Global Measurement of Nitrous Oxide and its Stable Isotopes Using Cavity Ring-down Spectroscopy

A. Steiker, A. Townsend and J. White

Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR), University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309; 303-492-5495, E-mail: amy.steiker@colorado.edu

Nitrous oxide (N\textsubscript{2}O), a greenhouse gas ~300 times the 100 year global warming potential of CO\textsubscript{2}, is currently increasing at a rate of 0.77 ppbv yr\textsuperscript{-1} (World Meteorological Organization 2010) mainly due to increased microbial production from fertilized agricultural systems (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). Due to the complexity of microorganism processes within soil, the spatiotemporal effects of fertilizer on N\textsubscript{2}O production at a high resolution remain largely unconstrained. Advances in the use of intramolecular, or position-specific, stable isotope techniques (\beta position \textsuperscript{15}N\textsuperscript{14}N\textsuperscript{16}O versus \alpha position \textsuperscript{14}N\textsuperscript{15}N\textsuperscript{16}O) can be a robust tool in order to determine the biological and physical controls over N\textsubscript{2}O emission. Picarro Instruments recently developed a wavelength-scanned cavity ring-down spectrometer coupled with a quantum cascade laser capable of the mid-infrared wavelength detection needed for N\textsubscript{2}O. This technique allows for streamlined simultaneous and continuous measurement of N\textsubscript{2}O concentration, \delta\textsuperscript{15}N\textalpha-N\textsubscript{2}O, and \delta\textsuperscript{15}N\textbeta-N\textsubscript{2}O with measurement uncertainties of < 0.5 ppb and 1.5‰ for mole-fractions and isotopic delta values, respectively. A subset of sites from the NOAA Global Monitoring Division Cooperative Sampling Network is being measured in order to describe the global distribution of N\textsubscript{2}O and its isotopes on a seasonal level. We expect to see a seasonal cycle in N\textsubscript{2}O isotopomers due to stratospheric mixing in the spring of each hemisphere and heightened ocean and soil microbial activity in the summer and fall of each hemisphere.

Figure 1. NOAA Cooperative Air Sampling Network N\textsubscript{2}O isotopic measurements in 2013. Left: bulk \delta\textsuperscript{15}N-N\textsubscript{2}O. Right: Site preference (\delta\textsuperscript{15}N\textalpha-N\textsubscript{2}O - \delta\textsuperscript{15}N\textbeta-N\textsubscript{2}O).