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New “Green” Biocide Delivery System for Cooling Systems

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## Background



Cooling Towers at a Public School  
by fresh water shortages, increased water and sewer charges, and stricter environmental regulation. The uncontrolled growth of microorganisms in cooling water causes severe problems related to increased risk of Legionnaires disease, plugging due to physical blockage of cooling water passages, accelerated corrosion under biological masses, and reduced heat exchanger efficiency due to biofouling of surfaces.

Due to purchase and operating economics, "wet" cooling towers are the technology of choice for commercial and industrial cooling systems as water is the best material for both transfer of heat and evaporative cooling. One drawback is that such use presents a biological control problem as warm water, with dissolved and suspended solids present, is an excellent medium for growth of microorganisms. Growth of microorganisms in cooling water is further encouraged by use of reclaimed wastewaters as makeup and increased cooling tower cycles of concentration, current trends which are being driven

### Present Practice – Health and Safety

Current cooling water biological control technology depends upon various toxic, hazardous chemicals such as chlorine, ozone, chlorine dioxide, dithiocarbamate, isothiazolin, hydantoin, and glutaraldehyde; commonly termed "biocides". While these biocides are often quite effective, their use represents substantial environmental, health, and safety concerns as there are over 300,000 cooling towers in the United States using an estimated 40 million pounds of such chemicals on an annual basis. Use of toxic biocides is basically everywhere as cooling towers are found throughout our country; in neighborhoods, towns, and cities. In addition to typical industrial installations; cooling towers are commonly found at hospitals, hotels, grocery stores, office buildings, warehouses, apartment buildings, schools, colleges, and retirement homes; basically, anywhere air conditioning or process cooling is needed.

Gas form oxidizing biocides such as chlorine, chlorine dioxide, and ozone; present a serious safety issue as low water solubility, reagent spills, and leakage can result in exposure of workers to toxic levels of the gas and explosion hazards. Liquid oxidizers, such as sodium hypochlorite and n,n,dibromosulfamate, are corrosive and reactive, exposing workers to chemical burns, toxic gas evolution, and explosion hazards. Solid oxidizers, such as hydantoin, are quite reactive and can explode when mixed with many organic materials, such as sawdust or even flour.

Chlorine gas is commonly used in larger cooling water applications due to its low cost and is thus present on site in large amounts, often 1 ton cylinders. This chemical is extremely toxic in the gas form and, if released in such larger amounts, represents a major risk for fatalities and serious injury within both the using facility and the surrounding community.

The non-oxidizing biocides in common use represent a substantial worker hazard due to toxicity, with several of the products being readily absorbed through the skin. The following table summarizes some relevant toxicity data on five chemicals commonly used as cooling water biocides.

Chemical Product	CAS Number	Acute oral toxicity, rat LD 50
glutaraldehyde	111-30-8	134 mg/kg
isothiazolin	26172-55-4	57.2 mg/kg
dithiocarbamate	142-59-6	395 mg/kg
bromochlorohydantoin	32718-18-6	877 mg/kg
dibromo propionamide	10222-10-2	308 mg/kg

Smaller users, the vast majority of cooling tower users, represent a special worker safety concern since cooling water treatment, and application of biocides, is often the responsibility of workers not trained in handling of toxic chemicals. A non-hazardous biocide technology would completely eliminate these concerns.

### Environmental Considerations

The widespread transport, storage, and use of biocides presents many opportunities for accidents which would result in release of these products into the environment with generally severe results. Both oxidizers and non-oxidizers are extremely toxic to most aquatic life and even small product spills and leaks can produce catastrophic effects. The following table summarizes some aquatic toxicity data for several commercial cooling water biocides along with the typical cooling water dosage range.

Biocide Product	CAS	LC 50 aquatic toxicity	Typical Dosage
glutaraldehyde 25%	111-30-8	rainbow trout	56.2 ppm
		daphnia	16.9 ppm
isothiazolin 1.5%	26172-55-4	rainbow trout	0.14 ppm
		daphnia	0.13 ppm
dithiocarbamate 30%	142-59-6	rainbow trout	0.10 ppm
bromochlorohydantoin 98%	32719-18-6	rainbow trout	0.42 ppm
dibromo propionamide 20%	10222-10-2	rainbow trout	2.3 ppm
polyquat 20%	7173-51-5	bluegill sunfish	1.6 ppm
		daphnia	0.47 ppm

Cooling towers, being basically evaporative coolers with about 80% of the input heat load being removed by evaporation, increase cooling water solids content rapidly with the result that routine blowdown is required to prevent scale formation. Typically, operating at four cycles of concentration, a cooling tower will evaporate 2,655 gpd and blowdown 885 gpd per 100 tons of thermal load. This blowdown has been recognized as a substantial source of highly toxic chemical input to the environment dependent upon the biocide(s) and discharge treatment in use. We are aware of several cases where environmental agencies have either banned the use of, or required treatment for, various biocides for direct stream discharge of blowdown. In the case of a smaller POTW and a large blowdown discharge, the POTW mixed liquor bio mass could be easily wiped out by the biocide content of the blowdown.

Since most non-oxidizing biocides are both long lived and/or difficult to destroy, oxidizing biocides, which can be easily destroyed by addition of a reducing reagent to the blowdown stream, are preferred from the standpoint of minimizing the environmental impact of cooling tower blowdown. Oxidizing biocides, however, still present significant hazards during transport, storage, and use.

Bromine, an oxidizing biocide, in its various delivery methods has been recognized as a superior cooling water biocide for many years. Unfortunately the delivery methods all suffer from the same environmental, health, and safety issues as other oxidizers as well as simple higher cost. Use of on-site electrolysis to make aqueous electrolytic bromine is appealing as sodium bromide solutions are non-hazardous and relatively low cost, while the electrolysis process is time proven, having been used for industrial production of both chlorine and bromine for over a hundred years. Problems with existing electrolysis technology for manufacture of aqueous electrolytic bromine are mainly economic in that platinum plated titanium is used in construction of the electrolysis cells which operate with a typical bromide to bromine conversion efficiency of just 35%.

### “Green” Biocide Delivery System

Given the advantages of bromine use for cooling water biological control, a project was started in 2001 to devise a cost effective electrolysis based delivery technology to make aqueous electrolytic bromine on-site, an initial patent application was filed in May, 2002.

This work resulted in development of a new delivery technology to produce aqueous electrolytic



Containerless Graphite Electrolysis Cell

bromine on-site from a non-hazardous precursor bromide salt solution. The process is based on a unique containerless electrolytic cell constructed of impregnated electrolytic graphite, **which is much lower cost than existing electrolysis cells.** A second innovation is use of a mixed solution of sodium bromide and chloride salts to obtain an 85+% conversion of bromide ion to bromine. Both liquid and solid mixed precursor salt products have been registered with the USEPA as biocides and the electrolytic units are manufactured in a USEPA registered facility. The toxicities of the two salts used in the electrolysis process, sodium bromide at 3500 mg/kg and sodium chloride (table salt) at 3000 mg/kg, are lower than any other biocide.

As the electrolytic bromine solution produced by the process is made "as needed" and immediately fed into the cooling tower water, there is essentially no worker exposure to the material, minimizing health and safety risks.

To put the potential toxicity hazard of the produced electrolytic bromine solution into a common prospective, household bleach is a highly alkaline, pH > 13.5, 5% sodium hypochlorite solution,

the active product produced by the electrolysis process is a mildly alkaline, pH < 10.0, 0.8% aqueous bromine solution. At the design 0.8% oxidizer content, the output of the electrolysis cell is below the hazardous designation level of 1.0% for oxidizers as established by OSHA.

The recommended dose of electrolytic bromine for typical cooling waters is 0.5 to 1.0 mg/l measured as total bromine. Following a dose, the bromine degrades to harmless bromide ion, often in as little as one to two hours. Many cooling tower controllers can be programmed to “lock out” blowdown during, and for a set time after, a biocide feed event. By proper programming of the cooling tower controller, any discharge of electrolytic bromine in cooling water blowdown can oftentimes be avoided. In some cooling systems, due to makeup water characteristics or specific thermal requirements, it may be impossible to lock out blowdown for the required time to degrade the electrolytic bromine, in which case an appropriate feed of a reducing agent, such as sodium sulfite, into the blowdown can be used to destroy the residual biocide.

Considering that typical sanitary wastewater is highly reducing, discharge of electrolytic bromine treated cooling water blowdown to sanitary sewers is not expected to present any problem unless the blowdown flow is a very significant portion of the total flow to the receiving POTW.

**Economics**

Capital cost for the new electrolytic bromine units is generally about 30% of the cost of equal capacity units based upon containerized, platinum plated titanium electrode technology. For cooling water biocide use, we have commercialized units in outputs ranging from 1 to 30 lb/day as bromine. A one (1) pound a day unit would usually be suitable for cooling towers with a thermal capacity up to 500 tons and cost about \$1300. A thirty (30) pound a day unit is currently in service at a 90 MW power station, approximately 15,000 tons thermal load, with a selling price of \$22,000.

Comparison of the cost to operate the new electrolysis process, as shown in the following table for a cooling tower in terms of \$/1000 gallons of cooling water treated, shows that it provides a substantial operating cost reduction over many commonly used biocides.

Product	Dose – mg/l	lb/1000 gallons	\$/lb product	\$/1000 gallon
30% carbamate	50	0.42	2.30	0.97
98% hydantoin	24	0.20	3.90	0.78
20% dibromo propionamide	37.5	0.31	3.30	1.02
1.5% isothiazolin	127	1.06	3.25	3.44
15% glutaraldehyde	227.5	1.90	2.45	4.66
electrolytic bromine	28 *	0.23	1.05	0.24

\* as liquid precursor, 12.7% Br

Power cost to operate the electrolytic process is minor, at \$0.10/kwh the power cost calculates as \$0.17/lb bromine, or \$0.04/1000 gallons cooling water treated, jumping the total cost to \$0.28.

## Proven Technology



30 lb/day Bromine Output Unit

Given the environmental, health, and safety hazards presented by current biocide technology and the proven advantages of the new electrolysis process, we expect that electrolytic bromine will eventually become the biocide of choice.

Shown at left is a 1 lb/day bromine output unit, note the separate power supply, electrolysis cell, and salt solution delivery pump.

Following six (6) months of field trials, the first commercial electrolysis process units were installed in June, 2003, and have proven to be a cost effective, reliable means of controlling the growth of microorganisms in cooling waters. The first three units installed, all in Pennsylvania, are currently operational.

Three papers have been presented to date on this new biocide delivery technology, the first at the Cooling Technology Institute in February, 2004, the second at the International Water Conference in October, 2004, and the third at the Association of Water Technologies, September, 2005. In particular, the International Water Conference paper reports upon a one year demonstration where chlorine gas use as a biocide was totally replaced by electrolytic bromine at an 1100 MW power station. Of great interest was that the operating cost for this installation, using separate salt solution feeds, was determined to be the same as chlorine gas, making the electrolysis process a very economical alternative technology.



Copies of this paper, and other referenced material, can be down loaded from the ProChemTech web site – [www.prochemtech.com](http://www.prochemtech.com)

The electrolytic bromine process discussed is patent pending and has been commercialized under the trademark names ElectroBrom and MiniBrom by ProChemTech International, Inc.