



UNIVERSITY OF NOVI SAD
Technical Faculty "Mihajlo Pupin"
Zrenjanin, Republic of Serbia



PROCEEDINGS
of the XIV International Conference on
**Industrial Engineering and
Environmental Protection**
IIZS 2024

Zrenjanin, Serbia, October 3-4, 2024.



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INTRODUCTION

Department of mechanical engineering and Department of environmental protection of Technical Faculty "Mihajlo Pupin", Zrenjanin, has organized the XIV International Conference Industrial Engineering and Environmental Protection – IIZS 2024.

The topics of scientific conference «IIZS 2024», cover the fields of Industrial Engineering and Environmental protection: Mechanical Engineering, Energetics and process technique, Designing and maintenance, Oil and gas engineering, Health and environmental protection, Environmental management, Occupational safety and Engineering management.

The main goals of the conference are: fostering innovation and expanding knowledge for engineers in industry and environmental protection; supporting researchers in presenting their current research results; establishing new contacts with premier national and international institutions and universities; popularizing the Faculty and its leadership role in our society and immediate environment, to attract a high-quality young individuals to study at our Faculty; cooperating with other organizations, public companies, and industry; initiating the collection of ideas for solving specific practical problems; interconnecting and establishing business contacts; introducing professional and business organizations to the results of scientific and technical research; and presenting scientific knowledge and exchanging experiences in industrial engineering.

We would like to express our gratitude to the partners of the IX International Conference "IIZS 2024" – Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Faculty of Engineering, Arad, Romania; University St. Kliment Ohridski, Technical Faculty, Bitola, Macedonia; University Politehnica Timisoara, Faculty of Engineering, Hunedoara, Romania; University of East Sarajevo, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, East Sarajevo, B&H, Republic of Srpska; and University of Giresun, Faculty of Engineering, Giresun, Turkey – for their support in organizing this event. We are also grateful to all the authors who have contributed their papers to the scientific meeting "IIZS 2024".

We would like to extend our special thanks to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Republic of Serbia, and the management of Technical Faculty "Mihajlo Pupin", University of Novi Sad, for supporting the organization of the Conference "IIZS 2024".

The IIZS Conference has become a traditional annual meeting for researchers from around the world. We are open to and grateful for any useful suggestions that could help make the next, XV International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Environmental Protection even better, both organizationally and programmatically.

Chairman of the Organizing Committee
Asst. Prof. Jasna Tolmač, PhD

Zrenjanin, October 3-4, 2024.

Conference participants are from the following countries:



Serbia



Romania



Bosnia and Herzegovina



Mexico



North Macedonia



Bulgaria



Croatia



Turkey



Montenegro



Austria

CONTENTS

PLENARY SESSION

Mirko Karakašić: EXAMINATION OF THE SAMPLE PROPERTIES MADE BY THE ADDITIVE TECHNOLOGY	2
Marija Perović: EVALUATING MICROPOLLUTANTS IN THE DANUBE RIVER: ASSESSING CONCENTRATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	12

Session 1: Mechanical Engineering

Svetlana Lilkova-Markova, Dimitar Lolov: FREE VIBRATION ANALYSIS OF A BEAM RESTING ON WINKLER ELASTIC FOUNDATION THROUGH THE SUMUDU TRANSFORM METHOD	23
Slobodan Juric, Slavica Prvulović, Jasna Tolmac, Ljubisa Josimovic, Uros Sarenac, Milos Josimovic: DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL FOR ASSESSING VIBRATION RISK LEVELS IN HYDROPOWER PLANT TECHNICAL SYSTEMS	28
Rade Dragović, Milada Novaković, Zoran Bakić, Marija Matotek Anđelić, Igor Kostovski, Valentina Mladenović: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN FUNCTION OF IMPROVING PRODUCT FUNCTIONALITIES	38
Juraj Marković, Hrvoje Glavaš, Tomislav Barić, Eleonora Desnica: THE ROLE OF COOLANT IN THE ENERGY BALANCE OF INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINES	45
Jure Marijić, Ivan Grgić, Marko Vilić, Mirko Karakašić, Željko Ivandić: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRIAL CONTROL SYSTEM FOR ROTOR WITH A FOCUS ON DESIGN FEATURES	54
Zoran Karastojković, Jasmina Pekez, Radiša Perić: THE ROLE OF CERIUM AND PRASEODYMIUM AS RARE-EARTH ELEMENTS IN FILLER METAL FOR BRAZING DIAMOND – AN OVERVIEW	63
Srđan Kovačević, Nikolina Tošić, Galina Ilinykin, David Mitrinović, Marko Muhadinović, Natalia Sliusar: MECHANICAL CENTRIFUGATION AND PYROLYSIS AS A COMBINED PROCESS FOR EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF OIL REFINERY SLUDGE	71
Dušan Jovanić, Eleonora Desnica, Dušan Malić: THE INFLUENCE OF THE LAYER HEIGHT ON THE HARDNESS OF THE TPU PLASTIC SPECIMEN MADE BY 3D PRINTING	77

Dejan Lukic, Mijodrag Milosevic, Ahmet Cekic, Maida Cohodar Husic, Djerzija Begic-Hajdarevic, Dejan Bozic: EVALUATION OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CELLULAR MANUFACTURING FOR A GROUP OF PRODUCT	84
Ljubica Lazić Vulićević, Danijela M. Jašin, Aleksandar Rajić, Valentina Mladenović, Ivan Palinkaš: THE MECHANICAL PROPERTIES OF A CIRCULAR CROSS-SECTION COLUMN MADE OF COMPOSITE MATERIAL PRODUCED USING A NEW MIXED PLASTIC RECYCLING TECHNOLOGY.....	93
Srđan Samardžić, Spasoje Trifković, Miroslav Milutinović: STRESS ANALYSIS OF CRANE SHACKLE USING FEM	100
Murat Ispir, Muharrem Hilmi Aksoy: BIOMIMETIC APPLICATIONS IN FLUID MECHANICS: FROM NATURE-INSPIRED DESIGNS TO TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS.....	108
Ivan Matin, Branko Štrbac, Miloš Ranisavljev, Miodrag Hadžistević, Đorđe Vukelić: THE DEVIATION BETWEEN INJECTED MOLDED PLASTIC PART AND FDM MANUFACTURED PART	114
Eyüb Canli: ALGEBRAIC DIAMETER PROPORTION EXPRESSIONS DERIVED AND EXAMINED FOR EQUAL FLOW DISTRIBUTION BY MANIFOLD NOZZLE COUPLE.....	120
Abdullah Çakan: OPTIMAL LQR CONTROL OF A PENDULUM BASED OVERHEAD CRANE USING THE WHALE OPTIMIZATION ALGORITHM	128
Jovan Pavlović, Dragoslav Janošević, Vesna Jovanović: ANALYSIS OF THE SYSTEM FOR ACTIVE VIBRATION REDUCTION DURING WHEEL LOADER MOVEMENT.....	134
Stanko P. Stankov: THE DIGITAL FACTORY–PRESENT AND FUTURE	140
Stanko P. Stankov: A SUPERVISORY CONTROL OF WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM.....	149
Borivoj Novaković, Luka Đorđević, Ljiljana Radovanović, Mihalj Bakator, Milan Marković, Stefan Ugrinov, Mića Đurđev: THE EXAMINATION OF OPERATIONAL CONDITION THROUGH THE VOLUMETRIC EFFICIENCY OF AN AXIAL PISTON PUMP.....	158
Sondra Preascilla Ioana Vacarescu, Nicolae Paraschiv, Flavius-Maxim Petcuț AUTOMATED DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEMS.....	164
Miloš Madić, Milan Trifunović, Marko Kovačević: DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORT VECTOR MACHINE MODEL FOR CHIP FORM CLASSIFICATION IN TURNING OF POM-C.....	171

Session 2: Energetics and Process Technique

Jovana Radnović, Vesna Makitan:

RISK ANALYSIS USING THE INTEGRATED FTA AND FMEA MODEL
ON THE EXAMPLE OF A BIOGAS PLANT 177

Nikola R. Vojnović, Dušan I. Ilić, Jovan P. Šetrajčić:

LOCALIZED STATES OF BASIC ELEMENTARY CHARGES IN
ULTRATHIN CRYSTALLINE FILM-STRUCTURES 186

Čugalj Jovana, Pekez Jasmina, Stojanov Jelena, Ašonja Aleksandar:

APPLICATION OF STATISTICAL METHODS IN ORDER TO DETERMINE
THE LEVEL OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY 191

Anca-Adriana Petcuț-Lasc, Valentina-Emilia Bălaș, Flavius-Maxim Petcuț:

ANALYSIS OF A RESIDENTIAL PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM 198

Session 3: Designing and Maintenance

**Anca Sabău, Mihaela Popa, Gabriela Stoia, Timotei Bogdan Bacoș,
Adrian Eugen Cioablă:**

PRELIMINARY STUDY ON DRIVER POSTURE THROUGH NEW
METHOD OF ANALYSIS 207

Peko Lakatuš:

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OPTIMIZATION IN INDUSTRIAL
TECHNICAL SYSTEMS 213

Session 4: Oil and Gas Engineering

**Branislava Radišić, Snežana Komatina, Slavica Prvulović, Snežana Filip,
Dragana Kovač:**

OPTIMIZATION OF OIL PRODUCTION ON THE EXAMPLE OF LIBYA 221

Danijela Jašin, Milana Drašković, Milada Novaković:

POSSIBILITIES OF PURIFICATION OF OIL CONTAMINATED
WATER USING PERLITE 229

Jasna Tolmač, Slavica Prvulović, Saša Jovanović, Uroš Šarenac, Branislava Radišić:

ANALYSIS OF TEMPERATURE DROP AND HEAT LOSSES OF CRUDE OIL
ALONG THE MAIN OIL PIPELINE 234

Session 5: Engineering Management

Vladimir Milošev, Rade Dragović, Igor Kostovski:

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS INCUBATORS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENERGY MANAGEMENT 241

Stefan Ugrinov, Mihalj Bakator, Edit Terek Stojanović, Mila Kavalić, Verica Gluvakov:

SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION 248

Zlatko Lacković, Milan Ivanović, Krešimir Lacković:

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR IN CORPORATE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION 256

Bojan Stankov, Sanja Stanisavljev, Mila Kavalić, Verrica Gluvakov,

Snežana Mirković:

THE APPLICATION OF INDUSTRY 4.0 AMONG ENTREPRENEURS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA 263

Dragana Kovač, Edit Terek Stojanović, Mila Kavalić, Maja Gaborov,

Melita Čočkalo-Hronjec:

GREEN BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES..... 271

Ilija Tabašević, Dragan D. Milanović, Mirjana Misita:

COMMISSIONING AND QUALIFICATION OF A PHARMACEUTICAL FACILITY 279

Držislav Vidaković, Marijana Hadzima-Nyarko, Laura Šoja:

CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR: THE SITUATION IN CROATIA..... 286

Marija Perović, Marija Todorović:

INTRODUCING ISO 22301 INTO AN ESTABLISHED INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IMS) 295

Session 6: Health and Environmental Protection

Stevo K. Jaćimovski, Dane Subošić, Jovan P. Šetrajčić:

VALIDATION OF SOME AIR POLLUTANT DISTRIBUTION MODELS 303

Milan Protić, Nikola Mišić, Ana Vukadinović, Jasmina Radosavljević, Miomir Raos:

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF FIRE HAZARDS FROM SMALL-SCALE METHANE FIRES 311

Vesna Drakulović, Višnja Mihajlović, Bogdana Vujić, Mića Đurđev, Milan Marković:

INTEGRATION OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIAL ECOLOGY: PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT 319

Goran Bošković, Višnja Mihajlović, Nikola Karanović, Natalija Nikolić, Zoran Čepić: METHODOLOGY OF DETERMINATION OF FIRE HAZARD ZONES IN THE HIGH-BAY WAREHOUSES	324
Natalija Nikolić, Jovana Čugalj, Vesna Drakulović: GIS AND REMOTE SENSING IN FOREST FIRE ANALYSIS IN SERBIA	330
Aleksandra Mihailović, Jordana Ninkov, Selena Samardžić, Savka Adamović, Robert Lakatoš, Sofija M. Forkapić, Tomas Nemeš: PTE DISTRIBUTION FACTOR AS AN INDICATOR OF URBAN SOIL POLLUTION.....	335
Milijana Keseric, Momir Tabakovic ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL OF PHOTOVOLTAICS ON AUSTRIAN RAILWAY NOISE BARRIERS: ADVANCING RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY SOLUTIONS.....	342
Gordana Rendulić Davidović, Milena Damnjanović, Nikola Radosavljević: GREENWASHING: TRICK OR THREAT.....	348
Lidija Milošević, Emina Mihajlović, Amelija Đorđević, Jelena Malenović Nikolić: PREDICTION OF LANDFILL FIRE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT HAZARD ZONES: CASE STUDY OF THE SANITARY LANDFILL IN PIROT	355
Nada Markovic, Nebojsa Ralevic: DISTRIBUTION OF PCB CONGENERS IN ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA	361
Madalina Zot, Francisc Popescu, Luisa Izabel Dungan: ASSESSMENT OF WATERBORNE TRANSPORT SECTOR IMPACT ON EUROPE AIR QUALITY WITH SHERPA MODEL	367
Borivoj Lj. Stepanov, Zoran M. Čepić, Đorđije D. Doder: NAVIGATING TOWARDS ZERO-EMISSION DISTRICT HEATING: THE DANISH GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM ESBJERG	373
Ermina Ćosović, Ivan Mihajlović, Vesna Spasojević Brkić: IMPACT OF FUEL CONSUMPTION ON CO ₂ EMISSIONS IN ROAD TRANSPORT IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES	380
Jelena Antović, Katarina Batalović, Ivana Mihajlović: APPLICATION OF THE MACHINE LEARNING IN SURFACE WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT	388
Nevena Živančev, Srđan Kovačević, Ivana Mihajlović: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SODA LAKES AND PANS CHEMICAL PROPERTIES IN SERBIA AND HUNGARY	396
Mihaela POPA, Valentina-Emilia BĂLAȘ: THE NECESSITY OF ROOFTOP GREENHOUSES FOR IMPROVING URBAN AIR QUALITY AND TEMPERATURE REGULATION.....	401

Daniel Alexuță, Marius M. Bălaș:

AQUAPONICS AS AN INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: CHALLENGES AND INDUSTRIAL SOLUTIONS 408

Dunja Istrat, Jelena Ćulibrk, Maja Petrović:

ASSESSING THE LANDSCAPE OF HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT 413

Edi Daruši:

NEOLIBERALISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY THROUGH THE GREEN NEW DEAL 420

Adrijana Babić, Zoran Čepić:

EXTENDING THE APPLICATION OF VR/AR TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SAFETY TRAINING IN THE CRUDE OIL INDUSTRY 427

Dejan Mihailović, Alexis Toribio Dantas:

NEITHER ANTHROPOCENE NOR CAPITALOCENE - A PATH TOWARD AN ANTI-CAPITALIST ECOLOGY 432

Tijana Adamov, Mladenka Novaković, Maja Petrović:

EVALUATING THE BIOACCUMULATION OF HAZARDOUS POLLUTANTS FROM MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE LANDFILL: A CASE STUDY ON BISPHENOL A AND PHTHALATES IN SERBIA 436

Jasmina Dedić, Jelena Djokić, Irma Dervišević, Bojan Stojčetočić:

THE EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF THE HEAVY METALS' MOBILITY OF THE METALLURGICAL WASTE IN TREPČA 443

Session 7: Environmental Management

Milan Ivanović:

EU GREEN TRANSITION DOES NOT HAVE A PLANETARY APPROACH 451

Dijana Vašaš Kuručev, Milica Bogdanov, Jasmina Poštin, Sanja Stankov, Milan Nikolić:

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE 458

Milica Bogdanov, Dijana Vašaš Kuručev, Jasmina Poštin, Sanja Stankov, Milan Nikolić:

THE IMPACT OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION ON REDUCING WORKPLACE INJURIES 464

Mihalj Bakator, Luka Đorđević, Borivoj Novaković, Velibor Premčevski, Stefan Ugrinov:

GREEN TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR ROLE IN URBAN SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES 471

Dragan Čočkalo, Mihalj Bakator, Milan Nikolić, Sanja Stanisavljev, Verica Gluvakov: SUSTAINABILITY AS A CORE COMPONENT OF QUALITY STANDARDS IN MODERN BUSINESSES	478
Monika Lutovska, Vladimir Mijakovski: ANALYSIS OF RISK ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY IN NORTH MACEDONIA.....	487
Jasmina Naerac, Nemanja Sremčev, Danijela Ćirić Lalić: INTEGRATING LEAN PRINCIPLES WITH ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR ENHANCED ECOLOGICAL PERFORMANCE	492

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EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF FIRE HAZARDS FROM SMALL-SCALE METHANE FIRES

Research paper

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Abstract: This paper presents an experimental study on the flame dynamics and radiation properties of small-scale methane fires, with a focus on safety implications in laboratory settings. The experiments were conducted using a methane sand burner to simulate various heat release rates (HRR) ranging from 3 kW to 10 kW. Key parameters, such as flame height and total heat flux, were measured and compared with estimations derived from the Heskestad and McCaffrey models. The results demonstrated good agreement between the experimental measurements and model predictions up to 8 kW, with significant discrepancies arising beyond this point. The study also highlights the nonlinear relationship between HRR and measured incident total heat flux, with the largest increases observed between 3–5 kW and 7–8 kW. The findings should be interpreted with caution due to external influences, such as flame tilting caused by minor airflow in the laboratory. Obtained results provide valuable insights for assessing fire hazards in small-scale methane fires and improving safety protocols.

Key words: pool fires, methane, flame length, incident thermal radiation

INTRODUCTION

Despite efforts toward transitioning to cleaner energy, fossil fuels, including oil and natural gas, still account for a significant portion of global energy consumption. Hydrocarbon use remains a dominant force in global energy markets, influencing both economic and environmental outcomes. United States, China, and other leading industrial nations account for half of global oil use, with much of the world's oil being traded between regions rather than consumed at the source [1]. The reliance on hydrocarbons adversely affects environmental sustainability and calls for the urgent need for energy transition strategies [2]. These insights reflect the complex balance between the economic benefits of hydrocarbons and the environmental challenges they pose, emphasizing the importance of integrating sustainable energy practices.

Safety incidents involving hydrocarbon fuels in the process industry come in various forms. Each of these incidents has distinct radiation characteristics, but they share the common factor of having devastating effects on nearby people and property. Tayab et al. (2023) provided a detailed analysis of over 50 process safety events, showing that failures in risk identification and asset integrity contributed to many incidents [3]. Similarly, Aslam et al. (2023) analyzed the effects of human factors, noting that over 30% of storage tank incidents are linked to human errors, particularly during critical activities such as flushing and purging hydrocarbon systems [4]. Study by Nolan (2011), showed that large incidents often escalate when hydrocarbons cannot be isolated from the source [5]. The integration of updated safety practices, continuous training, and better leadership during crises are critical to reducing the frequency and severity of incidents in the hydrocarbon industry.

Hydrocarbon events in the process industry are categorized based on the nature of the release and subsequent events such as fires, explosions, or toxic releases. These events often originate from the release of hydrocarbons in gaseous, liquid, or mist form, with gas

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releases posing the highest risk due to their potential to create vapor clouds that can lead to explosions or jet fires.

Pool fires are one of the most common fire hazards in the process industry, particularly in chemical and hydrocarbon processing facilities. Pool fires are a type of diffusion flame, where fuel and oxidizer mix at the onset of flame. In pool fires, fuel is vaporized from a liquid pool and then combusted in the air, creating a diffusion flame characterized by its dependence on heat and mass transfer processes.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the flame dynamics and radiation properties of methane flames in a laboratory setting, with a focus on safety considerations. Methane flames are not typically categorized as pool fires since pool fires usually involve liquid fuels that evaporate and burn as diffusion flames above the liquid surface. Methane, being a gas at standard conditions, does not form a liquid pool like hydrocarbons such as gasoline or heptane. However, under certain conditions, methane flames can be considered comparable to pool fires, particularly when examining combustion characteristics, heat transfer, and flame dynamics.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Experiments were performed with calibration burner used for ISO 13927 [6]. Burner design is shown on the Fig. 1 [6].

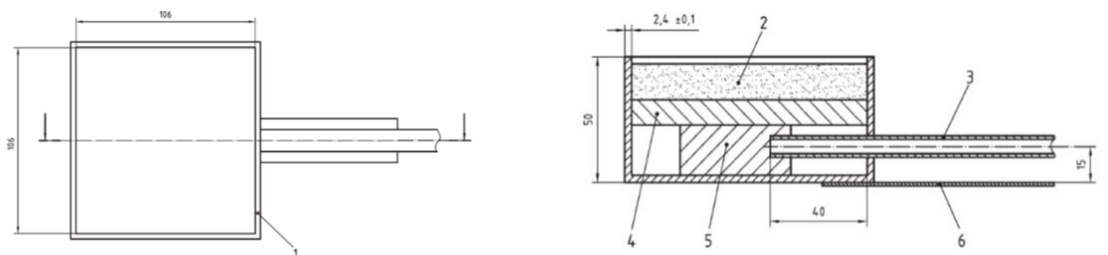


Fig. 1. Methane burner used for performing experiments [6]

where: 1. is square stainless-steel pan, 2 sand (with grain size approximately 1 mm to 2 mm), 3. is the stainless steel tube for methane conduit (inner diameter 8 mm), 4 and 5 are isolating ceramic-fiber blankets and 6. is handle for manipulation of burner.

The burner was connected to double rotameters (Influx, UK) calibrated for methane flow and then to a methane cylinder (250 bar). The cylinder was equipped with a double regulator. For safety reasons, a double flame arrestor system was used. One rotameter had a flow range between 0-18 l/min, while the other had a range of 0-2.8 l/min. A three-way valve was used to direct the methane flow from the gas cylinder to either of the flowmeters. For the experiments, only the flow meter with a higher range was used. According to the producer's recommendation, the flow through the flowmeters was limited to 2 bar. The configuration is shown in Fig. 2.

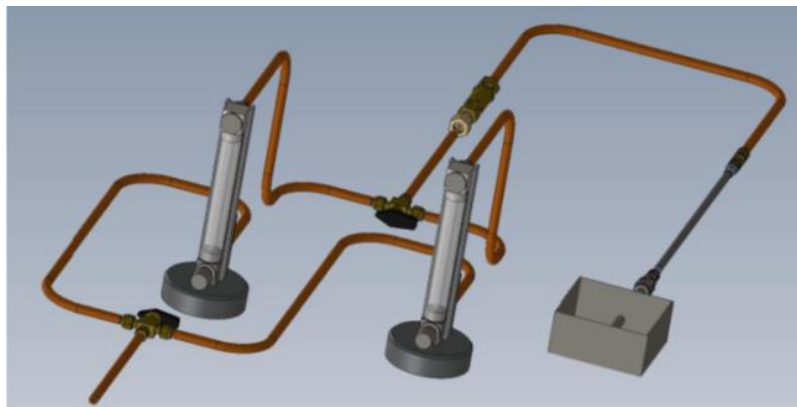


Fig. 2. System for conveying methane to the burner [7]

Experiment was performed for heat release values from 3 kW to 10 kW. The relationship between the heat release rate and the corresponding methane flow is shown in the Fig. 3.

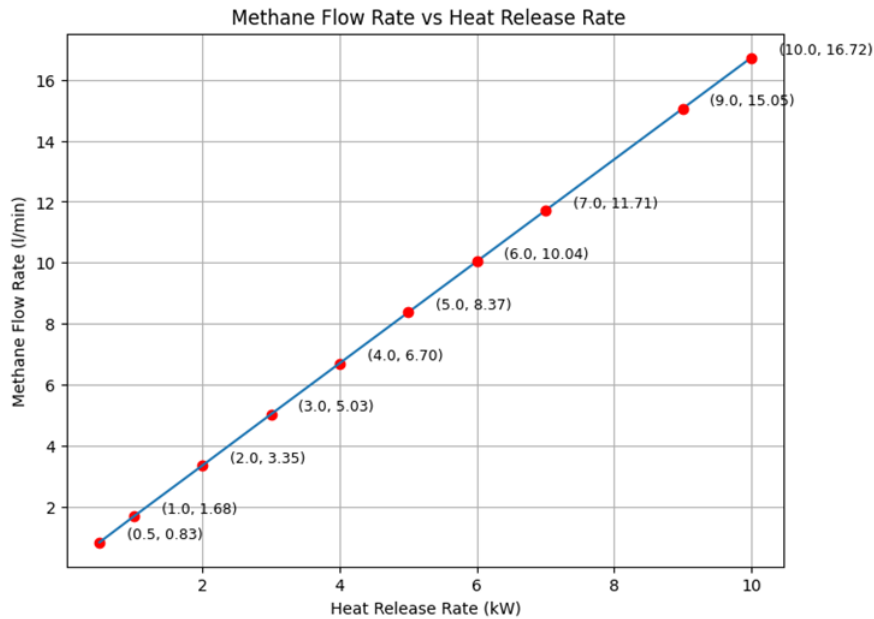


Fig. 3. Methane flow rate vs Heat release rate

For heat flux measurement, a calibrated water-cooled Schmidt-Boelter (thermopile type) heat flux meter (Medtherm, USA) was used. The measurement range of the heat flux meter is set to 100 kW/m². The heat flux meter was connected to a data processing device and then to a computer, allowing for immediate readings of the incoming thermal radiation. Data were displayed at a frequency of 1 Hz. The instrument was zeroed to show 0 kW/m² for ambient thermal radiation. The heat flux meter was continuously cooled through 6 mm barbs. Demineralized water with a flow rate in the range of 200-300 ml/min was used for cooling. The cooling loop of the heat flux meter was closed with an appropriate immersion pump. The heat flux meter was clamped to a vertical holder. This allowed the adjustment of the heat flux meter by height. The height of the heat flux meter could be adjusted, and for the experiments in this study, the thermopile part of the flux meter was set at a height of 15 cm, measured from the edge of the burner and at distance of 17 cm. The installation during the experiment is shown in Fig. 4. This configuration enabled continuous measurement of incoming thermal radiation.

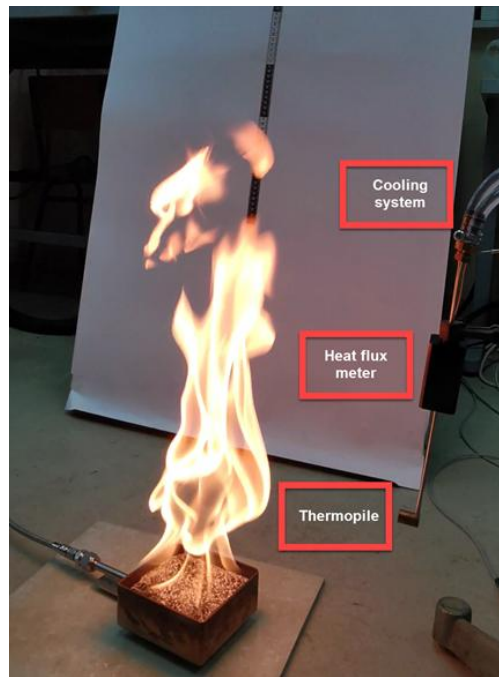


Fig. 4. Installation used for heat flux measurement

An aluminum meter was used to measure the flame length. It was attached to the back side of the sand burner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Flame height

Flame height is defined as the distance from the burner to the flame tip. From the very beginning, it was clear that measuring the flame height would be a very difficult task. A methane diffusion flame has a complex morphology dictated by turbulence. The flame has an irregular shape, with numerous small flames detaching from the main flame vertically and laterally. This is especially noticeable at higher fuel flow rates. See Fig. 4.



Fig. 5. Two frames for the same HRR illustrating the pulsating nature of the turbulent methane flame

Due to the pulsatory nature of the flame, it was difficult to precisely measure the flame height. Therefore, multiple measurements were collected for each heat release rate, and the results are reported in a normalized box plot Fig. 5. Mean values are indicated on the right side of the Gaussian distribution curve for each of the tested heat release rates.

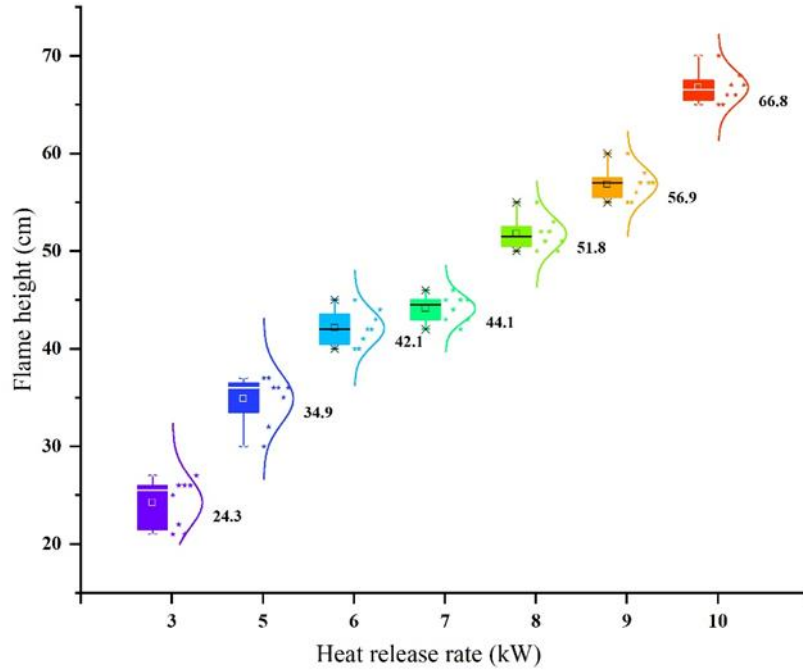


Fig. 6. Measured flame height and corresponding HRR

In the next step, the obtained values were compared with those derived from models found in the literature. For the comparison, the following two models were used: the Heskestad virtual origin model [8], and the model developed by McCaffrey [9].

Both models require the perimeter of the pool as an input, as they are used to describe pool fires. In the experiments, as previously mentioned, a square burner was used. Therefore, the equivalent diameter was calculated using the following formula:

$$D_{eq} = \sqrt{\frac{4A}{\pi}} \quad (1)$$

where: D_{eq} is the equivalent diameter (m) and A is the area of the burner (m^2). Hence, for the square burner used (10×10 cm), the following equivalent diameter was applied for further calculations:

$$D_{eq} = \sqrt{\frac{4 \times 0.01}{\pi}} = \sqrt{\frac{0.04}{3.14159}} \approx \sqrt{0.01273} \approx 0.113 \text{ m} \quad (2)$$

Heskestad's model [8] is based on the concept of a "virtual origin" of the flame, which adjusts the flame height based on the heat release rate and the plume's behavior near the flame base. According to this model, the flame height is given by:

$$h_f = 0.235 \cdot Q^{2/5} - 1.02 \cdot D \quad (3)$$

where: h_f is the flame height, Q is the heat release rate and D is the diameter of the fire source.

The McCaffrey model divides the flame into three distinct regions: continuous flame, intermittent flame, and buoyant plume, each with different behaviors. When predicting the flame height for a highly turbulent fire from the onset, like it is the case in this study, it is essential to account for both the continuous flame region and the intermittent region. Thus, for highly turbulent flames starting from the sand burner head, the intermittent region's equation:

$$h_f = C \cdot Q^{2/5} \quad (4)$$

where C is an empirical constant, gives the prediction for the flame height before transitioning into the buoyant plume.

Experimentally obtained results were compared with the estimations from the two aforementioned models. The results are summarized in Fig. 6.

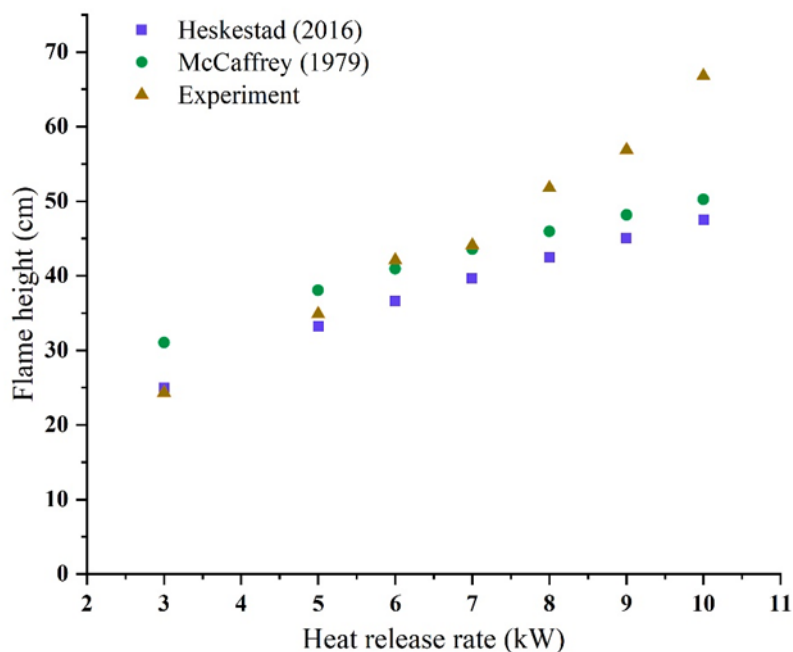


Fig. 7. Flame height vs. HRR: experimental results and model estimates

As can be seen from the figure, there was good agreement between the experimental results and the models up to a heat release rate of 8 kW. For heat release values of 6 and 7 kW, the experimental results were almost identical to the McCaffrey model. However, for a heat release rate of 7 kW, the experimentally obtained values began to diverge, and the difference between the models and experimental results increased. Therefore, for HRR values in the range between 3 and 8 kW, both models provided a reasonable estimate for flame height. For lower HRR values (3 to 5 kW), the Heskestad model provided accurate estimates, while for higher HRR values, the McCaffrey model performed better. For all tested HRR values, the intermodel agreement was satisfactory, with a decreasing trend in differences as the tested HRR increased.

Thermal radiation hazard

Measured thermal radiation values are presented as box normal plot in Fig. 7.

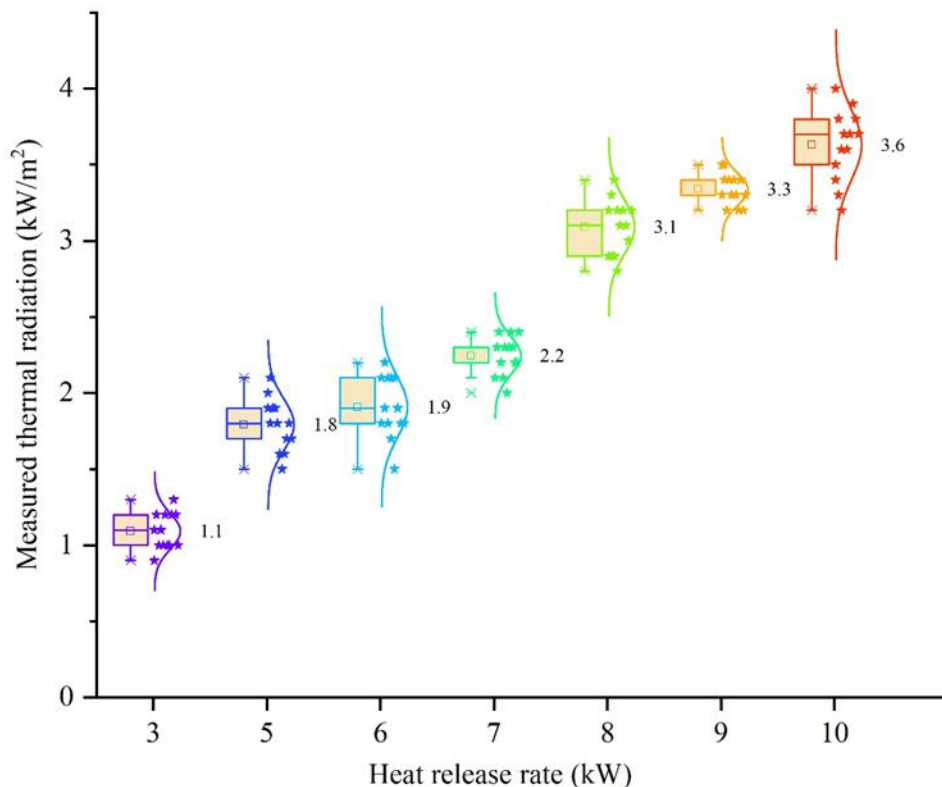


Fig. 8. Measured total heat flux from flame vs. HRR

As was expected, the measured total heat flux increased with increasing HRR. However, this increase was not regular. The largest changes in the measured total heat flux occurred between an HRR of 3 and 5 kW, and between 7 and 8 kW. The obtained values should be interpreted with caution due to the pulsating nature of the flame and flame tilting, which may have potentially affected the measurement process.

According to the NFPA 59A Standard [10], a heat flux level of 5 kW/m² is often used to determine hazard distances for human exposure to radiant heat from fires. In the European Union, the permissible exposing heat flux levels for radiant heat from fires are primarily outlined in the EN 1473 standard [11]. According to EN 1473, 1.5 kW/m² is threshold set for unshielded areas of critical importance where individuals without protective clothing may be exposed. The obtained results comply with NFPA 59A but not with the regulations outlined in EN 1473. However, it is important to note that distance from the direct flame significantly affects human thermal exposure. Therefore, while exposure at higher HRR may exceed the threshold set by EN 1473, the incident radiation at greater distances is considerably lower and considered acceptable. The main hazard from this type of laboratory flame arises from the stochastic nature of the flame. This includes highly unpredictable flame morphology (such as flame detachment) and, in particular, flame tilt, which can be induced by even minor disturbances in the surrounding airflow. These adverse events, especially at higher methane flow rates, should be regarded as primary safety concerns.

CONCLUSION

This experimental study examined the flame dynamics and thermal radiation properties of small-scale methane fires. The results demonstrated that both the Heskestad and McCaffrey models provide reasonable estimates of flame height for heat release rates (HRR) ranging between 3 and 8 kW. For lower HRR values, the Heskestad model was more accurate, while the McCaffrey model performed better at higher HRR values. Beyond 8 kW, the experimental

values began to diverge from the model predictions. This can be attributed to the complexity of flame behavior at elevated fuel flow rates.

Additionally, the thermal radiation measurements showed an expected increase in total incident heat flux with higher HRR. However, the increase was nonlinear, with significant changes observed between 3 and 5 kW, and 7 and 8 kW. Although the obtained heat flux values complied with the NFPA 59A standard, they exceeded the limits outlined in EN 1473. However, the incident radiation at greater distances from the flame is expected to be significantly lower, reducing the overall hazard.

The study emphasized the importance of considering flame morphology, particularly the stochastic behavior and flame tilting caused by minor airflow disturbances, as critical safety concerns in laboratory settings. These findings contribute valuable insights for improving safety protocols in handling flammable gas fires and assessing fire hazards in controlled environments.

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