

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
EXPERIMENTAL.....	2
Sample Collection.....	2
Analytical.....	6
Supporting Data.....	13
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	13
Seasonality.....	14
Impact of Storm Origin.....	18
Correlation Analysis.....	18
Year 1 and Year 2.....	20
Diurnal Variations.....	23
pH dependence.....	25
Copper Stability in Rainwater.....	25
Mineql + Speciation Calculations.....	29
Estuarine Water.....	32
Flux Calculations.....	32
CONCLUSIONS.....	36
REFERENCES.....	38
APPENDIX.....	43

ABSTRACT

Copper exists in two oxidation states in natural waters, Cu(I) and Cu(II). Determining the speciation of copper rather than its total concentration is essential in order to assess the atmospheric reactivity and environmental fate of copper in the troposphere. The concentration and speciation of copper was determined in rainwater samples from Wilmington, North Carolina, from August 25, 2000 to September 24, 2002. Volume weighted average concentrations of Cu_{total} , Cu(I), and Cu(II) in rainwater were 5.3 nM, 1.4 nM, and 3.2 nM, respectively. An undetermined ligand may be stabilizing Cu(I) in authentic rainwater.

Rainwater Cu(II) concentrations were significantly higher in the summer, whereas Cu(I) concentrations were significantly higher in the winter. The calculated atmospheric flux of copper, $504 \mu\text{g m}^{-2} \text{yr}^{-1}$, is in good agreement with the calculated copper flux at Florianopolis, Brazil and two Maryland Chesapeake Bay sites. Copper(I) and Cu(II) concentrations were not correlated with each other and Cu(II) concentrations did not correlate with any other rainwater analyte. Significant positive correlations were found between Cu(I) and DOC, SO_4^{2-} , NO_3^- , and Fe_{total} . All copper species (Cu(I), Cu(II), Cu_{total} , $Cu_{particulate}$) showed an inverse correlation with rainfall amount. All copper species increased in concentration with decreasing rainwater pH. All copper species were higher for storms of continental origin versus storms of coastal origin. No diurnal variations were seen with Cu(I). However, Cu(II) concentrations had a maximum between 12 pm – 6 pm. It is possible that Fe oxyhydroxides with adsorbed Cu(II) undergo reactions that release Cu(II) in the presence of sunlight.

Contamination by trace metals, such as copper, contributes to the degradation of estuarine systems in many areas, including North Carolina. Speciation, or the distribution of copper among its various chemical forms, controls the reactivity, toxicity, and bioavailability of the metal in estuarine sediments and water, as in rain. Estuarine water samples were collected and analyzed for Cu(I) during April, July, and November of 2001 and March 2002. The percentage of total copper as Cu(I) varied from 1.9% - 4.1% with an overall average of 3.4%. No flux of Cu(I) was observed into or out of the water overlying the estuarine sediments in controlled laboratory experiments. Almost the same amount of copper that enters the Cape Fear River estuary from atmospheric deposition (8.7×10^2 moles Cu/year) fluxes into the sediments (5.8×10^2 moles Cu/year).

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LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Cu(I) recovery experiments with filtered offshore water and fresh rain. Concentration of unspiked samples are corrected using % recovery of Cu(I) ..8	8
2. Graphite furnace temperature program for the analysis of copper10	10
3. Recovery experiment with the non-boiling evaporation preconcentration technique. The concentration of the riverine standard reference material (SLRS-4) is 28.48 ± 1.26 nM. Synthetic rain is pH 4.5 MilliQ water made by diluting 4 mL of 5 mM H ₂ SO ₄ to 1 L with MilliQ water.12	12
4. Volume weighted average concentrations (nM) and volume weighted standard deviations for Cu total, Cu particulate, Cu(I)(aq), Cu(II)(aq), and Cu(II)/Cu(I) ratio in rainwater collected at Wilmington, NC between August 25, 2000 and September 24, 2002. Year 1 is August 25, 2000 to September 23, 2001 and Year 2 is September 24, 2001 to September 24, 2002. The n was equal for Cu(I) and Cu(II) when calculating the Cu(II)/Cu(I) ratio. The %Cu(I)(aq) and %Cu(II)(aq) is relative to Cu total, n = number of samples and amt = rain amount in mm link 13	link 13
5. Volume weighted averages of total copper concentrations in various natural water environments. Asterisks indicate that a value is not volume weighted, but a simple average..... link 13	link 13
6. Percentage of Cu(I), Cr(III), and Fe(II) relative to total Cu, Cr, and Fe in Wilmington, NC rain. Percentages of dissolved Cu, Cr, and Fe. The oxidized:reduced ratio for dissolved Cu, Cr, and Fe. Chromium data obtained from Kieber et al. (2002). Iron data from Kieber et al. (2001)15	15
7. Correlation values (r values) for rainwater analytes that showed significant positive correlations. n is greater or equal to 50 for all correlations, except for Fe _{total} (n = 22) and Fe _{particulate} (n = 21). p is less than 0.005 for all correlations, except for Fe _{particulate} (p = 0.015). Asterisks indicate no significant positive correlation19	19
8. Volume weighted average concentrations (nM) and volume weighted standard deviations for Cu total, Cu particulate, Cu(I)(aq), Cu(II)(aq), and Cu(II)/Cu(I) ratio in rainwater collected at Wilmington, NC between August 25, 2000 and September 24, 2002. The n was equal for Cu(I) and Cu(II) when calculating the Cu(II)/Cu(I) ratio. The %Cu(I)(aq) and %Cu(II)(aq) is relative to Cu total, n = number of samples and amt = rain amount in mm link 25	link 25

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
9. Rainwater composition used in copper speciation calculations. The rainwater pH was 5.3, and it was assumed to be in equilibrium with air ($\log P_{\text{CO}_2} = -3.5$), so the concentration of CO_3^{2-} was 0.01nM, too small to affect copper speciation in this rainwater. No complexation observed between Cu(II) and the amino acids glycine, valine, tyrosine, threonine, phenylalanine, methionine, lysine, leucine, isoleucine, glutamate, asparagine, and alanine when they were present at concentrations up to 1 μ M	31
10. Cu(I) and total copper concentrations (nM) for Cape Fear River Estuary samples collected during April 2001, July 2001, November 2001, and March 2002. Station 2 for April 2001 only had one total copper value that corresponded to a Cu(I) value. Total copper was not analyzed for the March 2002 experiment. Total copper values were provided by C.Shank (unpublished data)	33
11. Copper(I) concentrations in core incubation experiments using Cape Fear estuary sediments collected during April 2001, July 2001, November 2001, and March 2002. Calculated Cu(I) fluxes in units of nmol/m ² /day.	34
12. Cu(I) photochemical results for Cape Fear River estuary water. Southport ferry terminal, depth of 15 meters, June 2001. Samples exposed to natural sunlight for 7.5 hours. Total Cu = 11.7 nM (C. Shank, unpublished data) ...	44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Aerochem Metrics Model 301 Automatic Sensing Wet/Dry Precipitation Collector	3
2. Volume weighted averages and standard deviations for Cu(I)(aq), Cu(II)(aq), total copper, and Cu(II)/Cu(I) ratio	16
3. Cu(I) (nM) versus SO ₄ ²⁻ (μM) and NO ₃ ⁻ (μM) in Wilmington, NC rain	21
4. Total Cu (nM) versus rain amount (mm) for Wilmington, NC rainwater	22
5. Volume weighted averages and standard deviations for Cu(II), Fe(II), and Fe(III) versus time of day	24
6. Volume weighted average and standard deviation for Cu(I) by time of day	26
7. Volume weighted averages and standard deviations for Cu(I)(aq), Cu(II)(aq), total copper, and particulate copper at pH ≥ 4.95, 4.55 ≤ pH ≤ 4.94, and pH ≤ 4.54	27
8. Synthetic rainwater spiked with 4.8 nM Cu(I) and extracted for Cu(I) within minutes. Authentic rainwater extracted for Cu(I) within minutes, after 4 hours, and after 24 hours	28
9. Total dissolved copper (TDCu) and ligand concentrations for selected rain events in Wilmington, NC. Values obtained from A. Sutton (2000), unpublished data	30
10. Possible complexes and concentrations for Cu(I) and Cu(II) in Wilmington, NC rainwater	31
11. The estuarine box model. Copper fluxes (moles Cu/year) for atmospheric deposition, riverine and oceanic input, and sediment-water exchange	35