

MASTER'S THESIS

Assessment of phytotoxic effects of PAHs and DDTs in solid-phase system using microalgal bioassays

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**Assessment of Phytotoxic Effects of PAHs and DDTs in
Solid-Phase System Using Microalgal Bioassays**

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for the degree of
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Abstract

Assessments of phytotoxic effects of soil pollutants are commonly relied on standard plant bioassays such as seed germination/root elongation and early seedling growth tests. However, they are either of low sensitivity or time consuming, which diminish their values used in risk assessment and environmental management of contaminated areas. On the other hand, microalgae are relatively easy to handle, multiply rapidly and widely accepted as surrogates for testing phytotoxicities of chemicals to higher plants due to their sensitivity to various toxicants. Pilot experiments aimed at providing a fast and sensitive phytotoxicity screening option in terrestrial environments were performed with the newly developed direct-contact solid-phase microalgal bioassays. Standard plant tests were also conducted for comparison. A soil survey was carried out to study the PAH and DDT contaminations and the diversity of microalgae in the 138 soil samples collected throughout Hong Kong. There was a widespread contamination of PAHs and DDTs, but generally the pollution levels for all land use categories (urban parks, greening areas, country parks, rural areas, restored landfills, agricultural farmlands, orchard farms, crematoria, industrial and near highway areas) were below the recommended values for residential and general purposes stated in soil quality guidelines from different countries (Netherlands, Denmark, Canada and China), except a few hotspots with exceptionally high concentrations of PAHs in urban parks. Forty microalgal species were identified in Hong Kong soils. No significant difference was found for richness indexes among different land use categories and this was also true for Shannon indexes, except in restored landfills which was significantly higher than other categories. Based on the results, toxicity experiments using spiked sand were performed to study the effects of naphthalene, phenanthrene,

pyrene, DDT, DDD and DDE on the growth of microalgae and higher plants. The novel 4-day solid-phase microalgal bioassays were conducted using *Selenastrum capricornutum*, *Chlorococcum hypnosporum* (commercially available) and *Chlorococcum meneghini* (locally isolated) while *Lolium perenne*, *Cynodon dactylon* (grasses) and *Brassica chinensis* (vegetable) were used in the 5-day seed germination/root elongation and 28-day early seedling growth tests. The results indicated that solid-phase microalgal bioassay had a higher sensitivity using algal density than the standard plant tests using germination rate, length and biomass as endpoints. In general, *S. capricornutum* was more vulnerable to PAHs and *C. meneghini* to DDTs. Another set of comparison was conducted using soils collected from the field which were contaminated with heavy metals, PAHs and DDTs. Seed germination/root elongation tests were insensitive while biomass showed a higher sensitivity than shoot or root length in the seedling growth tests. In general, the solid-phase microalgal bioassays were more sensitive except certain endpoints (e.g. biomass) in higher plant tests which exhibited comparative sensitivities to the most sensitive microalga *C. meneghini*. This study clearly demonstrated the feasibility and applicability of using a 4-day direct-contact solid-phase microalgal bioassay for fast screening of phytotoxic chemicals in the edaphic system. It is a very promising alternative bioassay though at the same time it possesses certain limitations, with rooms for improvement.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xv
List of Appendices	xix
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	xxii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Persistent Toxic Substances	1
1.2 Characteristics of PTS	7
1.3 Sources and Uses of PAHs and DDTs in the Environment.....	8
1.3.1 PAHs	8
1.3.2 DDTs	11
1.4 Fate, Transformations and Toxicity of PAHs and DDTs in the Environment... 13	
1.4.1 Fate of PAHs and DDTs in the Environment.....	13
1.4.2 Transformations of PAHs and DDTs in the Environment.....	15
1.4.2.1 Abiotic Transformations	15
1.4.2.2 Biotic Transformations	16
1.4.3 Toxicity of PAHs and DDTs	19
1.5 Current Assessment Protocols of Toxic Compounds.....	24
1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Present Study	30

Chapter 2 Spatial Distribution of PAHs and OCPs and Survey of Microalgae

Populations in Hong Kong	33
2.1 Introduction.....	33
2.2 Materials and Methods.....	35
2.2.1 Area of Study	35
2.2.2 Soil Sampling.....	37
2.2.3 Chemical Analyses of PAHs and OCPs.....	37
2.2.3.1 Reagents and Chemicals	37
2.2.3.2 Soil Extraction and Cleanup	37
2.2.3.3 Chemical Analyses.....	39
2.2.4 Counting and Identification of Soil Microalgae	41
2.2.4.1 Reagents and Chemicals	41
2.2.4.2 Experimental Setup for Most Probable Number Method	42
2.2.4.3 Counting and Identification of Microalgae.....	42
2.2.5 Statistical Analyses	44
2.3 Results and Discussion	44
2.3.1 Concentrations of PAHs and OCPs in Different Soil Categories	44
2.3.1.1 PAHs	44
2.3.1.2 DDTs.....	53
2.3.2 Potential Sources of PAHs and OCPs in Hong Kong Terrestrial Environment.....	56
2.3.2.1 PAHs	56
2.3.2.2 DDTs.....	63
2.3.3 Comparison with Soils Quality Criteria.....	67
2.3.4 Microalgal Populations in Hong Kong	72
2.4 Conclusions.....	77

Chapter 3 Assessment of Phytotoxicity of PAHs and DDTs Using a Solid-Phase

Algal Test	78
3.1 Introduction.....	78
3.1.1 Importance of Plants in Ecosystems	78
3.1.1.1 Vascular Plants.....	78
3.1.1.2 Microalgae	79
3.1.2 Assessment of Phytotoxic Effects of Chemicals using Vascular Plants.....	80
3.1.3 Choice of Species.....	82
3.1.4 Objectives of Study.....	84
3.2 Materials and Methods.....	84
3.2.1 Preparation of Chemical Stocks.....	84
3.2.2 Substrate Preparation and Spiking of Toxicants	85
3.2.3 Preparation of Vessels.....	85
3.2.4 Mass Culture of Microalgae	86
3.2.5 Preparation of Seeds	88
3.2.6 Experimental Setups	88
3.2.6.1 Experimental Setup and Incubation Condition for Solid-Phase Algal Test.....	88
3.2.6.2 Experimental Setup and Growth Condition for Seed Germination/Root Elongation Test.....	90
3.2.6.3 Experimental Setup and Growth Condition for Early Seedling Growth Test.....	91
3.2.7 Endpoints Measurements.....	91
3.2.7.1 Solid Phase Microalgal Test.....	91
3.2.7.2 Seed Germination/Root Elongation Test	95
3.2.7.3 Early Seedling Growth Test.....	96
3.2.8 Range Finding Test	97
3.2.9 Calculation of Effective Concentrations and Statistical Analyses.....	97
3.3 Results and Discussion	100

3.3.1 Solid-Phase Microalgal Toxicity Test	100
3.3.1.1 Influence on Photosynthetic Potential	100
3.3.1.2 Effects on Cell Growth and Chlorophyll <i>a</i> Concentration.....	106
3.3.1.3 Sensitivity of Solid-Phase Microalgae Test with Different Endpoints	113
3.3.2 Seed Germination/Root Elongation Tests	113
3.3.2.1 Effects on Germination Rate of Seeds	113
3.3.2.2 Reduction on Root Length.....	116
3.3.2.3 Influence on Germination Index	119
3.3.2.4 Sensitivity Among Various Parameters of Seed Germination/Root Elongation Test	122
3.3.3 Early Seedling Growth Test	123
3.3.3.1 Effects on Dry Shoot Mass	123
3.3.3.2 Response on Dry Root Mass.....	126
3.3.3.3 Influence on Shoot Length.....	129
3.3.3.4 Changes in Root Length	132
3.3.3.5 Sensitivity Among Various Parameters of Early Seedling Growth Test.....	135
3.3.4 Factors Affecting Species Specific Sensitivities Among Toxicants.....	136
3.3.4.1 Physiologies of Organisms and Physicochemical Parameters of Hydrophobic Chemicals	136
3.3.5 Principal Factors Influencing Toxicity of Organic Toxicants in Solid-Phase Microalgae Assay.....	138
3.3.6 Juxtaposition of Results from Solid-Phase Microalgal Assay, Seed Germination/Root Elongation Test and Early Seedling Growth Test..	145
3.4 Conclusions.....	148

Chapter 4 Comparative Study on Phytotoxicity of Contaminated Soils Using a Solid-Phase Microalgal Bioassay and Higher Plant Toxicity Test	150
4.1 Introduction.....	150
4.2 Materials and Methods.....	151
4.2.1 Soil Collection and Analyses	151
4.2.2 4-Day Solid-Phase Microalgal Bioassay	152
4.2.3 5-Day Seed Germination/Root Elongation Test	154
4.2.4 28-Day Early Seedling Growth Test	155
4.2.5 Effective Concentrations and Statistical Analyses.....	155
4.3 Results and Discussion	156
4.3.1 Physiochemical Properties of Soils.....	156
4.3.2 Phytotoxic Effects of Contaminated Soils to Microalgae.....	159
4.3.3 Phytotoxic Effects of Contaminated Soils to Seed Germination/Root Elongation.....	162
4.3.4 Phytotoxicity of Contaminated Soils to Early Seedling Growth	165
4.3.4.1 Effects on Biomass	165
4.3.4.2 Effects on Shoot and Root Length	165
4.3.5 EC ₅₀ Comparisons and Evaluation of the Feasibility of Screening Phytotoxicity by Solid-Phase Microalgal Test.....	169
4.4 Correlations between microalgae and higher plant's responses	172
4.5 Conclusions.....	174
Chapter 5 General Conclusions and Recommendations	175
5.1 Conclusions.....	175
5.2 Limitations, Improvements and Research Prospects of the Current Study	176
List of References	179
Appendices	215
Curriculum Vitae	250
List of Publications	251