This complex information would otherwise be difficult to separate from time integrated measurements of fleet emissions. The approach also allows for the direct quantification of the distribution of fleet emissions, and a broad evaluation of the effectiveness of local emissions regulations on the in-use fleet in real-world operation. An advantage of the plume-by-plume approach is the time resolution it provides, where samples time integrated over hours would likely result in mean EFs much lower than those of the high emitters, and not allow estimation of the impact of these high emitters. This information can also be combined, on a plume-by-plume basis, to determine the contribution from a subset of higher emitting vehicles to unregulated pollutants (e.g., BC and PN) in relation to current emissions standards. Given the large data set from the four measurement campaigns, temporal and seasonal analyses of the EFs will be conducted in a future publication. Additionally, this study presents PTR-TOF-MS measurements of BTEX and CH<sub>3</sub>OH from vehicle exhaust in the near-road environment, representing a novel application of this technique. These compounds were included as marker of VOCs from vehicle exhaust for the method validation; however, mass spectral data has

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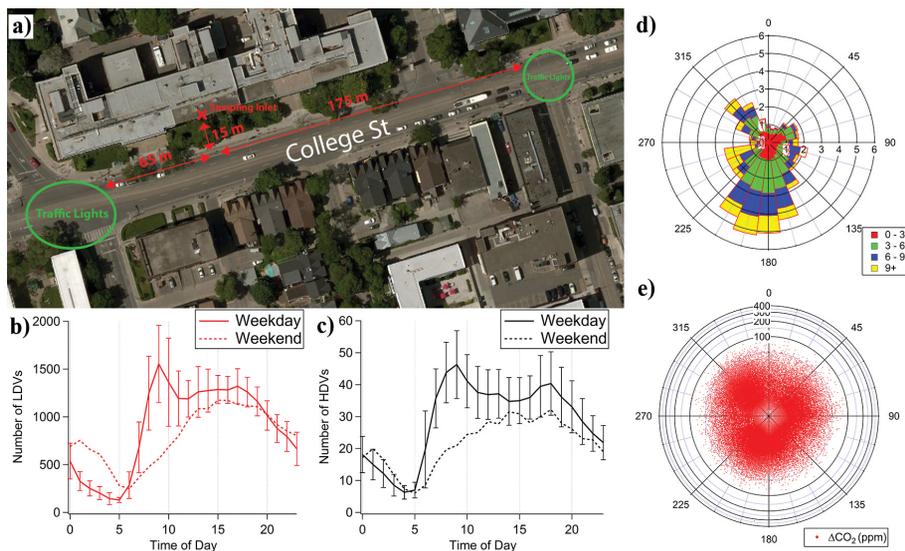
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**Figure 1.** Aerial view of measurement site including distances between sampling inlet, roadway, and nearby traffic lights (a); diurnal trends of number of light-duty vehicles (LDVs) (b) and heavy-duty vehicles (HDVs) (c) with error bars indicating SD; wind rose plot from measurements over all four campaigns (d); and captured plumes (red dots) as magnitude of  $\Delta\text{CO}_2$  (ppm) plotted in terms of wind direction (e). Satellite and aerial imagery is courtesy of Bing Maps.

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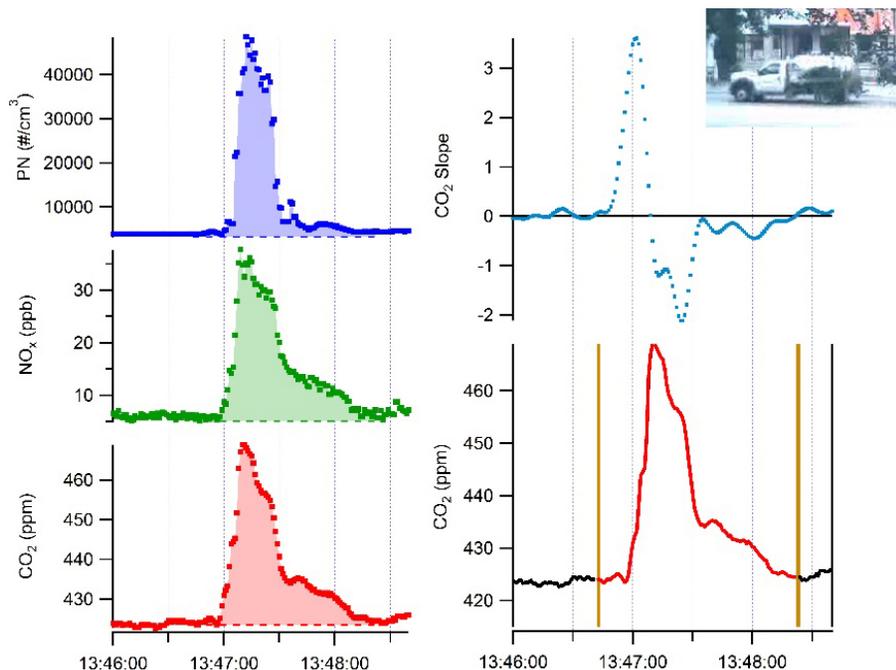
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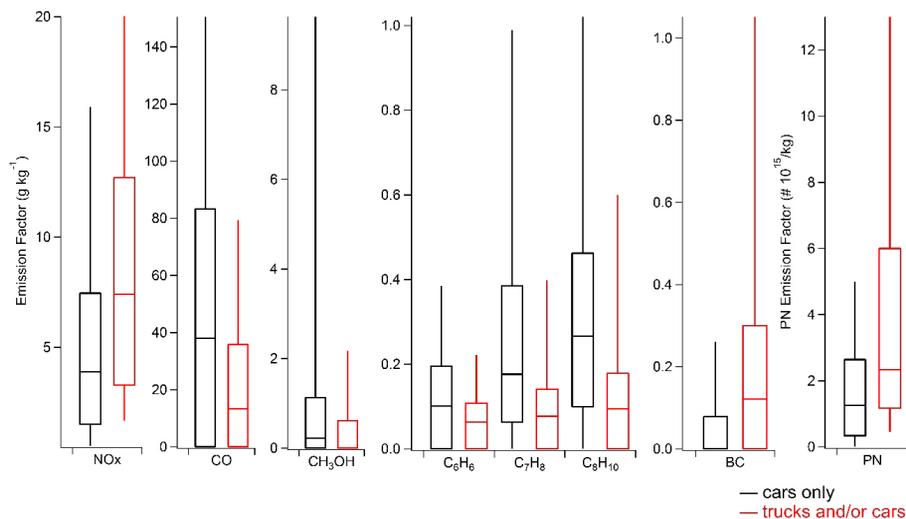


**Figure 2.** Time series of CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, and particle number concentration from a vehicle plume (left). The slope of CO<sub>2</sub> and the automated identification of the plume (right) with vertical lines marking the beginning and end of the plume period. Video footage (top right) of a utility truck was associated with the identified plume.

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**Figure 3.** Box and whisker plot of the emission factors for individual plume analysis separated between periods with no influence from trucks (red) and periods with at least one passing truck (black). Horizontal lines represent the median values, boxes represent the 75th percentile and whiskers represent the 90th percentile.

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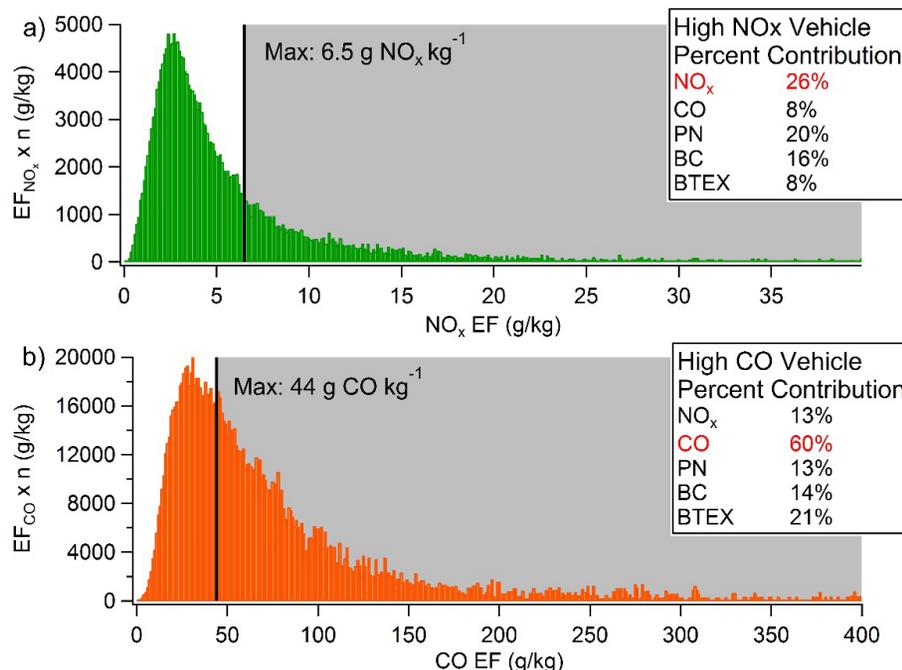
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**Figure 5.** Product distribution histograms of NO<sub>x</sub> (a) and CO (b) EFs of captured plumes from the detectable fleet with the maximum allowable emissions indicated by the black line. The plumes that exceed this limit (gray area) with corresponding percent contributions of other pollutants (text box). Not shown are 28 and 67 % of BDL EF plumes for NO<sub>x</sub> and CO respectively.