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Applications for
Environmental
analysis

Chloro- and nitrophenols
2,4-dinitrophenol (DNP)
phenol (P)
4-nitrophenol (4-NP)
2-methyl-4,6-dinitrophenol
(MDNP)
2-chlorophenol (2-CP)
2-nitrophenol (2-NP)
2,4-dimethylphenol (DMP)
4-chloro-3-methylphenol
(CMP)
2,4-dichlorophenol (DCP)
2,4,6-trichlorophenol (TCP)
pentachlorophenol (PCP)
PET Ketones
Glyphosate
Aminomethylphosphonic
acid (AMPA)

Glyphosate and AMPA

- **Glyphosate and AMPA in drinking water**
- **'Green' method using narrow-bore SweetSep™ AEX200**
- **Sensitive HPAEC-PAD method without pre-concentration**
- **Elution and detection within 6 minutes**

Summary

Glyphosate, commonly known by its original trade name Roundup, is the world's most widely used herbicide (weed killer). In March 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic in humans" [1]. Since the publication of this report the use of glyphosate is under debate worldwide. In addition, in the US, Bayer AG (manufacturer of Roundup) is engaged in billion dollar lawsuits with respect to claims of users that the glyphosate-based weed killer caused cancer.

Due to agricultural use, glyphosate and its metabolite AMPA can make their way into aquatic environments and drinking water, which makes monitoring of these compounds in water and other matrices necessary. In this application note a simple and sensitive analytical method is presented for the analysis of glyphosate and AMPA in drinking water, using the ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD analyzer. The method is based on separation by High Performance Anion Exchange Chromatography (HPAE) followed by Pulsed Amperometric Detection (HPAE-PAD) on a gold working electrode. The use of the new narrow-bore SweetSep™ AEX200 column with 5 µm particle size, resulted in the separation of glyphosate and AMPA in less than 6 min in combination with a significant reduction of mobile phase usage compared to 4 mm ID columns. The method does not require derivatisation nor pre-concentration of the sample.



Introduction

Glyphosate (N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine) is a broad-spectrum systemic herbicide and crop desiccant, and is the world's most widely used weed killer in agriculture and gardening. It was discovered in 1970 by Monsanto and brought into the market under the name Roundup in 1974 [2]. Aminomethylphosphonic acid (AMPA) is one of the primary and most stable degradation products of glyphosate. While glyphosate and formulations such as Roundup have been approved by regulatory bodies worldwide, concerns about their effects on humans and the environment persist, and have grown as the global usage of glyphosate increases. In March 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic in humans". However, there is no consensus about this classification. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) concluded at the end of 2015 that "the substance is unlikely be genotoxic (i.e. damaging to DNA) or to pose a carcinogenic threat to humans"[3]. In 2017, the European Commission extended the approval for the use of glyphosate for another 5 years until December 2022 [4]. This approval was extended in 2022 until December 2023, followed by a renewal for another 10 years in November 2023. This means that the use of glyphosate is approved in the EU until 15 December 2033 [5]. In addition, also the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans [6].



Figure 1. ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD Analyzer consisting of the ET210 eluent tray (for N₂ blanketing), a P6.1L isocratic pump with dual channel degasser and solvent selection valve, AS6.1L autosampler, and the DECADE Elite electrochemical detector.

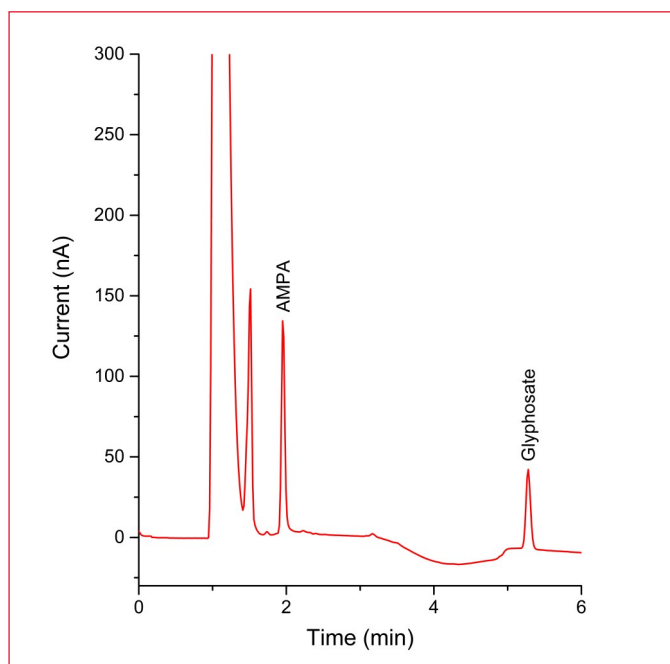


Figure 2. Chromatogram of a 100 μ L injection of a 10 μ g/L standard mixture of AMPA and glyphosate in 10 mM sodium hydroxide.

Due to agricultural use, glyphosate and AMPA can make their way into aquatic environments and drinking water, which makes monitoring necessary. Although, glyphosate has a low mobility in soil, it can enter surface and subsurface waters after direct use near aquatic environments or by runoff or leaching. Currently there is no world-wide guideline value established for glyphosate in drinking water [7]. For example, in the US the EPA stated that levels up to 700 μ g/L are allowed. In Canada, Australia and the EU member states the Maximum Allowed Concentrations (MAC's) are 280, 10 and 0.1 μ g/L, respectively, for glyphosate and AMPA in drinking water. There are several HPLC methods published about the analysis of glyphosate and AMPA, based on fluorescence detection [8], MS/MS detection [9] and electrochemical detection [10,11]. However, for fluorescence detection derivatization is necessary and although MS allows direct detection of the herbicides, it requires more expensive analysis equipment. Electrochemical detection is an attractive and cost-effective alternative, it offers quantification at ppb levels in drinking water by direct injection without derivatization and sample pre-concentration (SPE).

In this application note a sensitive method for the analysis of glyphosate and AMPA in drinking water is presented, based on High Performance Anion Exchange Chromatography in combination with Pulsed Amperometric Detection (HPAEC-PAD) using a new narrow-bore SweetSep™ AEX200 column. This together with the small (5 μ m) particles of this column results in the fast and sensitive analysis of glyphosate and its main metabolite.



Method

The analysis was performed using an ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD analyzer (figure 1). This system contains the P6.1L isocratic pump with integrated dual channel degasser, and a solvent switch, enabling step-gradient separation. For detection, a DECADE Elite electrochemical detector equipped with SenCell flow cell with gold working electrode was used. The system was controlled via a PC using the DataApex™ Clarity™ software, but is compatible with Thermo Scientific™ Chromeleon™ Chromatography Data System software as well. The HPAEC-PAD conditions are given in table 1.

Mobile phase preparation

To minimize the introduction of carbonate ions in the mobile phase, the eluents were carefully prepared manually using a 50% w/w carbonate-free NaOH solution (commercially available). The diluent was DI water (resistivity >18 MΩ.cm) which was sonicated and sparged with Nitrogen 5.0 (purity > 99.999%) prior to use. The alkaline mobile phases are prepared in pressure-resistant plastic (PPCO) bottles. Do not use glass bottles. The mobile phases were blanketed with Nitrogen 5.0 (0.4 bar) during the analysis using the ET210 eluent tray, to prevent the introduction of CO₂.

Table 1

LC-ECD conditions	
LC system	ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD analyzer, isocratic
Columns	SweetSep™ AEX200, 2.1 x 200 mm column, 5µm (Antec Scientific)
Filter	Pre-column filter PEEK, 0.5 µm
Mobile phase A	200 mM sodium acetate, 10 mM sodium hydroxide (sparged and blanketed with Nitrogen 5.0)
Mobile phase B	300 mM sodium acetate, 10 mM sodium hydroxide (sparged and blanketed with Nitrogen 5.0)
Flow rate	0.3 mL/min
Back pressure	About 180 bar
Injection	100 µL (full loop)
Temperature	35 °C for separation & detection
Flow cell	SenCell™ 2mm Au WE and HyREF (Pd/H ₂), AST 2
Potential waveform	Pulse mode 2 (see table 3)
I-cell	about 0.4 µA
ADF	0.1 Hz
Range	5 µA/V

Separation

Both glyphosate and AMPA are weak organic acids, having a phosphonic acid and amine group (figure 1). In addition, glyphosate also has a carboxylic acid moiety. Under alkaline conditions (pH around 12) these groups are deprotonated, and the compounds can be separated based on anion-exchange chromatography. An SweetSep™ AEX20 2.1 x 200 mm anion-exchange column (+ pre-filter) was chosen for the separation of glyphosate and AMPA (table 1).

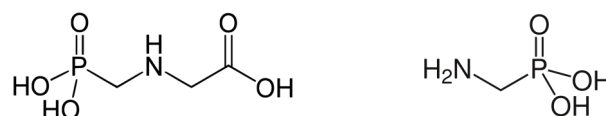


Figure 3. Structural formulas of glyphosate (left) and AMPA (right).

The analysis is based on a step-gradient elution profile, which is shown in table 2. Both mobile phases A and B contain 10 mM NaOH and different concentrations sodium acetate (NaOAc). The acetate anion acts as a strong ‘pusher’, allowing faster elution of strongly retained components. AMPA is eluted with mobile phase A containing 200 mM NaOAc. After 0.1 minute the system is switched to run mobile phase B with a higher NaOAc concentration (300 mM) to elute glyphosate. The flow rate of just 0.3 mL/min makes this method a ‘green’ alternative compared to the regular flow rates used on 4 mm I.D. columns.

Table 2

Step-gradient program			
Time (min)	Mobile phase*	B (%)	Description
0 - 0.1	200 mM NaOAc	0	Elution of AMPA
0.1 - 3	300 mM NaOAc	100	Elution of Glyphosate
3 - 10	200 mM NaOAc	0	Equilibration, starting conditions

*) The mobile phase also contain 10 mM NaOH, throughout the gradient, see table 1.

Detection

For the pulsed amperometric detection of glyphosate and AMPA the Antec SenCell™ electrochemical flow cell is used. This flow cell [12] has a confined wall-jet design and consists of a Au working electrode (WE), HyREF (Pd/H₂) reference electrode (RE) and stainless steel auxiliary electrode (AE). A special multi-step potential waveform [11], shown in figure 4,

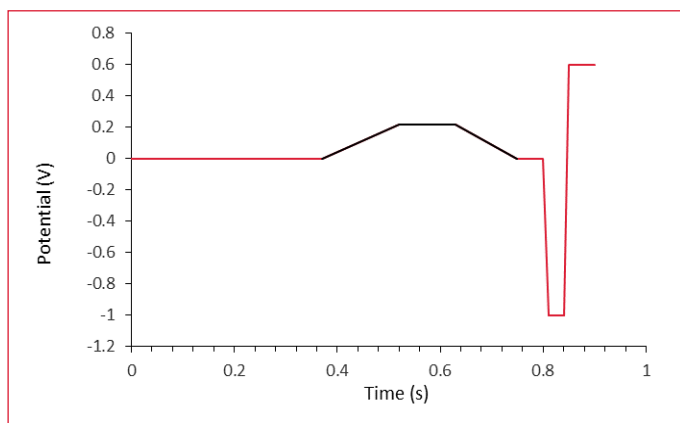


Figure 4. The PAD waveform for the detection of glyphosate and AMPA. The part of the curve shown in black is the time period in which the current is measured.

Table 3

PAD waveform (Pulse mode -2)

Time (s)	Potential (V)	Data sampling
0.00	0.00	
0.37	0.00	Begin
0.52	0.22	
0.63	0.22	
0.75	0.00	End
0.80	0.00	
0.81	-1.00	
0.84	-1.00	
0.85	0.60	
0.90	0.60	

was applied for detection of the compounds. The profile consisted of an upward scan, plateau and downwards scan, during which the current is measured. This particular waveform resulted in a more stable and reproducible long-term response, compared to the classical 3- or 4-step PAD waveforms with a square wave pattern.

The option to program multi-step waveforms (MPAD) up to 30 time points is available for the DECADE Elite from FW version 1.09 and onwards. This new measurement mode, Pulse mode-2, is only available when the Elite is controlled by software (not accessible from the front-panel). The multi-step waveform is programmed in the CDS method by entering time

-potential coordinates (t/E), as shown in table 3. The sampling interval is marked by a 'Begin' and 'End' marker. The sampling interval is freely programmable in the pulse table, and potential steps as well as slopes can be defined. This allows the programming of potential scans in a PAD waveform like used in integrated pulsed amperometric detection (IPAD)[13].

The new pulse mode-2 therefore extends the application areas of the DECADE Elite to IPAD measurements, used for example for the analysis of amino acids [14] and sulfur-containing antibiotics [13]. In fact, glyphosate is an aminophosphonic analogue of the amino acid glycine [2].

Preparation of standards and samples

Standards: 200 mg/L stock standards of AMPA and glyphosate were prepared in 10 mM sodium hydroxide. The addition of 10 mM sodium hydroxide to the standards resulted in a better peak shape (less tailing). Stock standards were kept in the fridge at 4 °C and were further diluted in 10 mM NaOH to a concentration range between 0.2 to 100 µg/L before analysis.

Sample preparation: a tap water sample was collected and processed: 50 µL of a 0.4 M NaOH solution was pipetted into a volume of 1950 µL of the tap water sample, resulting in an end concentration of 10 mM NaOH in the sample. 100 µL was directly injected into the LC system and analyzed.

Results

Figure 2 shows a chromatogram of a 100 µL injection of a 10 µg/L AMPA and glyphosate standard mixture in 10 mM NaOH. Within 6 minutes both AMPA and glyphosate are detected. The small baseline disturbance, starting at 3.2 min is caused by the step-gradient, when mobile phase B is introduced, which has a higher concentration of NaOAc than mobile phase A. The change from 200 to 300 mM NaOAc results in a decrease of approximately 20 nA of the background current and quickly stabilizes to allow for quick elution of glyphosate of a stable baseline.

Linearity

The linearity of the response of glyphosate and AMPA was investigated in the concentration range of 0.2 - 100 µg/L, which corresponds with a molar concentration range of 1 nmol/L - 591 nmol/L and 2 nmol/L - 900 nmol/L for glyphosate and AMPA respectively.



For both compounds the linearity was excellent with correlation coefficients better than 0.999 (see figure 5).

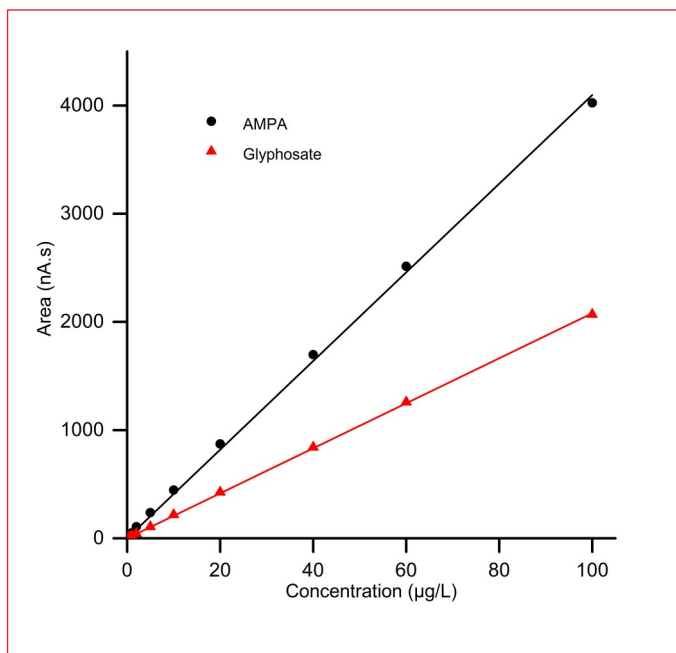


Figure 5. Calibration curve of glyphosate and AMPA in the concentration range of 1 - 100 µg/L. ($R > 0.999$).

Repeatability

The repeatability of the method was evaluated by ten repetitive injections of a 1, 5 and 50 µg/L standard mix of glyphosate and AMPA. The relative standard deviations (RSD) for retention times and peak area are shown in table 4.

RSD's for retention time were < 0.4% for all repro data sets. A good repeatability of the response (peak area) for both AMPA and glyphosate was obtained for the 5 and 50 µg/L standards. It is evident from table 4 that the RSD's of the peak area of the 1 µg/L standard were higher (3%).

LOD

The Limit of Detection (LOD) and Limit of Quantitation (LOQ) was determined based on the response of the 0.5 µg/L standard mix. The LOD was calculated as the analyte response corresponding to 3x the ASTM noise. The LOQ was calculated as the analyte response corresponding to 10x the ASTM noise. The noise was calculated based on a 5 minute section of the baseline during an extended run after elution glyphosate (10 segments of 0.5 minutes). The results are shown in table 5.

The Detection limits found for AMPA and glyphosate are 0.04 µg/L and 0.10 µg/L, respectively. These LOD's are sufficient to reliably quantify and monitor the maximum allowed concentrations (MAC's) of glyphosate and AMPA in drinking water in the US, Canada and Australia and other countries in the world. For application in the EU member states some additional sample preparation step (SPE) to pre-concentrate the sample might be required to monitor concentrations around the EU guideline value of 0.1 µg/L.

Sample analysis

A tap water sample was analyzed using the described method. The sample preparation of the tap water sample is simple and described in the method section. The chromatogram of the tap water sample is shown in figure 6 together with a chromatogram of a 1 µg/L standard and spiked tap water sample (1 µg/L std) for reference and identification. Note that only the relevant time window (first 6 minutes) is shown where the analytes of interest are eluting. The total run duration was 10 minutes taking into account the equilibration step. In the shown tap water sample no quantifiable amount of glyphosate and AMPA is present. Since the tap water was

Table 4

Repeatability of 100 µL injections of AMPA and glyphosate standard mixtures in 10 mM NaOH (n=10)

Compound	RSD's (%) 1 µg/L		RSD's (%) 5 µg/L		RSD's (%) 50 µg/L	
	t_R	Area	t_R	Area	t_R	Area
AMPA	0.24	3.1	0.26	1.3	0.00	1.2
Glyphosate	0.32	3.3	0.32	1.4	0.37	0.3

Table 5

Limit of Detection (LOD) and Limit of Quantitation (LOQ)

Compound	Limit of detection (LOD)		Limit of Quantitation (LOQ)
	µg/L (ppb)	nmol/L	µg/L (ppb)
AMPA	0.04	0.34	0.13
Glyphosate	0.10	0.62	0.35



collected in The Netherlands, such low level (below LOD) of glyphosate and its degradation product could be expected due to the strict EU limits ($< 0.1\mu\text{g/L}$).

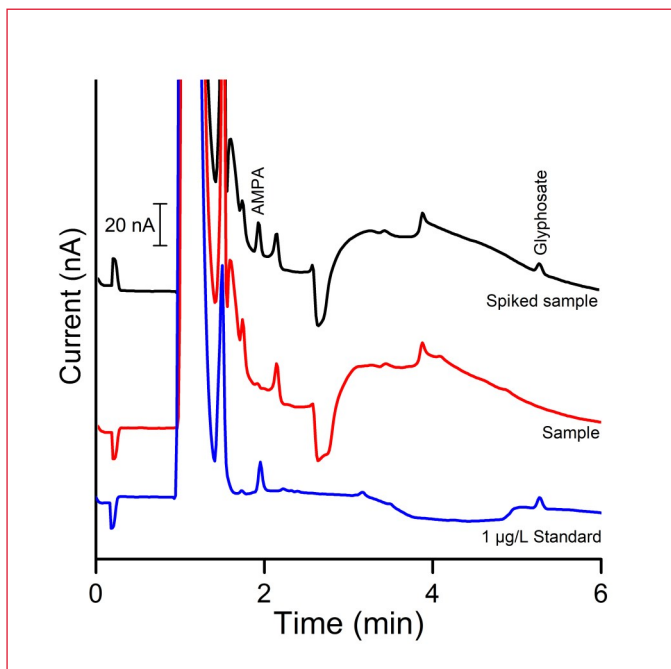


Figure 6. Stacked overlay of a chromatogram of a tap water sample (red), tap water sample spiked with $1\mu\text{g/L}$ AMPA and glyphosate (black) and a $1\mu\text{g/L}$ AMPA and glyphosate standard (blue).

When larger amounts of AMPA and glyphosate are expected, consider decreasing the injection volume to reduce the baseline disturbance (front peak).

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Conclusion

The ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD analyzer based on the DECADE Elite detector, SenCell flow cell and SweetSep™ AEX200 column offers a simple and cost-effective analysis solution for the quantification of glyphosate and AMPA in drinking water. The presented HPAEC-PAD method allows fast separation, within 6 min of both components, followed by sensitive direct detection (no need for derivatization).

LOD's of 0.04 µg/L and 0.1 µg/L for AMPA and glyphosate were achieved, without pre-concentration of the sample. The new MPAD mode in the DECADE Elite offers the possibility to program multi-step potential waveforms, commonly used in ion chromatography applications based on Integrated Pulsed Amperometric Detection.



Ordering information

Detector only	
176.0035B*	DECADE Elite SCC electrochemical detector
116.4321	SenCell 2 mm Au HyREF
ALEXYS analyzer	
180.0055W	ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD Analyzer –isocratic
116.4321	SenCell 2 mm Au HyREF
195.0035#	Clarity CDS single instr. incl LC, AS module
Columns	
260.0011	SweetSep™ AEX200, 2.1x200mm column, 5µm
260.0100	Pre-column filter PEEK, 0.5 µm
260.0110#	Replacement PEEK frits, 0.5 µm, 10 pcs
Software*	
195.0035	Clarity CDS single instr. incl LC, AS module

*) Antec ECD drivers are available for Chromeleon CDS, OpenLAB CDS and Empower CDS. The ALEXYS HPAEC-PAD analyzer (full system) can also be controlled under Thermo Fisher Scientific Chromeleon™ CDS. Please contact Antec for more details.

#) The pre-column filter PEEK, 0.5 µm (pn 260.0100) includes a starter pack of 4 replacement PEEK frits. A 10 pack of replacement PEEK frits can be ordered under pn 260.0110.

For research purpose only. The information shown in this communication is solely to demonstrate the applicability of the ALEXYS system and DECADE Elite detector. The actual performance may be affected by factors beyond Antec’s control. Specifications mentioned in this application note are subject to change without further notice.

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