On the origin of $^{129}$I in rain water near Zürich

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(Received March 8, 2001; accepted in revised form May 15, 2001)

I-129 / Sellafield / La Hague / $^{129}$I / Atmospheric transport

Summary. $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation at Dübendorf/Zürich, Switzerland, have been determined with monthly resolution for almost three years in the mid 1990s. The results confirm that annual mean $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation in central Europe have remained about constant since the late 1980s. Liquid and gaseous emissions from the nuclear fuel reprocessing plants at Sellafield and La Hague are discussed as the only possible sources of $^{129}$I in precipitation in central Europe. Based on an upper limit estimate for iodine transferred from the sea to the atmosphere, the gaseous discharges constitute the potentially bigger $^{129}$I reservoir for precipitation. Moreover, the time dependence of the annual gaseous $^{129}$I releases from Sellafield and La Hague correlates much better with the $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation in central Europe since the late 1980s than does the time dependence of the liquid emissions from these sites. At monthly resolution, the $^{129}$I concentrations in the precipitation samples close to Zürich exhibit a large variability. A meteorological transport analysis was carried out for four selected months with particularly low or high observed $^{129}$I concentrations. It was found that meteorological transport alone, based upon assimilated wind fields and observed precipitation values, can not directly account for the large month-to-month variability.

1. Introduction

$^{129}$I is a long-lived ($T_{1/2} = 15.7$ Ma) radionuclide whose abundances in the environment have been elevated by several orders of magnitude by human action. The main sources of the prenuclear $^{129}$I inventory are spontaneous fission of uranium in the lithosphere and interaction of cosmic ray particles with xenon in the upper atmosphere. The prenuclear clear equilibrium $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratio in the surface hydrosphere has been determined from measurements of recent prenuclear marine sediments at levels around $1.5 \times 10^{-12}$ [1]. This prenuclear ratio has been drastically enhanced due to the anthropogenic emissions primarily from nuclear fuel reprocessing plants, which are discussed in detail below. A review of modern $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratios in the environment is given by Schmidt et al. [2]. Here, only the nearly continuous increase of $^{129}$I concentrations in an ice core from the Swiss Alps from 1950 to 1986 is mentioned [3, 4]. A calculated mean $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratio for the years 1983 to 1986 for that ice core is as high as $5 \times 10^{-5}$ assuming an iodine content of 1.75 $\mu$g/kg, a mean concentration calculated for precipitation in southern Germany (see below). When these data from a high altitude sampling site are compared to data from Bachhuber and Bunzl [5] for rain in Bavaria/Germany 1988/89 with $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratios from $6.2 \times 10^{-7}$ to $9.6 \times 10^{-7}$, a further dramatic increase can be seen. Then, the environmental $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratios in central Europe seem to have remained stable in the early 1990s [6, 7]. In spite of the fact that all these $^{129}$I abundances far away from the emission sources are not seen as radiologically hazardous to people, a detailed observation of the trends of $^{129}$I concentrations in Europe is considered necessary. This necessity has become even more important due to the fact that one of the main sources of $^{129}$I releases into the environment in the 1980s – the nuclear fuel reprocessing facility in La Hague – has increased its liquid discharges of $^{129}$I into the English Channel drastically after 1988 [8] whereas the liquid releases from Sellafield were increased much less from 1988 to 1996 [9, 10]. Moreover, as shown in detail below, both reprocessing plants continue with their $^{129}$I discharges at a very high level.

The equilibrium mass of naturally produced mobile $^{129}$I in the compartments atmosphere, biosphere, and hydrosphere was estimated at 260 kg [11]. This reservoir was enlarged by atmospheric nuclear weapons tests. For these releases, $^{129}$I masses of 50 kg [12], 80 kg ([13, 14]) or 150 kg ([13, 15]) are published. Eisenbud and Gesell [13] give 1.9 GBq $^{129}$I emissions per megaton atmospheric bombs. For the yields of atmospheric bomb tests, the estimates vary from 276 megatons [14] to 547 megatons [15]. The Chernobyl accident gave only rise to an atmospheric emission of 1.3 kg $^{129}$I [16]. In contrast, Hanford (nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in the north-western USA) emitted from 1944 to 1972 around 260 kg $^{129}$I into the atmosphere [17] with high peak emissions in the mid 1940s to early 1950s.
when in the early part of that period the gaseous emissions did not pass a filter. The largest additions to the mobile 129I reservoir have been due to the liquid releases of the reprocessing plants at Sellafield (approximately 720 kg from 1961–1997) [8, 10] and at La Hague (approximately 1310 kg from 1966 to 1996) [18]. Compared to these releases the gaseous discharges into the atmosphere of the two sites are relatively small, with approximately 160 kg from Sellafield (1952 to 1999 without 1993) [9, 10] and 58 kg from La Hague (1966 to 1996) [18]. However, it has to be mentioned that the gaseous amount released from Sellafield is only roughly known because of large uncertainties in the emission data for the 1950s [9]. Some important emission and immision data for 129I are illustrated in Fig. 1. Although from the sum of all these releases 129I/127I ratios of only approximately 3 × 10⁻¹¹ would be expected if total mixing of the mobile reservoirs of both isotopes took place, the elevating effect on the iodine isotopic ratio is around 5 to 6 orders of magnitude mainly due to the fact that the deep sea, which constitutes the main mobile 127I reservoir has not yet equilibrated with the anthropogenic 129I emissions [19].

The main goals of the present work are to test the constancy of 129I concentrations in central European rains in the 1990s, and to strengthen the scarce data base of modern 129I concentrations in central Europe. Likely reasons for the large month-to-month variability of the 129I concentrations in precipitation close to Zürich were investigated by applying a detailed meteorological transport analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The radionuclide concentrations of 129I determined in the rain water samples are shown in Table 1. A large scatter in monthly data is observed. Similar variations have also been measured by Krupp and Aumann for rainfall in Germany [22] and at a shorter time resolution by Lopez-Gutierrez et al. for rain in southern Spain [24]. A possible reason for this scatter will be discussed in connection with the application of a meteorological transport model below. The mass-weighted annual mean concentrations of 129I are compared to literature data for central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s in Table 2.

Mass-weighted average relative standard deviations (one sigma) for the annual 129I concentrations at Dübendorf range from 3.7% to 4.3%. Because the original 127I concentration of the rain was not analyzed, an estimate of the inherent 129I/127I ratio of the samples should be based on an assumption of the 127I concentration. The compilation of Fuge and Johnson [25] gives a range from 0.5 to 10 µg/kg I in rain, whereas from the data from Krupp and Aumann [22] an average concentration of 2 µg/kg can be calculated for southern Germany, compared to about 1.5 µg/kg for a site in Bavaria calculated from the data of Bachhuber and Bunzl [5]. Consequently, the ratio of the samples analyzed. Moran et al. [26] determined 1.7 µg/kg as median iodine concentration of precipitation samples in the US. The mass-weighted means for the inherent 129I/127I ratios are: 3.8 × 10⁻⁷ for 1994, 3.2 × 10⁻⁷ for 1995 and 4.0 × 10⁻⁷ for
On the origin of $^{129}$I in rain water near Zürich

Table 1. $^{129}$I atom concentrations in water samples from Dübendorf/Zürich, Switzerland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>$^{129}$I [10$^6$/kg]</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>$^{129}$I [10$^6$/kg]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 1994</td>
<td>3.60 ± 0.18</td>
<td>June 1995</td>
<td>26.1 ± 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1994</td>
<td>17.3 ± 0.87</td>
<td>July 1995</td>
<td>16.3 ± 0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1994</td>
<td>359 ± 12</td>
<td>August 1995</td>
<td>26.9 ± 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1994</td>
<td>37.3 ± 1.3</td>
<td>September 1995</td>
<td>10.1 ± 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1994</td>
<td>2.16 ± 0.11</td>
<td>August 1996</td>
<td>5.35 ± 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1994</td>
<td>4.97 ± 0.61</td>
<td>September 1996</td>
<td>14.9 ± 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1994</td>
<td>127 ± 5</td>
<td>October 1996</td>
<td>52.0 ± 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1994</td>
<td>22.9 ± 0.9</td>
<td>November 1996</td>
<td>39.8 ± 0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1994</td>
<td>2.42 ± 0.11</td>
<td>December 1996</td>
<td>7.45 ± 0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1994</td>
<td>5.99 ± 0.35</td>
<td>January 1997</td>
<td>70.4 ± 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1995</td>
<td>6.94 ± 0.47</td>
<td>February 1997</td>
<td>25.4 ± 2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1995</td>
<td>29.5 ± 0.1</td>
<td>March 1997</td>
<td>92.8 ± 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1995</td>
<td>12.9 ± 0.7</td>
<td>May 1997</td>
<td>445 ± 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1995</td>
<td>103 ± 4</td>
<td>June 1997</td>
<td>22.2 ± 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1995</td>
<td>41.5 ± 1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. $^{129}$I atom concentrations in precipitation in central Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location, year</th>
<th>$^{129}$I [10$^6$/kg]</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bavaria 1988</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavaria 1989</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dübendorf/Zürich 1994</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>[This work]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dübendorf/Zürich 1995</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>[This work]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dübendorf/Zürich 1996/97</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>[This work]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Germany (3 locations) 1995</td>
<td>60.7–88.7</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Saxony open-field inland 1997</td>
<td>20–52</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Saxony open-field inland 1998</td>
<td>33–49</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Saxony open-field inland 1999 (Jan–Jun)</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1996/97, with relative standard deviations of about 4% for each ratio.

These annual mean isotopic ratios are of the same order of magnitude but slightly lower than those determined by Krupp and Aumann [22] for rain in southern Germany in 1995 (6.9 × 10$^{-2}$ to 9.7 × 10$^{-2}$) and those by Bachhuber and Bunzl [5] for rain in Bavaria in 1988 and 1989 (6.2 × 10$^{-2}$ to 9.6 × 10$^{-2}$). Szidat et al. [7] determined mean $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratios for open-field rain at different inland locations in northern Germany (1997/98) from 3.6 × 10$^{-2}$ to 6.6 × 10$^{-2}$. The statement by Szidat et al. [6, 7] that the $^{129}$I/$^{127}$I ratio has not increased further since the late 1980s thus seems to be confirmed by this work, within the uncertainties of our measurement.

Whereas the inherent isotopic ratios of this work can only be estimated, the annual deposition rates for $^{129}$I in mBq m$^{-2}$ a$^{-1}$ can be calculated. In Table 3 the results are compared to the data from Krupp and Aumann [22], Bachhuber and Bunzl [5], and Szidat et al. [7], respectively. However, it has to be mentioned that we scaled up the annual deposition rates of this work from the e.g. 10 months of sampling to the complete year. Therefore it is very difficult to estimate standard deviations for these data. The decrease in the annual deposition rates for Dübendorf only reflects less precipitation in the months for which samples in 1996/97 were taken compared to 1994/95. This becomes obvious from the comparison of the average annual $^{129}$I concentrations in Table 2. For the deposition rates calculated by Wagner [4],

Table 3. Annual deposition rates of $^{129}$I in precipitation in mBq m$^{-2}$ a$^{-1}$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deposition rate</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiescherhorn, Switzerland</td>
<td>1983–86</td>
<td>0.6–0.9</td>
<td>[4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mappenberg, Bavaria</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mappenberg, Bavaria</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Germany</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5.8–10.6</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dübendorf near Zürich</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>This work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dübendorf near Zürich</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>This work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dübendorf near Zürich</td>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>This work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Saxony (inland), Germany</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1.8–5.7</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Saxony (inland), Germany</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3.9–6.6</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Saxony (inland), Germany</td>
<td>1999 (Jan–Jun)</td>
<td>1.9–3.4</td>
<td>(calculated from first 6 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
it has to be mentioned that they may be too low due to wind erosion at the high Alpine sampling site and also due to the loss of some organic iodine compounds (see above).

As stated above, the chemical procedure of this work ensures the analysis of all iodine species, whereas for instance a technique using ion exchange without previous destruction of organic iodine compounds will lead to $^{129}\text{I}$ concentrations that are too low. In order to estimate the part of $^{129}\text{I}$ that is present in organic compounds in rain, the sample of November 1996 was divided into two subsamples. One of these subsamples was treated in the way described above whereas the second one was subjected to anion exchange as described by Wagner et al. [3]. A first estimate of the part of $^{129}\text{I}$ present in organic compounds in rain water close to Zürich is 15%. Of course more analyses are necessary to confirm this number. Our first result is by far lower than the results obtained by Krupp and Aumann [22] of 37 to 56% organic $^{129}\text{I}$ in rain in southern Germany.

The distribution of liquid $^{129}\text{I}$ discharges from the two major European reprocessing plants has been investigated by Raisbeck et al. (e.g. [8, 12]). They found $^{129}\text{I}$ from these emissions in the Kara Sea and proposed $^{129}\text{I}$ as tracer for deep water formation in the North Atlantic [27]. The drastic increase in liquid $^{129}\text{I}$ emissions from La Hague from 1988 to 1995 was observed in Utsira (southern Norway) without delay at a time resolution of one year [8]. Whereas these authors found as early as 1984 $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratios up to $10^{-5}$ in the English Channel they determined isotopic ratios from 3 to $5 \times 10^{-5}$ as late as 1991 and 1993 in the central North Sea and close to southern Norway [12]. In contrast to these relatively low isotopic ratios, Szidat et al. [7, 28] found $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratios of about $1.5 \times 10^{-6}$ in sea water near Cuxhaven (close to the coast of the German Bay) in 1999 and 2000. Because the liquid emissions from La Hague and Sellafield exceeded their direct atmospheric emissions by around a factor of 20 from 1988 to 1995 [9, 10, 18] some authors assumed that the transfer of $^{129}\text{I}$ from the sea into the atmosphere constitutes the dominating source of $^{129}\text{I}$ for the precipitation in central Europe [22]. The other possibility is that the gaseous $^{129}\text{I}$ releases are the most important sources for $^{129}\text{I}$ in central European precipitation. Examples of gaseous $^{129}\text{I}$ emissions dominating $^{129}\text{I}$ in environmental samples are mosses downwind the Sellafield plant analyzed by Rucklidge et al. [29]. Later, Moran et al. stated that $^{129}\text{I}$ in some environmental samples in the United States was the result of the gaseous discharges from Sellafield and La Hague [26]. In the same paper these authors estimated the global mass of $^{129}\text{I}$ transferred annually from the sea into the atmosphere at only 20 g. Moran et al. also proved atmospheric emissions of the Savannah River plant as the $^{129}\text{I}$ source for some environmental samples in the Southeast of the United States [30].

The amount of iodine that is transferred annually from the sea to the atmosphere is not known exactly. Reifenhäuser and Heumann [31] determined $8 \times 10^7\text{kg}$ as annual mass that enters the atmosphere globally as methyl iodide derived from measurements in Antarctica. The highest value for the global annual transfer of methyl iodide with $1.3 \times 10^9\text{kg}$ was obtained by Rasmussen et al. [32] whose data included regions of relatively high biological activity. These authors stated that the major part of the methyl iodide globally and annually transferred to the atmosphere, $1.0 \times 10^7\text{kg}$, is transferred at regions of high biological activity that amount to only 10% of the global marine surface. Below we will treat the North Sea as a biologically active region and use Rasmussen’s data to estimate the mass of $^{129}\text{I}$ annually transferred from the sea to the atmosphere. Treating the North Sea and the English Channel as areas of high biological activity may justify neglect of the transfer of iodine compounds other than methyl iodide.

### 3.1 Relative contributions of liquid and gaseous $^{129}\text{I}$ emissions

The answer to the question whether liquid or gaseous releases dominate the $^{129}\text{I}$ concentrations in precipitation in central Europe is of general interest in the near future because the time dependence of these two types of emissions has been quite different (see below).

Investigations into the following four questions may help solve the above puzzle: 1) Are the $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratios in the North Sea and in the English Channel sufficient to explain iodine isotopic ratios in the precipitation in central Europe? 2) Is the amount of $^{129}\text{I}$ that is transferred from the sea to the atmosphere with a sufficiently high $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratio enough for the precipitation in central Europe and how does this amount compare to the mass of $^{129}\text{I}$ directly released into the atmosphere? 3) Do the $^{129}\text{I}$ concentrations in precipitation in central Europe correlate better with the time dependence of the liquid or that one of the gaseous emissions of the two reprocessing plants? 4) Can the large scatter in monthly $^{129}\text{I}$ concentrations be explained by different source regions of the air masses especially at the days with precipitation during the respective months?

The first question cannot be answered unambiguously. If one took the isotopic ratios determined by Raisbeck et al. [12] as late as 1991 and 1993 in the central North Sea and close to southern Norway as representative, the North Sea could not be the dominant source of $^{129}\text{I}$ in precipitation. Consequently, a substantial, if not dominant, contribution from the gaseous releases would be needed to reach an $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratio of about $5 \times 10^{-7}$. However, if the iodine isotopic ratios in the early 1990s were already as high as determined by Szidat et al. in the late 1990s close to Cuxhaven [7], $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratios and $^{129}\text{I}$ concentrations in precipitation could be explained with a marine input alone. Because the sea water flow from the English Channel into the North Sea is dominated by currents close to the coast and neither sea water nor seaweed samples close to the Dutch and German coast from the end of the 1980s and begin of the 1990s have been analyzed, an attempt to estimate the $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratios in that region should be worthwhile especially because it should constitute a zone of relatively high biological activity also due to large flat tidal areas. An easy attempt to carry out this task is to take the coastal sample from that time period that is closest to that region and scale it using a transport model. This sample is the sample No.11 close to Gravelines, where $3.1 \times 10^{-7}$ as $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratio was found in 1991. For scaling, the ratio of the isotopic ratios between the respective boxes (Nos. 105 and 109) of the box model from Nielsen [33] as applied by Szidat [28] is taken yielding in an $^{129}\text{I}/^{127}\text{I}$ ratio of $1.6 \times 10^{-7}$ for the northern
Dutch and German coastal area. Other possibilities as to
scale up the results from Raisbeck et al. [8] for the seaweed
samples at Utsira (southern Norway) to that region close to
the Dutch and German coast are considered much more
complicated due to the effect of water masses passing re-
gions of very different depths and will not be carried out
here. So we estimate ratios higher than those determined by
Raisbeck in the central North Sea [12] but lower by about
factor of 3 than the ratios needed to explain 129I/127I ratios
in precipitation in central Europe for the northern Dutch
and German coastal regions. For the Belgian and western
Dutch coastal region, the experimental result of 3.1 × 10^{-7}
for 129I/127I at Gravelines [12] is taken as an upper limit for
the begin of the 1990s, which is around a factor of 2 lower
than the isotopic ratio needed.

Below we want to use these estimates to determine
the sea surface that could give rise to the transfer of an
129I/127I ratio of 5 × 10^{-7} to the atmosphere in the early
1990s. The underlying areas in the English Channel and
coastal regions of the North Sea are shown in Fig. 2. As
described above, 1.6 × 10^{-7} is used as 129I/127I ratio for area
IV of 19 000 km² and 3.1 × 10^{-7} is used for area III which
amounts to 18 000 km². Based on the measurements of Rais-
beck et al. [12] we used 2.5 × 10^{-6} as 129I/127I ratio for area I
(5000 km²) and 5 × 10^{-7} for the 29 000 km² of area II. A sea
surface of 70 000 km² with an isotopic ratio of 5 × 10^{-7}
in the early 1990s affected by liquid emissions from La Hague
is the result of our calculation.

Because the marine discharges from La Hague amounted
to 73% of the total liquid emissions of the two reprocessing
plants from 1988–1992 [8, 18], this area may be scaled up
to 96 000 km² to include areas of the Irish Sea affected by
liquid emissions from Sellafield. Furthermore, an 129I/127I
ratio of 5 × 10^{-7} is considered a lower limit for the iodine
isotopic ratio in precipitation in the early 1990s in central
Europe. For the iodine flux from the sea to the atmosphere,
the publication of Rasmussen et al. [32] is used as basis.
These authors give a flux of 1 × 10^{-9} kg I/a from areas of
high biological activity that amount to only 10% of the
global sea surface, i.e. 3.5 × 10^7 km². Using that flux dens-
ity of 28.6 kg I/km², the affected sea surface of 96 000 km²
calculated above and an isotopic ratio of 5 × 10^{-7}, 1.37 kg
129I are estimated as an upper limit for the mass annually
transferred from the affected sea area. We would like to em-
phasize that we treated the whole area in Fig. 2 as well as
a region in the Irish Sea as regions of high biological ac-
tivity. For the precipitation in central Europe about 760 g
129I per year are needed, when an area of 10^6 km² and an
annual deposition rate of 5 mBq m^{-2} a^{-1} are used as basis.
For a more reliable estimate, the iodine transfer in the North
Sea and the English Channel itself has to be studied. Nev-
evertheless, about 6.5 kg 129I [9, 10, 18] emitted annually from
Sellafield and La Hague to the atmosphere from 1991 to
1996 (without 1993 for which we have no data for Sellafield)
can preliminarily be compared to this 1.37 kg. Based on this
comparison, it is very likely that the gaseous emissions do
contribute substantially to the precipitation in central Eu-
rope even when the large uncertainties of the comparison
are taken into account. It is emphasized again that a more
precise determination of the transfer factor for iodine from
the sea to the atmosphere at the location of interest itself
is needed to better estimate the relative contributions of li-
quid and gaseous discharges to the precipitation in central
Europe.

To answer the third question about the correlation of the
time dependences of gaseous and liquid 129I emissions
with the 129I concentrations in precipitation in central Europe
since 1988 the respective data are plotted in Fig. 3. In that
figure, 129I concentrations in precipitation as well as both
types of releases are normalized to their respective values
in 1988. The liquid discharges were enhanced by a factor
of 6.4 from 1988 to 1996. This increase has been observed,
as stated above, in seaweed samples at the coast of south-
ern Norway [8]. In contrast to this the gaseous emissions from Sellafield and La Hague remained approximately constant during that period and exhibited only an increase by a factor of 1.4 from 1988 to 1996 [9, 10, 18]. The $^{129}$I concentrations determined in central Europe since 1988 show only a weak, if any, time dependence. Consequently, the $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation are in much better agreement with the time dependence of the gaseous emissions of the two reprocessing plants than with their liquid releases.

The month-to-month variations in $^{129}$I concentrations (cf. Table 1) might be related to differences in the source regions and atmospheric transport conditions of the air masses that lead to the sampled precipitation close to Zürich. For instance, large monthly $^{129}$I concentrations might be a consequence of many rain events during the months with advection directly from La Hague or from Sellafield and with no or only a few rain events with transport from a different source region which would dilute the measured $^{129}$I precipitation concentrations. Additionally for the air masses advected from the La Hague/Sellafield region it is important that no (or little) precipitation occurs before they reach the measurement site. On the other hand, low monthly $^{129}$I concentrations can be expected when the air mass advection is not from the La Hague/Sellafield region on rainy days in Zürich, or when the air parcels have lost their $^{129}$I atoms due to wet scavenging on their way to central Europe, or when significant dilution occurs from rain events with other source regions.

In order to test the influence of atmospheric transport, three-dimensional assimilated wind fields from the European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecast (ECMWF) are used to calculate backward trajectories [34] for two high $^{129}$I months May 1994 (9405) and May 1997 (9705), and two low $^{129}$I months November 1994 (9411) and December 1996 (9612). The wind fields are globally available every 6 hours on a latitude/longitude grid with a horizontal resolution of 1 degree and on 31 vertical levels (therefrom about 14 in the lowest 5 km). Note that assimilated data constitute a “sophisticated combination” of a short-range numerical model forecast and all globally available surface and upper-air observations. A set of 19 trajectories is started between 950 hPa and 400 hPa at Dübendorf every 6 hours during a selected month, and then calculated 72 hours backward in time. Daily precipitation data for Dübendorf was provided by the ANETZ measurement station of the Swiss Meteorological Institute in Zürich, which is situated about 10 km from Dübendorf. The total amount of precipitation for the selected four months are: 234.2 mm in 9405, 54.3 mm in 9705, 43.0 mm in 9411, and 78.5 mm in 9612.

Fig. 4 shows an example for atmospheric transport from the La Hague/Sellafield region to the measurement site on 8 May 1997. Furthermore, two regions around each of the source regions La Hague and Sellafield are marked, which we considered for liquid and gaseous emissions.

The results of the trajectory calculations are summarized in Table 4a and 4b, which are based upon those trajectories that satisfy the following two criteria: The backward trajectory started at Dübendorf hits at least one of the four source regions marked in Fig. 4, and the precipitation in Zürich exceeds 1 mm on the starting day of the trajectory. Table 4a gives the number of days per month where these two criteria are fulfilled. During the high $^{129}$I months May 1994 and May 1997, the La Hague source region is more often “connected” to the measurement site than during the low $^{129}$I months Nov. 1994 and Dec. 1996. On the other hand, this is not true for Sellafield, for where no significant differences can be discerned. Further information can be gained from Table 4b which answers the question how much of the monthly precipitation can be potentially loaded with $^{129}$I. For instance, 22% of the precipitation which was measured in May 1994 in Zürich, was due to condensation in air masses coming from the La Hague marine region. If differences in the source regions and atmospheric transport conditions

![Fig. 4](image-url)
Two possible explanations for this discrepancy relate to the atmospheric transport from the source regions to the measurement site itself, and to the variability of the gaseous release of $^{129}$I. These two issues will be briefly discussed. We assumed that the emitted $^{129}$I (for instance from La Hague) will be rained out in Zürich if the trajectory “connects” the source with the measurement site. But wet scavenging of an air parcel before its arrival at the measurement site might, in fact, considerably reduce the amount of $^{129}$I rained out later in Zürich. The consideration of this effect is, however, very difficult given the coarse temporal resolution (24 hours) of the precipitation measurements over Europe. For the second issue, additional qualitative information can be gained from weekly $^{85}$Kr measurements in Freiburg im Breisgau [35], which is located about 120 km from Zürich. High $^{85}$Kr concentrations may indicate high gaseous $^{129}$I emissions, whereas low $^{85}$Kr concentrations point to low gaseous $^{129}$I discharges. It must however be emphasized that $^{85}$Kr unlike $^{129}$I is not washed out by precipitation, and that the distance between Freiburg and Zürich allows only qualitative inferences. In the high $^{129}$I months, precipitation associated with transport from La Hague/Sellafield occurs during the weeks with high $^{85}$Kr concentrations (for instance, the precipitation event on 22 May 1997 goes along with a weekly $^{85}$Kr value of 2.73 mBq/m$^3$, and the one on 28/29 May 1994 with 1.97 mBq/m$^3$). On the other hand, lower $^{85}$Kr concentrations (mostly below 1.4 mBq/m$^3$) are typical for the low $^{129}$I months.

To summarize, the trajectory-based analysis cannot account for the large month-to-month variations of the $^{129}$I on two orders of magnitude, and suggests that they could be due to variable gaseous emissions or due to wet scavenging between the source regions and Zurich. More detailed investigations would be highly desirable, if possible based upon weekly $^{129}$I samples and upon the now published monthly data of gaseous halogen emissions [36], that are available on the internet. These new release data for La Hague indicate that the gaseous $^{129}$I discharges have been decreased by about a factor of 6 from 1996 to 2000. Unless a similar reduction was achieved at Sellafield, the British reprocessing plant should dominate the gaseous $^{129}$I releases in 2000.

A last attempt to distinguish between marine or atmospheric $^{129}$I is to look at the seasonal variation in our data. Whereas four of the five highest monthly $^{129}$I concentrations were found in spring, Rasmussen et al. [32] found a maximum in methyl iodide transfer from the sea to the atmosphere during summer. Consequently, we tend to assume that high $^{129}$I concentrations in spring do not reflect an increase in biological activity in the North Sea, but may be more likely due to high gaseous discharges during the respective months as indicated by $^{85}$Kr measurements in Freiburg im Breisgau [35] and by monthly $^{85}$Kr emission data from La Hague [36].

4. Conclusions

It has been confirmed that $^{129}$I concentrations in rain in central Europe have not been increased further within the measurement uncertainties until 1997 compared to the already strongly elevated concentrations analyzed for the late 1980s. Typical $^{129}$I atom concentrations in rain in Switzerland in the years 1994 to 1997 are on the order of $10^9$ at/kg but exhibit strong variations. The deposition rates determined for Dübendorf in the mid 1990s are a bit lower than but of the same order of magnitude as those determined in Germany for 1995 and 1997/98. The time dependence of the $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation in central Europe that have been analyzed since 1988 is in much better agreement with the gaseous emissions from the reprocessing plants at Sellafield and La Hague than with the liquid releases from these sites. Using a transfer factor for iodine from the sea to the atmosphere, that was not determined in the area of interest itself, the gaseous emissions of the two nuclear fuel reprocessing plants constitute the bigger $^{129}$I reservoir compared to the iodine from the liquid emissions that has been transferred into the atmosphere. In order to better estimate these two reservoirs, a determination of this transfer factor is considered necessary in the North Sea and the English Channel itself. The high month-to-month variability of the $^{129}$I concentrations in the precipitation samples could not be explained by changes in atmospheric transport alone. Comparison with $^{85}$Kr data from Freiburg im Breisgau may indicate some, even short-term, time dependence of gaseous releases from the reprocessing plants. But also a possible effect of e.g. wet scavenging of $^{129}$I between the emission sources and the sampling site has to be taken into account. The chances to explain the month-to-month scatter in $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation should be higher for weekly sampling because more detailed transport calculations would be feasible, also based upon higher resolution numerical data sets. In addition, a more reliable indicator of atmospheric emissions than $^{85}$Kr measured with weekly resolution at some distance from the sampling site is needed to address the question of the relative contributions of marine and atmospheric $^{129}$I emissions to the precipitation in central Europe more exactly. Due to the very different time dependence of liquid and gaseous releases of $^{129}$I from the two major nuclear reprocessing plants, the development of $^{129}$I concentrations in precipitation in future depends on whether the gaseous or the liquid discharges are the dominant source.

Acknowledgment. The preparation of some of the samples by S. Bollhalder-Lück (EAWAG) is gratefully acknowledged. Discussions with R. Michel and T. Ernst (ZSR, Universität Hannover) are greatly appreciated. In refereeing this manuscript, Peter H. Santschi and Kathy Schwehr made helpful comments and improved the English style. This work has been supported in part by the German National Science Foundation (DFG), Bonn and by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF), Bern. MS has been supported through the EU project STACCATO under contract BBW 99.0582-2 resp. EVK2-CT-1999-00050.

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ISSN 0940-7650, p. 67.