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# Reaction of Perfluorooctanoic Acid with Criegee Intermediates and Implications for the Atmospheric Fate of Perfluorocarboxylic Acids

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*Abstract:* The reaction of perfluorooctanoic acid with the smallest carbonyl oxide Criegee intermediate, CH<sub>2</sub>OO, has been measured and is very rapid, with a rate coefficient of  $(4.9 \pm 0.8) \times 10^{-10}$  cm<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, similar to that for reactions of Criegee intermediates with other organic acids. Evidence is shown for the formation of hydroperoxymethyl perfluorooctanoate as a product. With such a large rate coefficient, reaction with Criegee intermediates can be a substantial contributor to atmospheric removal of perfluorocarboxylic acids. However, the atmospheric fates of the ester product largely regenerate the initial acid reactant. Wet deposition regenerates the perfluorocarboxylic acid via condensed-phase hydrolysis. Gas-phase reaction with OH is expected principally to result in formation of the acid anhydride, which also hydrolyzes to regenerate the acid, although a minor channel could lead to destruction of the perfluorinated backbone.

\*Authors to whom correspondence should be addressed: <u>cataatj@sandia.gov</u> (CAT), <u>D.E.Shallcross@bristol.ac.uk</u> (DES). Perfluorocarboxylic acids (PFCAs) are a class of compounds with the general formula  $C_xF_{2x+1}COOH$  that are ubiquitous in the environment.<sup>1</sup> The smallest member of the series, trifluoroacetic acid (TFA), has both natural and man-made sources.<sup>2</sup> The larger members of the series have no known natural sources and are present in the environment solely as a result of human activities. It has been shown previously that reaction with Criegee Intermediates is an important gas-phase atmospheric fate of trifluoroacetic acid<sup>2</sup> and other organic acids.<sup>3-5</sup> We extend this work by reporting a study of the longer-chain member of the series perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA; C<sub>7</sub>F<sub>15</sub>COOH).

PFOA was used for more than 60 years to provide surface coatings for industrial and consumer products, as a surfactant in fluoropolymer production, and in fire-fighting foams. It is a highly persistent chemical<sup>6</sup> and bioaccumulates in birds,<sup>7</sup> fish,<sup>8</sup> and humans.<sup>9</sup> The Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee of UNEP at its thirteenth meeting<sup>10</sup> recommended to the Conference of the Parties to list PFOA and its salts and PFOA-related compounds in Annex A or B of the Stockholm Convention. The production and use of PFOA was phased-out by the chemical industry in 2015.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to direct industrial emissions, PFCAs arise from the degradation of fluorotelomer alcohols with the generic formula  $F(CF_2)_nCH_2CH_2OH$ , where *n* is an even number.<sup>6, 12, 13</sup> These alcohols are used in oil and water repelling coatings and waxes<sup>13</sup> and have a lifetime of around 20 days, allowing significant hemispheric transportation.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, PFOA and other PFCAs have been observed in terrestrial<sup>14</sup> and aquatic remote environments.<sup>15, 16</sup> Indoor air may contain higher PFOA concentration than that in outdoor air because there is estimated to be 10-20 times higher concentrations of fluorotelomer alcohols in the indoor environment.<sup>17-19</sup>

In the atmosphere it is believed that reaction of PFOA with oxidants such as the OH radical is too slow to be an important loss process. The reaction of PFOA with OH occurs at ambient temperature with a rate coefficient of  $1.7 \times 10^{-13}$  cm<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>,<sup>20</sup> so the lifetime with respect to OH loss would be *ca*. 68 days.<sup>21</sup> Direct photolysis in the troposphere is small because the UV absorption of PFOA is at short wavelength,<sup>22</sup> so wet and dry deposition were believed to be the main removal processes of PFOA. Based on an effective Henry's law coefficient of  $2.46 \times 10^3$  mol L<sup>-1</sup> atm<sup>-1</sup> and a global average dry deposition velocity of 1.9 mm s<sup>-1</sup>, the lifetime of PFOA with respect to wet deposition and dry deposition has been estimated to be 17 and 48 days, respectively,<sup>6</sup> giving an overall lifetime of around 12 days. Recently it has been reported that carbonyl oxide Criegee intermediates (CH<sub>2</sub>OO, CH<sub>3</sub>CHOO and (CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>COO) react at or even above the gas-kinetic limit with organic and inorganic acids.<sup>2-4, 23</sup>

Criegee intermediates (C.I.) are reactive zwitterionic species that are formed during the ozonolysis of alkenes in solution<sup>24, 25</sup> and in the gas phase. In the last few years the gas-phase reactivity of thermalized "stabilized Criegee intermediates" (S.C.I.) with a variety of potential atmospheric co-reactants (e.g. SO<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O and NO<sub>2</sub>) has been determined directly by different research groups, which has been reviewed in several recent papers.<sup>26-30</sup> Preliminary estimates

suggest that levels of some Criegee intermediates can be as high as  $1 \times 10^5$  cm<sup>-3</sup> in indoor<sup>31</sup> and outdoor environments<sup>27, 30, 32</sup> and therefore, if reaction (1) has a rate coefficient similar to those determined for other organic acids<sup>2-4</sup> then it could be a significant or even dominant loss process.

S.C.I. + 
$$C_7F_{15}COOH \rightarrow \text{products}$$
 (1)

In this study the direct determination of the rate coefficient for the reaction of perfluorooctanoic acid with the simplest S.C.I., CH<sub>2</sub>OO, has been made at room temperature and around 4 Torr total pressure. We use the STOCHEM-CRI<sup>33-35</sup> atmospheric chemistry and transport model to investigate reaction (1) as a chemical loss process of PFOA and quantify its significance compared with the other physical and chemical loss processes of PFOA. Reaction (1) is assumed to be an insertion of the S.C.I. into the O-H bond of PFOA as suggested for other carboxylic acids;<sup>3</sup> the atmospheric implications of the product are also discussed.

#### Experiment

The CH<sub>2</sub>OO reaction with PFOA was investigated using the Sandia multiplexed photoionization mass spectrometry apparatus at the Advanced Light Source of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Additional measurements for the rate constant determination were carried out at Sandia National Laboratories using a hydrogen discharge lamp (10.2 eV) for photoionization. The CH<sub>2</sub>OO Criegee intermediate is formed from the reaction of  $O_2$  with •CH<sub>2</sub>I radical, produced by pulsed 351 nm laser photolysis of diiodomethane <sup>36</sup>, and detected by synchrotron photoionization and time-of-flight mass spectrometry (TOF-MS), following the experimental methods of Welz and coworkers.<sup>4, 36, 37</sup> The decay of the resulting CH<sub>2</sub>OO Criegee intermediate is measured as a function of PFOA concentration. The PFOA is delivered in a flow of He that passes through a thermostatically controlled (T = 20 °C / 293.15 K) mixing vessel, a "U-tube" filled with solid PFOA powder ( $\geq$  95%) mixed with sand (quartz sand, 50-70 mesh particle size). The concentration of PFOA in the flow is calculated from the pressure in the mixing vessel and the experimentally determined vapor pressure curves of PFOA.<sup>38, 39</sup> From the literature we estimate uncertainty in PFOA vapor pressure of ~ 5 %. The mixing vessel was held below the temperature in the laboratory where experiments were performed to prevent PFOA condensation downstream. Also, measurements at various PFOA concentrations were performed in a random order and no sign of any "memory effect" was observed, suggesting PFOA adsorption on the delivery system was unimportant under the experimental conditions.

Uncertainties in the individual pseudo-first order rate coefficient determinations are empirically judged to be  $\pm 15\%$  based on repeated measurements at the same concentration of PFOA. The initial concentration of CH<sub>2</sub>OO is estimated as ~  $1-2 \times 10^{11}$  cm<sup>-3</sup>; because of the very fast kinetics of CH<sub>2</sub>OO + PFOA reaction and limitations on the time response of the experimental system, the measurements at the lowest PFOA concentrations do not meet usual criteria for the pseudo-first order limit. The uncertainty at the lowest concentrations is taken to be

correspondingly larger (up to  $\pm$  30%), and that uncertainty is reflected in the overall final rate coefficient determination.

#### Modeling

The Global Chemistry Transport Model, CRI-STOCHEM used in this study has been described in detail elsewhere.<sup>33-35, 40, 41</sup> The S.C.I. concentration was estimated by considering its production through the ozonolysis reactions of the modeled alkenes (ethene, propene, *trans*-but-2-ene, isoprene,  $\alpha$ -pinene,  $\beta$ -pinene) and loss through unimolecular reaction, and the reactions with water and water dimer. The rate constants for the reactions between alkenes and O<sub>3</sub> were taken from the Master Chemical Mechanism (MCM) (http://mcm.leeds.ac.uk/MCM). The rate constants for the loss of S.C.I. with water and water dimer were taken from the literature.<sup>42</sup> Steady state concentrations of S.C.I. ranging from zero to  $6.0 \times 10^5$ , with average of  $1.5 \times 10^4$ cm<sup>-3</sup>, are estimated in our model study.<sup>5, 27</sup> The global distribution of the lifetime of PFOA with respect to the loss by reaction with S.C.I. and the global reduction in lifetime factor of PFOA ((loss by OH + deposition loss)/(loss by OH + deposition loss + loss by S.C.I.) was estimated under the assumption that reactions of all Criegee intermediates with PFOA occur with the same rate coefficient as that determined for  $k_1$  (at least for reactions of organic acids the rate coefficients with stabilized C1 and C2 Criegee intermediates are known to be similar).<sup>4</sup>

#### **Results and Discussion**

#### Kinetics

Figure 1 shows traces of CH<sub>2</sub>OO signals at various PFOA concentrations. An exponential decay is employed to fit the data, and the decay constants are plotted against the PFOA concentration in Figure 2. The linear fit to this plot, weighted by the estimated uncertainties in the individual determinations (with larger uncertainty for the lowest-concentration measurements as described above), returns the second-order rate coefficient for the reaction of CH<sub>2</sub>OO with PFOA,  $k_1 = (4.9 \pm 0.8) \times 10^{-10}$  cm<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> (95% uncertainty bounds). The reactivity of CH<sub>2</sub>OO towards PFOA is similar to that with TFA,<sup>2</sup>  $k = (3.4 \pm 0.3) \times 10^{-10}$  cm<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, and consistent with the general behavior of carbonyl oxides towards organic acids, which shows a strong dependence on the dipole moment of the acid. A structure-activity relationship (SAR) based on a dipole-dipole capture model<sup>3</sup> predicts a rate coefficient of 2.9 × 10<sup>-10</sup> cm<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, about 60% lower than the present experimental measurement, a reasonable level of agreement for the SAR prediction.

The reactions of carbonyl oxides with organic acids are calculated<sup>43, 44</sup> and observed<sup>3</sup> to proceed by insertion to form hydroperoxyesters. Theory shows that this 1,4-insertion is barrierless, resulting in large rate coefficients, as observed experimentally.<sup>43</sup> By analogy, the reaction of CH<sub>2</sub>OO with PFOA should form a hydroperoxymethyl perfluorooctanoate (Scheme I), which we abbreviate to HPMPFO.



Scheme I: hydroperoxymethyl 2,2,3,3,4,4,5,5,6,6,7,7,8,8,8-pentadecafluorooctanoate (HPMPFO)



*Figure 1.* Measured decay of photolytically produced CH<sub>2</sub>OO, detected by 10.2 eV photoionization, for several concentrations of PFOA. Fits to an exponential decay function are shown as the lines.



*Figure 2.* Plot of the pseudo-first order decay constants, acquired from fits as shown in Figure 1, versus the concentration of PFOA. The slope of the fitted line gives the second-order rate coefficient for CH<sub>2</sub>OO removal by PFOA.



*Figure 3.* Time behavior of signals for the CH<sub>2</sub>OO reactant (m/z = 46) and a fragment ion of the product (m/z = 47) of reaction 1.

The HPMPFO product has a mass of 460 amu. A search for product signal around the flight time corresponding to a cation at m/z = 460 was not successful (see Figures S1 and S2); but the fragment protonated carbonyl oxide is observed at m/z = 47, with a rise time corresponding to the decay time of CH<sub>2</sub>OO (Figure 3). The kinetic profile matches that of a stable product; the hydroperoxymethyl esters formed in reactions of Criegee intermediates with other acids have been observed to dissociatively ionize to yield a protonated Criegee intermediate.<sup>3</sup> Photoionization signals at the parent mass for other hydroperoxymethyl esters are often small or unobservable,<sup>3, 4, 45</sup> although the hydroperoxymethyl-2,2,2-trifluoroacetate from CH<sub>2</sub>OO reaction with trifluoroacetic acid does show a parent ion signal.<sup>3</sup> Figure 4 compares the photoionization spectrum of this fragment ion to m/z = 47 fragment ions from hydroperoxymethyl esters formed in several other Criegee intermediate reactions. The similarity in the spectra suggests substantial commonality in the dissociative ionization process of these analogous molecules. The neutral •CH<sub>2</sub>OOH radical is essentially unbound<sup>46, 47</sup> and direct ionization of this species cannot be the source of the stable product spectrum. Moreover, the spectrum is not consistent with direct ionization of the more stable CH<sub>3</sub>OO• radical.<sup>48</sup>



*Figure 4.* Photoionization spectrum for the m/z = 47 fragment ion from the HPMPFO product of reaction 1, compared to spectra for similar products from CH<sub>2</sub>OO reactions with other halogenated acids <sup>3</sup> and the direct photoionization spectrum of the methylperoxy radical <sup>48</sup>.

#### Modeling

Combining the value of  $k_1$  measured here and a global annual average S.C.I. concentration of 1.5 × 10<sup>4</sup> cm<sup>-3</sup> gives a lifetime of PFOA with respect to loss by reaction with S.C.I. of 1.7 days. Given that the global model is likely to underestimate the level of Criegee intermediates, especially in regions of high ozone and high alkene (urban outflow and where high biogenic emissions meet elevated ozone),<sup>49</sup> the impact of reaction (1) as a loss process compared with other loss processes (e.g. loss by OH, wet deposition and dry deposition) could be substantial, reducing its lifetime by more than 90% in high S.C.I. regions (Figure 5). Over much of the Earth the reaction with Criegee intermediates are likely to be the dominant loss process for PFOA and similar perfluorinated carboxylic acids.



*Figure 5.* The reduction in lifetime factor due to the reaction of S.C.I. with PFOA. Reduction in lifetime factor is the ratio of the literature sum of loss processes (loss by OH + deposition loss) to the revised sum of loss processes (loss by OH + deposition loss+ loss by reaction with S.C.I.)

However this rapid loss does not necessarily correspond to permanent removal of PFOA, and assessment of atmospheric consequences demands consideration of the set of possible fates for HPMPFO. The University of Manchester UManSysProp tool,<sup>50</sup> which applies group contribution methods<sup>51, 52</sup> to estimate vapor pressures, predicts the vapor pressure of HPMPFO to be ~ 40 times smaller than that of the PFOA reactant, which may lead to increased nucleation and secondary organic aerosol formation over terrestrial regions.<sup>3</sup> If the product is taken up into atmospheric aqueous phases including cloud, fog and aerosol liquid water, expected to occur on a time scale of approximately 5-15 days,<sup>53</sup> rapid hydrolysis<sup>54</sup> is expected to regenerate PFOA and hydroperoxymethanol or formic acid. The net effect of the reaction would then be largely to accelerate the wet deposition of PFOA and convert the Criegee intermediates into aqueous-phase products. Hydroperoxyesters in general are also expected to be lost from the atmosphere by reaction with OH radicals. Hydrogen abstraction from the OO-H bond would be expected to occur with a rate constant of approximately the value of  $(0.5-1.0) \times 10^{-11}$  cm<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> observed for the analogous reaction with methyl hydroperoxide.<sup>55</sup> Combining this rate constant with  $[OH] = 1 \times$  $10^{6}$  cm<sup>-3</sup> gives an estimate of ~1-2 days for the atmospheric lifetime of HPMPFO with respect to reaction with OH. A rate coefficient of  $k(OH+HPMPFO) = 4.8 \times 10^{-12} \text{ cm}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$  is calculated using the Estimation Programs Interface (EPI) Suite developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency;<sup>56</sup> for this rate coefficient the estimated lifetime against reaction with OH is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days.

Reaction of HPMPFO with OH is conceivably important for PFOA destruction because in the presence of NO it could lead to "unzipping" of the fluorinated alkyl chain by the following mechanism:<sup>12</sup>

$$C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}OOH + OH \rightarrow C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}OO + H_{2}O$$

$$C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}OO + NO \rightarrow C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}O + NO_{2}$$

$$C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}O \rightarrow C_{7}F_{15}C(O)O + HCHO$$

$$C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}O + O_{2} \rightarrow C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCHO + HO_{2}$$

$$C_{7}F_{15}C(O)OCH_{2}O \rightarrow C_{7}F_{15} + CO_{2}$$

$$C_{7}F_{15} + O_{2}/NO/H_{2}O \rightarrow O + O_{2} + HF$$

$$(2)$$

$$(2)$$

$$(2)$$

$$(3)$$

$$(3)$$

$$(4a)$$

$$(4b)$$

However, unless reaction (4a) is substantially more rapid than reaction (4b), the reaction of PFOA with Criegee intermediates will largely form the acid anhydride  $C_7F_{15}C(O)OCHO$ , which will hydrolyze to regenerate PFOA

$$C_7F_{15}C(O)OCHO + H_2O \rightarrow PFOA + HCOOH$$
 (7)

and not initiate atmospheric perfluorocarboxylic acid degradation. Measurements of degradation in the analogous  $CF_3C(O)OCH_3$  system<sup>57</sup> suggest that reaction of the fluoroalkoxy radical with O<sub>2</sub> (4b) will be far more important than dissociation (4a). Further investigation of the reactions of HPMPFO or similar hydroperoxyfluoroesters is required to completely understand the mechanism of atmospheric removal.

The results presented here for PFOA, combined with previous results for TFA, show that reaction with Criegee intermediates is the dominant gas-phase atmospheric fate of perfluorocarboxylic acids over land masses. The concentration of reactive alkenes and hence Criegee intermediates drops off sharply over the ocean and Criegee intermediate chemistry is less important. The reactions of perfluorocarboxylic acids  $C_xF_{2x+1}C(O)OH$  with general Criegee intermediates  $(R_1)(R_2)$ COO, where  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  denote an H atom or a hydrocarbon radical group, produce hydroperoxyfluoroesters of the general formula  $C_xF_{2x+1}C(O)OC(R_1)(R_2)OOH$ . These will in turn be removed by uptake into atmospheric aqueous aerosols and reaction with OH radicals. Uptake into aqueous aerosols will be followed by hydrolysis to reform the perfluorocarboxylic acid,<sup>54</sup> with a net effect the same as direct uptake of the perfluorocarboxylic acid into the aqueous aerosol. However, reaction with OH radicals, expected to occur on a time scale of 1-2 days, will likely lead to regeneration of the gas-phase perfluorocarboxylic acid, with at most a minor contribution from oxidative degradation into CO<sub>2</sub> and HF. As a consequence, reactions with S.C.I. are unlikely to be a substantial overall loss mechanism for gas-phase atmospheric perfluorocarboxylic acids. Further modeling studies are needed to quantify the global impact of such reactions as an atmospheric fate for perfluorocarboxylic acids.

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Supporting Information. Figures S1 and S2.

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