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Approaching personal exposure assessment at population scale: The Holy Grail is not made of gold

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Abstract

Introduction: Assessing personal exposure to air pollution has proven challenging, especially at scales relevant for epidemiologic research. The exposure monitors themselves pose technological limitations (cost, noise, weight) that restrict research to relatively modest sample sizes. Further complicating this problem are issues of reliability and user compliance, both of which are exacerbated when conducting research in resource-limited environments.

Methods: We developed a new monitor, an ultrasonic personal aerosol sampler (UPAS) through advances in low-cost electronics, open-source programming, and additive manufacturing. The UPAS is a time-integrated aerosol monitor that features a novel, virtually silent micro-pump. The UPAS was tested for pump and battery performance, flow accuracy, sampling efficiency, and through chamber tests against an EPA-certified reference method for PM_{2.5}.

Results: The UPAS prototype weighs 190g, emits under 40 dB of noise, and can operate continuously for 48 or 24 hr on a single battery charge at either 1 or 2 L/min of flow, respectively. The UPAS cyclone inlet performed within 5% of the EPA federal reference method (FRM) for PM_{2.5}. Chamber tests relative to the FRM sampler showed low bias (accuracy of 5.5 +/- 4.8% at one

standard deviation), good precision (6.1% relative standard deviation among co-located devices), and high linearity across a broad range of PM_{2.5} concentrations (20-1000 ug/m³) that are relevant to household air pollution.

Conclusions: The UPAS shows promise for increasing our ability assess personal PM exposures by reducing the size, weight, and cost of personal samplers. As a result, sampling can be conducted at scales that are more relevant to epidemiologic and community-based research.

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