

**Volatile organic  
compound emissions  
from *Larrea tridentata*  
(creosotebush)**

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**Volatile organic compound emissions  
from *Larrea tridentata* (creosotebush)**

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Received: 28 May 2010 – Accepted: 22 June 2010 – Published: 12 July 2010

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Published by Copernicus Publications on behalf of the European Geosciences Union.

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## Abstract

The emission of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) from plants impacts both climate and air quality by fueling atmospheric chemistry and by contributing to aerosol particles. While a variety of ecosystems have been investigated for VOC emissions, deserts remain essentially unstudied, partially because of their low biomass densities and water limitations. However, during the North American monsoon, a pronounced increase in rainfall from an extremely dry June (<5 mm precipitation) to a rainy July (>80 mm) occurs over large areas of the Sonoran desert in the Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico. We present results from the CREosote ATmosphere Interactions through Volatile Emissions (CREATIVE 2009) field study in Southern Arizona aimed at quantifying emission rates of VOCs from creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*) during the summer 2009 monsoon season. This species was chosen because of its vast distribution in North and South American deserts and because its resins have been reported to contain a rich set of VOCs. We observed a strong diurnal pattern with branch emissions and ambient concentrations of an extensive suite of VOCs with maxima in early afternoon. These include VOCs typically observed in forest sites (oxygenated VOCs and volatile isoprenoids) as well as a large number of other compounds, some of which have not been previously described from any plant including 1-chloro-2-methoxy-benzene and isobutyronitrile. Although generally considered to be derived from anthropogenic sources, we observed emissions of aromatic compounds including benzene, and a broad range of phenolics. Dimethyl sulfide emissions from creosotebush were higher than reported from any previously studied plant suggesting that terrestrial ecosystems should be reconsidered as an important source of this climatically important gas. We also present direct, primary emission measurements of isoprene and its apparent oxidation products methyl vinyl ketone, methacrolein, and 3-methyl furan (the later three compounds are typically assumed to form from secondary reactions within the atmosphere), as well as a group of compounds considered to be fatty acid oxidation products. These results suggest that one important function of some

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VOCs in creosotebush is as an antioxidant. We also find that emissions of nitriles from creosotebush represent an unaccounted for loss of nitrogen from arid ecosystems. Our results demonstrate the richness of creosotebush volatile emissions and highlight the need for further research into their atmospheric and ecological impacts.

## 1 Introduction

Surface emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) profoundly influence the composition of the atmosphere by providing reactive species for tropospheric chemistry (Atkinson and Arey, 2003) and providing condensable oxidation products for the formation of organic aerosols (Sakulyanontvittaya et al., 2008; Saathoff et al., 2009). The atmospheric impact of biogenic VOC emissions by terrestrial vegetation is enhanced relative to the impact from anthropogenic VOC sources by biogenic VOCs having greater reactivity to oxidants, and larger global emission rates (Guenther et al., 1995). However, the Southwestern US has recently become one of the fastest growing population regions in the country, resulting in increased anthropogenic emissions of atmospheric pollutants like VOCs and nitrogen oxides. Together with natural biogenic VOC emissions from native desert vegetation, anthropogenic emissions may contribute to the exceedence of US air quality standards for hazardous air pollutants such as ground level ozone (Kleinman et al., 2003; Wise and Comrie, 2005; Diem, 2000). While ecosystems around the world have been studied for VOC emissions, most attention has been given to forests with a high leaf area index (LAI) such as Tropical (Karl et al., 2004) Boreal (Rinne et al., 2005), and Pine (Schade and Goldstein, 2001) forests where volatile isoprenoids and oxygenated VOCs have been consistently observed as the predominate compounds released. In contrast, very little is known about biogenic VOC emissions from native desert plants and the associated effects on air quality and climate. Higher air temperatures and solar insolation of desert ecosystems may drive high VOC emission rates from these regions.

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Several species of desert plants are well known for their strong odor. For example, creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*) is often referred to in Sonora, Mexico as hediondilla, the "little stinker". By the Last Glacial Maximum, creosotebush already inhabited the Southwestern United States (Duran et al., 2005). Over the last century, the area dominated by creosotebush in North America has increased, and is associated with coincident land degradation during that time (Grover and Musick, 1990). Creosotebush is pervasive in all three North American warm deserts: the Mojave, the Sonoran, and the Chihuahuan; suggesting that its contributions to regional biogenic VOC emissions could be significant. Creosotebush leaves are opposite, with two asymmetrical oblong leaflets joined at the base, measuring about 10 mm long and 3 to 4 mm wide. The phenolic resin that coats these leaves has been shown to promote water use efficiency, deter herbivores, and screen ultra-violet radiation (Meinzer et al., 1990; Rhoades, 1977). This resinous coating is exuded from glandular trichomes; specialized epidermal cells containing volatile oils and other plant-produced secretions that can comprise as much as 20% of the dry leaf weight (Sakakibara et al., 1976). Previous work has identified nearly one hundred volatile constituents in these resins consisting mostly of monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes, aromatics, and unsaturated ketones (Mabry, 1979). The non-volatile components of creosotebush resin such as waxes (Seigler et al., 1974), flavanoids (Sakakibara et al., 1976), and lignins (Konno et al., 1990) including the potent antioxidant nordihydroguaiaretic acid (Arteaga et al., 2005) have been studied.

To our knowledge, only three studies have attempted to measure VOC emissions from creosotebush (emission rates normalized to leaf dry weight, gdw). In the first study, significant emissions of the oxygenated VOCs formic and acetic acids ( $0.6$  and  $0.7 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ , respectively) and formaldehyde ( $3.1 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) were observed (Knowlton et al., 1999). In a second study, 13 plants including creosotebush were surveyed for VOC emissions in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts for VOC emissions (Geron et al., 2006). The authors found that while creosotebush emissions were dominated by methanol ( $100 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), significant emissions of monoterpenes ( $2.0 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), sesquiterpenes ( $0.5$  to  $2 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), and acetalde-

hyde ( $1.0 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) also occurred (adjusted to  $30^\circ\text{C}$ ). In the third study on creosotebush VOC emissions (Papiez et al., 2009), only monoterpenes were observed, but at emission rates that were a factor of six lower than those of Geron et al. which was attributed to differences in phenology or environmental conditions. While Geron et al. detected small isoprene emissions from several other desert plants, they found negligible isoprene emissions from creosotebush as did Papiez et al. Modeling results from Geron et al. suggested that isoprene emissions from the Mojave are 10 to 30 times less than from Eastern US forests while monoterpene emissions are 3 to 8 times less (normalized to land area). While these results suggest that desert ecosystems may represent a relatively small source of reactive hydrocarbons in the atmosphere, this conclusion was primarily based on a limited set of measurements from a large number of species, and on the assumption that like other forests studied, volatile isoprenoids are the dominant compounds released by desert vegetation.

Indirect evidence for substantial VOC emissions from desert vegetation was obtained from ambient ozone concentration monitoring at five stations around Tucson, Arizona between April and September of 1995–1998 (Diem, 2000). The results showed a dramatic change from a weekend effect in June (wherein ground-level ozone is greater on weekends than on weekdays) to a weekday effect in July (wherein the opposite is observed: ground-level ozone is greater on weekdays than on weekends) associated with the onset of the North American Monsoon. It was hypothesized that biogenic VOC emissions from the Sonoran desert increase dramatically with increased atmospheric moisture in July and August in the Tucson area thereby changing the limiting ozone precursor from VOCs to nitrogen oxides ( $\text{NO}_x$ ). We were able to test this hypothesis in Southern Arizona during the 2009 summer monsoon season. Here we present the results of creosotebush branch emissions and ambient concentration measurements and find substantial branch emissions and ambient concentrations of all compounds previously reported from creosotebush. In addition to volatile isoprenoids (isoprene, monoterpenes, oxygenated monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes, oxygenated sesquiterpenes), a large array of VOCs not typically observed from forest sites

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are reported here including sulfides, nitriles, and an extensive list of oxygenated VOCs, aromatics, and fatty acid oxidation products.

## 2 Material and methods

### 2.1 Site description

The CREATIVE (CREosote ATmosphere Interactions through Volatile Emissions) field experiment occurred between 10 June and 1 October 2009 at the Santa Rita Experimental Range (SRER), approximately 40 miles north of the US/Mexico border in Southern Arizona. Creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*) is the dominant vegetation species at the SRER study site (Morton and Melgoza, 1991) within a reserve wherein vegetation measurements began in 1902. The specific location for this study was selected as a creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*) dominated ecosystem at the northern central boundary of the SRER (31° 54' 44.26" N, 110° 50' 12.92" W, 994 m a.s.l.), where average annual rainfall totals 330 mm (<http://ag.arizona.edu/SRER/data.html>), split evenly between summer and winter seasons (McClaran, 2003). At this location, total canopy cover is about 24%: 14% creosotebush and the other 10% a combination of annual grasses, annual herbaceous species, and cacti (Kurc and Benton, 2010). Here, the creosotebush has an average height just under 2 m with about 24 stems per shrub, averaging about 10 mm in diameter, and soil in the area is a sandy loam with no caliche layer down to at least 1 m (Kurc and Benton, 2010).

### 2.2 Meteorological and VOC measurements

Meteorological and VOC measurements are described in detail in the supplementary information. Briefly, a small air temperature controlled mobile laboratory (3 m×3 m) was used to house a high sensitivity proton transfer reaction mass spectrometer (PTR-MS) and a gas chromatograph. Wind speed, air temperature, and VOC measurements

ACPD

10, 17113–17151, 2010

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were made at 4.0 m height above the ground on a 5.0 m aluminum tower installed 36 m south of the laboratory. For VOC analysis, sample air was pumped from the tower or individual branch enclosures through heated Teflon tubing to the PTR-MS and gas chromatograph. Air samples (3.0 L) from branch enclosures were also collected on sorbent tubes and analyzed by GC-MS and (0.2 L) GC-PTR-MS.

### 3 Results and discussion

Unlike many broad leaf and conifer forests where VOC emissions are dominated by volatile isoprenoids (isoprene, monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes), creosotebush emissions include a rich set of non-isoprenoid compounds. GC-MS results from branch enclosure samples collected from a detached branch transported to Biosphere 2 (Fig. 2, Top) and in-situ in the field (Fig. 2, Bottom) demonstrates the richness of creosotebush VOC emissions (Table 1). We have classified these VOCs into six structural groups: 1) volatile isoprenoids, 2) oxygenated VOCs, 3) fatty acid oxidation products, 4) aromatics, 5) sulfides, and 6) nitriles. Except for a variety of alkanes which cannot be detected by PTR-MS (hexane, dodecane, tridecane, etc.), the PTR-MS was used to quantify the majority of the compounds identified by GC-MS from creosotebush branch enclosures. PTR-MS was also used to quantify several additional VOCs that the GC-MS did not detect well, including the highly volatile compounds methanol, acetaldehyde, ethanol, and dimethyl sulfide. These compounds are not quantitatively retained on sorbent tubes under field conditions and/or are lost during dry purging.

GC-PTR-MS chromatograms obtained in the field from branch enclosure samples revealed distinct peaks for methanol ( $m/z$  33), acetaldehyde ( $m/z$  45), acetone ( $m/z$  59), isoprene ( $m/z$  69), methacrolein and methyl vinyl ketone ( $m/z$  71), methyl ethyl ketone and 2-methyl propanal ( $m/z$  73), methyl acetate ( $m/z$  75), 3-methyl furan, hexanal, and 3-hexen-1-ol acetate ( $m/z$  83), and five different monoterpenes ( $m/z$  137,81) (Figs. 5–7). At least five monoterpenes were identified from creosotebush branch samples by GC-MS including  $\alpha$ -pinene, camphene, carene, limonene, and ocimene. These

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results demonstrate that for some mass to charge ratios ( $m/z$ ), single creosotebush compounds can be measured by PTR-MS. However, other  $m/z$  values have two or more compounds that contribute to the measured signal. Although the use of PTR-MS to quantify biosphere-atmosphere exchange rates of VOCs is becoming more common, validation of mass assignments to specific compounds is less common. Our results demonstrate that the use of thermal desorption GC-PTR-MS and GC-MS is a useful method for this validation. While the oxygenated VOCs, volatile isoprenoids, and nitriles were present in every branch enclosure sample analyzed by GC-MS (four replicate samples were collected with two analyzed at Biosphere 2 and two analyzed at NCAR), the presence of individual aromatics and fatty acid oxidation products was more variable, with some compounds only appearing in one sample. Therefore, we recommend that GC-PTR-MS and GC-MS work be routinely performed on complex VOC samples such as creosotebush emissions to validate PTR-MS measurements.

In the case where more than one compound contributes to a given  $m/z$  value measured by PTR-MS, we estimate that they possess similar normalized sensitivities. By calibrating the PTR-MS to one of the compounds and applying the normalized calibration factor to the measured signal, we then estimate total concentrations. For example, since the signal at  $m/z$  73 is due to both methyl ethyl ketone and 2-methyl propanal, we calculate the total concentration of methyl ethyl ketone+2-methyl propanal by calibrating the PTR-MS to methyl ethyl ketone.

### 3.1 PTR-MS branch enclosure and ambient concentration measurements

Calibration of the PTR-MS with permeation tube standards (methanol, ethanol, acetone, acetic acid, and isoprene) during ambient air monitoring revealed normalized VOC sensitivities ( $\text{ppbv ncps}^{-1}$ ) that remained relatively constant over the course of the experiment ( $<30\%$  relative standard deviation, 9 calibrations). Using the second calibration technique described in the supplementary information (cyclohexane solutions), the normalized sensitivity for methyl vinyl ketone measured during the field experiment was within 3% of that determined after the experiment using the same technique.

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Normalized sensitivities for  $\alpha$ -pinene determined using a permeation tube during the experiment was within 6% of that determined after the experiment using the cyclohexane technique. These results suggest that cyclohexane solutions offer a repeatable and accurate method for calibration of the PTR-MS to VOCs not easily obtained in permeation tubes or compressed gas cylinders. However, compounds with a low solubility in cyclohexane should be avoided (e.g., organic acids).

Figures 5–13 include representative plots of the ground-based VOC measurements during CREATIVE 2009 with PTR-MS including one day of creosotebush branch emission rates (left column) followed by two days of ambient mixing ratios (right column). Branch emissions of all VOCs appeared to follow a strong diurnal pattern with maxima during mid day to early afternoon. In addition, except for methanol and acetone, ambient concentrations also appeared to show a strong diurnal pattern with maxima during mid day. While branch emission rates of methanol also appeared to follow a strong diurnal pattern, considerable emissions continued until late into the night (Fig. 7). Because methanol production in plants is related to cell wall expansion during growth and not recently photoassimilated carbon, continued production and emission at night is possible. In contrast with most other VOCs whose concentrations peaked at midday, continued methanol emissions at night coupled with the decreased height of the atmospheric boundary layer may have contributed to the observed methanol concentration pattern with a maximum at night (Fig. 7). No clear diurnal pattern was generally observed for acetone which may be a result of high (several ppbv) background concentrations advected into the site (Fig. 7). In addition, ambient concentrations of benzene and xylene+benzaldehyde displayed spikes that indicate potential anthropogenic influences (Fig. 10).

Maximum noon time (12:00–14:00 LT) air temperatures inside the enclosure used for the eight branches studied for VOC emissions by PTR-MS ranged between 40–48 °C, and radiation conditions at branch height (made outside the enclosure) ranged between 2000–2500 PAR. By comparison, maximum ambient temperatures during the same time period measured by the sonic anemometer ranged between 39–46 °C. These val-

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ues fall into a normal ambient temperature range for low elevations of the southwest region during the summer, and suggest that extreme heating inside the branch enclosure did not occur; enclosure temperatures were no more than a few degrees above ambient. A summary of branch emission rates and ambient concentrations measured with PTR-MS is shown in Table 1. We estimate total noon time VOC emission rates of 14–118  $\mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$  (seven branches). Unlike the Geron et al. observations of creosotebush emissions which were dominated by methanol and ethanol (97% by carbon mass %), a much wider variety of compounds were observed here including isoprenoids (32.7%), an extended suite of oxygenated VOCs (35.0%), fatty acid oxidation products (21.1%), aromatics (8.0%), sulfides (1.9%), and nitriles (1.3%) (noontime average of seven branches, Fig. 4).

### 3.2 Oxygenated VOCs

We found creosotebush to be a strong source of oxygenated VOCs, with average noon time emissions of 24.0  $\mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ , 35.0% of the total VOC emissions by mass of carbon. Average noon time emission rates of methanol, acetone, and acetaldehyde fluxes were 4.5, 2.5, 3.7  $\mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ , respectively. A significant methyl acetate emission (0.3  $\mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) from creosotebush branches was verified by GC-MS (Fig. 2: Peak 3, top chromatogram) and GC-PTR-MS (Fig. 6). Although rarely reported from plants, methyl acetate has been previously observed in floral scents.

In some of the branch enclosures, water vapor condensed inside the bag during the day due to the high transpiration rates. This resulted in the loss of the highly water soluble VOCs acetic acid, ethanol, and pyruvic acid (data not shown). Therefore, the expected diurnal patterns were only observed from three of the branch enclosures where condensation did not occur (example in Fig. 8). From these branches, average noon time emission rates of acetic acid, ethanol, and pyruvic acid were up to 1.7, 11.7, and 0.2  $\mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ , respectively. Previous work in our lab using PTR-MS and GC-MS in selected ion mode has shown that pyruvic acid likely contributes to the PTR-MS signal at  $m/z$  89 and is a precursor in the biosynthesis of many VOCs including volatile

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isoprenoids (isoprene, monoterpenes, and sesquiterpenes) and several oxygenated VOCs (acetaldehyde, acetone, acetic acid, and ethanol) (Jardine et al., 2010).

### 3.3 Nitriles and sulfides

Using GC-MS, we discovered that creosotebush emits measurable quantities of isobutyronitrile and 2-methyl butanenitrile (Fig. 2). Although isobutyronitrile ( $m/z$  70) and 2-methyl butanenitrile ( $m/z$  84) were measured with PTR-MS mass-scans from creosotebush branch emissions, these nitriles were not included in the ambient air measurements. Due to the interference by  $^{13}\text{C}$ -isoprene at  $m/z$  70 measured by PTR-MS, we subtracted 5.5% of the signal at  $m/z$  69 from  $m/z$  70 to estimate the concentration of isobutyronitrile using  $m/z$  70. A similar subtraction to quantify 2-methyl butanenitrile was done for the influence on  $m/z$  84 by 3-methyl furan. The average noon time emission rate of isobutyronitrile was  $0.7 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ . More importantly, this represents a large loss of nitrogen from these ecosystems of  $8.4 \text{ ng N m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  with a maximum loss rate of  $35 \text{ ng N m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  (normalized to leaf area). For comparison, at a site in the Mohave Desert dominated by creosotebush, total reactive nitrogen ( $\text{NO} + \text{NH}_3$ ) emissions were measured from dry and artificially wetted soils (McCalley and Sparks, 2009). A maximum emission rate of  $5 \text{ ng N m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  (ground area) was measured from dry soils and  $150 \text{ ng N m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  was measured from wetted soils. While the authors claimed that these emissions dominate arid-land nitrogen export, our observations suggest that nitrile emissions from creosotebush are also present. Several studies using PTR-MS to measure biomass burning of plant materials have reported the emission of nitrile compounds including acetonitrile, propenenitrile, and propanenitrile (Christian et al., 2004). Emission of nitrile compounds from some plants may be related to stress. For example, following attack by herbivores, two nitriles (6,7-dithiooctanenitrile and 5-(methylthio) pentanenitrile) were shown by GC-MS to be emitted from *Arabidopsis thaliana* (Van Poecke et al., 2001). Although the mechanism of formation needs to be explored in more detail, it is possible that nitrile emissions from creosotebush involve the hydrolysis of glucosinolates by myrosinases which are enzymes that have

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thioglucoisidase activity (Bones and Rossiter, 1996).

Another surprising result from the CREATIVE 2009 field campaign are the large average emission rates and ambient concentrations of dimethyl sulfide (DMS) and 2,4-dithiapentane measured with PTR-MS at  $m/z$  63 ( $0.2 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) and  $m/z$  109 ( $1.2 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), respectively. DMS has a potentially potent effect on climate by forming sulfate aerosols in the atmosphere that can act as cloud condensation nuclei (Lovelock, 1976). While very few DMS emission rate measurements from terrestrial plants exist, it is generally thought that most plants are a source of DMS to the atmosphere, but that terrestrial vegetation is considered a minor source compared with the oceans (Watts, 2000). While several studies using GC techniques have measured DMS from terrestrial plants, only a few species studied release small amounts of it (Yonemura et al., 2005; Geng and Mu, 2006). For example, when 19 tree species were surveyed, the maximum DMS emission rates ( $0.4 \text{ pmol m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) were more than three orders of magnitude lower than measured here for creosotebush ( $0.8 \text{ nmol m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) (Geng and Mu, 2006). DMS fluxes from several plants were also shown to be light and temperature dependent with the highest fluxes measured from corn at  $30^\circ\text{C}$  ( $30 \text{ ng S gdw}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$ ) (Fall et al., 1988). In comparison, noon time emission rates from creosotebush reached values up to  $585 \text{ ng S gdw}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$ ; (a branch exposed to field temperatures up to  $48^\circ\text{C}$ ), nearly twenty times larger than those reported for corn. Therefore, DMS emissions from creosotebush should be taken into account when constructing terrestrial emission inventories in North and South America.

A PTR-MS signal at  $m/z$  63 attributed to DMS blown inland from the coast was also observed in forest ambient air (Jordan et al., 2009). One possibility is that the signal at  $m/z$  63 arises from a water-acetaldehyde- $\text{H}^+$  cluster. However, previous research found no humidity dependence on acetaldehyde ( $m/z$  45) and DMS ( $m/z$  63) concentration measurements by PTR-MS (Warneke et al., 2001). In this study, when 19 ppbv acetaldehyde was introduced into zero air humidified to  $20^\circ\text{C}$  (Fig. 3), a strong  $\text{H}^+$ -acetaldehyde signal was detected at  $m/z$  45, but without an increase in the signal at  $m/z$  63 ( $\text{H}^+$ -acetaldehyde- $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  cluster). Given the high sensitivity of PTR-MS to

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$m/z$  63 when dimethyl sulfide in cyclohexane was used for calibration, we conclude that significant VOC-water cluster formation does not occur during ambient air and branch flux measurements.

### 3.4 Aromatics and chlorocarbons

Aromatic compounds in the atmosphere are widely considered to be primarily of anthropogenic origin (Na et al., 2005; Hellen et al., 2005; Burstyn et al., 2007), and are often not considered in discussions of biogenic emissions from plants (e.g., Kesselmeier and Staudt, 1999). These compounds are a concern for air quality because of their carcinogenic effects in animals (Mehlman, 1991). Several aromatic compounds have been shown to be emitted from plants including toluene (White et al., 2009), benzaldehyde (Batten et al., 1995), and phenol (Holzinger et al., 2000). A survey of seven Mediterranean woody species revealed only a few species emitted phenol (Penuelas and Llusia, 2001). We found that average noon time emissions of aromatic VOCs ( $5.5 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) represent 8.0% of the total noon time VOC emissions from creosotebush (Fig. 4).

While volatile components make up a significant portion of creosotebush resin, the majority consists of a variety of non-volatile polyphenolic compounds such as flavonoids and lignin produced from the shikimic acid pathway. Volatile aromatic compounds that are emitted into the atmosphere in measurable quantities from creosotebush including benzene, phenol, xylene, benzaldehyde, acetophenone, and 1-chloro-2-methoxy-benzene (Table 1) are possibly also produced from the shikimic acid pathway. To our knowledge, these are the first emission rate estimates of the halocarbon 1-chloro-2-methoxy-benzene from any plant. Emissions of halocarbons are a concern because they can carry chlorine to the stratosphere and participate in the catalytic destruction of ozone. Previous work has identified creosotebush scrub ecosystems in Southern California to be a source of chloroform, methyl chloroform, and carbon-tetrachloride (Rhew et al., 2008). GC-MS measurements from the Southern Arizona creosotebush branch enclosure sample collected in the field reveal the presence of

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elevated carbon tetrachloride (Fig. 2, bottom chromatograph, peak 8). While previously often considered strictly anthropogenic, our results demonstrate that aromatic compounds in the atmosphere can have a measurable biogenic source. Additional research is necessary to determine whether these emissions are unique to creosotebush or are also released from other plants. The presence of volatile aromatic compounds in essential oils from multiple plant species suggests that many plants may produce and emit volatile aromatic compounds (Chiu et al., 2009).

### 3.5 Volatile isoprenoids

A large list of volatile isoprenoids including isoprene, monoterpenes, oxygenated monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes, and oxygenated sesquiterpenes were found to be produced by creosotebush. While previous studies did not detect isoprene emissions from creosotebush, we found a substantial average noon time emission rate of  $7.5 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ . Monoterpene fluxes detected by Geron et al. ( $5.0 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ , adjusted to  $40^\circ\text{C}$  for comparison), are within the range measured in this study (range:  $2.2\text{--}21.9 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ , average of  $10.4 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ). In addition, our average estimate for sesquiterpene emissions ( $0.8 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) falls within the emission range ( $0.5\text{--}2.0 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) of  $\beta$ -caryophyllene (a sesquiterpene) made by Geron et al. Two sesquiterpenes including  $\beta$ -caryophyllene were detected from branch enclosure samples by GC-MS analysis at Biosphere 2 (Fig. 2) whereas at least 15 different sesquiterpenes and oxygenated sesquiterpenes (data not shown) were detected from branch enclosure samples analyzed at NCAR using GC-MS. In addition, emissions of 2-methyl-3-buten-2-ol (MBO) were likely significant but could not be separately determined due to the presence of 2-pentanone, pentanal, and MBO at the PTR-MS signal at  $m/z$  87 (average noon time emissions of  $0.7 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ). Although MBO emissions are generally considered to be isolated to Pine trees, our results demonstrate that this assumption is incorrect and highlights the need to screen more plants for MBO emissions to the atmosphere. The presence of both isoprene and MBO emissions is interesting, given that most species studied have been reported to emit one or

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the other, depending on the presence of isoprene or MBO synthases. However, recent evidence suggests that MBO synthase enzymes may be able to produce both MBO and isoprene (Thomas D. Sharkey, personal communication).

In Amazonia, inverse modeling of vertical concentration gradients of methyl vinyl ketone+methacrolein concentrations suggested a source from isoprene oxidation above the canopy (Karl et al., 2009). This agrees with the general assumption that methyl vinyl ketone and methacrolein are secondary oxidation products of isoprene in the atmosphere (Pang et al., 2009; Helmig et al., 1998). However, primary emissions of the isoprene oxidation products methyl vinyl ketone+methacrolein ( $0.4 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) and 3-methyl furan ( $1.0 \mu\text{g C gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ) were found to be directly emitted in significant quantities from creosotebush; representing  $\sim 19\%$  of the branch level isoprene emission rates on average. Given the air residence time in the enclosure of approximately one minute and the likely low ozone concentrations, we assume gas phase oxidation of isoprene is negligible. Past studies have shown negligible ( $<2\%$ ) gas phase isoprene oxidation reactions using dynamic plant enclosures even during ozone fumigation (Fares et al., 2008). Isoprene produced by plants has been shown to reduce ozone damage in leaves, but the mechanism are not yet fully understood (Loreto and Velikova, 2001; Loreto and Fares, 2007). Isoprene oxidation products may be produced during reactions with reactive oxygen species (ROS) which are known to accumulate in plants during stress (Kotchoni and Gachomo, 2006). During metabolism at elevated temperatures, mitochondria may become sources of ROS which could react with isoprene within the plant to produce the oxidation products methyl vinyl ketone, methacrolein, and 3-methyl furan; thereby protecting important cellular components from oxidative damage. Our observations provide the first direct evidence that this protection is mediated by isoprene oxidation reactions. However, methacrolein and methyl vinyl ketone may also be produced from fatty acid oxidation (Almeras et al., 2003). Other studies have suggested that primary branch emissions (Holzinger et al., 2000) and ambient concentrations (Jordan et al., 2009; Holzinger et al., 2002) of a VOC detected at  $m/z$  71 with PTR-MS correspond to methyl vinyl ketone and methacrolein. We

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used GC-MS and GC-PTR-MS to verify their identities (Fig. 2, bottom chromatogram, peaks 3 and 4; Fig. 6). Therefore, our results call into question the idea that isoprene oxidation products derive exclusively from isoprene photooxidation in the atmosphere and supports the hypothesis that one of the major functions of volatile isoprenoids in plants is to act as an antioxidant (Vickers et al., 2009).

### 3.6 Fatty acid oxidation products

The stress-induced activation of the octadecanoid pathway in plants leads to the biosynthesis of metabolites from the oxidation of fatty acids termed oxylipins including volatile C<sub>6</sub> aldehydes and alcohols (Vick and Zimmerman, 1989; Hatanaka et al., 1987). This ubiquitous pathway has been shown to be elicited following a wide range of stresses including wounding (Farmer and Ryan, 1992) and herbivory (Schmelz et al., 2003). Although the octadecanoid pathway appears to be a general response of plants to stress, we measured high average noon time creosotebush emissions (14.5 µg C gdw<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) and ambient concentrations of a large group of VOCs which we have loosely termed fatty acid oxidation products (Figs. 9 and 11). These include the classic C<sub>6</sub> green leaf volatiles and their acetate esters (hexanal, 3-hexen-1-ol acetate, hexyl acetate) but more generally, C<sub>2</sub>-C<sub>18</sub> alkenes, aldehydes, ketones, alcohols, and acetate esters. Therefore, emissions of these VOCs may derive from enzymatic reactions (lipoxygenase) or non-enzymatic reactions (reactions with ROS). Because the branches were not under any obvious biotic or abiotic stress during the enclosure measurements, we suggest that one possible role for the oxidation of fatty acids is the protection of creosotebush from oxidation by ROS generated during metabolism at high temperatures, exposure to UV light, and atmospheric oxidants like ozone. In addition, the presence of these compounds in the resin likely contributes to an increase in water use efficiency.

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## 4 Conclusions

Although desert ecosystems are generally considered small sources of reactive hydrocarbons in the atmosphere, we find substantial emissions of a wide variety of compounds from creosotebush. These emissions may act to degrade regional air quality by increasing atmospheric oxidants and particulates. Previous research on creosotebush VOC emissions have reported no isoprene emissions, but with significant monoterpene, sesquiterpene, and oxygenated VOC emissions. During CREATIVE 2009, we observed large branch emission rates of a wide range of VOCs including volatile isoprenoids (including isoprene), oxygenated VOCs, aromatics, sulfides, nitriles, and fatty acid oxidation products. Emissions and ambient concentrations followed ambient temperature and light and displayed strong diurnal patterns with maxima during midday. Unlike other field sites where volatile isoprenoids are the dominant compounds released, average emissions from creosotebush are divided roughly equally into oxygenated VOCs, volatile isoprenoids, and fatty acid oxidation products+aromatics+sulfides+nitriles. Several new compounds of biogenic origin including 1-chloro-2-methoxy-benzene and isobutyronitrile are reported here for the first time. Emissions of nitriles from creosotebush represent a significant loss of nitrogen from desert ecosystems that may reinforce nitrogen limitations in desert environments. While aromatic compounds in the atmosphere are generally considered to be of anthropogenic origin, the wide array of aromatic and phenolic VOCs emitted by creosotebush suggests that this assumption needs to be revisited in certain ecosystems. We also provide the first primary emission rate estimates of isoprene together with its three oxidation products 3-methyl furan, methyl vinyl ketone, and methacrolein. Together with primary emissions of a wide group of compounds we have roughly classified as fatty acid oxidation products, these observations provide the first direct evidence that volatile isoprenoids and fatty acids may function as antioxidants in plants.

Not only does creosotebush emit a vast array of compounds, when compared with other plants on a leaf area or dry weight basis, branch emissions of individ-

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ual VOCs are very high. For example, a review paper that summarized the literature on oxygenated VOCs emissions from plants (Seco et al., 2007) found maximum emission rates for acetic acid ( $0.5 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), acetone ( $0.9 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), acetaldehyde ( $0.7 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), and methanol ( $0.9 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ). In comparison, we found average noon time emission rates from creosotebush of acetic acid ( $1.7 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), acetone ( $2.5 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), acetaldehyde ( $3.7 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ), and methanol ( $4.5 \mu\text{gC gdw}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ ); 2.9–5.7 times higher than the maximum literature rates summarized by Seco et al. (2007) Of potential significance for the formation of cloud condensation nuclei, we found that maximum dimethyl sulfide emissions from creosotebush are higher than reported from any plant. Creosotebush emissions may be higher than other reported species in part because of the high ambient temperatures and solar insolation experienced during the summer in the desert southwest, but also because of their potential protective roles against abiotic and biotic stresses (herbivory, UV light, desiccation, oxidants). Some of these stresses may not be as severe in plants growing in cooler, non-water limited ecosystems. However, because branch enclosures may induce physiological stresses in some plants, our branch emission rate measurements should be considered as an upper limit.

In conclusion, given its vast distribution in North America, additional research is needed to understand the physiological, ecological and atmospheric impacts of creosotebush VOC emissions. Particular attention should be given to the potential influences of summer monsoons and winter frontal storms on creosotebush VOC emissions as well as the potential influences of these emissions on air quality and precipitation dynamics.

**Supplementary material related to this article is available online at:**  
**[http://www.atmos-chem-phys-discuss.net/10/17113/2010/  
acpd-10-17113-2010-supplement.pdf](http://www.atmos-chem-phys-discuss.net/10/17113/2010/acpd-10-17113-2010-supplement.pdf)**

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*Acknowledgements.* This research was supported by the University of Arizona-Biosphere 2 Earth Science division. We would like to kindly thank Trina Shartsis, David Zeng, Evan Sommer, and Angela Jardine at the University of Arizona, and Mark Heitlinger at the Santa Rita Experimental Range (SREER) for assistance with the required infrastructure needed in this study. Instrumentation support is acknowledged from NSF (CHE 0216226) and from Edward P. Bass.

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**Table 1.** Summary of branch flux and ambient concentrations of creosotebush VOCs measured using PTR-MS and GC-MS. Compounds are organized according to structure class: (black) volatile isoprenoids, (red) oxygenated VOCs, (green) nitriles, (orange) sulfides, (purple) aromatics, (blue) isoprenoid and fatty acid oxidation products. Compounds detected in branch enclosure samples analyzed by GC-MS at Biosphere 2 (B2) and the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) are designated in the fourth column. \* Compounds identities verified by standards.

	PTR-MS	Detected in resins?	Branch	Range of noontime Branch Emission Rates	average noontime Branch Emission Rates	Range of noontime Ambient Concentrations
VOCs detected in this study	m/z	Mabry 1979	GC-MS	nmole m <sup>-2</sup> s <sup>-1</sup>	μgC gdw <sup>-1</sup> hr <sup>-1</sup>	pptv or ppbv
isoprene*	69	no	NCAR, B2	0.6-16	7.5	300 pptv
monoterpenes*	137	yes	NCAR, B2	1.5-10	21.9	0.3-1.5 ppbv
camphor, methyl salicylate*	153	yes, no	NCAR, B2	0.2-1.0	0.9	100 pptv
borneol, limonene oxide	155	yes	NCAR, B2	0.0-1.0	2.7	30 pptv
sesquiterpenes*	205	yes	NCAR, B2	0.0-0.8	0.8	600 pptv
methanol	33	no	GC-PTR-MS	6.0-40.0	4.5	2.0-7.0 ppbv
acetaldehyde	45	no	GC-PTR-MS	1.5-20	3.7	1.5-2.0 ppbv
ethanol	47	no		6.0-40	1.1	40-100 ppbv
acetone*	59	no	GC-PTR-MS, B2	1.0-8.0	2.5	2.0-3.5 ppbv
acetic acid*	61	no	NCAR, B2	0.2-10.0	1.7	1.0-5.5 ppbv
methyl acetate*	75	no	B2	0.3-1.5	0.3	300-400 pptv
pyruvic acid	89	no		0.2-1.2	0.2	100 pptv
isobutyronitrile*	70	no	NCAR, B2	0-2.5	0.7	
2-methyl butanenitrile	84	no	NCAR, B2	0.08-0.5	0.2	
dimethyl sulfide	63	no		0.06-0.8	0.2	150-500 pptv
2,4-dithiapentane	109	no	NCAR	0.2-1.0	1.2	0.5-8.0 ppbv
benzene*	79	no	NCAR, B2	0.06-0.2	0.2	120-150 pptv
phenol*	95	no	B2	0.04-0.5	0.5	80 pptv
xylene, benzaldehyde*	107	yes	NCAR, B2	0.02-0.4	0.4	200 pptv
acetophenone*	121	yes	NCAR, B2	0.02-0.4	0.4	300 pptv
1-methoxy-2-methyl-benzene	123	no	B2	0.03-0.1	0.2	
guaiacol	125	no		0.02-0.3	0.2	200-400 pptv
octanal, 3-methyl-2-buten-1-ol acetate	129	no	NCAR, B2	0.01-0.2	0.1	100-200 pptv
homosalate	139	no	NCAR, B2	0.1-2.0	3.5	0.6-2 ppbv
methyl vinyl ketone*, methacrolein	71	no	GC-PTR-MS, B2	0.1-1.0	0.4	140-300 pptv
methyl ethyl ketone*, 2-methyl-propanal	73	no	GC-PTR-MS, B2	0.35-2.0	0.9	200-1500 pptv
hexanal*, 3-hexen-1-ol acetate, 3-methyl furan	83	no	NCAR, B2	0.07-1.5	1.0	100-150 pptv
3-methyl-2-butenal, 2-methyl-1-pentene	85	no	NCAR, B2	0.25-2.5	1.5	140 pptv
2-methyl-3-buten-2-ol, 2-pentanone, pentanal	87	no	NCAR, B2	0.1-0.8	0.7	400 pptv
1-hexen-3-one, 1-heptene	99	no	NCAR, B2	0.1-3.0	2.0	500-600 pptv
hexanal*	101	yes	NCAR, B2	0.05-0.6	0.5	300-400 pptv
2-heptanone, 2-methyl cyclohexanol, heptanal	115	yes	NCAR, B2	0.02-0.14	0.2	200-300 pptv
1-octen-3-one, 1-nonenol, 1-nonanol, 6-methyl-5-hepten-2-one	127	no	NCAR, B2	0.2-1.2	1.5	0.7-2.0 ppbv
2,6-dimethyl-1,3,5,7-octatetraene, cymene*	135	no	NCAR, B2	0.02-0.1	0.1	
1-decene	141	no	NCAR, B2	0.06-0.1	0.3	20 pptv
nonanal*, 3-hexen-1-ol acetate, 1-chloro-2-methoxy-benzene	143	no	NCAR, B2	0.2-2.5	3.0	0.6-1.0 ppbv
hexyl acetate	145	no	NCAR, B2	0.01-0.25	0.2	10-12 pptv
2-(2-butenyl)-3-methyl-cyclopenten-1-one	151	yes	NCAR	0.0-1.0	0.5	150 pptv
decanal*	157	no	NCAR, B2	0.0-1.0	0.8	300 pptv
2-undecanone	171	yes	NCAR, B2	0.0-1.0	0.9	300 pptv

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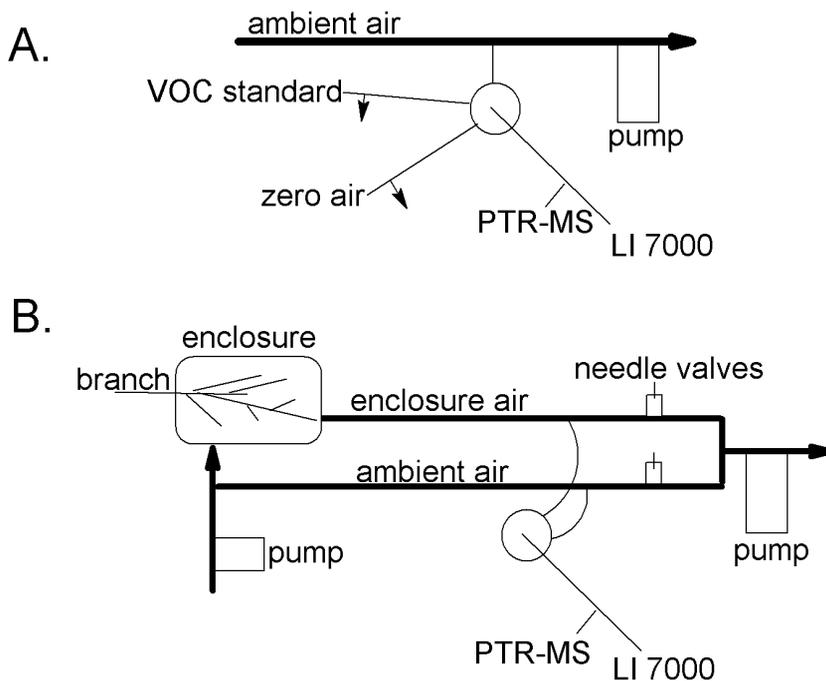
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**Fig. 1.** Gas inlets for **(A)** ambient air VOC concentration and **(B)** branch VOC flux measurements.

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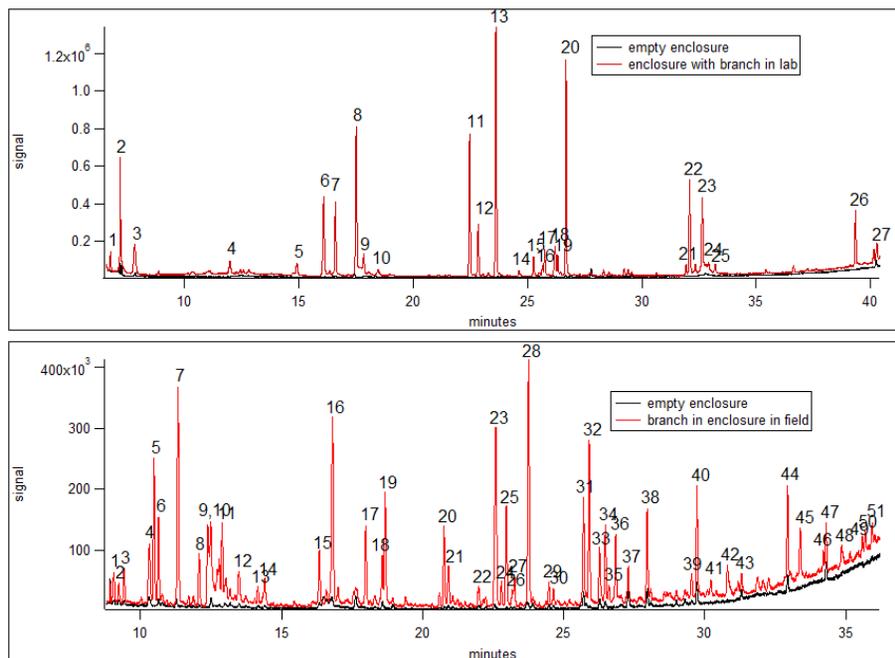


Fig. 2.

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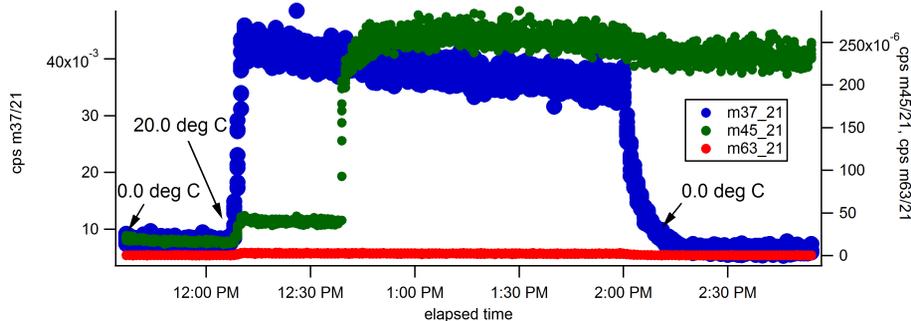
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**Fig. 2.** Total ion chromatograms of creosotebush VOCs from GC-MS air samples taken in the lab (top graph) and in the field (bottom graph). Compounds present in the lab sample (top) include 1) isoprene, 2) unknown, 3) methyl acetate, 4) isobutyronitrile, 5) acetic acid, 6) 2-methyl-butanitrile, 7) unknown, 8) 1-hexen-3-one, 9) unknown, 10) hexanal, 11) tricyclene, 12) alpha-pinene, 13) camphene, 14) beta-pinene, 15) 1-octen-3-one, 16) limonene oxide, 17) 3-hexen-1-ol acetate, 18) 1-methoxy-2-methyl-benzene, 19) limonene, 20) ocimene, 21) unidentified monoterpene, 22) camphor, 23) isoborneol, 24) unknown, 25) methyl salicylate, 26) beta-caryophyllene, 27) 1,5,9,9-tetramethyl-1,4,7-cycloundecatriene (a sesquiterpene). Compounds present in the field sample (bottom) include isoprene and acetone (not shown), 1) 2-methyl propanal, 2) hexane, 3) methacrolein, 4) methyl vinyl ketone, 5) 3-methyl furan, 6) methyl ethyl ketone, 7) 2-methyl-3-buten-2-ol, 8) carbon tetrachloride, 9) isobutyronitrile, 10) benzene, 11) 1-heptene, 12) 2-methyl-1-pentene, 13) 2-pentanone, 14) pentanal, 15) 2-methyl-butanenitrile, 16) unknown, 17) unknown, 18) hexanal, 19) 3-methyl-2-butenal, 20) 1-nonene, 21) xylene, 22) unknown, 23) tricyclene, 24) 1-nonanol, 25)  $\alpha$ -pinene, 26) 1-(2-chloroethoxy) butane, 27) unknown, 28) camphene, 29) 1-decene, 30) unknown, 31) benzaldehyde, 32) 3-hexen-1-ol acetate, 33) octanal, 34) limonene, 35) cymene, 36) ocimene, 37) 2-ethyl-1-hexanol, 38) phenol, 39) acetophenone, 40) nonanal, 41) 2,6-dimethyl-1,3,5,7-octatetraene, 42) 1-chloro-2-methoxy-benzene, 43) dodecane, 44) decanal, 45) methyl salicylate, 46) 1-tridecene, 47) tridecane, 48) benzothiazole, 49) 2-undecanone, 50) acetic acid, 1,7,7-trimethyl-bicyclo[2.2.1]hept-2-yl ester, 51) octadecanal.

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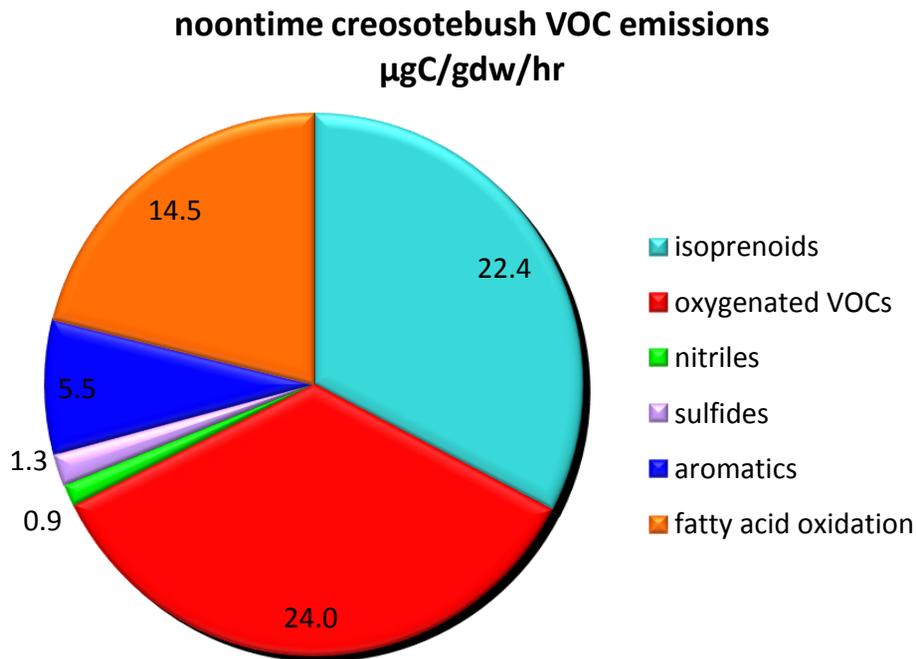


**Fig. 3.** Calibration of PTR-MS to 19.0 ppbv acetaldehyde in air with a 20°C dewpoint and 0°C dewpoint. The lack of signal at  $m/z$  63 upon addition of acetaldehyde to the humidified air demonstrates the lack of significant acetaldehyde-water cluster formation. Because calibration with dimethyl sulfide results in a strong signal at  $m/z$  63 (data not shown), we conclude that dimethyl sulfide is present in ambient air and creosotebush branch emissions.

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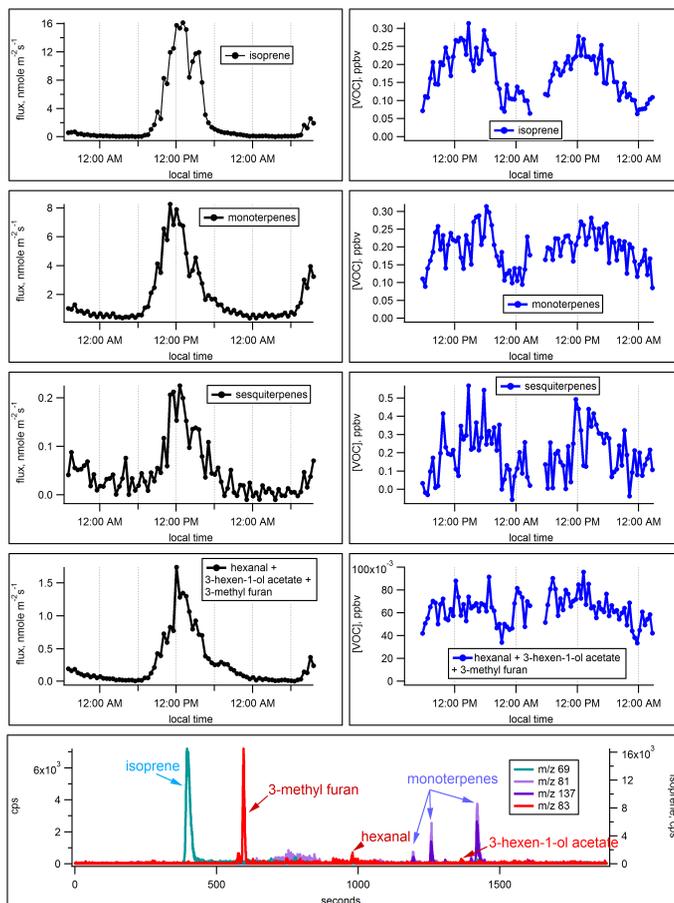


**Fig. 4.** Piechart showing average noontime VOC fluxes from seven creosotebush branches (by mass of carbon).

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**Fig. 5.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column). GC-PTR-MS chromatogram (bottom).

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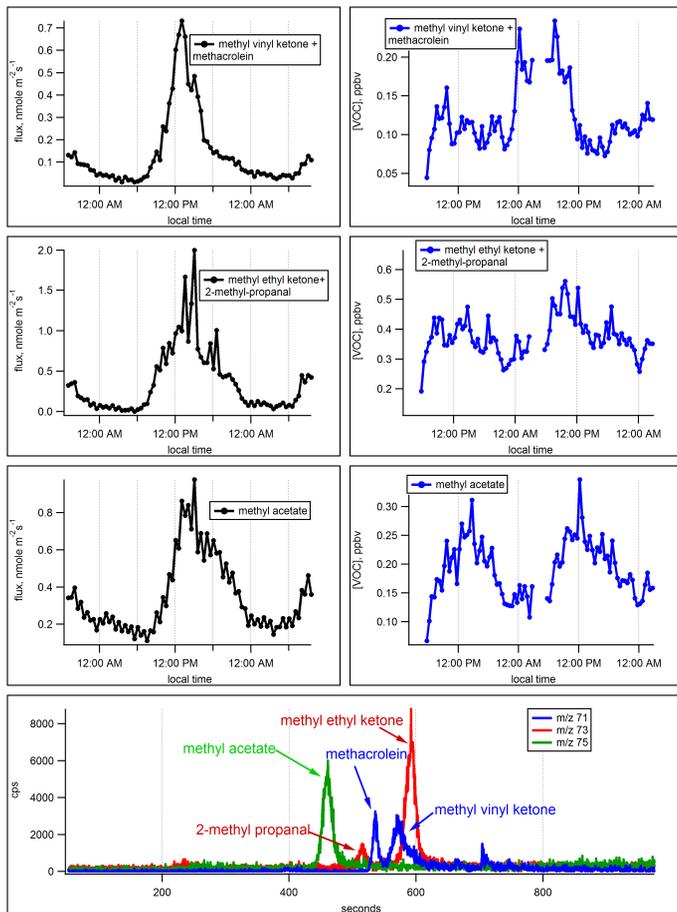
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**Fig. 6.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column). GC-PTR-MS chromatogram (bottom).

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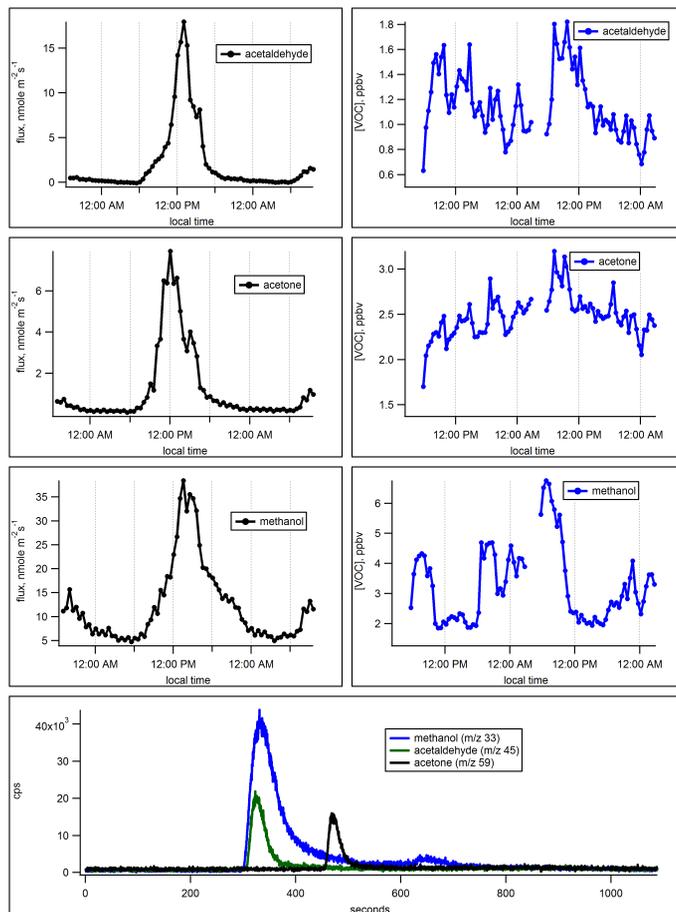
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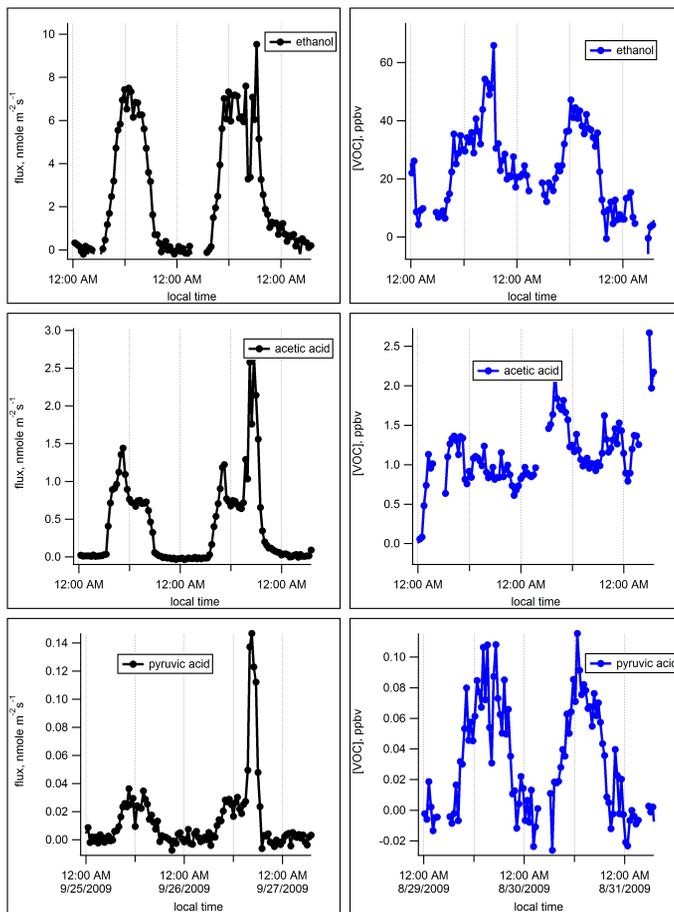


**Fig. 7.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column). GC-PTR-MS chromatogram (bottom).

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**Fig. 8.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column).

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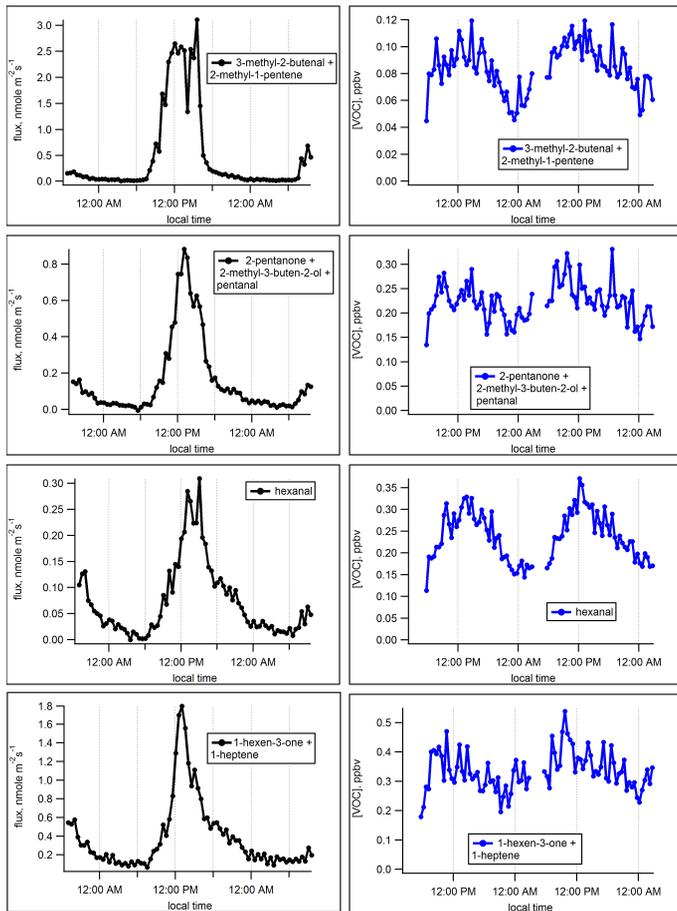
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**Fig. 9.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column).

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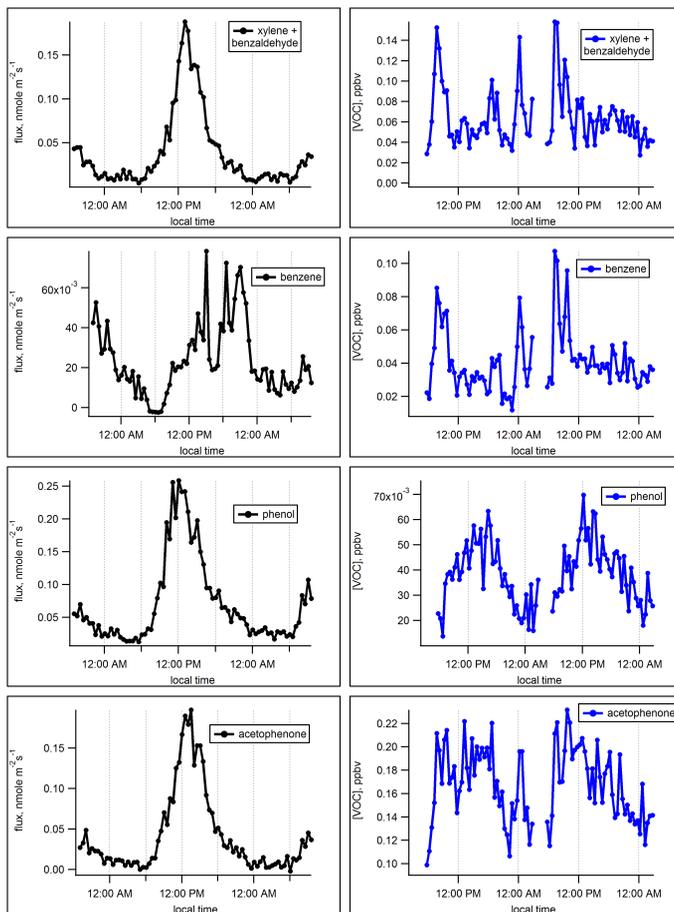
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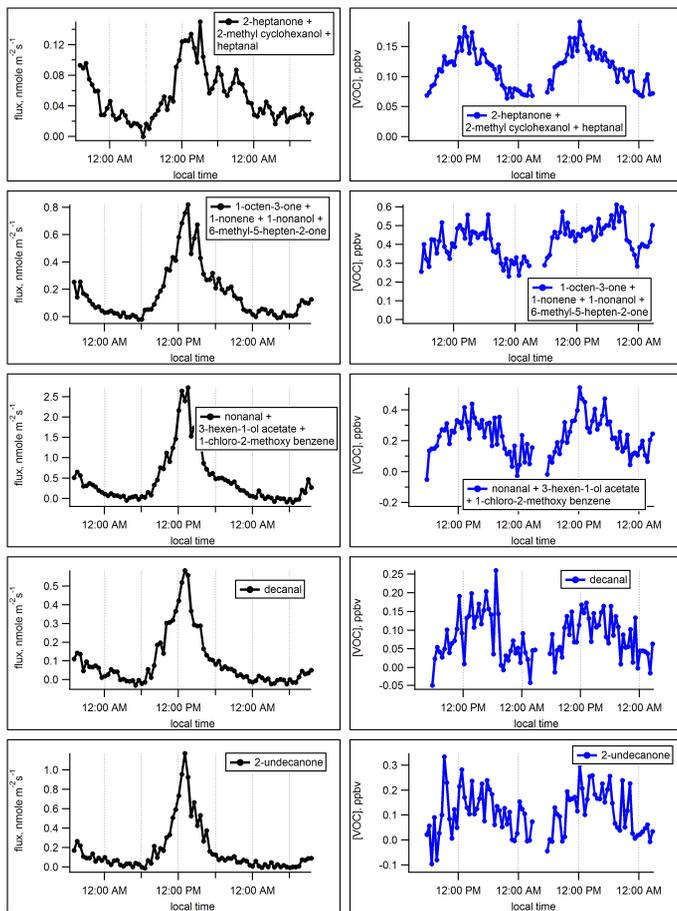
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**Fig. 10.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column).[Title Page](#)[Abstract](#)[Introduction](#)[Conclusions](#)[References](#)[Tables](#)[Figures](#)[⏪](#)[⏩](#)[◀](#)[▶](#)[Back](#)[Close](#)[Full Screen / Esc](#)[Printer-friendly Version](#)[Interactive Discussion](#)



**Fig. 11.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column).

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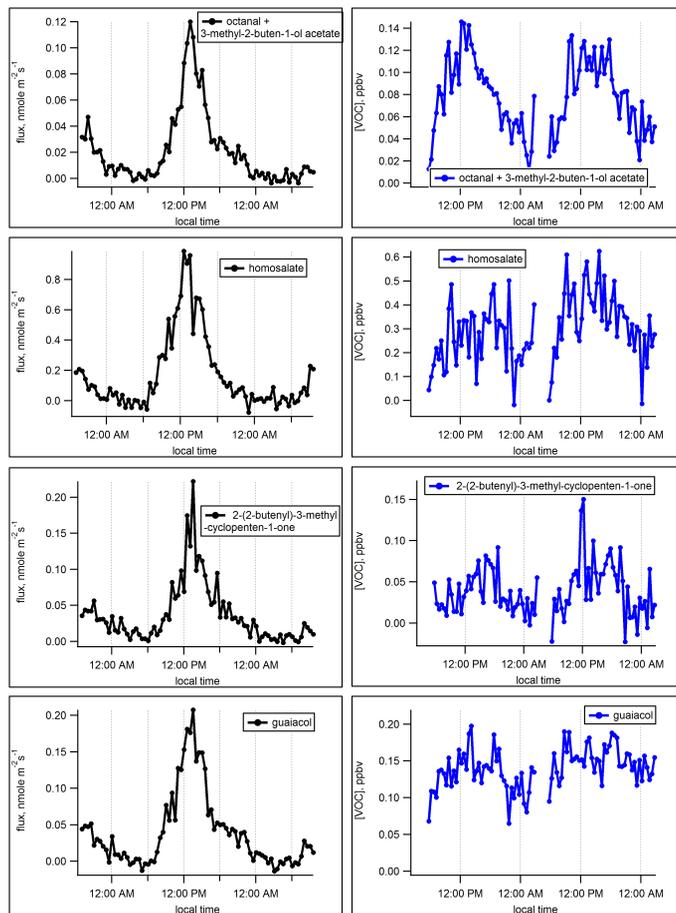
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**Fig. 12.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column).

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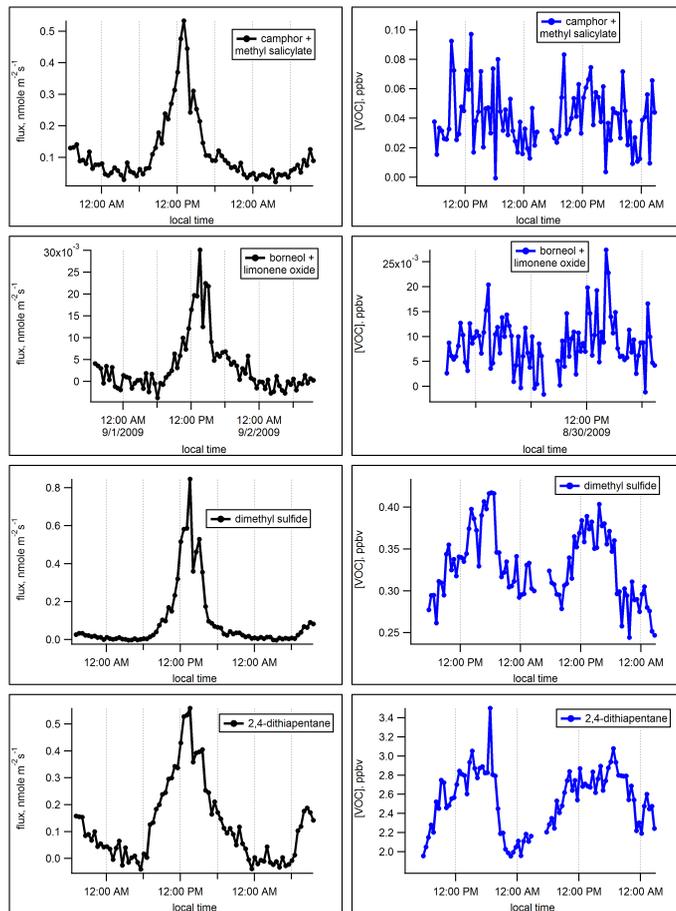
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**Fig. 13.** Branch enclosure flux (left column) and ambient concentration (right column).

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