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Nørgaard Schmidt, Stine; Gan, Jay; Kretschmann, Andreas Christopher; Cedergreen, Nina; Mayer, Philipp

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Passive Dosing of Pyrethroid Insecticides to *Daphnia magna*: Expressing Excess Toxicity by Chemical Activity

**Stine N. Schmidt**1*, Jay Gan2, Andreas C. Kretschmann3, Nina Cedergreen1 and Philipp Mayer1

1Department of Environmental Engineering, Technical University of Denmark, Denmark; 2Department of Environmental Sciences, University of California Riverside, U. S.; 3Department of Pharmacy, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; 4Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

*e-mail: stnsch@env.dtu.dk

**Introduction and objectives**

It is challenging to control and express exposure of hydrophobic organic compounds in aquatic toxicity experiments, due to the sorption of these compounds to vessel surfaces and organic material. In the current study, passive dosing was used to tightly control exposure throughout toxicity experiments [1], while chemical activity was used to express exposure and form basis for comparison of toxicity data [2].

This study addresses the acute toxicity of pyrethroid insecticides towards the aquatic invertebrate *Daphnia magna* and asks:

1. Is pyrethroid toxicity generally underestimated in the literature due to poorly controlled exposure?
2. At which chemical activity do pyrethroids exert their toxicity, and how similar are the median effect chemical activity (Ec50) for different pyrethroids?
3. How much more toxic are pyrethroids relative to baseline toxicity?

**Results**

**Figure 1.** Passive dosing experiments. 1: Pyrethroid-loaded silicone and 2: Equilibrated water with *Daphnia magna*.

**Figure 2.** Immobilisation (%) of *Daphnia magna* after 48 h exposure to the three pyrethroids as a function of freely dissolved concentration (Cfree; µg L−1). The median effect concentrations (Ec50) are given, with ranges of literature Ec50 values indicated by dark grey bars (—). The Ec50 values correspond to 160 pmol L−1 (95% CI: 149-219 pmol L−1) for α-cypermethrin, 333 pmol L−1 (95% CI: 296-374 pmol L−1) for esfenvalerate and 357 pmol L−1 (95% CI: 300-426 pmol L−1) for bifenthrin. Error bars represent the standard error of the mean (n=6).

**Figure 3.** Regression of subcooled liquid solubility (Sliq; mmol L−1), solid line, and lines representing the chemical activity 0.1, 0.01, 0.001 and 0.0001 (a, unit less, broken line). The solid line is the chemical activity range of 10−1 to 10−3 for the initiation of baseline toxicity, Ec50 values of napthalene (1), phenanthrene (2), α-cypermethrin (3), esfenvalerate (4) and bifenthrin (5) are plotted against their Sliq values. The median effect chemical activity (Ec50) is +0.000032, +0.000302 and +0.00079 for α-cypermethrin, esfenvalerate and bifenthrin, respectively.

**Conclusions**

Based on current data, the following was concluded:

1. In general, the median effect concentrations (Ec50) were in agreement with lowest literature values (Figure 2), and these studies thereby validate each other. To the contrary, higher literature values seem to underestimate pyrethroid toxicity.
2. The three pyrethroids had median effect chemical activities (Ec50) in the chemical activity range 0.00001 to 0.001 (Figure 3), corresponding to median immobilisation at 0.01 to 1% of the pyrethroids’ subcooled liquid solubility. The Ec50 values were within 2 orders of magnitude.
3. The three pyrethroids were 1-3 orders of magnitude more toxic relative to baseline toxicity (Figure 3). In this way, excess toxicity was expressed by Ec50 values well below the chemical activity range 0.01 to 0.1 for the initiation of baseline toxicity.

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