

Response to Prof. Paul Seakins

Studying atmospheric processes such as isoprene oxidation under realistic concentrations of NO_x, hydrocarbons and radicals is an important goal in chamber studies. Improvements in VOC measurement techniques allow these compounds to be measured at low concentrations with a resulting decrease in the radical concentrations required to detect measurable differences in concentrations and in general to operate at concentrations much closer to those of ambient conditions, providing a better test of chemical models. However, working at ambient concentrations extends the duration of the experiment; this has a practical effect on the number of repetitions, but potentially increases the role of heterogeneous chemistry. The authors present initial data from a new steady-state, slow continuous flow chamber looking at background chemistry and reporting some initial results on isoprene oxidation. I think it would be helpful for the authors to address the following points to improve what is already a good paper.

*We thank Prof. Paul Seakins for the constructive and insightful comments. Our point-by-point responses can be found below, with reviewer comments in **black**, our responses in **blue**, alongside the relevant revisions to the manuscript in **red**.*

1) As Ref #1 has already commented, it would be helpful to provide some comparisons with other chambers which are capable of operating under zero to medium NO_x conditions.

[Responses] In the revised manuscript, we first introduce four experimental methods that have been used in previous studies targeting at a controlled NO level from a few hundreds of ppt to a few ppb. Then in Section 4.1, we add a paragraph comparing the photochemical oxidation environment created in the present study with the ‘intermediate-NO’ conditions achieved by chambers that employed these experimental approaches.

[Revisions] We have added following discussions in the revised manuscript:

“Experimental approaches targeting at a controlled NO level (sub-ppb to ppb) have been introduced over the years. For outdoor chambers, experiments were typically performed by exposing a gas mixture of O₃/NO_x/VOCs or HONO/NO_x/VOCs to natural sunlight (Bloss et al., 2005; Karl et al., 2006). OH radicals were produced either via the photolysis of ozone and subsequent reaction of O(¹D) with H₂O or directly from the photolysis of HONO. NO levels ranging from a few hundreds of ppt to a few ppb over the course of several hours of reactions have been reported. In the absence of any additional supply, NO will be eventually depleted in a closed chamber environment, and the initial ‘moderate-NO’ condition will essentially transfer to

the ‘zero-NO’ condition. For indoor chambers, a ‘slow chemistry’ scenario initiated by photolyzing methyl nitrite (CH_3ONO) under extremely low UV intensities as the OH radical source ($J_{\text{CH}_3\text{ONO}} \sim 10^{-5} \text{ s}^{-1}$) was created to study the autoxidation chemistry of peroxy radicals produced from isoprene photooxidation (Crounse et al., 2011; Crounse et al., 2012; Teng et al., 2017). The resulting NO and HO_2 mixing ratios are maintained at ~ppt level ($\text{CH}_3\text{ONO} + \text{O}_2 + h\nu \rightarrow \text{HO}_2 + \text{NO} + \text{HCHO}$) over the course of several hours of reaction, and the average OH concentration ($\text{OH} \sim 10^5 \text{ molec cm}^{-3}$) is approximately one order of magnitude lower than that in the typical daytime ambient atmosphere. Another example relates to a recent method development in the Potential Aerosol Mass (PAM) flow tube reactor where nitrous oxide (N_2O) was used to produce ~ppb level of NO ($\text{O}_3 + h\nu \rightarrow \text{O}_2 + \text{O}^{(1)\text{D}}$; $\text{O}^{(1)\text{D}} + \text{N}_2\text{O} \rightarrow 2\text{NO}$) (Lambe et al., 2017). Timescales for chemical reactions and gas-particle partitioning are ultimately limited to the mean residence time (~80 s) of the PAM reactor.”

“For example, a steady-state NO level at ~1 ppb was created by the continuously mixed flow chamber operation for the study of isoprene photooxidation chemistry (Liu et al., 2013).”

“We further compare the photochemical oxidation environment created here with the ‘intermediate-NO’ conditions achieved by other chambers that employed the experimental approaches introduced earlier. In terms of the oxidizing power, all approaches are capable of maintaining an atmospheric relevant OH level ($\sim 10^6 \text{ molec cm}^{-3}$), except the ‘slow chemistry’ scenario that limits the photolysis rate of the OH precursor and results in an average OH mixing ratio of $\sim 10^5 \text{ molec cm}^{-3}$ (Crounse et al., 2012; Teng et al., 2017). At comparable OH levels, the overall atmospheric OH exposure achieved in the flow tube reactor is rather limited due to the short residence time (e.g., ~80 s in the PAM reactor). In terms of the NO_x level, precisely controlled steady-state NO concentration can be achieved for an indefinite time period by operating chambers in the continuously mixed flow mode. However, NO_2 accumulates during the continuous oxidation process and the resulting NO_2/NO ratio can be as much as an order of magnitude higher than that achieved in the static outdoor chambers.”

2) AMT is a technical journal and so I think it would be appropriate to include some more technical aspects (e.g. spectra of the lamps, temperature profiles across the chamber when lamps in operation, rationale for minimum 10% relative humidity – presumably it would be possible to run with cylinder air if necessary). Is the air in the chamber mechanically mixed or just relies on incoming air flow? How was the mixing time determined?

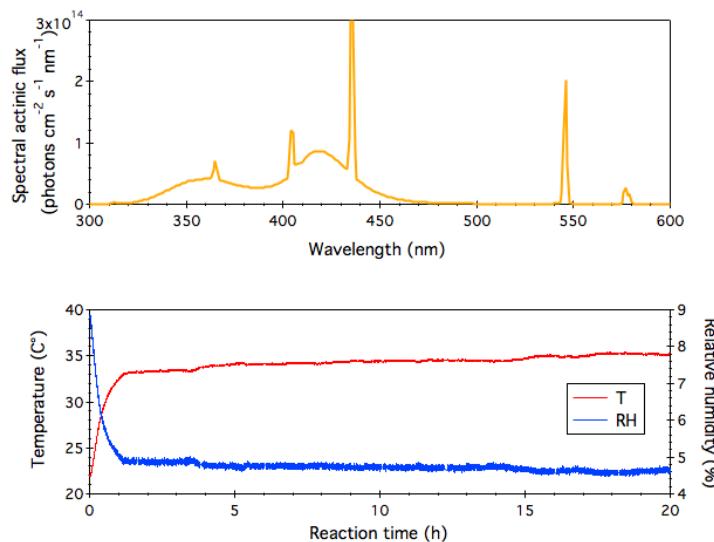
[Responses] We have added a new figure showing the spectra of the 100% UV lamps used in the experiment as well as the temperature and relative humidity profiles across the chamber

during a 20 h continuous flow experiment under maximum radiation conditions in the supplement, also given below.

As we constantly flowing 40 L/min purified dry air into the chamber during the continuous flow mode operation, it is financially impractical to use cylinders as the air supply. We use an AADCO zero air generator (Model 737-42) to purify the house air. This generator contains a methane burner, which is the main source of water vapor in the chamber flushing air (RH \leq 10%). As shown in Figure S1, RH started at \sim 9% at the beginning of the experiment and dropped to \sim 5% when temperature increased to \sim 307 K.

Chamber mixing relies on the flushing air at a constant flow rate of 40 L/min. A tracer compound, e.g., CO₂ and NO, is injected into the chamber. The mixing time is then established by the time it takes for the measurement signal to stabilize following injection. A combination of different injection and sampling ports are used to determine the average mixing time.

[Revisions] Figure S1 showing the spectra of 100% UV lights and T/RH temporal profiles during a 20 h continuous flow experiment is given below:



We have added following discussions in the main text:

“The relative humidity of the chamber air is below 10% under dry conditions (the remaining water vapor is generated from methane combustion during the air purification process)...”

“Typical temperature and relative humidity profiles across the chamber under maximum irradiation conditions are given in Figure S1 in the Supplement.”

“The chamber is actively mixed by the turbulence created by the 40 L min⁻¹ flushing air. The characteristic mixing time is defined as the time it takes for the measurement signal of a tracer

compound (e.g., CO₂ and NO) to stabilize following a pulse injection. The average mixing time in the NCAR chamber was determined to be ~9 min, which is ~4% of the residence time.”

3) An important aspect of any simulation chamber and particularly one with long reaction times is the reproducibility of the results. Have repeat measurements been carried out? When working with higher concentrations of NO_x is there any evidence of wall reactions or that the walls can be a source of HO_x (HONO)?

[Responses] We have performed a series of experiments to examine the reaction mechanisms for the OH-initiated oxidation of isoprene under a wide range of steady state NO levels, i.e., from ~80 ppt to ~300 ppb. The molar yields of MACR and MVK were measured by GC-FID. The measured molar yields of MACR and MVK from two replicate experiments agree within 4.4% and 1.7%, respectively. We are currently preparing these results for a future publication.

We found that the chamber wall might be a potential source of NO_x under the so-called ‘low NO conditions’. We ran a blank experiment by flushing the chamber for > 24 h, keeping the chamber at static mode under dark conditions for an hour, and then turning 100% UV lights on for another few hours. We used a high sensitivity chemiluminescence instrument with a detection limit of ~ 25 ppt to measure the NO concentration in the chamber. When the chamber was operated at static mode under dark conditions, we did not observe any NO in the chamber, indicating zero penetration of room air into the Teflon chamber. When we turned on the UV lights, we saw a sharp increase of NO by about 30-40 ppt. This amount of NO stayed in the bag during lights on and gradually diminished after lights off. We suspect that the observed NO was produced from the photolysis of HONO deposited on the Teflon wall.

4) Isoprene chemistry is a topical and very important subject, but, as the authors point out, it is a system where there is still some uncertainty in the chemistry. Have the authors carried out any intermediate studies (e.g. ethane or butane oxidation) where the chemistry is better defined. Reproducing results from a simpler VOC system would give greater confidence that the excellent data obtained for isoprene can be directly compared with the literature.

[Responses] Isoprene chemistry under high NO conditions has been extensively studied. The molar yields determined from previous studies range from 30–35% for MVK and 20–25% for MACR in the presence of > 60 ppb NO (Tuazon and Atkinson, 1990; Paulson and Seinfeld, 1992; Miyoshi et al., 1994; Ruppert and Becker, 2000; Sprengnether et al., 2002; Galloway et al.,

2011). We measured the molar yields of MACR and MVK from isoprene photooxidation in the presence of \sim 300 ppb NO using GC-FID. Our results, 24.9% for MACR and 32.2% for MVK, fall within the range obtained by previous measurements.

We investigated the OH-initiated oxidation of butane and butene under both high and low NO conditions. Experiments were performed in the static mode and typically lasted for several hours. The goal of these experiments is to examine the possibility and mechanisms of thermal decomposition of fragile products in the GC and PTRMS sampling system. We measured the molar yields of small carbonyl products, such as propanal and MEK, with the use of a cold trap system in front of the instrument inlets. Our measurements agree well with the predictions by the MCM mechanism. Detailed results will be forthcoming in a future publication.