

Feasibility Study of Suspended Ion Exchange for Organic Matter Removal and Disinfection By-product Minimisation in UK Lowland Waters

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Abstract

This investigation compared the performance of suspended ion exchange (SIX) and granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration for organic matter removal and reduction of trihalomethane (THM) and haloacetic acid (HAA) formation potential. SIX treatment resulted in increased organic matter removal (60%) when compared with GAC (45%). SIX treatment produced a stable treated water Dissolved Organic Carbon (DOC), while changes in brine concentration had no effect on the removal of organic disinfection by-product (DBP) precursors. Liquid chromatography organic carbon detection analysis (LC-OCD) showed that the differences in the organic matter removal by SIX in comparison to GAC were caused by the increased affinity of the SIX process towards the 1 kDa and 0.5-0.35 kDa organic matter size bands. These were the molecular weight

fractions comprising most of the overall DOC. Organic matter removal was consistent with the minimisation of THM and HAA formation. THM formation was reduced by 50% and 65%, whereas HAA formation was lowered by 60% and 70% in comparison to the untreated water, after GAC and SIX treatment, respectively. A linear correlation between the Br:DOC ratio and the bromine substitution factor was found for THMs and HAAs, suggesting that the formation of Br-DBPs was not selective to the treatment but attributed to bulk organic matter removal and bromide content at source. The use of resin in chloride form increased the chloride to sulphate mass ratio and Larson Index suggesting a risk for increased corrosivity of SIX treated water in the distribution network.

Keywords: DBP precursors; corrosion; costs; HAAs; LC-OCD; SIX; THMs.

Introduction

This research was part of Anglian Water’s long-term programme that aims to increase the resilience of water quality and supply in the region. The high alkalinity of water sources in the Anglian Water region limits the implementation of pH-optimised coagulation at most sites due to the high costs associated with application of chemicals for pH control. As a result, the scope for removal of organic matter from Anglian Water source waters is much lower

than might otherwise be possible. Therefore, finding a process that enables organic matter reduction without pH adjustment is part of Anglian’s long-term research. Prior to the research presented in this article, the use of suspended ion exchange (SIX) was assessed at laboratory scale for the treatment of different lowland sources within the Anglian region (Carra et al., 2021). Results were promising, motivating further research on SIX at pilot scale and

investigation of regeneration chemicals.

Coagulation is the most widely applied treatment for the removal of organic matter due to its favourable balance between removal efficiency and total expenditure (TOTEX) costs (Jacangelo et al., 1995). In coagulation, a positively charged ion (typically a Fe or Al salt) links to negatively charged colloids by different mechanisms (entrapment, adsorption,

complexation, and destabilization), promoting destabilisation and aggregation. The process is more selective towards higher molecular weight organic matter that carries negative charge (Finkbeiner et al., 2020). In terms of chemical dosing practices, charge neutralisation and sweep flocculation are the two methods used to remove contaminants via coagulation. When using charge neutralization, the pH is optimised to promote the presence of positively coagulant charged species. A stoichiometrical coagulant dose in relation to the organic matter charge is used, which destabilises the colloids and promotes organic matter removal. For sweep flocculation, an excess coagulant dose is used without altering pH, creating insoluble hydrolysis products that enmesh the pollutants (Crittenden et al., 2012). The net positive charge of the coagulant salt significantly decreases with increasing pH (Sharp et al., 2006). The increased chemical dosing required to modify the pH to achieve charge neutralisation in alkalinity buffered sources explains the widespread use of sweep flocculation for lowland surface waters. Sweep flocculation, however, is not as efficient as charge neutralisation for the reduction of Dissolved Organic Carbon (DOC). In addition, some types of organic matter are not well removed by coagulation despite pH and coagulant optimisation. For example, Sharp et al. (2006) demonstrated the relationship between the hydrophilic non-acid fraction of organic matter in raw water and the residual DOC obtained after coagulation.

In the UK, upland sources are characterised by an increased proportion of hydrophobic organic matter, whereas for lowland areas the inputs of microbial activity and effluent organic matter are more pronounced (Ritson et al., 2014). Typically, organic matter in upland sources has an increased proportion of hydrophobic moieties with compounds of a larger molecular weight. On the other side, lowland sources have high concentration of hydrophilic moieties with compounds of reduced molecular weight (Mergen et al., 2008; Ritson et al., 2014) that are typically not well removed by coagulation. This type of organic matter has been shown

to have lower formation potentials for trihalomethanes (THMs) and haloacetic acids (HAAs). However, if not sufficiently removed, there is still a risk of forming disinfection by-products (DBPs) above the regulatory limits (Phetrak et al., 2016; Carra et al., 2021). This is a challenge common for surface waters within the Anglian Water region as they are all considered lowland sources.

From the alternative technologies that have been considered for enhanced organic matter removal, ion exchange (IEX) (Levchuk et al., 2018) has received significant attention due to the high degree of charge associated with many types of organic matter found in source waters (Bolto, Dixon and Eldridge, 2004). IEX has been proven to achieve organic matter reduction in alkaline buffered sources without the need to alter pH (Caltran et al., 2020; Carra et al., 2021). For organic matter removal, strong and weak anion exchange resins are used (referring to the Arrhenius theory of dissociation). Typically, the process of IEX involves the stoichiometrical exchange of chloride for an ion with higher affinity to that displaced from the exchanger (Helfferich, 1995). IEX targets negatively charged organics regardless of the compound type (Smith et al., 2020), being particularly effective at removing low molecular weight organics, which diffuse better through the resin pores (Mergen et al., 2008; Bazri and Mohseni, 2016). In practice, this allows for the treatment of hydrophilic charged organics that are not readily removed either by coagulation or granular activated carbon (GAC), reducing the THM and HAA formation for sources with hydrophilic organic matter (Hanigan et al., 2013). In addition to organic matter, IEX also removes inorganic anions (e.g., nitrates or sulphates), which increases the resilience for treatment of source waters that contain elevated nitrate concentrations.

Of the different IEX alternatives commercially available, SIX was selected to undertake a pilot trial due to previous laboratory testing showing its high efficiency in the removal of organic matter from lowland source waters (Carra et al.,

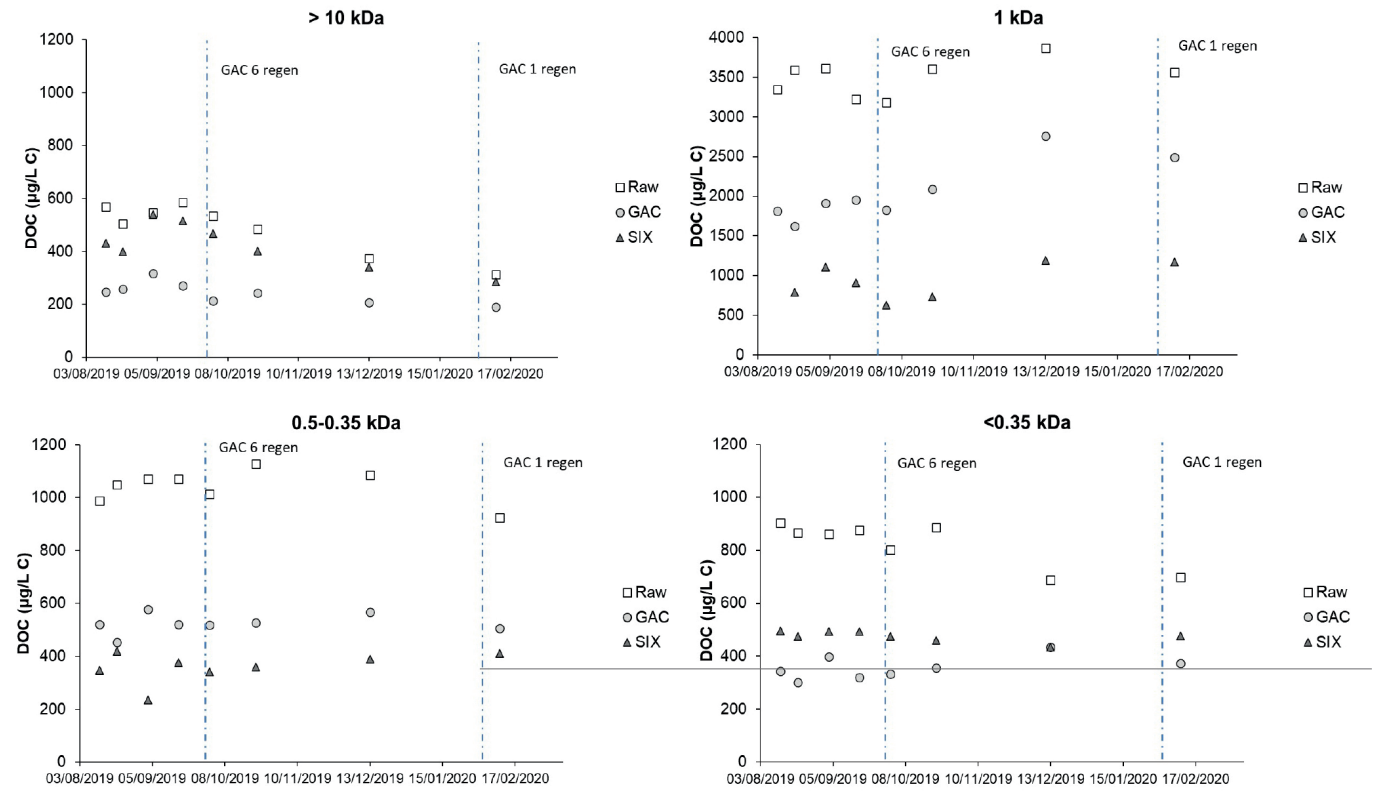
2021). Within the UK, the use of SIX at pilot scale has been benchmarked against the performance of coagulation processes at full scale water treatment works (WTWs) (Metcalf et al., 2015; Finkbeiner et al., 2018). To the author’s knowledge, there have been few, if any, studies that have compared SIX with roughing GAC filters at the front end of WTWs for treatment of surface waters. Some studies have compared the performance of activated carbon with IEX (Tan et al., 2008; Hanigan et al., 2013). However, these have been limited to bench scale comparisons, which may not be representative of full-scale conditions. In addition, most of the UK based studies that have been performed assessing the removal of organic matter by IEX have been focused on their application to upland sources (Mergen et al., 2008; Metcalfe et al., 2015; Finkbeiner et al., 2018). On this regard, this study is expected to bring insights into the long-term performance, scalability, and treated water quality for lowland sources.

The present study aimed to establish the long-term differences in organic matter treatability between GAC and SIX for a lowland river source not amenable to treatment by conventional coagulation. The efficiency of each process was examined based on the different organic matter size fractions removal and reduction of THM and HAA formation potential. In addition, the influence of the brine concentration on organic matter removal, DBP formation and inorganic anions removal was evaluated.

SIX pilot trial at Hall WTW

The pilot trial was located at Hall WTWs, which was built in 2014 to supply the increasing population in the Lincoln area. It abstracts water directly from the River Trent and has a maximum treatment capacity of 20 MLD. Previous tests at the design stage had identified that the organic matter in the source water was not amenable to coagulation and GAC filters were selected as the main organic matter removal process. The treatment flowsheet (Figure 1) is constituted by roughing GAC filters (Filtrisorb TL-830),

Figure 6. Organic matter molecular weight fractions in the raw water and GAC and SIX treated waters during the trial.



products from humic-like substances, with similar properties to them, explaining the higher removal obtained with SIX $685 \pm 80 \mu\text{g/L}$ vs $540 \pm 80 \mu\text{g/L}$ with GAC. The smallest group, with 350 Da, has been linked to hydrophilic and amphiphilic material, such as low molecular weight alcohols or amino acids and GAC showed higher removals than SIX (475 ± 90 with GAC vs $350 \pm 80 \mu\text{g/L}$ with SIX). The lower amenability of removal by SIX were attributed to the reduced degree of charge of this fraction. The results evidenced the differences in the treatability of organic matter by GAC and SIX, where LC-OCD analysis highlighted that the differences in bulk organic removal (DOC) were related to the 1 kDa size group.

THMs and HAAs formation potential tests

One of the aims of the trial was to understand the THM and HAA formation potential of the SIX treated water and its comparison to GAC treated water. DBP formation tests were performed on raw

water and SIX and GAC treated water. The formation tests were designed to simulate the conditions on site. Samples were chlorinated to achieve $0.9 \pm 0.05 \text{ mg/L}$ of free chlorine to achieve the target for the final water on site and for 7.5 hours contact time. This contact time aimed at mimicking the average residence time of the chlorinated water in the treated water service reservoir at the WTW.

In agreement with DOC removal, SIX was more efficient in eliminating DBP precursors than GAC (Figure 7). SIX treated water presented stable THM ($49 \pm 7 \mu\text{g/L}$) and HAAs ($34 \pm 6 \mu\text{g/L}$) formation potential during the trial, regardless of the raw water quality. On the other hand, GAC treated water showed an average formation of 70 ± 10 and $44 \pm 6 \mu\text{g/L}$, respectively, throughout the trial. DBP formation tests followed the reported trends for DOC removal (Figure 4), and whilst the GAC treated water reflected the changes observed in the raw water, with results within $50\text{--}100 \mu\text{g/L}$ for THMs and $34\text{--}55 \mu\text{g/L}$ for HAAs, the SIX treated water showed stable THM and HAA formation

regardless of the raw water quality seasonality or brine optimisation.

The effectiveness in minimising THM and HAA formation potential was compared using DBP yield ratios (raw water DBP yield to GAC or SIX treated water DBP yield, $\mu\text{g DBP}$ in the raw water per mg DOC / $\mu\text{g DBP}$ in the treated water per mg DOC) to assess if the DBP minimisation was caused by selective removal of DBP precursors (Figure 8). The reduction in the DBP yield ratios achieved by SIX and GAC were similar for THMs and HAAs. For example, during the first three months of the trial (Aug-Oct 2019), SIX presented a ratio of 3.4 ± 0.5 and 3.5 ± 0.5 for THMs and HAAs, respectively. Equivalent results for the GAC treated water were 2.6 ± 0.3 and 2.6 ± 0.3 for THMs and HAAs. During the colder months the similarities between GAC and SIX ratios were maintained. There was an overall decrease in the THMs and HAAs ratio from the summer/autumn to the winter, caused by a reduction in the DBP formation potential of the raw water (Figure 7). Results evidenced limited reduction in the THM and HAAs reactivity treatment

with both processes, in agreement with other author's findings (Metcalf et al., 2015; Finkbeiner et al., 2018). Therefore, bulk organic matter removal was considered as the main cause for the THM and HAA formation potential reductions in either the SIX or GAC treated water.

Bromide is readily oxidised by free chlorine (Bond et al., 2014) and it is more reactive towards organic matter than chlorine (Symons et al., 1993). Low concentrations of bromide can increase the proportion of brominated DBPs which present an increased toxicity in comparison to their chlorinated equivalents (Sfynia, 2017). The influence of the bromide concentration on the speciation of THMs and HAAs was assessed by the Bromine Substitution Factor (BSF) (Hua and Reckhow, 2012). The BSF is defined as the bromine percentage of the total amount of halogen on each type of DBPs and it can differ from 0 to 1 (Hua and Reckhow, 2012) as defined below:

$$BSF(\%) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n br_i \cdot \text{molar concentration brominated species}_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n h_i \cdot \text{molar concentration DBP species}_i}$$

With Br defined as the number of brominated atoms in the DBP species, h_i being the number of halogenated atoms (Br and Cl) in the DBP species, n is the number of brominated species and p the number of DBP species.

For THMs:

$$BSF_{THM} = \frac{[BDCM] + 2 \cdot [DBCM] + 3 \cdot [TBA]}{3 \cdot ([CF] + [BDCM] + [DBCM] + [TBA])}$$

Where BDCM is bromodichloromethane; DBCM is dibromochloromethane; BF is bromoform; and CF is chloroform.

And HAAs:

$$BSF_{HAA} = \frac{([BCAA] + [MBAA] + [BDCAA]) + 2 \cdot ([DBAA] + [DCAA]) + 3 \cdot [TBAA]}{([MCAA] + [MBAA] + 2 \cdot ([DBAA] + [DCAA]) + [BCAA]) + 3 \cdot ([DCBAA] + [DBCAA] + [TCBA] + [TBAA])}$$

Where BCAA is bromochloroacetic acid; MBAA is monobromoacetic acid; BDCAA is bromodichloroacetic acid; DBAA is dibromoacetic acid; DBCAA is dibromochloroacetic acid; TBAA is tribromoacetic acid; MCAA is monochloroacetic acid; DCAA is dichloroacetic acid; and DCBAA is

Figure 7. THM and HAA formation from the raw water and GAC and SIX treated water.

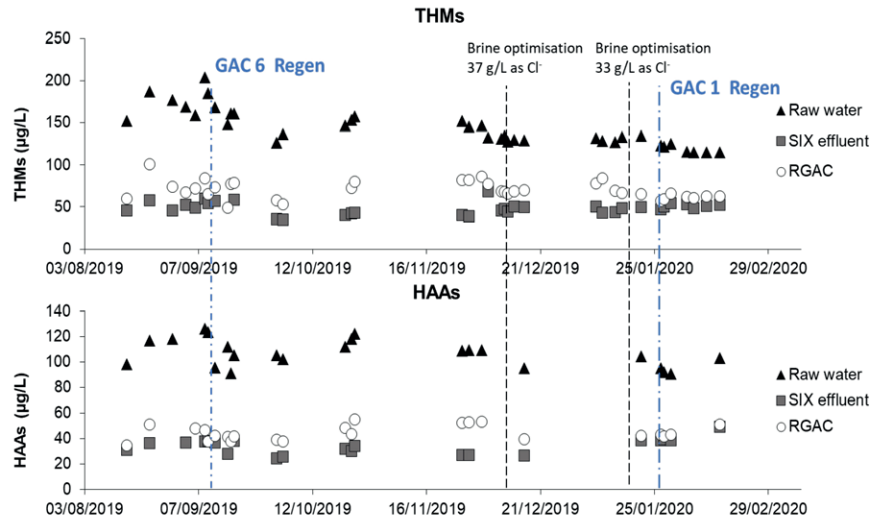


Figure 8. Raw water to SIX or GAC treated water DBP yield ratio during the trial.

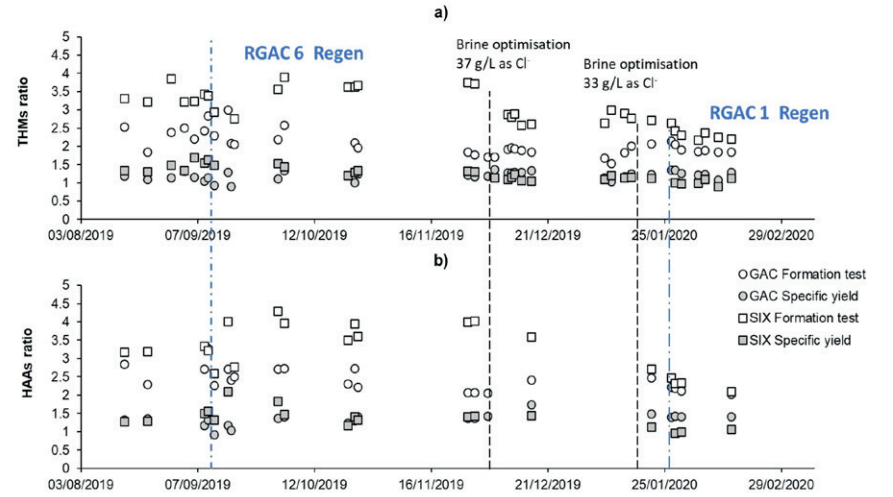
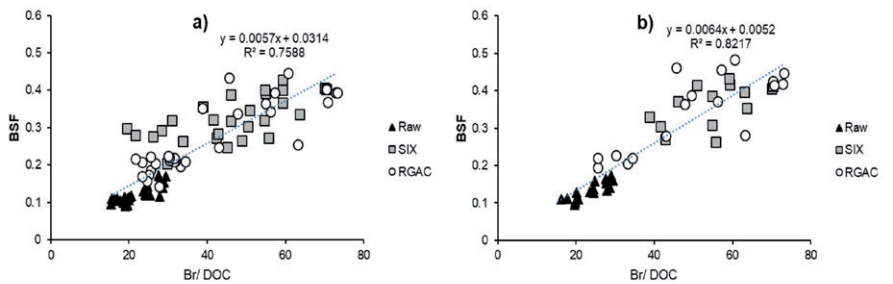


Figure 9. BSF for THMs (a) and HAAs (b) for the raw and treated waters by SIX and GAC.



dichlorobromoacetic acid.

The BSF is linked to the formation of brominated DBP species, and Figure 9 links it to the Br:DOC ratio ($\mu\text{g Br/mg DOC}$) (Figure 9). Neither SIX nor GAC removed bromide, and thus, the bromide:DOC ratio increased after treatment. A linear correlation was observed for the BSF and the Br/DOC ratio for THMs ($R^2 = 0.76$) and

HAAs ($R^2 = 0.82$), supporting the fact that DBP speciation was strongly influenced by the Br:DOC ratio (Figure 9). Results agreed with the findings from Boyer and Singer (2008) who reported increases of dibromochloromethane from 7.4 to 15 $\mu\text{g/L}$, when comparing the formation of the raw and MIEX treated water, outlining the influence of the bromide concentration in the speciation of the DBPs.

Brine optimisation and corrosion indexes

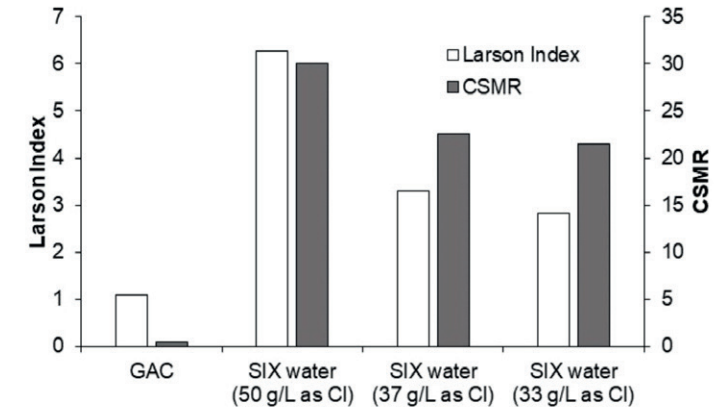
Optimising the brine usage is key not only from an economic perspective, but also to reduce the brine waste (Maul et al., 2014). Brine optimisation was carried out by reducing the fresh brine chloride concentration during the trial from 50 g/L to 33 g/L as chloride (Figure 10). Although the brine optimisation did not impact organic matter removal, there was a decrease in the uptake of inorganic ions. In particular, nitrate and alkalinity were removed 28-30% less.

Sulphate was removed below LOD in all cases. IEX resins preferably exchange the ion with the smallest solvated equivalent volume (i.e. hydrated radii normalised by the ion's valence), which explains the general preference for polycharged anions in detriment of single charged ones (Helfferrich, 1995). For example, the solvated equivalent volume of sulphate is 0.17 nm (Tansel, 2012) whereas for nitrate and bicarbonate is 0.34 and 0.36 nm, respectively (Volkov et al., 1997; Kiss et al., 2013). The resin used on this study, was regenerated in Cl⁻ form, has a gel type structure with quaternary ammonium as the fixed anion, and a high capacity per L (1.25 eq/L according to the manufacturer), which favours the exchange of polycharged anions (Helfferrich, 1995; Lanxess, 2016).

The removal of inorganic ions affect the water chemistry. Chloride to sulphate mass ratio (CSMR) values higher than 0.5 have been linked to increased lead release via galvanic corrosion (Nguyen et al., 2011; Willison and Boyer, 2012). Galvanic attack of the lead soldering in copper pipes due to the electromigration of chloride to the lead anode surface, impedes the formation of a passivating scale, increasing plumbosolvency, which does not occur with sulphate (Nguyen et al., 2011; Willison and Boyer, 2012).

In addition, previous research has linked the proportion of corrosive agents (chloride and sulphate) to inhibitory

Figure 10. Larson-Skold index and CSMR for the GAC treated water, final water and treated water by SIX for the different brine concentrations tested (50, 37 and 33 g/L as Cl⁻)



agents in domestic waters (bicarbonate) to the corrosivity of natural waters on mild cast iron pipes (Larson and Skold, 1958). Larson and Skold (1958) showed that increased concentrations of chloride and sulphate relative to alkalinity may interfere with the formation of this film, increasing the corrosion rates.

The Larson Index (LI)(Larson and Skold, 1958) is defined as the ratio between the sum of chloride and sulphate milliequivalents divided by the alkalinity. A LI value higher than 0.8 indicates the potential for corrosion.

$$LI = \frac{[Cl^-] + 2 * [SO_4^{2-}]}{[Alk]}$$

The purpose of this assessment was to determine the risk of corrosion for SIX treated water. The LI was slightly above the 0.8 threshold for the GAC treated water (Figure 10), suggesting some degree of aggressivity towards cast iron pipes. The use of SIX under optimised conditions, increased the LI by a factor of 3 in comparison to the GAC treated water, suggesting a high risk of corrosion.

A similar trend was observed for the CSMR, where results increased from 0.4-0.5 for the GAC treated water in comparison to 23-30 for the SIX treated water. The results indicate that SIX treated water will be more aggressive with respect to plumbosolvency than for GAC treated water. A survey in the

USA considering >100 sites countrywide, effectively related increases in the CSMR with risk of concentrations >10 µg/L as lead (Stets et al., 2018), supporting the findings. Furthermore, for an equivalent CSMR, increased anion concentrations also increase lead solubility (Willison and Boyer, 2012). The use of bicarbonate-form resin is proposed as an alternative regenerant to minimise the risk of corrosion, due to the mild inhibiting effect of on corrosion (Nguyen et al., 2011).

Conclusions

The applicability of SIX has been assessed for a lowland river source with high inorganic ion concentration and compared to GAC filtration. The major conclusions of this work are:

- SIX reduced organic matter 15% more on average than GAC and up to up to 30%, mainly because of the increased affinity of IEX towards the 1-0.35 kDa organic matter fraction.
- The SIX process was more robust than GAC to the impact of water quality variability, achieving similar final DOC levels for the duration of the trial. The stability observed for DOC was also seen for THM and HAA formation, with 49 ± 7 µg/L and 34 ± 6 µg/L for THMs and HAAs, respectively. Higher concentrations were observed for GAC treated water, with 70 ± 10 µg/L for THMs and 44 ± 6 µg/L for HAAs.

- Reducing the brine concentration from 50 to 33 g/L as Cl⁻ did not have an impact on organic matter removal or DBP formation, although the removal of nitrate and alkalinity were up to 30% lower.
- A linear correlation between the Br:DOC ratio and the BSF was found for THMs (R²=0.76) and HAAs (R²=0.82), evidencing the relationship between the bromide content of the source and the bromo-DBP formation. This would suggest that the formation of Br-DBPs was not selective to the treatment but attributed to bulk organic matter removal.
- The increase in the LI and CSMR for the SIX treated water presents a risk of corrosion in the distribution network, potentially impacting the solubility of metal from iron and lead pipes.

Next steps of the research include further testing and modelling on the use of bicarbonate as a regenerant.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Anglian Water, who funded and supported the work; Anglian Water Laboratories, for the provision of water analysis; and PWN Technologies, Netherlands, for the technical support throughout the project.

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2021-12

Institute of Water

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Fernandez-Lozano J, Jarvis P, Dunn C, et al., (2021) Feasibility study of suspended ion exchange for organic matter removal and disinfection by-product minimisation in UK lowland waters. Institute of Water Journal, Issue 6, 2021, pp. 4-11