

Lab-scale and Field-scale Study of Siloxane Contaminants Removal from Biogas

Alireza Divsalar¹, Lin Sun¹, Hasan Divsalar¹, Matthew N. Dods¹, Richard W. Prosser², Theodore T. Tsotsis^{1*}

1 Mork Family Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089 (USA); 2 GC Environmental, Inc., CA 92807 (USA)

**Corresponding author: tsotsis@usc.edu*

Highlights

- A UV photodecomposition reactor was investigated for potential application in biogas remediation
- The biogas oxygen content and the radiation intensity have a positive effect on the siloxane contaminants removal
- A 3-D model was developed to validate the experimental data and to calculate the reaction parameters
- Field-testing has validated the efficiency of the technology

1. Introduction

Because of its large methane content, biogas has been studied in recent years as a potential alternative renewable energy source. Although biogas is mostly composed of methane (CH₄) and carbon dioxide (CO₂), together with smaller concentrations of oxygen (O₂) and nitrogen (N₂), it also contains a variety of trace impurities known as the non-methane organic compounds (NMOC), which include silicon-containing compounds known as siloxanes. The presence of the NMOC in biogas creates technical challenges that presently hinder its widespread use as a renewable fuel for power generation. Siloxanes, in particular, have been shown to generate silica (SiO₂) microparticulates during combustion, which have been found to damage the equipment, and also present a potent threat to the environment, if released [1]. To date, relatively little research has focused on the removal of siloxanes from biogas, which is the primary focus of this study. Currently, the most common techniques employed commercially for remediating siloxanes in biogas (including the most frequently encountered ones such as L2 and D4) are adsorption and absorption.

Although adsorption is, typically, an effective technique for the removal of trace contaminants from gaseous waste-streams, it is not all that effective for the clean-up of siloxanes because their concentration in biogas is, typically, quite low compared to those of the other NMOC. Reactive absorption processes require the use of harsh absorption agents (e.g., nitric acid and/or sulfuric acid), something that significantly increases the cost and technical complexity associated with these processes. Physical absorption techniques involve less toxic chemicals but, on the other hand, are not all that effective for the removal of light siloxanes (e.g., L2) due to their high volatilities. Additionally, adsorption and physical absorption processes suffer from similar disadvantages: (i) the need for absorbent regeneration, which can reduce siloxane removal efficiencies over time due to the accumulation of siloxanes inside the absorbing medium from successive regeneration cycles; (ii) the fact that the siloxanes are released intact during the regeneration process, and thus must be properly disposed of.

2. Methods

The UV photodecomposition reactor (PhoR) is a simple and potentially cost-effective means, which was used in this study for remediating the siloxane pollutants in landfill gas and biogas. Single and integrated (with catalytic oxidizers) systems of UV reactors were utilized for the lab-scale and field-scale studies. For the lab-scale studies, two simulated landfill gas compositions were utilized, termed SLFG and SLFGV. They have the same fixed-gas content, but the latter contains, in addition, five NMOC compounds at ppm levels. Real LFG was used in the field studies.

3. Results and discussion

The feasibility of using the UV photodecomposition system for siloxane contaminants removal was previously proven in preliminary studies, and a US patent has been issued [2]. Further studies were carried out in this project to investigate the effect of LFG flow rate, initial siloxane feed concentration and biogas type (simulated vs. real) on siloxane impurities removal. Our studies show that the siloxane conversion increases as the gas flow rate decreases, as expected. Also, there is no significant dependence of conversion on siloxane concentration. For instance, Figure 1 shows the field-test results for L2 and D4 conversion as a function of retention time at different feed concentrations when a 41W UV lamp was used inside the PhoR.

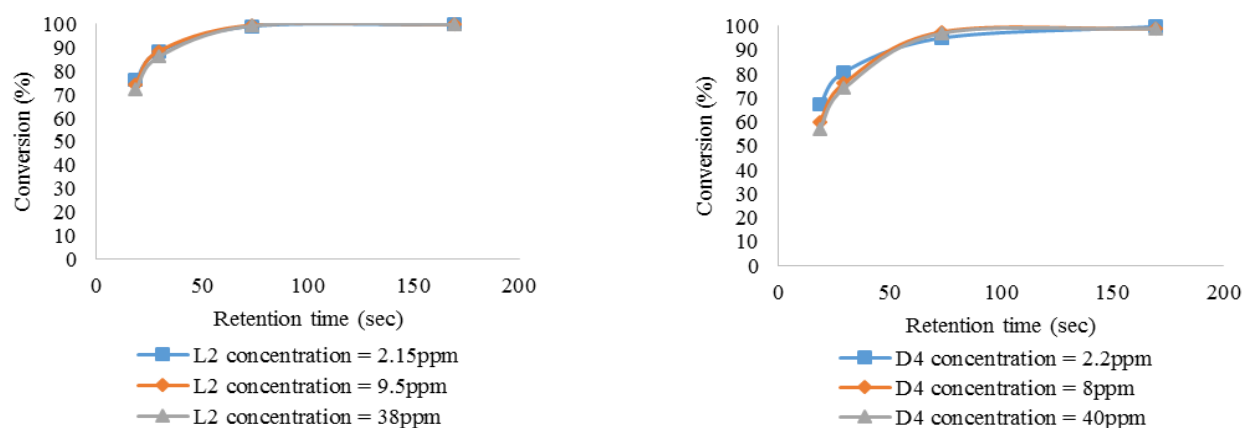


Figure 1. L2 and D4 conversion as a function of retention time for different feed siloxane concentrations

4. Conclusions

Not only is high siloxane removal attained by the PhoR, but also other NMOC compounds undergo a photocatalytic decomposition reaction as well, and thus high conversions were also attained for those contaminants. The high conversions attained for siloxane removal using the photo-decomposition technique at a real landfill site as well as in the lab indicate the efficiency and advantage of using this method compared to more commonly used technologies for biogas clean-up. Higher linear siloxane (L2) conversions compared to cyclic ones (D4) were obtained for the lab-scale and field-scale studies. Oxygen has an important effect on the photodecomposition process. The higher the oxygen present in the system is, the more ozone is produced which, in turn, results in higher conversion of the siloxanes and of the rest of the NMOC compounds. 3-D reactor models were also developed in this research, and were shown to account accurately for all phenomena that take place inside the reactor. Using these models, reaction kinetic parameters were computed (by utilizing the non-linear fitting regression toolbox option in Matlab linked with ANSYS® Fluent) that can accurately describe the experimental data for mixtures of siloxanes in air as well as in the biogas.

References

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Keywords

Landfill Gas; Siloxane; UV Photodecomposition; Reactor Modeling;