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Short communication

Interaction of nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) with a monolayer of oleic acid at the air-water interface – A simple proxy for atmospheric aerosol

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ABSTRACT

The reactions between atmospheric oxidants and organic amphiphiles at the air–water interface of an aerosol droplet may affect the size and critical supersaturation required for cloud droplet formation. We demonstrate that no reaction occurs between gaseous nitrogen dioxide (1000 ppm in air) and a mono-layer of an insoluble amphiphile, oleic acid (*cis*-9-octadecenoic acid), at the air–water interface which removes material from the air–water interface. We present evidence that the NO₂ isomerises the *cis*-9-octadecenoic (oleic) acid to *trans*-9-octadecenoic (elaidic) acid. The study presented here is important for future and previous studies of (1) the reaction between the nitrate radical, NO₃, and thin organic films as NO₂ is usually present in high concentrations in these experimental systems and (2) the effect of NO₂ air pollution on the unsaturated fatty acids and lipids found at the air–liquid surface of human lung lining fluid.

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1. Introduction

Atmospheric aerosol may act as cloud condensation nuclei (CCN) for cloud formation and are thus important when considering atmospheric radiative transfer and precipitation events (IPCC, 2007). The aerosol particles are often covered in an organic film (Tervahattu et al., 2002a,b;, 2005; Gilman et al., 2006; Peterson et al., 2006; Peterson and Tyler, 2003, 2002) including species such as oleic acid (cis-9-octadecenoic acid) that accumulates at the air-water interface (Peterson and Tyler, 2003, 2002; Tervahattu et al., 2002a,b; 2005; Russell et al., 2002; Mochida et al., 2002). A detailed review of organic films on atmospheric aerosol has been prepared by Donaldson and Vaida (2006). The presence of an organic film on an atmospheric particle is significant because a surface monolayer of organic material may change the optical properties and the hygroscopic properties of the particle (Andreae and Rosenfeld, 2008). Atmospheric oxidation or removal of this film may thus cause a change in the CCN size and properties with climatic effects.

The reactivity of gas-phase NO₂ with gas-phase organic species containing double bonds has previously been explored by one of us (King et al., 2002). Although the reactions of NO₂ with stable (nonradical) organic compounds in the atmosphere are not generally thought to be significant, in polluted environments, with high mixing ratios of NO₂ and volatile organic compounds, the reaction of NO₂ with carbon–carbon double bonds is important (Harrison et al., 1998; Huie, 1994). There has been much work on the liquid phase reactions between NO₂ and unsaturated fatty acids as this is important for in vivo environments (Velsor and Postlethwait, 1997; Postlethwait et al., 1995; Jain et al., 2008; Enami et al., 2009; Balazy and Nigam, 2003; Balazy et al., 2001; Balazy, 2000; Balazy and Chemtob, 2008). The results of these bulk liquid phase studies demonstrate that reaction of NO₂ with the fatty acids leads to isomerisation of the double bond and, at high concentrations of NO₂ and O₂, nitro compounds are formed and the double bond may be broken. Docherty and Ziemann (2006) review the chemistry that occurs between liquid phase NO2 and alkenes and conclude that NO₂ adds to the double bond followed by oxygen addition and the formation of hydroxy nitrite, carbonyl nitrite and a nitrooxy nitrite species, (Docherty and Ziemann, 2006), polymerization of the initial reaction products does not seem favorable.

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There have only been a few studies on the reaction of NO₂ with surface bound unsaturated species. Gross and Bertram (2009) exposed a monolayer of a terminal alkene, undec-10-ene. on a gold coated wafer to an atmosphere of NO₂ and subjected the wafer to XPS analysis. The authors noted no change in the ratio of oxygen to carbon atoms or in the ratio of oxidized carbon to total carbon – suggesting no reaction with NO₂. Lai et al. (1994), studied the reaction between gas-phase NO₂ and the lipid 1palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine (POPC), which contains the oleoyl moiety as the only unsaturated group, on the surface of glass. Lai and Finlayson-Pitts (1991) found that at very high mixing ratios of NO₂ in air, 15 000 ppm, the NO₂ added to the POPC and reacted to form various nitro and nitrate products. At lower mixing ratios of NO₂ in air, 5000 ppm, the NO₂ catalysed the isomerisation of the double bond in POPC from cis- to trans-. The reaction between NO₂ and an unsaturated compound at the air-water interface may be expected to follow different reaction kinetics and result in different products from when the organic compound is in the bulk liquid or gas phase, or bound to a solid support. Wadia et al. (2000) have previously shown that the reaction between a double bond and ozone at the air-water interface is kinetically enhanced compared to the corresponding gas-phase system.

We have studied the reaction of NO_2 with an unsaturated organic film at the air—water interface as the formation of polar, soluble, nitrogenated products, that would subsequently be lost from the interfacial region, would be relevant to the hygroscopic properties of atmospheric aerosol.

Knowledge of the reaction of NO_2 with organic compounds is important not just because it may occur in the atmosphere, but because the production of the key night time atmospheric oxidant, the nitrate radical (NO_3), in the laboratory inevitably involves the presence of high levels of NO_2 , often many orders of magnitude larger than the concentration of NO_3 (Wayne et al., 1991). Thus the reactivity of NO_2 with unsaturated organic compounds must be understood to ensure it is not a source of potential interference of nitrate radical chemistry.

The aim of this work is to investigate the effect of gas-phase NO_2 on a monolayer of oleic acid at the air-water interface using neutron reflection and surface pressure measurements.

2. Experimental

The interaction between gaseous nitrogen dioxide and deuterated oleic acid at the air-water interface was studied on a Langmuir trough contained in a 45 L aluminum gas chamber with a floatglass lid. Fused quartz windows were used to allow passage of the neutrons and laser light required for alignment. A more detailed description of the experimental set-up can be found in King et al. (2009). The surface excess (surface coverage) of deuterated organic material at the air-water interface was monitored by neutron reflection as described by Lu et al. (2000) and simultaneously the surface pressure was monitored using a Wilhelmy plate. The neutron reflection measurements were made using the SURF reflectometer at the ISIS pulsed spallation neutron source at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Chilton, UK. The incident neutron beam, containing a range of wavelengths, was collimated and inclined so that it fell at a grazing angle of incidence of $\theta = 1.5^{\circ}$ to the horizontal of the air-liquid interface. The range of neutron wavelengths, λ , provides data for the reflectivity, R, as function of momentum transfer, Q, between about 0.06 and 0.5 Å⁻¹. All reflectivity data were normalised for the intensity of the incident beam and the absolute reflectivity obtained by calibration to a pure D₂O standard.

2.1. Neutron reflection

A full account of the use of neutron reflection to study organic molecules at the air—water interface can be found in the review by Lu et al. (2000) and only a brief description is provided here. The reflectivity of an interface depends on the effective refractive index, n, for neutrons of the material at the interface. The value of n for any compound can be calculated from known values of the coherent scattering lengths (Sears, 1992) of different nuclei using:

$$n = 1 - \frac{\lambda^2 \sum_i \frac{b_i}{\nabla}}{2\pi},\tag{1}$$

where $\sum_i b_i$ is the sum of scattering lengths for elements in volume V and λ is the wavelength of the neutrons. As the scattering lengths of hydrogen (b = -3.74 fm) and deuterium (b = 6.68 fm) are of opposite sign it is possible to mix 8% (by volume) of D₂O with H₂O to produce an aqueous solution with the same refractive index for neutrons as air, \sim 1. When a monolayer of an organic species is placed at the air–water interface of such a mixture the reflection occurs from the interfacial region only and the reflected signal can be interpreted simply in terms of the amount of material at the interface. Thus neutron reflection is an excellent method to study organic films at the air–water interface.

For the experiments described here the data were modelled as a single uniform layer between two semi-infinite media of zero scattering length density. The layer is characterised by its thickness, δ , and the scattering length density, ρ , which is *b* per unit volume. A least-squares fitting procedure was used to compare modelled data calculated according to Abeles optical matrix method (Abelés, 1950) with each experimental data set measured in a time sequence. In a layer of thickness, δ , and scattering length density, ρ , the surface excess (surface coverage), Γ , of C₁₇D₃₃COOH with a total scattering length *b*_m is then given by:

$$\Gamma = \frac{\rho \delta}{b_m} \tag{2}$$

The fitted parameters can thus be used to directly obtain the surface coverage of deuterium atoms as a function of time.

2.2. Generation of nitrogen dioxide atmosphere

Nitrogen dioxide in air was blown into the gas chamber at $1.2 \text{ L} \text{min}^{-1}$ for time durations of 60-30000 s. All tubing was PTFE and all connections were made of PTFE or stainless steel. The concentration of the gas flowing into the chamber was 1000 ppm in synthetic air at atmospheric pressure. The gas (Microgas) was supplied as a calibration gas for atmospheric chemiluminescence NOx instruments and was used within 15 days of delivery.

2.3. Monitoring surface active species

A monolayer of deuterated oleic acid ($C_{17}D_{33}$ COOH), synthesized at the Oxford Isotope Facility, University of Oxford) was placed at the air—water interface of null reflecting water. The oleic acid film was spread on the surface as a 1 mg mL⁻¹ solution of oleic acid in chloroform using a micro-litre syringe. The film was compressed to an initial surface pressure, II, of 10–25 mN m⁻¹. The film was then exposed to the dilute flow of nitrogen dioxide in air whilst the surface coverage of deuterated material and surface pressure were recorded. During a typical measurement the surface pressure was recorded at rates greater than 1 Hz and the neutron reflectivity recorded continuously in intervals of ~ 900 s. Each kinetic run took about 7000–30 000 s. 2.5

2.0

1.5

10

0.5

0.0

7000

NO₂ off

5000

6000

Surface coverage

0

/ 10¹⁸

molecule m⁻²



3000 4000

Time / s

Surface pressure, П

Surface coverage, T

2000

3. Results and discussion

Five separate experiments (kinetic runs) were performed and in each case no reaction between NO_2 and oleic acid was observed. The surface coverage data, an example is shown in Fig. 1, demonstrates that there is no loss of deuterated material from the interface, in contrast to the reaction of ozone with deuterated oleic acid at the air–water interface which leads to a pronounced decrease in the surface coverage of deuterated material (King et al., 2009). Thus there is no evidence that NO_2 reacts with oleic acid at the air–water interface and no evidence for cleavage of the carbon–carbon double bond.

Two subtle changes are shown in Fig. 1. The first change is the gradual change in surface pressure with time. The surface pressure of the deuterated oleic acid decays with time in the absence of NO_2 owing to a very small loss of material to the trough barriers (Hardy et al., 2006) (too low to be detected by neutron reflection measurements over the timescale of the experiment). After the



Fig. 2. Surface pressure, Π of oleic and elaidic acid at the air-water interface versus mole fractions of elaidic and oleic acids. Data re-plotted from (Feher et al., 1977).



Fig. 3. An expanded version of the surface pressure versus time data of Fig. 1 (labeled run A) and an additional repeat experiment (labeled run B) at a similar starting surface pressure. The markers occur for every 300th data point. The NO_2 was introduced into the chamber at approximately 400 s (run B) and 1100 s (run A).

flow of NO₂ is initiated there is an enhanced decrease of surface pressure with time. The reaction of the NO₂ with the null reflecting water sub-phase causes the pH of the sub-phase to decrease from neutral to a pH of \sim 3.4. It is unlikely that the decrease in surface pressure is brought about by the decrease in sub-phase pH as oleic acid is less soluble in acid solutions than neutral solutions. Isomerization of the double bond from oleic acid (cis-9-octadeanoic acid) to elaidic acid (trans-9-octadecanoic acid) would explain the enhanced decrease in surface pressure observed in the presence of NO₂. Pressure-area isotherm of elaidic and oleic acids, Linden and Rosenholm (1995), Cullen et al. (1971), are similar but elaidic acid has a surface pressure $3-10 \text{ mN m}^{-1}$ lower than oleic acid for the same surface coverage. Feher et al. (1977) recorded II-area isotherms of six binary mixture of oleic and elaidic acid at the air–water interface. Re-plotting the data of Feher et al. (1977) as Π versus the mole fraction of elaidic acid for an initial surface pressure of 20 mN m⁻¹ (Fig. 2) displays a similar Π behavior as shown in Fig. 1, including the initial positive inflection when the NO₂ is first exposed to the film. Further evidence for isomerisation comes from the study of Lai and Finlayson-Pitts (1991), who noted isomerisation of the double bond in the oleic acid moiety of the POPC lipid in the presence of \sim 5000 ppm NO₂. Fig. 3, re-plots the surface pressure data (run A) in Fig. 1 along with other data (run B) from an identical experiment on an expanded abscissa and ordinate scale. The points of addition of NO₂ can clearly be seen on this figure as an enhanced decrease in surface pressure. The decay of surface pressure in the presence of NO₂ is non-exponential function whilst the decay of surface pressure in the initial absence of NO₂ is exponential with time and can be extrapolated to longer exposure times (dashed lines) to demonstrate the increased decay of surface pressure in the presence of NO₂. The noise in the surface pressure measurements is too small to be observed on the scale of this plot.

4. Conclusions

The work reported here demonstrates that the reaction between oleic acid at the air—water interface and NO₂, at mixing ratios usually found in the atmosphere, is not important for the removal of oleic acid from the atmosphere or in altering the hygroscopic

/ mN m ⁻¹

Surface pressure, II,

30

25

20

15

10

0

þ

NO₂ on

 (\cdot)

1000

properties of an equivalent aqueous particle coated with a monolayer of oleic acid. The double bond may be isomerised to the transform, and this will give a small change in the surface tension of the droplet, but there will be no noticeable effect on the critical supersaturation of the droplet and thus the slight change in surface tension is of minimal atmospheric relevance. It should be noted that these comments pertain to oxidation of unsaturated surface active compounds at the air-water interface and are relevant to aqueous particles coated with an organic film. An aerosol particle with an organic core may effectively dissolve and accumulate a relatively high concentration of NO₂ (with respect to the gas phase) and thus, in the presence of dissolved oxygen, an irreversible reaction between NO2 and unsaturated species can occur in particles of this type leading to the formation of nitro products as suggested by the work relevant to *in vivo* studies Jain et al. (2008), Balazy and Chemtob (2008).

Although the isomerisation of oleic acid to elaidic acid does not change the hygroscopic properties of atmospheric aerosol significantly it would be prudent to remember that the reaction kinetics of the two isomers are likely to differ slightly. Although the primary species emitted into the atmosphere may be the *cis*-isomer (oleic acid), reaction with atmospheric NO₂ in highly polluted regions may lead to conversion to the *trans*- form. When studying the reactions of unsaturated species in these environments the use of a substrate with a *trans*- double bond might therefore be more appropriate.

Experimentalists studying the reaction between NO₃ radicals and unsaturated acid molecules at the air—water interface should be aware that the presence of NO₂ in their system may lead to complications if present in very high levels only (Lai and Finlayson-Pitts, 1991). At high NO₂ mixing ratios the literature suggests that reaction with NO₂ can lead to cleavage of the double bond or the formation of various nitro products, (Docherty and Ziemann, 2006). At the relatively low mixing ratios of NO₂ used in this work (\leq 1000 ppm) the formation of irreversible addition products was not found although the double bond may be isomerised under these conditions.

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