



Origin of oxidized mercury in the summertime free troposphere over the southeastern US

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Received: 17 August 2015 – Accepted: 3 September 2015 – Published: 5 October 2015

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

ACPD

15, 26839–26893, 2015

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Abstract

We collected mercury observations as part of the Nitrogen, Oxidants, Mercury, and Aerosol Distributions, Sources, and Sinks (NOMADSS) aircraft campaign over the southeastern US between 1 June and 15 July 2013. We use the GEOS-Chem chemical transport model to interpret these observations and place new constraints on bromine radical initiated mercury oxidation chemistry in the free troposphere. We find that the model reproduces the observed mean concentration of total atmospheric mercury (THg) (observations: $1.49 \pm 0.16 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$, model: $1.51 \pm 0.08 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$), as well as the vertical profile of THg. The majority (65 %) of observations of oxidized mercury (Hg(II)) are below the instrument's detection limit (detection limit per flight: $58\text{--}228 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$), consistent with model-calculated Hg(II) concentrations of $0\text{--}196 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$. However, for observations above the detection limit we find that modeled Hg(II) concentrations are a factor of 3 too low (observations: $212 \pm 112 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, model: $67 \pm 44 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$). The highest Hg(II) concentrations, $300\text{--}680 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, were observed in dry ($\text{RH} < 35 \%$) and clean air masses during two flights over Texas at $5\text{--}7 \text{ km}$ altitude and off the North Carolina coast at $1\text{--}3 \text{ km}$. The GEOS-Chem model, back trajectories and observed chemical tracers for these air masses indicate subsidence and transport from the upper and middle troposphere of the subtropical anticyclones, where fast oxidation of elemental mercury (Hg(0)) to Hg(II) and lack of Hg(II) removal lead to efficient accumulation of Hg(II). We hypothesize that the most likely explanation for the model bias is a systematic underestimate of the $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{Br}$ reaction rate. We find that sensitivity simulations with tripled bromine radical concentrations or a faster oxidation rate constant for $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{Br}$, result in $1.5\text{--}2$ times higher modeled Hg(II) concentrations and improved agreement with the observations. The modeled tropospheric lifetime of Hg(0) against oxidation to Hg(II) decreases from 5 months in the base simulation to $2.8\text{--}1.2$ months in our sensitivity simulations. In order to maintain the modeled global burden of THg, we need to increase the in-cloud reduction of Hg(II), thus leading to faster chemical cycling between Hg(0) and Hg(II). Observations and model results for the NOMADSS

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campaign suggest that the subtropical anticyclones are significant global sources of Hg(II).

1 Introduction

Exposure to mercury affects the human nervous system, hinders cognitive development in children, and causes cardiovascular diseases in adults (Mergler et al., 2007; Karagas et al., 2012). In fish, mammals, and birds, mercury can adversely affect reproductive behavior (Scheuhammer et al., 2007). Although mercury is naturally present in our environment, human activities have increased its concentrations in the atmosphere and ocean by factors of 3 to 7 (Lamborg et al., 2002; Selin, 2009; Strode et al., 2010; Amos et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2014) making mercury exposure a major public health concern.

In the troposphere, 90 % of mercury occurs in its elemental form (Hg(0)) in the gas phase, while the rest is in the oxidized (mercuric, +2) state (Hg(II)), either in the gas-phase or bound to particles (Gustin et al., 2013). The chemical forms of atmospheric Hg(II) have not been identified, but laboratory and theoretical studies suggest that they likely include HgCl₂, HgBr₂, HgBrBrO, HgBrNO₂, HgBrHO₂, HgO, HgSO₄, Hg(NO₃)₂, and Hg(OH)₂ (Gustin et al., 2013; Dibble et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2015). Both natural and anthropogenic processes emit mercury to the atmosphere, mostly as Hg(0). Atmospheric Hg(II) originates predominantly from the oxidation of Hg(0), with a minor contribution from direct anthropogenic emissions (Driscoll et al., 2013). Unlike Hg(0), Hg(II) is highly water-soluble and reactive, and is quickly scavenged from the atmosphere by rainwater or aerosol particles, such that 60 % of the global mercury deposition is estimated to occur by wet and dry deposition of Hg(II) (Selin et al., 2008; Holmes et al., 2010).

Atomic bromine (Br) has been observed as the main oxidant of atmospheric Hg(0) in the polar and the marine boundary layers (Lindberg et al., 2002; Ebinghaus et al., 2002; Laurier et al., 2003; Obrist et al., 2011), and laboratory studies (Ariya et al.,

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2002; Donohoue et al., 2006), theoretical calculations (Goodsite et al., 2004, 2012; Balabanov et al., 2005; Dibble et al., 2012; Shepler et al., 2007), and modeling studies (Holmes et al., 2006, 2010) suggest a predominant role of Br in the oxidation of Hg(0) in the global atmosphere. While other oxidants have been proposed, in particular OH and O₃ (Hall, 1995; Spicer et al., 2002; Pal and Ariya, 2004a, b; Sumner et al., 2005; Rutter et al., 2012), theoretical studies (Calvert and Lindberg, 2005; Goodsite et al., 2004; Hynes et al., 2009) suggest that the bimolecular reaction of Hg(0) with O₃ and OH is too slow in the atmosphere, and the fast rates observed in the laboratory could have been influenced by wall-mediated reactions or formation of aerosol particles (Tossell, 2006; Subir et al., 2011).

Measurements at a few high-elevation sites have shown episodic enhancements of Hg(II) concentrations (350–600 pg m⁻³) usually in low relative humidity and low CO air, suggesting efficient in situ production of Hg(II) in the free troposphere (Landis et al., 2005; Swartzendruber et al., 2006; Fain et al., 2009; Sheu et al., 2010; Weiss-Penzias et al., 2015). Sillman et al. (2007) reported higher (60–248 pg m⁻³) Hg(II) concentrations at 3 km altitude than near the surface in aircraft flights off the Florida coast. Swartzendruber et al. (2009) found a large variability in Hg(II) concentrations (0–500 pg m⁻³) during five flights over the Pacific Northwest below 5 km altitude, with higher concentrations in free-tropospheric air with low aerosol concentrations. Lyman and Jaffe (2012), found enhanced Hg(II) concentrations of ~ 450 pg m⁻³ and depleted total mercury (THg, THg = Hg(0) + Hg(II)) concentrations (< 1 ng m⁻³) in a stratospheric intrusion, suggesting rapid oxidation of Hg(0) and loss of Hg(II) above the tropopause. During multiple year-round flights over Tennessee, USA, Brooks et al. (2014) found that Hg(II) concentrations at 2–4 km altitude were 10–30 times higher than those near the surface throughout the year. Typically, these past aircraft campaigns have focused on Hg(II) measurements over small spatial scales. The sparseness of free-tropospheric measurements of Hg(II) has hindered the validation of redox chemistry in global models of tropospheric mercury, which display large inter-model variability in wet and dry deposition (Bullock et al., 2008, 2009; Travníkov et al., 2010).

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The Nitrogen, Oxidants, Mercury and Aerosol Distributions, Sources, and Sinks (NOMADSS) aircraft campaign was conducted over the southeastern US to determine the distribution of THg and Hg(II) at a regional scale. Here, we analyze these observations using the GEOS-Chem chemical transport model with the goals of examining the origin of Hg(II) in the free troposphere and testing the kinetics of the Br-initiated oxidation mechanism.

2 Observations and model used in this study

2.1 The NOMADSS campaign

The NOMADSS aircraft campaign was conducted over the southeastern US from 1 June to 15 July 2013 using the NSF/NCAR C-130 aircraft. We conducted 19 research flights of 4–7 h duration each out of Smyrna, Tennessee (36°1′ N, 86°31′ W) (Fig. 1). NOMADSS was part of the larger Southeast Atmosphere Study (SAS), a collaborative effort to characterize the atmospheric composition over the southeastern US (http://www.eol.ucar.edu/field_projects/sas). One of the objectives of the NOMADSS campaign, and the focus of this study, was to quantify the tropospheric distribution of mercury species. Mercury measurements were made using the University of Washington's Detector of Oxidized Mercury Species (UW-DOHGS), which is currently the only instrument capable of making simultaneous measurements of total and elemental mercury concentrations aboard an aircraft platform at a relatively high time resolution of 2.5 min (Swartzendruber et al., 2009; Lyman and Jaffe, 2012; Ambrose et al., 2013, 2015). In addition, the C-130 aircraft was equipped with other instruments summarized in Table 1.

This paper complements several other papers focused on the analysis of mercury measurements during NOMADSS. In particular, Gratz et al. (2015a) present an analysis of the high Hg(II) concentrations and BrO concentrations observed on one NOMADSS flight (research flight 6). Ambrose et al. (2015) use the NOMADSS obser-

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variations to calculate enhancement ratios of Hg in the plumes of six coal-fired power plants, and compare them to the Hg emission ratios reported in the emission inventories. Song et al. (2014) combine the NOMADSS observations with results from the GEOS-Chem model to constrain Hg emissions from land and ocean sources. Gratz et al. (2015b) use the NOMADSS observations over Lake Michigan and a plume dispersion model to quantify the outflow of Hg from the Chicago/Gary industrial area.

2.2 The UW-DOHGS instrument

The UW-DOHGS is a dual channel instrument that simultaneously measures concentrations of THg and Hg(0). Ambrose et al. (2015) discuss the configuration of the instrument during NOMADSS, in-flight calibration as well as pre- and post-campaign laboratory tests. Briefly, the UW-DOHGS draws a fast flow of ambient air from a rear-facing aircraft inlet heated to 110 °C to facilitate transmission of Hg(II) compounds. Two Tekran[®] 2537B Hg vapor analyzers subsample the inlet flow at 1 L min⁻¹ (at 0 °C and 1 atm) through parallel channels. The Tekran[®] analyzers sample Hg(0) by Au-amalgamation pre-concentration on paired sample cartridges, with quantification by cold vapor atomic fluorescence spectrometry (CVAFS). The sample integration time and measurement time resolution are both 2.5 min. In the THg channel, Hg(II) compounds are reduced to Hg(0) by passing the sampled air through a quartz pyrolyzer heated to 650 °C. In the Hg(0) channel, Hg(II) (in gas and particle-bound phases) is removed using either a quartz wool trap (first fourteen flights) or a cation exchange membrane (remaining five flights). Hg(II) concentrations are calculated from the difference between the THg and Hg(0) measurements. The UW-DOHGS is not affected by O₃-interference, unlike the Tekran[®] 2537-1130-1135 speciation system that uses KCl denuders for Hg(II) capture (Lyman et al., 2010; Ambrose et al., 2013; McClure et al., 2014). A limitation of UW-DOHGS is that the quartz wool traps can release Hg(II) in humid conditions (Ambrose et al., 2013, 2015), which decreased the number of Hg(II)

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observations in the boundary layer during the first fourteen flights. This was not a problem on the later five flights.

During NOMADSS, the 1σ uncertainty in THg and Hg(0) was 8–10 %, and the detection limit (DL) was $< 0.05 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$. For Hg(II), the 1σ uncertainty varied between 38 pg m^{-3} (at THg of 1.2 ng m^{-3}) and 55 pg m^{-3} (at THg of 2.8 ng m^{-3}). The 3σ Hg(II) DL for the campaign ranged between 58 and 228 pg m^{-3} .

The UW-DOHGS instrument was operational during all 19 flights of the NOMADSS campaign, and concentrations of THg were measured continuously during each flight, except during calibration cycles. A total of 2381 (2.5 min average) observations of THg were made during the campaign (Table 2). Hg(II) concentrations could be determined for only ~ 60 % of the time (1503 observations), because of periodic in-flight calibration cycles and because of reduced retention efficiency of the Hg(II) traps during some flight segments in the moist boundary layer. For the entire NOMADSS campaign, 35 % of the Hg(II) measurements (528 points out of 1503) were above the instrument's DL. Here and in the rest of the paper, we use ADL (Above Detection Limit) observations to refer to Hg(II) measurements above the instrument's DL and BDL (Below Detection Limit) for Hg(II) measurements below the DL. In the boundary layer (defined here as altitude $< 2 \text{ km}$ and water vapor $> 8 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$), 87 % of the 532 observations were BDL. In the free troposphere, 53 % out of the 971 observations were BDL.

As more than half the Hg(II) observations during NOMADSS were BDL, we follow the recommendation of Helsel (2011) and use the robust regression on order statistics (ROS) method to assign values for BDL observations. The ROS method assumes a lognormal distribution for the observations, and estimates the distribution's parameters using ADL measurements. The BDL values are then estimated using the fitted distribution. The ROS method is applied to calculate Hg(II) means and standard deviations reported in Tables 1 and 2 and Figs. 2–5.

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2.3 The GEOS-Chem model

2.3.1 General description

The GEOS-Chem global 3-D atmospheric chemical transport model (www.geos-chem.org) is driven by meteorological fields from the NASA Global Modeling and Assimilation Office (GMAO) Goddard Earth Observing System (GEOS) Version 5 Forward Processing (FP). The GEOS-5 FP system consists of a general circulation model (GCM) coupled with a data assimilation (DAS) system (Rienecker et al., 2008), with a native horizontal resolution of 0.25° latitude by 0.3125° longitude and 72 vertical levels up to 0.01 hPa. The GEOS-5 FP meteorological fields are archived either at 1 or 3 h intervals, depending on the variables.

GEOS-Chem includes advection (Lin and Rood, 1996), convective transport (Wu et al., 2007), turbulent mixing (Lin and McElroy, 2010), wet deposition (Liu et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2011; Amos et al., 2012), and dry deposition (Wang et al., 1998; Zhang et al., 2011) of chemical species. The full-chemistry simulation includes an up-to-date chemical mechanism for gas-phase and heterogeneous reactions of HO_x - NO_x -VOC- O_3 -aerosols in the troposphere (Bey et al., 2001) with the recent addition of bromine chemistry (Parrella et al., 2012). We use here GEOS-Chem model version 9-02.

The GEOS-Chem Hg model simulates the emissions, chemistry, transport, and deposition of $\text{Hg}(0)$ and $\text{Hg}(\text{II})$ in the atmosphere (Selin et al., 2007) with updates from Holmes et al. (2010); Amos et al. (2012), and Zhang et al., 2012), coupled with a 2-D ocean (Strode et al., 2007; Soerensen et al., 2010) and a 2-D land (Selin et al., 2008; Holmes et al., 2010). The model includes prescribed emissions from biomass burning and geogenic activity (Holmes et al., 2010). The global GEOS-Chem Hg simulation, with a resolution of 4° latitude \times 5° longitude, was evaluated by Holmes et al. (2010), who found the modeled THg ($1.71 \pm 0.5 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) to be in good agreement with observations ($1.86 \pm 1.0 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$, correlation coefficient = 0.9) at 39 land-based sites across the globe. Simulated THg concentrations were about 10 % higher than THg concentrations measured during three aircraft campaigns (INTEX-B, CARIBIC, and ARCTAS),

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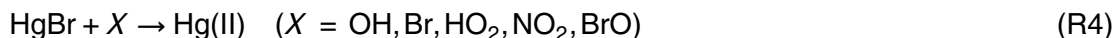
but modeled vertical profiles were consistent with observations in the troposphere. Zhang et al. (2012) developed a nested-grid Hg simulation in GEOS-Chem, using a higher horizontal resolution ($0.5^\circ \times 0.667^\circ$) over North America. They found that the average annual modeled wet deposition ($7.2 \pm 3.2 \mu\text{g m}^{-2} \text{yr}^{-1}$) at 95 Mercury Deposition Network (MDN; <http://nadp.sws.uiuc.edu/mdn/>) sites was close to the observations ($8.8 \pm 3.6 \mu\text{g m}^{-2} \text{yr}^{-1}$) and showed a correlation coefficient of 0.78. The modeled annual mean THg concentrations ($1.42 \pm 0.11 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) were unbiased with respect to the observations ($1.46 \pm 0.11 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) at 19 surface-based sites. While the modeled gaseous Hg(II) concentrations at these sites were higher than the observations by a factor of 1.5, the model captured the observed seasonal cycle, with higher concentrations during spring and summer at most sites.

2.3.2 Updates to Hg emissions in GEOS-Chem

We have updated the global anthropogenic Hg emissions to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) 2010 (<http://www.amap.no/mercury-emissions/datasets>), and over North America we use the U.S. EPA National Emissions Inventory (NEI) 2011 (<http://www.epa.gov/ttnchie1/net/2011inventory.html>) and Environment Canada's National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) 2011 emission inventories. The speciation of anthropogenic emissions is assumed to be 90 % Hg(0) : 10 % Hg(II) from all anthropogenic sources based on Zhang et al. (2012) and Kos et al. (2013). For 2013, the GEOS-Chem global emission of mercury is 1850 Mg a^{-1} from anthropogenic sources, 5025 Mg a^{-1} from natural sources and re-emission, and 225 Mg a^{-1} from biomass burning. For 1 June–15 July 2013, the anthropogenic, natural, and biomass burning emissions over North America are 130, 870 and 22 d^{-1} , respectively.

2.3.3 Updates to Hg chemistry in GEOS-Chem

The oxidation of Hg(0) is modeled as a two-step reaction initiated by Br radicals as originally implemented in GEOS-Chem by Holmes et al. (2010), based on the work of Goodsite et al. (2004); Donohoue et al. (2006), and Balabanov et al. (2005):



We use the recently corrected rate constant for the HgBr dissociation reaction (R2) (Goodsite et al., 2012). Holmes et al. (2010) had assumed Br and OH as the second-step oxidants (R4). In addition, based on the recommendations of Dibble et al. (2012), we have updated this mechanism to include HO₂, NO₂, and BrO as the second-step oxidants. The rates constants used here are:

$$k_1 = 1.46 \times 10^{-32} \times \left(\frac{T}{298}\right)^{-1.86} \times [\text{M}] \quad \text{cm}^{-3} \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \quad (\text{Donohoue et al., 2006}) \quad (1)$$

$$k_2 = 2.67 \times 10^{41} \exp\left(\frac{-7292}{T}\right) \left(\frac{T}{298}\right)^{1.76} \times k_1 \quad \text{s}^{-1} \quad (\text{Goodsite et al., 2012}) \quad (2)$$

$$k_3 = 3.9 \times 10^{-11} \quad \text{cm}^{-3} \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \quad (\text{Balabanov et al., 2005}) \quad (3)$$

$$k_4 = 2.5 \times 10^{-10} \times \left(\frac{T}{298}\right)^{-0.57} \quad \text{cm}^{-3} \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \quad (\text{Goodsite et al., 2012; Dibble et al., 2012}) \quad (4)$$

The reduction of Hg(II) to Hg(0) is assumed to occur in cloud droplets in the presence of sunlight. The reduction is assumed to be proportional to the photolysis frequency

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of NO₂, and the coefficient is estimated by constraining the model results with the observed mean burden of THg in the troposphere (Holmes et al., 2010). The uptake of Hg(II) by sea-salt particles is simulated as a kinetic mass transfer process (Holmes et al., 2010). For non sea-salt aerosol particles, gas-particle partitioning is simulated as an equilibrium process based on an empirical relationship (Amos et al., 2012). The modeled wet and dry deposition of gas-phase Hg(II) is analogous to that of HNO₃, and of particle-bound Hg(II) to that of sulfate particles.

2.3.4 Simulations conducted for this study

In this study, the GEOS-Chem Hg model is run in a one-way nested-grid configuration, with the native horizontal resolution (0.25° × 0.3125°) over North America, and a coarser resolution (2° × 2.5°) globally. Both, the coarse- and fine-grid models, share the same vertical resolution with 47 layers (13 layers in the bottom 2 km, and 16 layers between 2 and 10 km). The global Hg model is spun-up with a 3 year simulation, and is then used to generate the initial and boundary conditions for the nested-domain, and to calculate the annual global mercury budget. Monthly concentrations of Br, BrO, OH, HO₂, NO₂, O₃ and aerosols are obtained from a 1 year 4° × 5° global HO_x–NO_x–VOC–O₃–BrO_x–aerosols tropospheric chemistry GEOS-Chem simulation. We run the nested 0.25° × 0.3125° Hg model for North America from 1 June to 15 July 2013. For comparison to the NOMADSS aircraft observations, the model is sampled along the flight track at the 2.5 min time step of the UW-DOHGS instrument.

In addition to the BASE simulation with the Hg(0) + Br chemistry described above (Sect. 2.3.3), we perform two sensitivity simulations. In the first sensitivity simulation (3×Br) we increase the GEOS-Chem Br and BrO concentrations by a factor of 3 in the 45° S to 45° N latitude band between 750 hPa and the tropopause. Parrella et al. (2012) found that the GEOS-Chem BrO is within the BrO measurement uncertainties of the GOME-2 satellite in the polar regions and at mid-latitudes, but in the tropics the GEOS-Chem BrO is too low by a factor of 2–4 throughout the year (Fig. 5 of Parrella et al., 2012). Furthermore, recent aircraft-based observations of BrO in the tropical

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and subtropical free troposphere of the Southern Hemisphere reported concentrations which were 2–4 times higher than predicted by the GEOS-Chem model (Wang et al., 2015).

In the second sensitivity simulation (FastK), we replace the Donohoue et al. (2006) rate constant for Reaction (R1) by the faster rate constant measured by Ariya et al. (2002). Following Dibble et al. (2012), we proportionally increase the rate constant for the backward reaction (R2) as follows:

$$k_{1,\text{FastK}} = 3.6 \times 10^{-12} \times \left(\frac{[M]_{T,p}}{[M]_{273.15\text{ K}, 1\text{ atm}}} \right) \text{ cm}^{-3} \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} \quad (5)$$

(Ariya et al., 2002)

$$k_{2,\text{FastK}} = k_2 \times \left(\frac{k_{1,\text{FastK}}}{k_1} \right) \text{ s}^{-1} \quad (\text{Goodsite et al., 2012, Dibble et al., 2012}) \quad (6)$$

Relative to the BASE simulation, $k_{1,\text{FastK}}$ and $k_{2,\text{FastK}}$ are 10 times larger near the surface and 5 times larger in the upper troposphere (10–12 km). For both these sensitivity simulations, the in-cloud reduction rate is increased such that the tropospheric burden and lifetime of THg is similar to the BASE simulation. This enables us to isolate the model's sensitivity to the redox chemistry of Hg.

At the 39 global land-based sites considered previously by Holmes et al. (2010), the results of the BASE (1.71 ng m^{-3}), $3 \times \text{Br}$ (1.74 ng m^{-3}), and FastK (1.64 ng m^{-3}) models are comparable to the observations (1.86 ng m^{-3}). Figure S1 (in the Supplement) shows a comparison with observations of the inter-hemispheric gradient and the seasonal cycle of total gaseous Hg concentrations.

3 Observed horizontal and vertical distribution of THg and Hg(II)

The vertical and horizontal distributions of THg and Hg(II) concentrations observed during NOMADSS are presented in Figs. 2 and 3. We exclude from these figures

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and the rest of our analysis fresh pollution plumes, where NO_x , SO_2 , or C_3H_8 exceed 2 ppbv. This eliminates 6 % of the THg and 4 % of the Hg(II) measurements. The mean and standard deviation of the observed THg concentrations was $1.49 \pm 0.16 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$ (Fig. 3a). THg concentrations decrease slightly with altitude, from 1.54 ng m^{-3} near the surface to 1.38 ng m^{-3} at 6–7 km altitude (Fig. 2a), which is in agreement with previous aircraft-based measurements of THg over North America (Talbot et al., 2007; Swartzendruber et al., 2009; Mao et al., 2010). The variability in THg concentration is small, with standard deviations at different levels ranging from 6 to 15 % of the mean concentrations. The weak vertical gradient and the low standard deviation of the THg concentrations are consistent with the long tropospheric lifetime of THg.

For Hg(II), the observed mean concentration was $212 \pm 112 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, for ADL measurements (35 % of measurements) (Table 2). When we include BDL values using the ROS method (see Sect. 2.2), the mean Hg(II) concentration is $110 \pm 103 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$ (Table 2). In order to assess the overall mean distribution of Hg(II) during NOMADSS, Figs. 2b and 3c display the Hg(II) statistics that include BDL values estimated with the ROS method. Figure 2b shows that observed Hg(II) concentrations increased from 40 pg m^{-3} at 0–1 km altitude to 200 pg m^{-3} at 6–7 km (Fig. 2b). Large enhancements in Hg(II) concentrations, of up to 500 pg m^{-3} , were observed at 5–7 km during two research flights (RF) over Texas (RF-06 and RF-09, box 1 in Figs. 2b and 3d). Concentrations of up to 680 pg m^{-3} were observed at 1–3 km on one flight over the Atlantic Ocean (RF-16). We will discuss these flights in more detail in Sect. 6.

Previous Hg(II) measurements at high-elevation ground sites and from aircraft showed that high free tropospheric Hg(II) concentrations were generally observed in air masses that were dry and clean (Landis et al., 2005; Swartzendruber et al., 2006, 2009; Fain et al., 2009; Sheu et al., 2010). To examine whether this relation holds for the NOMADSS observations, we classify all THg and Hg(II) observations based on the measured relative humidity (RH) and CO concentrations (Table 2). We use thresholds of $\text{RH} = 35 \%$ and $\text{CO} = 75 \text{ ppbv}$ to classify the observations into four categories: “high RH/high CO”, “high RH/low CO”, “low RH/high CO”, and “low RH/low CO”. When RH or

CO measurements were not available (18 % of the observations), we use the GEOS-Chem simulated RH values and CO concentrations. The ROS procedure is used to assign values for BDL observations separately for each category.

Using this method, Hg(II) observations partition into the four categories as follows (Table 2): “low RH/low CO” (12 % of observations), “low RH/high CO” (28 %), “high RH/low CO” (10 %), “high RH/high CO” (50 %). The highest mean concentrations of Hg(II) are found in the “low RH/low CO” category (239 pg m^{-3} for all observations, 289 pg m^{-3} for ADL observations). Observations in this category had the lowest average THg concentrations (1.35 ng m^{-3}), and were relatively clean with low mixing ratios for CH_2O (0.5 ppbv), NO_x (55 pptv), O_3 (52 ppbv), and a mean RH of 16 %. These air samples were observed mainly during the high altitude (5–7 km) flights over Texas (RF-06 and RF-09), and at 1–3 km over the Atlantic on RF-16. The chemical characteristics and HYbrid Single-Particle Lagrangian Integrated Trajectory (HYSPLIT) (Draxler and Hess, 1998) back trajectories for these “low RH/low CO” air masses indicate subsidence from the clean subtropical upper troposphere (Sect. 6).

The “low RH/high CO” category displays moderate enhancements in Hg(II) concentrations, with a mean of 146 pg m^{-3} (189 pg m^{-3} for ADL observations). Back trajectories (not shown here) indicate transport from high latitudes ($> 60^\circ \text{ N}$) accompanied by subsidence. The mean concentrations of NO_x (67 pptv) and CH_2O (0.7 ppbv) were low and similar to values for the “low RH/low CO” category, indicating relatively clean air masses but originating from the mid- and upper-troposphere at high latitudes instead of tropical latitudes as in the “low RH/low CO” category.

Most of the remaining Hg(II) observations (50 % of observations) fall in the “high RH/high CO” category. These observations were collected mainly in the continental boundary layer, with moderately high concentrations of CO (124 ppbv), CH_2O (2.7 ppbv), and NO_x (232 pptv). In this category, the mean concentration of THg is 1.53 ng m^{-3} , while that of Hg(II) is 48 pg m^{-3} (155 pg m^{-3} for ADL observations, which account for only 14 % of observations in this category). The “high RH/low CO” category has lower CO (68 ppbv), CH_2O (0.9 ppbv), NO_x (44 pptv), and O_3 (43 ppbv). These

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samples were observed mostly near the marine boundary layer over the Atlantic Ocean (RF-14 and RF-16), but some were observed at high altitudes possibly in air detrained from clouds. In this category, the mean concentration of THg is 1.44 ng m^{-3} , and that of Hg(II) is 108 pg m^{-3} (249 pg m^{-3} for ADL observations, 30 % of the observations).

The observations of Hg(II) during NOMADSS are similar to previous observations of Hg(II) in terms of their magnitude, vertical profiles, and airmass characteristics. During five summertime flights in the Pacific Northwest, Swartzendruber et al. (2009) also found RGM (gaseous component of Hg(II)) to be generally below the instrument's DL of $80\text{--}160 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$. They found high RGM air masses ($200\text{--}500 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) on two flights at 2–6 km altitude. These air masses had low aerosol extinction coefficient, indicating either larger production of RGM at higher altitudes or loss of RGM in the presence of aerosol particles (Swartzendruber et al., 2009). On 28 flights from August 2012 to June 2013, Brooks et al. (2014) found that mean RGM and PBM (particle-bound component of Hg(II)) concentrations at 0–6 km over Tennessee, USA were 34.4 and 29.6 pg m^{-3} , respectively. The highest concentrations on each flight were always observed at 2–4.5 km altitude. RGM concentrations exhibited a minimum in the winter months and a maximum in the summer months. On one flight in June 2013, the vertical profile of RGM showed a steep increase from the surface ($\sim 5 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) to 4 km altitude (120 pg m^{-3}) followed by decrease between 4 and 6 km (70 pg m^{-3}) (Brooks et al., 2014). At the high elevation Mt. Bachelor Observatory (2.7 km a.s.l.) in Oregon, the mean RGM concentration during May–August 2005 was 43 pg m^{-3} (Swartzendruber et al., 2006). Low RGM concentrations ($< 50 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) were seen in boundary layer air during the day, and higher concentrations were seen in free-tropospheric air during the night. The highest 10 % of nighttime RGM concentrations were between 160 and 600 pg m^{-3} , and were measured in air with low RH and low CO, in similarity to the observations of high Hg(II) in our “low RH/low CO” category during NOMADSS.

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4 Comparison to the BASE GEOS-Chem Hg simulation

The THg concentrations simulated in the BASE GEOS-Chem model ($1.51 \pm 0.08 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) agree well with observations ($1.49 \pm 0.16 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) (Fig. 3a–b). The model captures the lower THg concentrations observed over central Texas, South Carolina, and part of the Atlantic Ocean, but overestimates THg concentrations over the Ohio River Valley by $\sim 20\%$, possibly because of recent reductions in power plant emissions of mercury not captured in the 2011 NEI inventory used in our study. The model reproduces the vertical profile of observed THg, decreasing from 1.57 ng m^{-3} (observed: $1.54 \pm 0.15 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) near the surface to 1.43 ng m^{-3} (observed: $1.38 \pm 0.19 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) at 6–7 km altitude. However, we note that the variability of modeled THg in each 1 km bin (shaded green area in Fig. 2a) is a factor of 2 to 5 lower than the observed variability. Overall, the GEOS-Chem THg concentrations are within $\pm 10\%$ of the measured concentrations for 70 % of the observations, which indicates that the model provides reasonable simulations of the emissions and mean lifetime of THg in the lower and middle troposphere during NOMADSS.

Because the majority of Hg(II) measurements are below the 58–228 pg m^{-3} DL of the UW-DOHGS instrument, we consider ADL and BDL observations separately. Table 3 shows that when observed Hg(II) are BDL (65 % of measurements), the mean Hg(II) concentrations predicted with the BASE simulation ($39 \pm 34 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) are indeed below the instrument's DL. For ADL observations, the BASE model underestimates observations by a factor of 3 (model: $67 \pm 44 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, observations: $212 \pm 112 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$). The model predicts an increase in Hg(II) concentrations with altitude which is much smaller than observed (Fig. 2b). While underestimating the observed mean concentrations, the model captures the factor of 3–6 increase in Hg(II) in the “low RH” air mass categories relative to the “high RH” categories (Tables 2 and 3).

Figure 5 shows scatter plots between observed and modeled Hg(II) concentrations for the “low RH/low CO” and “low RH/high CO” categories. We find that the GEOS-Chem BASE simulation has a large negative (-47 to -58%) normalized mean bias

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($NMB = \sum_i (M_i - O_i) / \sum_i O_i$), where O_i and M_i are observed and simulated values, and for $O_i < DL$, $\sum_i O_i$ is calculated using the ROS procedure). Furthermore, about 60 % of modeled Hg(II) values are within a factor of two of the observations (FAC2 = fraction of points where $0.5 \leq M_i/O_i \leq 2$, for $O_i \leq DL$, we assume $0.5 \leq M_i/O_i \leq 2$ if $M_i < 2 \times DL$).

If we consider only ADL observations, FAC2 decreases to 28–39 %.

Figure S2 (Supplement) displays scatterplots for the “high RH” categories. For ADL observations, the NMB is between –75 and –94 % for these categories (Fig. S2 and Table 3). We note that for these two “high RH” categories a conclusive evaluation of the model performance is difficult, however, because of the large fraction of BDL observations.

Considering the systematic model underestimate of observed Hg(II) concentrations, particularly in dry air masses where reduction and wet deposition are suppressed, we hypothesize that the bias in the Hg(II) concentrations is because the model simulated oxidation of Hg(0) to Hg(II) is too slow. We test this hypothesis in the next section by examining two sensitivity simulations.

5 Sensitivity studies with enhanced Hg(0) oxidation

As described in Sect. 2.3.4, we conduct two sensitivity simulations: in the 3×Br simulation, we evaluate the model’s response to an increase in Br concentrations, and in the FastK simulation, we evaluate the model’s response to a faster oxidation rate constant. The results of these simulations are summarized in Table 3 and detailed comparisons to observations are presented in Figs. 4 and 5. Both the 3×Br and FastK simulations reproduce the observed mean concentration (Table 3) and vertical profile (Fig. 4a) of THg as we compensate the increase in Hg(0) oxidation with an increase in Hg(II) reduction rate to maintain the THg burden.

The 3×Br and FastK simulations predict a stronger vertical gradient in Hg(II) concentrations, in closer agreement with observations (Fig. 4). Above 5 km, Hg(II) concentrations in the 3×Br ($165 \pm 104 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) and FastK ($184 \pm 156 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) simulations show sig-

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nificantly better agreement with observations ($189 \pm 103 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) relative to the BASE simulation ($97 \pm 46 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) (Fig. 4b). For the “low RH/low CO” category, average modeled Hg(II) concentrations increase from $99 \pm 48 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$ (BASE) to $162 \pm 104 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$ (3×Br) and $208 \pm 144 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$ (FastK), compared to the observed $239 \pm 141 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$. The modeled NMB for all Hg(II) observations in the “low RH/low CO” category decreases from -58% (BASE simulation) to -32% (3×Br) and -12% (FastK), while the FAC2 index increases from 62% (BASE) to 69% (3×Br) and 80% (FastK) (Fig. 5a and b, c). However, the sensitivity simulations cannot reproduce the high Hg(II) concentrations observed on RF-16 at 1–3 km (orange circles in Fig. 5). We present a detailed discussion of this flight in Sect. 6.

In the “low RH/high CO” category, the 3×Br Hg(II) concentrations ($91 \pm 67 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) are $\sim 20 \%$ higher than the BASE model ($76 \pm 36 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$), but lower than the observed concentrations ($146 \pm 81 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) (Table 3). In the FastK simulation, Hg(II) concentrations increase to $128 \pm 95 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, improving the NMB (FastK: -11% , 3×Br: -37% , BASE: -47%) (Fig. 5d–f). For this category, the 3×Br Hg(II) concentrations are not much higher than the BASE simulation because in the 3×Br we use higher Br concentration only between 45° N and 45° S , whereas most of the “low RH/high CO” air masses originated from high latitudes. The FAC2 index is higher in the FastK simulation (75%) compared to the BASE (58%) and 3×Br (61%) simulations.

Overall, the factor of 2 decrease in model bias for Hg(II) with the sensitivity simulations particularly for the “low RH/low CO” air samples suggests that the oxidation of Hg(0) in the upper troposphere is 3 (3×Br) to 5 (FastK) times faster than what was considered previously in the GEOS-Chem model.

We ran two additional simulations that included oxidation by OH/O₃ and by BrO, respectively, in addition to the Br-initiated oxidation of the BASE version, to test whether the underestimate in the modeled oxidation results from exclusion of these oxidants. We add the following oxidation reactions to the model:





where $k_5 = 3.0 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^3 \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (Hall, 1995), $k_6 = 8.7 \times 10^{-14} \text{ cm}^3 \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (Sommar et al., 2001), and $k_7 = 3.0 \times 10^{-14} \text{ cm}^3 \text{ molecule}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (Spicer et al., 2002)

The inclusion of $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{O}_3$ and $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{OH}$ pathways decreases the global tropospheric chemical lifetime of Hg(0) for June–July 2013 from 3.2 months (BASE simulation) to 0.6 months, which is also lower than the lifetimes in the $3 \times \text{Br}$ (1.9 months) and the FastK (0.7 months) simulations. However, the $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{O}_3$ and $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{OH}$ reaction pathways have a relatively small effect on the modeled Hg(II) concentrations in the upper troposphere. The 5–7 km Hg(II) concentrations in this simulation ($108 \pm 79 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) are similar to the BASE simulation ($97 \pm 45 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$), but the Hg(II) concentrations below 5 km ($71 \pm 51 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) are higher than the BASE simulation ($39 \pm 33 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$). The increase in oxidation with the $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{O}_3$ and $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{OH}$ pathways is mostly in the lower troposphere, whereas in the upper troposphere, faster oxidation is compensated by faster reduction. While the oxidation rates of $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{O}_3$ and $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{OH}$ reactions have large uncertainties (see Sect. 1), our results indicate that the underestimate in Hg(II) concentrations in the BASE model persists despite the inclusion of the $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{O}_3$ and $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{OH}$ oxidation pathways.

When the $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{BrO}$ oxidation pathway is added, the June–July global tropospheric chemical lifetime of Hg(0) is 0.9 months. The simulated 5–7 km Hg(II) concentrations ($115 \pm 75 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) are higher than those in the BASE simulation, but not as high as the $3 \times \text{Br}$ and FastK simulations, and much lower than the observations. The NMB for the “low RH/low CO” air masses is –47 % for this simulation, compared to –32 % for the $3 \times \text{Br}$ simulation and –12 % for the FastK simulation. Thus, although including the $\text{Hg(0)} + \text{BrO}$ reaction with the rate from Spicer et al. (2002) brings the model closer to the observations, it does not completely explain the model underestimate of Hg(II) concentrations.

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6 Case studies of individual flights

We analyze in more detail three NOMADSS flights during which high concentrations of Hg(II) were observed. For RF-06 and RF-09 over Texas, we trace the origin of the high Hg(II) to transport from the subtropical Pacific anticyclone, while for RF-16 off the South Carolina Coast, enhanced Hg(II) concentrations appear to have been produced in the subtropical Atlantic anticyclone. The timeseries of the observations and model results along the flight tracks are shown in Figs. 6–8.

6.1 RF-06 (19 June 2013) and RF-09 (24 June 2013)

One of the goal of RF-06 was to sample in dry air masses with potentially enhanced Hg(II) concentrations. The meteorological forecasts indicated the presence of such an air mass at 6 km altitude over west Texas. After sampling in the boundary layer, the aircraft ascended to 6.8 km altitude, measuring 182–347 pg m^{-3} of Hg(II) between 18:02 and 19:47 UTC (Fig. 6a and d). The mean concentration of THg in this air mass was 1.35 ng m^{-3} , about 20 % lower than the THg concentrations measured during the rest of the flight (Fig. 6b). The observed low RH (11 %), CO (65 ppbv), O₃ (39 ppbv), NO_x (53 pptv), CH₂O (204 pptv), and C₃H₈ (36 pptv) indicate a clean and dry air mass (Fig. 6d). The 7 day HYSPLIT back trajectories (Fig. 6e) indicate that the air mass was transported from the subtropical Pacific anticyclone 3 days before it was sampled over Texas (see also Gratz et al., 2015a). The back trajectories show subsidence of the air mass from the upper troposphere (10–12 km) before transport out of the Pacific anticyclone.

Figure 6c shows that the 3×Br simulation captures the enhancement in Hg(II) concentrations observed over Texas (observations: 251 pg m^{-3} , 3×Br: 306 pg m^{-3}), while the BASE model (146 pg m^{-3}) is too low and the FastK model (367 pg m^{-3}) too high. Outside the region with the high Hg(II) concentration, all three model simulations calculate Hg(II) concentrations that are BDL (DL: 114 pg m^{-3}), and are in agreement with the observations. During this flight, observations indicate high BrO concentrations of

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1.9 ± 0.35 pptv (Fig. 6d) (Gratz et al., 2015a). The GEOS-Chem modeled BrO concentrations in this air mass (0.3–0.4 pptv) are a factor of 5 lower than the observations (Fig. 6d), and thus our assumption of higher Br concentrations in the 3×Br simulation is more consistent with these measurements (Sect. 2.3.4).

The transport pattern of dry air from the subtropical Pacific upper troposphere to the southeastern US persisted for several days and was sampled again on 24 June 2013 during flight RF-09 (Fig. 7a). High Hg(II) concentrations of 200–480 pg m⁻³ were measured between 16:00 and 19:30 UTC as the C-130 aircraft flew five constant-altitude legs between 2.5 and 6.7 km over eastern Texas. Low RH (19 %) and low O₃ concentrations (50 ppbv) accompanied the high Hg(II) (Fig. 7c and d). BrO measurements are not available for this flight due to interference of clouds with the instrument. The HYSPLIT back trajectories show transport from the subtropical Pacific anticyclone (Fig. 7e), similar to RF-06. As the C-130 aircraft descended to 1.2 km, high concentration of Hg(II) (up to 360 pg m⁻³) were observed in the continental boundary layer between 19:30 and 20:00 UTC. This was associated with high THg concentrations of 2.0 ng m⁻³, and was likely due to emissions of both Hg(II) and Hg(0) from nearby sources.

The mean THg concentrations for RF-09 calculated by the three simulations are between 1.38 and 1.42 ng m⁻³, and are close to the mean of the observations (Fig. 7b). Between 16:00 and 19:00 UTC, the Hg(II) concentrations calculated with the FastK model (302 pg m⁻³) are closer to the observations (321 pg m⁻³) than with the BASE (127 pg m⁻³) and 3×Br (253 pg m⁻³) models (Fig. 7c). However, between 19:00 and 19:30 UTC, the modeled Hg(II) concentrations for the three simulations are considerably lower (40–60 pg m⁻³) than the observed concentrations (300 pg m⁻³). The simulated RH (54 %) during this time was also higher than the observed RH (25 %). A comparison of the observed and modeled vertical profiles of isoprene (not shown) indicates an overestimate in the modeled local boundary layer depth, which could explain the difference between the model and the observations for this section of the flight.

For both RF-06 and RF-09, the GEOS-Chem simulations predict that the high observed Hg(II) concentrations were produced in the upper troposphere of the Pacific

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anticyclone. The upper troposphere is characterized by fast oxidation of Hg(0) to Hg(II) due to cold temperatures and higher Br concentrations. Furthermore, the cloud-free conditions within the anticyclones prevent removal of Hg(II) by deposition and aqueous reduction, leading to accumulation of Hg(II) (Sect. 8).

6.2 RF-16 (8 July 2013)

During RF-16, the aircraft flew to the South Carolina coast, with the goal of measuring the vertical distribution of mercury over the ocean (Fig. 8a). Of the eight constant altitude legs flown over the Atlantic, four were in the free troposphere, between 1.0 and 4.5 km, and four were in the marine boundary layer (MBL). THg concentrations showed a slight decrease from the MBL (1.58 ng m^{-3}) to the top of the vertical profile (1.37 ng m^{-3}) (Fig. 8b). Hg(II) was mostly BDL (DL: 91 pg m^{-3}) in the MBL, but was high in the free troposphere reaching up to 680 pg m^{-3} with a mean concentration of 450 pg m^{-3} (Fig. 8c). The free-tropospheric air had a low concentration of CO (65 ppbv) and low RH (33 %) (Fig. 8d). The CHBr_3 concentration was about 1 pptv in the free tropospheric air, compared to about 2 pptv in the MBL. In consistency with the low RH and CHBr_3 , the HYSPLIT back trajectories show slow subsidence of the air mass from 4–6 km altitude in the subtropical Bermuda anticyclone (Fig. 8e).

The simulated THg concentrations in the MBL ($1.34\text{--}1.38 \text{ ng m}^{-3}$) are lower than the observations (1.58 ng m^{-3}), suggesting an underestimate in the ocean emission flux (Song et al., 2015) or an overestimate in the deposition flux (Fig. 8b). None of the model simulations capture the enhancements in Hg(II) observed between 17:00 and 18:15 UTC, and again between 19:30 and 20:15 UTC (Fig. 8c). During this flight, observed BrO concentrations remained below the instrument's DL of 0.9 pptv, and the modeled BrO concentrations were 0.1–0.3 pptv. We performed an additional simulation increasing the modeled BrO concentrations in the free troposphere of the Bermuda anticyclone to 0.9 pptv (with a proportional increase in Br radical concentrations) for the FastK simulation (FastK + 0.9BrO). The resulting Hg(II) concentrations along the flight track increase to $150\text{--}500 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, in better agreement with the observations (Fig. 8c).

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The oxidation of Hg(0) in this air mass was considerably faster than the 3×Br or FastK simulations, which suggests that the uncertainties in both the Br radical concentrations and in the oxidation rate constant can simultaneously affect the overall bias in the modeled Hg(II) in certain areas.

7 Links to previous studies

The above comparison of the simulated Hg(II) concentrations with the NOMADSS observations shows that the Hg(0) oxidation based on the standard rate constants (Goodsite et al., 2004, 2012; Donohoue et al., 2006) and the GEOS-Chem calculated Br concentrations is too slow. Increasing the free tropospheric Br concentrations by a factor of 3 or considering the higher rate constants of Ariya et al. (2002) leads to significant improvement in the model results in the free troposphere compared to the NOMADSS observations. By contrast, Weiss-Penzias et al. (2015) found that the GEOS-Chem simulated Hg(II) concentrations in the free troposphere were 2.5 times higher on average than the observed concentrations at five high-elevation sites in western USA and Taiwan. Differences in the instruments and models used in their study and ours make it difficult to directly compare our findings. Weiss-Penzias et al. (2015) used the Tekran® 2537-1130-1135 system, which can underestimate Hg(II) in the presence of O₃ (Lyman et al., 2010; McClure et al., 2014). Their GEOS-Chem model is based on the reaction kinetics described in Holmes et al. (2010) and does not include updates described in Sect. 2.3.3. Importantly, the rate constant for the dissociation of HgBr (reaction R2) has since been corrected, and is now a factor of 10–20 higher than the previous value. The faster rate of dissociation of HgBr decreases the modeled Hg(II) concentration at 600 hPa by a factor of about 1.5.

The relatively high DL of the UW-DOHGS instrument make the NOMADSS observations unsuitable for an evaluation of faster oxidation in the boundary layer. However, three previous studies in the tropical and mid-latitude MBL have reported similar find-

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ings that the standard $\text{Hg}(0) + \text{Br}$ oxidation kinetics are too slow to reproduce the observed $\text{Hg}(\text{II})$ concentrations, as discussed below.

Sprovieri et al. (2010) observed the diurnal cycle in RGM concentrations over the Adriatic Sea with daily enhancements of $20\text{--}40\text{ pg m}^{-3}$ at midday. Using a box model, the authors found that they could reasonably reproduce the observations with the Ariya et al. (2002) rate constant for the $\text{Hg}(0) + \text{Br}$ reaction (R1), but only if the HgBr thermal dissociation (Reaction R2) was neglected. In their study, Br was considered to be the sole second-step oxidant (Reaction R4). If HO_2 , NO_2 , and BrO were to be included as second-step oxidants (Dibble et al., 2012), as we do in our FastK simulation, it would provide an additional pathway for the oxidation of HgBr to $\text{Hg}(\text{II})$, and partly overcome the slowing effect of the HgBr thermal dissociation.

In analyzing RGM observations over the Galapagos Islands in the equatorial Pacific, Wang et al. (2014) showed that the inclusion of HO_2 and NO_2 as second-step oxidants in the $\text{Hg}(0) + \text{Br}$ reaction scheme based on Goodsite et al. (2012) and Dibble et al. (2012) was necessary to simulate the observed magnitude of the midday peaks in RGM concentrations. The box modeling study assumed peak daytime BrO concentrations of 0.2 pptv , which is similar to the annual average GEOS-Chem BrO concentration of 0.14 pptv . However, because of the uncertainties in the Tekran[®] 2537-1130-1135 system measurements, the actual concentrations of $\text{Hg}(\text{II})$ could possibly be higher than the observed concentrations (Wang et al., 2014; Lyman et al., 2010; Ambrose et al., 2013).

Tas et al. (2012) present an analysis of mercury depletion events associated with extremely high BrO concentrations ($20\text{--}80\text{ pptv}$) over the Dead Sea in Israel. They found that the standard Br -initiated mechanism was insufficient to reproduce the rate of depletion of $\text{Hg}(0)$ and showed that oxidation of $\text{Hg}(0)$ by BrO , at a rate close to that reported by Spicer et al. (2002), was necessary to explain the loss of $\text{Hg}(0)$. If the FastK kinetics are considered, the Br -initiated pathway by itself can explain a large fraction of observed depletion rate of $\text{Hg}(0)$. Although, the BrO oxidation pathway cannot be entirely ignored (as discussed in Sect. 5), its importance, in this case, would be much

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smaller than found by Tas et al. (2012). Overall, these MBL studies are consistent with our analysis of the NOMADSS free tropospheric observations in implying much faster tropospheric oxidation of Hg(0) than currently assumed.

8 Implications of faster oxidation in the GEOS-Chem model

5 The global annual tropospheric mercury budgets for the three simulations are presented in Fig. 9. Despite faster oxidation in the 3×Br and FastK simulations, we maintain the same global burden of THg by increasing the Hg(II) reduction rate (Sect. 2.3.4). Thus, the lifetime of THg against deposition is similar in all three simulations (~ 8.5 months). While we acknowledge that the modeled burden and lifetime of THg are af-
 10 fected by the uncertainty in the emission and deposition fluxes of mercury (Lin et al., 2006; Selin, 2009), we choose to maintain these in the three simulations because it allows us to focus on the model's sensitivity to redox kinetics.

The tropospheric oxidation of Hg(0) to Hg(II) increases from 10 900 Mga⁻¹ in the BASE simulation, to 18 300 Mga⁻¹ for 3×Br (factor of 1.7 increase) and
 15 42 100 Mga⁻¹ (factor of 3.9 increase) for the FastK simulation. The lifetime of Hg(0) against oxidation to Hg(II) decreases from 5 months in the BASE simulation to 2.8–1.2 months in the 3×Br and FastK simulations. The tropospheric burden of Hg(II) increases by 33 % in the 3×Br simulation and by 66 % in the FastK simulations.

Compared to the BASE simulation, the lifetime of Hg(II) against reduction decreases
 20 from 35 days (BASE simulation) to 19 days (3×Br) and 8 days (FastK) simulations, respectively. This results in faster cycling between Hg(0) and Hg(II). Globally, 48 % of the Hg(II) formed in the troposphere in the BASE simulation is reduced back to Hg(0) (Fig. 9a), whereas in the 3×Br and FastK simulations, that fraction increases to 68–88 % (Fig. 9b and c). The faster reduction in the simulations with faster oxidation im-
 25 plies that reduction plays a predominant role in controlling the burden and distribution of Hg(II) in the atmosphere. In view of our poor understanding of Hg(II) reduction in the

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atmosphere (Subir et al., 2011), we suggest that further laboratory and field measurements be conducted to constrain this process.

In this study, we chose to increase the reduction rate of Hg(II) to maintain the global burden of THg when oxidation is enhanced in 3×Br and FastK simulations. An alternative approach would have been to keep the reduction rate constant and increase the global emissions of THg by factors of 2 to 4. Such a large increase exceeds the range of reported emission estimates (Selin, 2009; Song et al., 2015; Pirrone et al., 2010), and thus we did not consider it. Moreover, this would lead to a 2 to 4-fold decrease in the lifetime of THg against deposition which is not supported by the nearly constant vertical profiles of THg observed in the troposphere during NOMADSS and other aircraft campaigns (Holmes et al., 2010).

Figure 10 shows the simulated distribution of Hg(II) at 450 hPa (6.5 km) for 1 June–15 July 2013. In all three simulations, Hg(II) is enhanced in the subtropical anticyclones, with larger enhancements in the 3×Br and the FastK simulations (Fig. 10a–c). A vertical profile in the Pacific subtropical anticyclone (Box 1, Fig. 10d) shows that the increase occurs throughout the free troposphere (Fig. 10d). Over the eastern US (Fig. 10e), the free tropospheric Hg(II) vertical profiles are similar for the three simulations below 8 km, where on average the increase in oxidation is matched by the increase in aqueous phase reduction in clouds. Above 8 km, the absence of liquid clouds prevents reduction from compensating for faster oxidation, and Hg(II) concentrations in the 3×Br and FastK simulations are higher. Thus, the increase in the global Hg(II) mass burden in the 3×Br and FastK simulations is concentrated largely in the subtropical anticyclones, and, to a smaller extent, in the extra-tropical upper troposphere.

Two processes maintain the high modeled Hg(II) concentrations in the subtropical anticyclones. First, the anticyclones are characterized by large-scale sinking motion which transports higher Hg(II) concentrations from the upper troposphere where fast oxidation of Hg(0) results from higher Br concentrations and lower temperatures slowing the thermal dissociation of the HgBr intermediate (Reaction R2). The locations of the 450 hPa enhancements in Hg(II) concentrations displayed in Fig. 10 are thus largely

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associated with the descending branches of the Hadley circulation. Note that the model predicts larger Hg(II) concentrations in the Southern Hemisphere subtropics where the winter Hadley circulation is stronger. Second, the sinking air in the anticyclones suppresses cloud formation and precipitation, thereby preventing loss of Hg(II) by reduction and wet deposition. This leads to efficient accumulation of Hg(II) in the subtropical anticyclones, even at lower altitudes. The model predicts low 450 hPa Hg(II) concentrations in regions in the tropics with high cloud cover and precipitation (such as the Western Pacific), and in regions with low insolation, such as the Southern (winter) Hemisphere polar region.

The model simulates frequent episodes of high Hg(II) concentrations at 6.5 km over Texas during summer of 2013 (Fig. 11a). From 1 June to 15 July, simulated midday (noon-3 p.m.) Hg(II) concentrations were higher than 250 pg m^{-3} for 15 days in the FastK simulation (3×Br: 12 days), two of which were the days when RF-06 and RF-09 were conducted. RF-10 also flew at 7 km (425 hPa) over northern Texas and Oklahoma (Fig. 1) on 27 June 2013, but observed Hg(II) concentrations remained BDL (DL: 134 pg m^{-3}) during the high altitude leg. The 3×Br and FastK modeled Hg(II) concentrations over this region during RF-10 were 136 and 208 pg m^{-3} , respectively, significantly lower than those simulated for RF-06 and RF-09. The highest Hg(II) at 6.5 km over Texas and Oklahoma occurs when the wind over the southern US is southwesterly (Fig. 11b) transporting Hg(II) from the semi-permanent Pacific anticyclone, whereas the lowest concentrations occur when the transport is from the north (Fig. 11c). Our results suggest that the transport of Hg(II) produced in the Pacific anticyclone could be an important source of Hg(II) over southeastern US, potentially influencing wet deposition in the region if these high Hg(II) air masses are exposed to deep convection.

9 Conclusions

In this work, we have analyzed aircraft-based measurements of atmospheric mercury species (THg and Hg(II)) made during the NOMADSS campaign that took place over

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the southeastern US during summer 2013. The THg observations show a weak vertical gradient with higher concentrations in the bottom 1 km (1.54 ng m^{-3}), and lower concentrations between 6 and 7 km (1.38 ng m^{-3}) in the atmosphere.

During NOMADSS, the mean Hg(II) concentrations observed above the instrument's limit of detection was $212 (\pm 112) \text{ pg m}^{-3}$. Using the robust regression on order statistics procedure, the estimated mean Hg(II) concentration for all observations was $110 (\pm 103) \text{ pg m}^{-3}$. The highest Hg(II) concentrations, $300\text{--}680 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$, were seen at 5–7 km altitude during two flights over Texas and at 1–3 km during one flight over the Atlantic Ocean. These high Hg(II) concentrations were associated with clean subsid- ing air masses originating in the upper troposphere within the Pacific or Atlantic anti- cyclones. The low temperatures and high concentrations of the bromine radical in the upper troposphere lead to faster oxidation of Hg(0), while the lack of removal from in- cloud reduction or wet deposition in the dry anticyclones lead to efficient accumulation of Hg(II).

We used the GEOS-Chem model to evaluate the oxidation kinetics and interpret these observations. The modeled THg concentrations are in close agreement with the observations, reproducing the horizontal and vertical distribution of THg. The simulated Hg(II) concentrations, on the other hand, are a factor of 2.2 lower than the observed concentrations. We attribute this systematic bias to an underestimate in the modeled oxidation of Hg(0) to Hg(II).

We perform two additional simulations with: (i) three times the Br radical concentra- tions between 45° N and 45° S and between 750 hPa and the tropopause ($3\times \text{Br}$), and (ii) a faster Hg(0)+Br oxidation rate constant (FastK). The model performance improves with both these simulations, especially above 5 km altitude and in air masses with low RH ($< 35\%$) and low CO ($< 75 \text{ ppbv}$), where some of the highest Hg(II) concentrations were observed. For these air masses, the Hg(II) concentrations simulated with the $3\times \text{Br}$ ($162 \pm 104 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) and the FastK ($208 \pm 144 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) models are 60–100 % higher than the BASE simulation ($99 \pm 48 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$) and in closer agreement with the observations ($239 \pm 141 \text{ pg m}^{-3}$).

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This faster oxidation decreases the lifetime of Hg(0) against oxidation from 5 months in the BASE simulation to 2.8 months with the 3×Br simulation, and to 1.2 month with the FastK simulation. To maintain the global THg burden, the faster modeled Hg(0) oxidation is balanced by an increase in the modeled Hg(II) reduction rates. The contribution of reduction to the overall loss of Hg(II) (by deposition and reduction) increases from 48 % in the BASE simulation to 68 and 88 % in the 3×Br and the FastK simulations, respectively, implying a greater importance of reduction to chemistry of mercury in the atmosphere. In the subtropical anticyclones, the 3×Br and FastK simulations predict a 3 to 5-fold enhancement in Hg(II) concentrations at 450 hPa relative to the global average Hg(II) concentration. These subtropical anticyclones are dry, cloud-free regions which provide ideal conditions for accumulation of Hg(II). The high Hg(II) in the Pacific anticyclone is periodically transported over southern US during summer and could be an important source of mercury wet deposition in the region. Future measurements in the subtropical anticyclones can help us gain deeper insights into the pathways of Hg(0) oxidation in the atmosphere.

The Supplement related to this article is available online at doi:10.5194/acpd-15-26839-2015-supplement.

Acknowledgements. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant # 1217010 to D. A. Jaffe, L. Jaeglé and N. E. Selin, grant # 1215712 to J. Stutz, and grant # 1216743 to C. A. Cantrell and R. L. Mauldin III. The authors thank participants from National Center for Atmospheric Research's Earth Observing Laboratory and Research Aviation Facility for their support in the planning and execution of the NOMADSS campaign.

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Table 1. Chemical and meteorological measurements used in this work.

Observations	Measurement technique	Instrument model/Reference
THg, Hg(0), and Hg(II)	Dual-channel CVAFS (UW-DOHGS)	Lyman and Jaffe (2012); Ambrose et al. (2013, 2015)
BrO	Differential Optical Absorption Spectroscopy	Platt and Stutz (2008)
RH	Chilled mirror hygrometry	Buck 1011C
CO	Vacuum-UV Resonance Fluorescence	Aero-Laser AL5001
NO, NO ₂ , O ₃	NO ₂ chemiluminescence	Ridley et al. (2004)
CH ₂ O, CHBr ₃ , C ₃ H ₈	Gas chromatography/mass spectrometry	Apel et al. (2010)
SO ₂	Pulsed fluorescence	Thermo Scientific Model 43i-TLE

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**Table 2.** Chemical characteristics of NOMADSS observations classified in four air mass categories.

	All observations	low RH/low CO	low RH/high CO	high RH/low CO	high RH/high CO
No of THg observations ^a	2381	233	551	212	1385
THg observations (ng m ⁻³)	1.49 ± 0.16	1.35 ± 0.15	1.48 ± 0.11	1.44 ± 0.20	1.53 ± 0.15
No of Hg(II) observations ^b	1503	184	414	159	746
(ADL)	(528)	(132)	(244)	(47)	(105)
Hg(II) all observations (pg m ⁻³) ^c	110 ± 103	239 ± 141	146 ± 81	108 ± 123	48 ± 57
(ADL) ^d	(212 ± 112)	(289 ± 136)	(189 ± 76)	(249 ± 140)	(155 ± 73)
Altitude (km)	2.6 ± 1.9	4.6 ± 1.8	3.9 ± 1.2	2.9 ± 2.2	1.7 ± 1.5
RH (%)	49 ± 27	16 ± 10	15 ± 9	68 ± 17	66 ± 13
CO (ppbv)	107 ± 33	65 ± 4	97 ± 13	65 ± 3	124 ± 30
O ₃ (ppbv)	55 ± 14	52 ± 16	63 ± 17	43 ± 16	54 ± 10
NO _x (pptv)	158 ± 156	55 ± 32	67 ± 34	44 ± 39	232 ± 170
CH ₂ O (ppbv)	1.8 ± 1.4	0.5 ± 0.3	0.7 ± 0.3	0.9 ± 0.4	2.7 ± 1.3

The four air mass categories are based on thresholds of RH = 35 % and CO = 75 ppbv. The mean and standard deviation for each category are indicated.

^a Number of 2.5 min THg samples.

^b Total number of 2.5 min Hg(II) samples, including samples below the detection limit (BDL). The number in parenthesis indicates the number of 2.5 min Hg(II) samples above the detection limit (ADL).

^c Mean Hg(II) concentration and standard deviation for all observations, including BDL as estimated using the ROS method.

^d Mean Hg(II) concentration and standard deviation for ADL observations.

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Table 3. Modeled THg and Hg(II) concentrations in the three GEOS-Chem Hg simulations for the four air mass categories.

	All observations	“low RH/low CO”	“low RH/high CO”	“high RH/low CO”	“high RH/high CO”
Observed Hg(II) (pg m ⁻³)					
All	110 ± 103	239 ± 141	146 ± 81	108 ± 123	48 ± 57
(ADL)	212 ± 112	289 ± 136	189 ± 76	249 ± 140	155 ± 73
BASE model Hg(II) (pg m ⁻³)					
All	49 ± 41	99 ± 48	76 ± 36	20 ± 25	28 ± 19
(ADL) ^a	67 ± 44	96 ± 51	75 ± 34	14 ± 18	38 ± 19
(BDL) ^b	39 ± 44	105 ± 37	78 ± 39	22 ± 27	26 ± 18
3×Br model Hg(II) (pg m ⁻³)					
All	62 ± 72	162 ± 104	91 ± 67	28 ± 41	29 ± 28
(ADL) ^a	98 ± 94	176 ± 116	94 ± 76	19 ± 30	44 ± 29
(BDL) ^b	43 ± 94	124 ± 47	86 ± 51	31 ± 45	26 ± 27
FastK model Hg(II) (pg m ⁻³)					
All	80 ± 98	208 ± 144	128 ± 95	18 ± 25	34 ± 32
(ADL) ^a	125 ± 120	216 ± 160	128 ± 89	16 ± 17	55 ± 42
(BDL) ^b	55 ± 120	189 ± 88	129 ± 102	19 ± 28	31 ± 28
Observed THg (ng m ⁻³)					
All	1.49 ± 0.16	1.35 ± 0.15	1.48 ± 0.11	1.44 ± 0.20	1.53 ± 0.15
BASE model THg (ng m ⁻³)					
All	1.51 ± 0.08	1.43 ± 0.06	1.50 ± 0.05	1.40 ± 0.03	1.55 ± 0.07
3×Br model THg (ng m ⁻³)					
All	1.51 ± 0.11	1.40 ± 0.09	1.50 ± 0.08	1.36 ± 0.04	1.55 ± 0.10
FastK model THg (ng m ⁻³)					
All	1.52 ± 0.09	1.44 ± 0.07	1.52 ± 0.06	1.40 ± 0.04	1.55 ± 0.08

^a Model values corresponding to ADL observations.

^b Model values corresponding to BDL observations.

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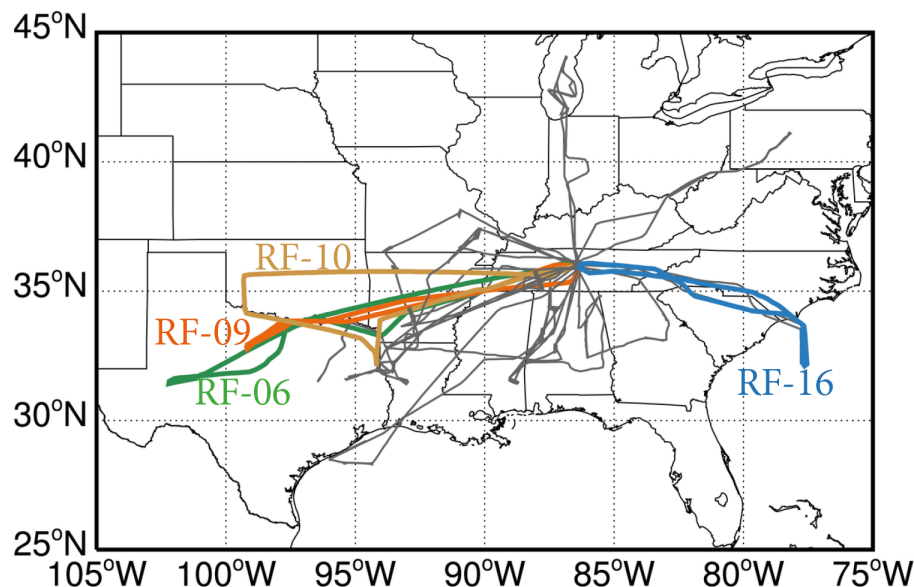


Figure 1. Flight tracks of the NSF/NCAR C-130 aircraft during the 19 NOMADSS research flights between 1 June and 15 July 2013. The flight tracks of four flights discussed in the text are highlighted in color (RF-06, RF-09, RF-10, and RF-16).

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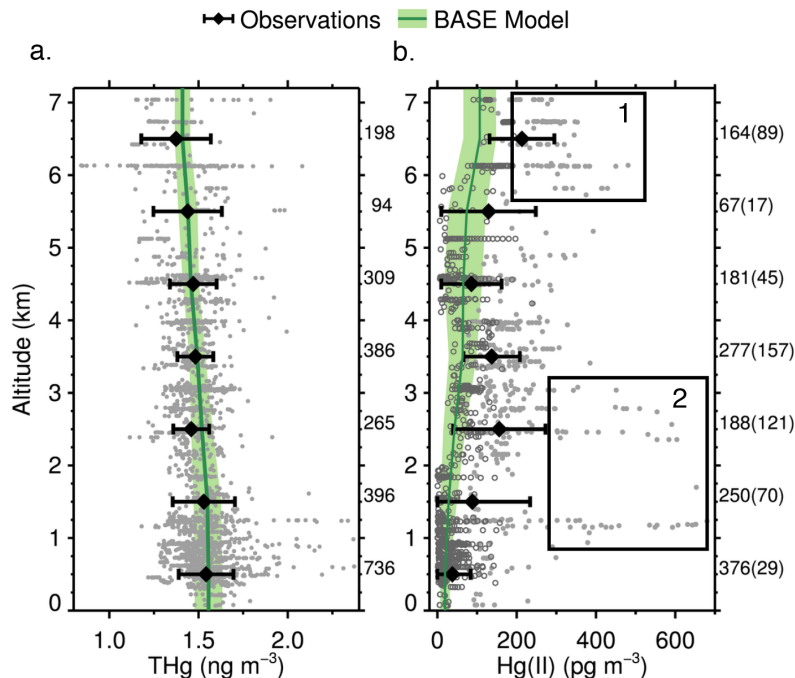


Figure 2. Vertical profiles of **(a)** THg and **(b)** Hg(II) during NOMADSS. Individual 2.5 min observations are shown with grey circles. Observations above the detection limit (ADL) are indicated as filled circles, while observations below the detection limit (BDL) are as shown open circles and are estimated using the regression on order statistics (ROS) method. The means and standard deviations calculated for 1 km vertical bins are shown for the observations (black diamonds and error bars) and the BASE GEOS-Chem simulation (green line and shading). The numbers on the right hand side of each panel indicate the number of 2.5 min observations in each 1 km bin. For Hg(II), the second number in parenthesis indicates the number of ADL observations. The areas marked as "1" and "2" highlight measurements of high Hg(II) concentrations and are referenced in the text and Fig. 3.

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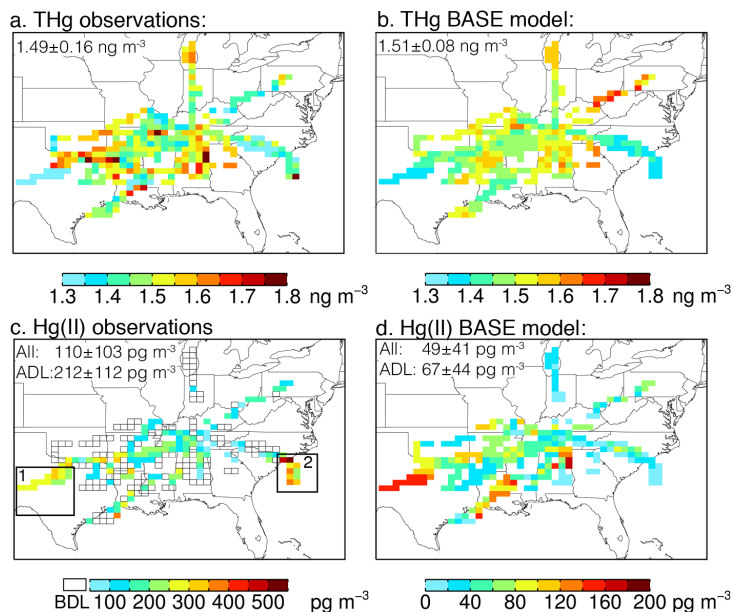


Figure 3. Horizontal distribution of THg (top panels) and Hg(II) (bottom panels). Observations are shown on panels (a, c), while results from the BASE GEOS-Chem simulation are on panels (b, d). Observed and simulated values are averaged in 0.5° latitude by 0.625° longitude columns. For Hg(II) observations, the means include ROS estimates for values below the detection limit (BDL). Locations where all observed Hg(II) concentrations were BDL are shown by open squares. Note the different color scales for the observed and modeled Hg(II) concentrations (c, d). Regions marked as “1” and “2” highlight the areas with high Hg(II) and are referenced in the text and in Fig. 2. The numbers at the top of each panel indicate the means and standard deviations for all the modeled and observed concentrations. For Hg(II) we separate the statistics for all the measurements (“All”) and for the measurements above the detection limit (“ADL”).

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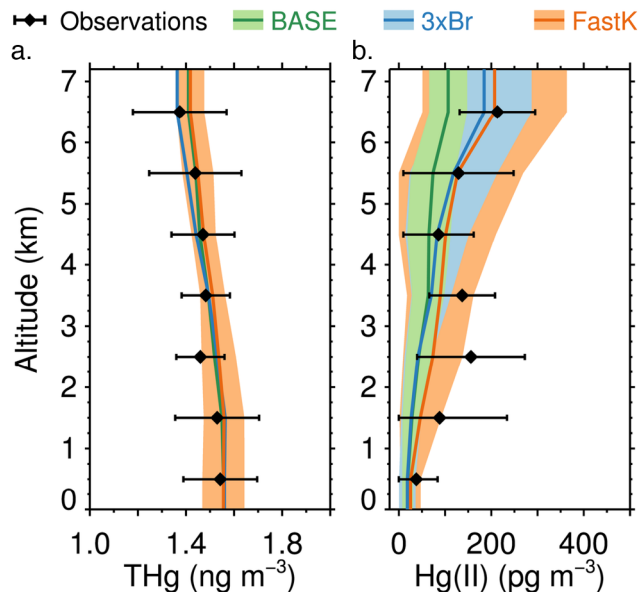


Figure 4. Mean vertical profiles of **(a)** THg and **(b)** Hg(II) concentrations averaged in 1 km vertical bins during NOMADSS. Observations are shown with black diamonds (error bars indicate the standard deviation). BDL Hg(II) observations are estimated using the ROS method for each vertical bin. The means and standard deviations for the three model simulations are shown as lines and shading: BASE (green), 3×Br (blue), and FastK (orange).

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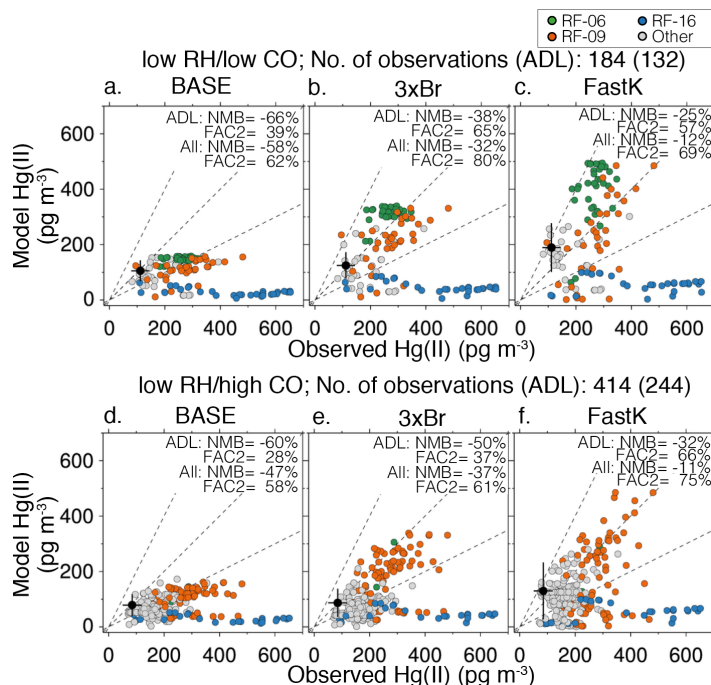


Figure 5. Scatterplot of observed and simulated concentrations of Hg(II) for the three model simulations in the (a–c) “low RH/low CO”, and (d–f) “low RH/high CO” categories. Each column corresponds to our three GEOS-Chem simulations: BASE (left column), 3×Br (middle column) and FastK (right column). Observations for RF-06 (green), RF-09 (orange), and RF-16 (blue) are highlighted in color, with the remaining observations indicated by grey symbols. The black circles and error bars represent the mean and standard deviations of values below the detection limit (BDL) estimated with the ROS method for each air mass category separately and the corresponding simulated concentrations. The Normalized Mean Bias (NMB) and fraction of points where the model is within a factor of 2 of the observations (FAC2) are indicated on each panel (see text for definitions).

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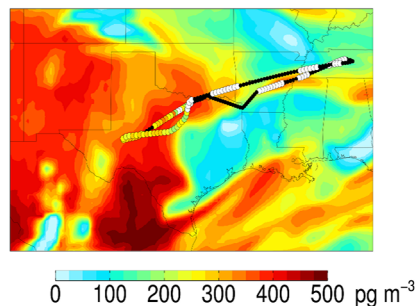
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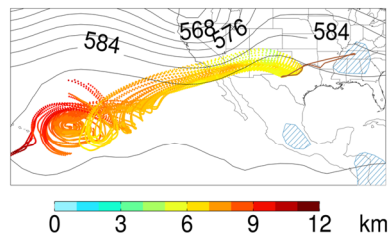
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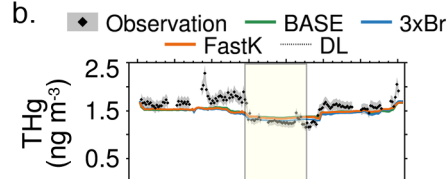
a.



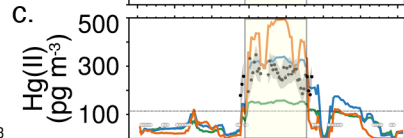
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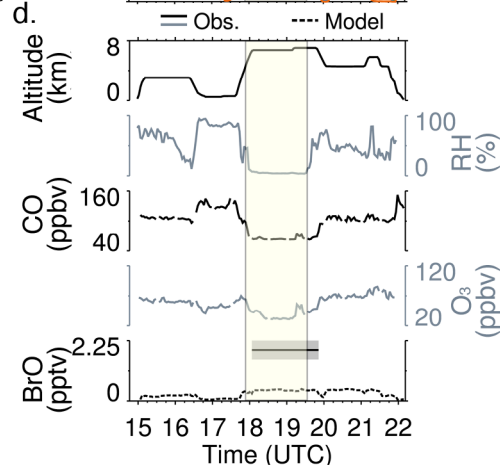
b.



c.



d.



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Figure 6. Case study for RF-06 on 19 June 2013. **(a)**, the C-130 flight track with circles color-coded based on observed Hg(II) concentrations (locations along the flight track with no Hg(II) observations are filled in black, and below the detection limit (BDL) observations are filled in white). The background map displays the GEOS-Chem Hg(II) concentrations at 450 hPa for 3×Br simulation between 17:00–20:00 UTC. The timeseries of the observations of THg and Hg(II) are shown in **(b, c)**. The THg and Hg(II) measurements are represented by filled diamonds with the uncertainty represented by the gray shading. The dashed line represents the DL, and BDL observations are plotted at DL/2 with open circles. Modeled concentrations of THg and Hg(II) are displayed for the BASE (green line), 3×Br (blue), FastK (orange) simulations. Flight times where high Hg(II) concentrations were observed are highlighted. The time-series of flight altitude, RH, CO, O₃ and BrO (observations and model) are shown in **(d)**. Panel **(e)** shows the 7 day HYSPLIT back trajectories for the highlighted sections of the flight. The contours show the NCEP/NCAR Reanalysis 500 hPa geopotential heights on 18Z for the day of the flight. The hatched areas show regions with greater than an average of 10 mm day⁻¹ of surface precipitation for seven days before the flight.

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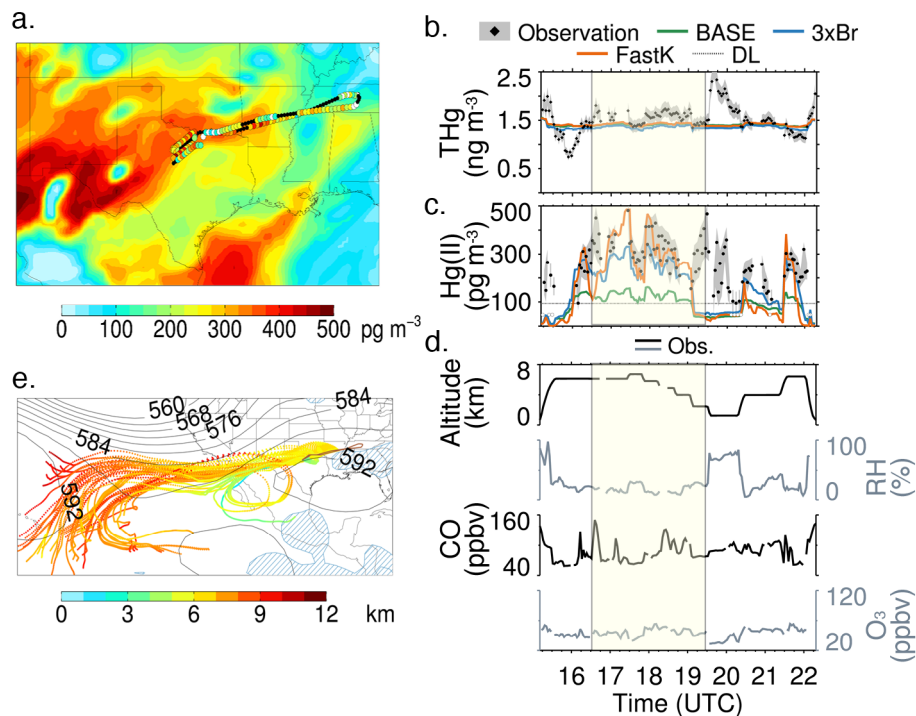


Figure 7. Case study for RF-09 on 24 June 2013. Same as Fig. 6, except that we do not show BrO concentrations which were not measured on this flight.

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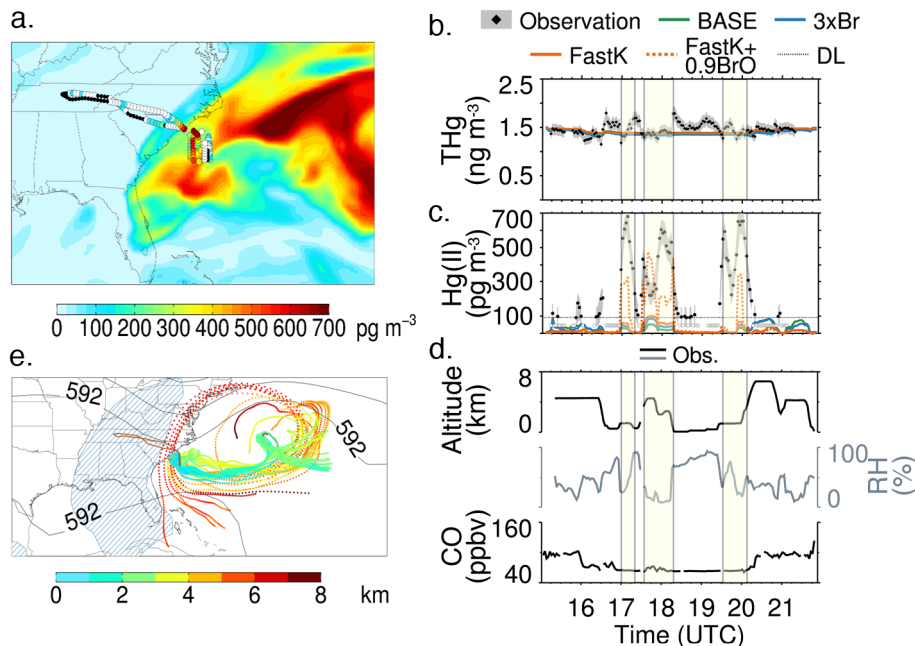


Figure 8. Case study for RF-16 on 8 July 2013. Same as Fig. 6, except the background map (a) displays Hg(II) concentrations at 800 hPa for the FastK + 0.9BrO pptv simulation. Also we add the FastK + 0.9 ppt simulation as an orange dashed line in panels (b, c). O_3 concentrations were not available for this flight and BrO concentrations were below the instrument's detection limit.

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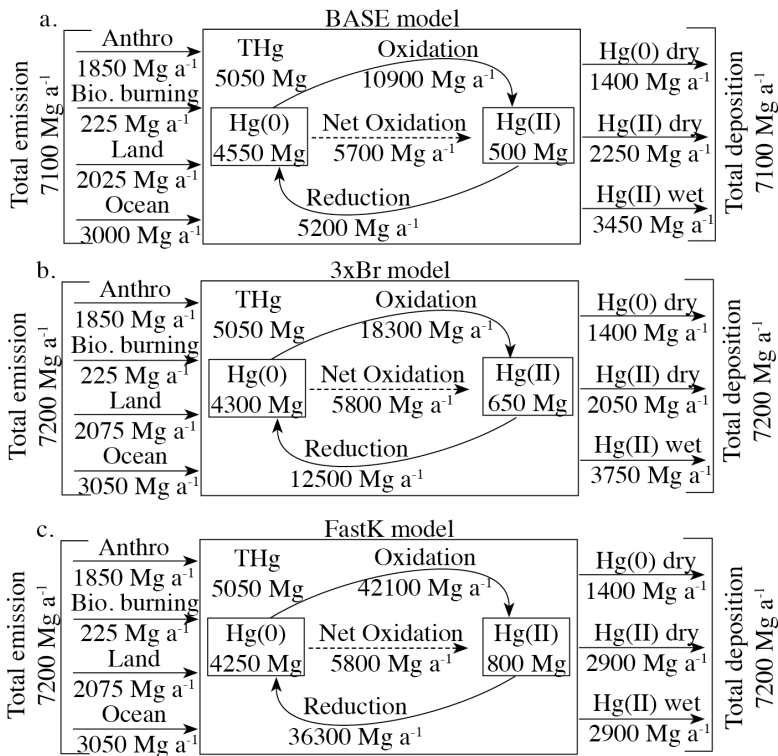


Figure 9. Annual global tropospheric budget of mercury in the (a) BASE, (b) 3xBr, and (c) FastK simulations for 2013. The burdens are in units of Mg (10⁶ g) and the fluxes are in units of Mg a⁻¹ (Mg per year).

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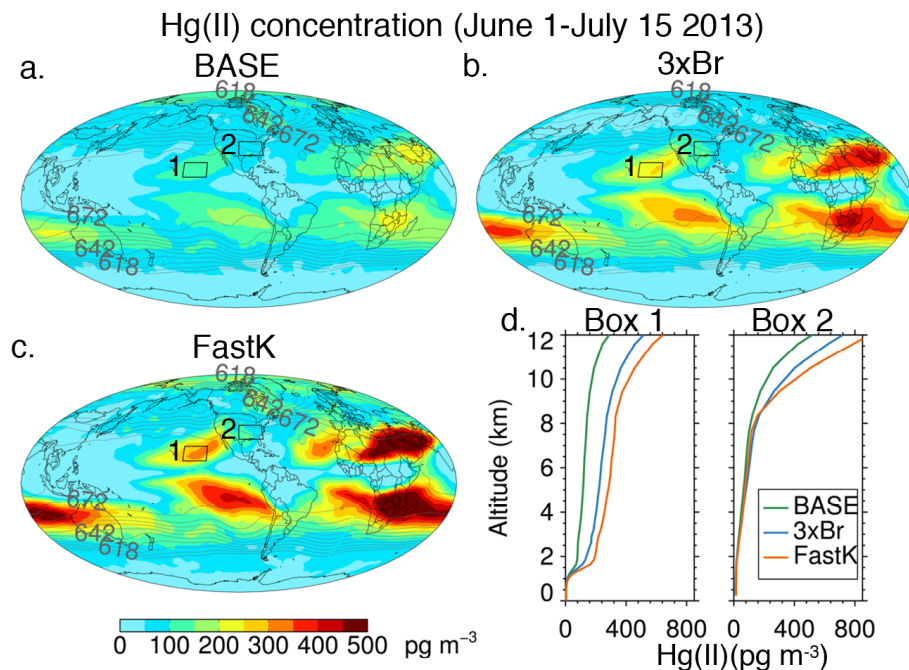


Figure 10. Average concentration of Hg(II) at 450 hPa during NOMADSS (1 June to 15 July 2013) for the (a) BASE, (b) 3xBr, and (c) FastK simulations. The contours show the NCEP/NCAR Reanalysis 450 hPa geopotential height averaged over the same period (contour interval: 6 decameter). Panel (d) indicates the mean modeled vertical profiles of Hg(II) concentrations for regions marked as “Box 1” and “Box 2” for the three simulations.

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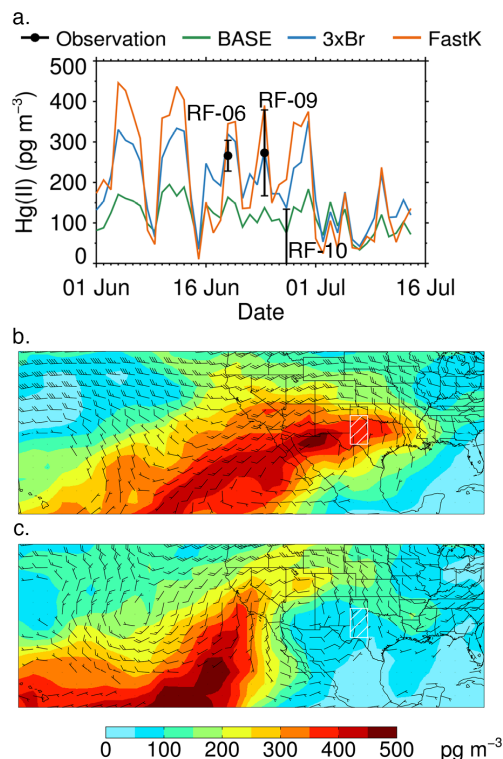


Figure 11. (a) Modeled timeseries of midday (noon–3 p.m.) Hg(II) concentrations at 6.5 km altitude over Texas (white rectangle shown in panels (b), (c)) for the three GEOS-Chem simulations for 1 June–15 July 2013 and the mean and standard deviations of Hg(II) observations at 6–7 km over Texas for RF-06, RF-09 and RF-10. (b) mean midday FastK Hg(II) concentrations and winds at 6.5 km altitude for the 10 highest FastK Hg(II) concentrations from the timeseries in panel (a). (c) Mean midday FastK Hg(II) concentrations for the 10 days with the lowest Hg(II) concentrations.