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Source assessment of atmospheric lead measured at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard

A. Bazzano¹, F. Ardini¹, M. Grotti¹, S. Becagli², R. Traversi², R. Udisti², M. Malandrino³ and D. Cappelletti⁴

¹Department of Chemistry and Industrial Chemistry, University of Genoa, 16146, Italy
²Department of Chemistry, University of Florence, 50019, Italy
³Department of Chemistry, University of Torino, 10125, Italy
⁴Department of Chemistry, Biology and Biotechnologies, University of Perugia, 06123, Italy

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Presenting author email: andrea.bazzano@edu.unige.it

The lead isotopic composition of aerosols reaching the polar regions potentially contains valuable information on the source and long-range transport of atmospheric particulate and associated contaminants, which will complement that from meteorological and elemental composition studies.

In the frame of the Italian polar research programmes, size-segregated (PM₁₀) aerosol samples of atmospheric aerosols have been systematically collected at Ny-Ålesund (Svalbard Islands, Norwegian Arctic) in 2010-2014 and analysed for elemental composition and stable lead isotope ratios (²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁷Pb, ²⁰⁸Pb/²⁰⁷Pb), along with other chemical tracers, such as aluminium (crustal marker) and non-sea-salt sulphates (anthropic and marine biogenic marker).

It was found that most of lead reaching Ny-Ålesund is anthropogenic, with a marked seasonality of both the concentration and isotopic signature. For example, lead concentration in summer 2012 decreased by 40% (p<0.01) compared to spring, whereas ²⁰⁸Pb/²⁰⁶Pb moved from 2.107±0.004 to 2.090±0.009 (p=6.0×10⁻⁶). The same trend was found for the non-sea-salt sulphates, mainly from anthropic sources.

By comparing the measured isotopic ratios to literature data (Figure 1), the atmospheric lead reaching the Arctic during spring could be related to inputs from eastern Eurasia, whereas North America was the major source of atmospheric lead during the summer.

This change was likely due to the quick, recurring transition from spring to summer in the Arctic atmospheric circulation, leading to a shift in the pattern of the source regions of the aerosol. The source assessment was confirmed by the back-trajectory analysis of air masses (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of cluster analysis of monthly back-trajectories (BTs). Values are the percentage of BTs represented by the cluster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>Jul</th>
<th>Aug</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Europe</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eurasia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenland, Iceland</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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