

Interactive comment on “Seasonal ozone vertical profiles over North America using the AQMEII group of air quality models: model inter-comparison and stratospheric intrusions” by Marina Astitha et al.

Anonymous Referee #1

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General Comments

The AQMEII project has resulted in an unprecedented intercomparison and examination of European and North American regional air quality models. The sensitivity of regional AQ model predictions to chemical lateral boundary conditions (CLBCs) was examined in the first two phases of AQMEII. This paper extends that previous work by analyzing one-year-long North American simulations performed in AQMEII Phase 3 by four AQ modeling systems that used the same anthropogenic and wildfire emissions

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and the same CLBCs. Model predictions of vertical ozone distributions across North America were compared with weekly ozonesonde data from a subset of the North American ozonesonde "network" and with a special daily ozonesonde data set from the 2010 CalNex field study in California. The comparison against measurements was also supplemented by a model-based analysis of chemically inert tracers specified at the model lateral boundaries.

As has usually been the case in AQMEII, no single model was the obvious best performer. The inert tracer analysis showed the strong dependence of interior ozone concentrations on specified CLBCs. It also appeared that model skill in predicting upper-tropospheric ozone depended more on the meteorological model used than on the AQ model used.

This is a well-written paper and I recommend acceptance of this manuscript with minor revisions. I have made a number of specific comments and suggestions below along with a number of minor editorial suggestions and corrections that I hope will improve the final version. I have also suggested revisions to a number of the figures that I believe will help readers.

Specific Comments

1. Since this paper is a contribution to Phase 3 of AQMEII, it would help a potential reader if the title of the paper referred to the "AQMEII-3 group of air quality models". This would also be consistent with the use of "AQMEII-3" in the Abstract and body of the paper.

2. In the second paragraph of the Introduction the authors note the scarcity of upper-air measurements that can be used to evaluate regional AQ models. This paper makes use of ozonesonde measurements to evaluate upper-air performance, but measurements from instrumented commercial airliners from the MOZAIC program

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have also been used to evaluate ozone (and NO_x and CO) predictions made by regional AQ models. This second data source could be mentioned explicitly in the Introduction as part of the overview, and there are two relevant AQMEII papers that used MOZAIC data: the AQMEII-1 paper by Solazzo et al. (2013), which is referenced here, and the AQMEII-2 paper by Giordano et al. (2015, *Atmos. Environ.*, vol. 115, pp. 371-388, doi:10.1016/j.atmosenv.2015.02.034), which is not referenced but which also seems relevant.

3. I had several questions about the summary of atmospheric modeling systems provided in Section 2.1:

* Nothing is said about the different horizontal domains considered by the four modeling systems even though the choice of domain size and location resulted in at least one model (DE1) missing one of the ozonesonde stations considered (Stony Plain). Domain extent is also not mentioned in the list of differences between modeling systems (lines 29-30).

* Table 1 lists the horizontal grid spacing for model DK1 as 50 km but Table 1 of Solazzo et al. (2017) has a value of 16.7 km for the same model. This apparent inconsistency is more than a detail since the coarse grid spacing of DK1 is used as an explanation of model behavior (e.g., p. 6).

* This section notes that some harmonization was achieved between modeling systems in AQMEII-3, including common simulation period, common anthropogenic and wildfire emissions, and common lateral boundary conditions. However, although the modeling domain considered includes much of Canada and part of Mexico (e.g., Figure 1), nothing is said about the Canadian and Mexican emissions that were (presumably) used.

* On page 4, line 3 it is stated that each modeling system included 3 non-reactive tracers, but Table 1 indicates that one model (US1) did not include non-reactive tracers.

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4. In Section 2.3, rather than stating that the seasonality of the ozone profiles is "under-represented", is the point being made that the samples are small and hence the sampling variations may be large? And can a reference be given for the calculation of the 95% bootstrapping confidence limits?

5. I found the description of the use of the Fractional Difference Indicator in Figure 12 given at the end of Section 5 and in the Figure 12 caption to be somewhat unclear. Is FD calculated for each individual profile and then averaged or are the individual profiles averaged and then FD calculated?

6. Here are some possible changes to the figures that could make them easier to interpret and more impactful:

* Figures 2-4: Only 3 seasons are shown – fall plots are missing even though the fall period is referred to in the Fig. 2 caption. The seasonal box plots for the fall in Figure S1 are a useful supplement but not a substitute (cf. p. 6, l. 20-21).

* Figures 2-4: It would help the reader if a thicker line were used for the observed profiles. The legend and the season labels could also be made larger.

* Figure 5: The season labels are "floating" at the top of each bar chart and might appear to be associated with the bar chart above them; this confusion could be avoided if they were moved lower. Also, "Hunstv." is an odd abbreviation for Huntsville.

* Figure 6: It would help the reader if all of the labels, both on and above each Taylor diagram, could be made larger.

* Figure 7: As in Figures 2-4, use a thicker line for the observed profile. The number of sites considered in each panel could also be added in parentheses to the top label for each panel (e.g., "Winter - Western sites (2)").

* Figure 8: Why are DK1 results missing for Wallops when they are available in Figure 5? The DE1 results missing for Stony Plain, on the other hand, are expected.

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* Figure 9b: Why is the observed 95th-percentile profile slightly different in the DK1 panel at about 5 km a.s.l. compared to the other three panels?

* Figure 10: The usual units for total ozone column are Dobson units. A sentence could be added to the caption to note what the TOC range shown (400 to $1100 \times 10^{-5} \text{ kg m}^{-2}$) is in DU.

* Figure 11: If the panels are ordered from left to right by decreasing latitude, why is the Shasta panel where it is? (same question for Figure S5)

* Figures S2 and S3: Season labels could be made larger if they were moved to the right-hand side and the station names moved lower in the winter panels. The legends could also be made larger if they were moved higher up.

* Figure S3: It is stated on page 6 (line 32) that wind speed profiles are not available for Huntsville. What about Narrangansett, Boulder, and Trinidad Head, which are also not shown in this figure?

Technical Corrections/Suggestions

p. 1, l. 25 "... have provided *modeled* ozone vertical profiles ..." (i.e., vs. measured profiles)

p. 3, l. 18 "are used ... are performed ... are prepared"?

p. 4, l. 5-6 Lack of chemistry is mentioned several times – too repetitive?.

p. 4, l. 23 Perhaps "Ozonesonde *data* are obtained from various networks ..."

p. 4, l. 29 Perhaps "The ten sites depicted in Figure 1a had *weekly* launches throughout the entire year ..."

p. 5, l. 10 Perhaps "... at seven sites, one in southern British Columbia (*Kelowna*) and six in California"

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p. 6, l. 16 "... the mean mixing ratios Narrangansett"?

p. 7, l. 12 For clarity, perhaps "For the UT, the highest errors *in ozone mixing ratio* occur during ..."

p. 7, l. 14 "Trinidad Head" rather than "Trinidad" (twice)

p. 8, l. 18 RMSD or RMSE?

p. 8, l. 30 "... but *not* chemistry"?

p. 9, l. 5-11 The use of "mb" here is inconsistent with the use of "hPa" in the rest of the paper.

p. 9, l. 21 Liu et al. (2018)?

p. 10, l. 28 Can a reference be provided for ERA-interim?

p. 13 There are multiple reference formats being used.

p. 18 Could include characterization of the site location relative to the model domain in this table for the IONS stations (i.e., "West").

p. 30, l. 3 For the observed ozone profiles, the symbols look more like diamonds than circles.

p. 31, l. 26 Should it be "Plots a and c" and "Plots b and d"?

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