

# REDUCTION OF HEAT STRESS IN CHEMICAL PROTECTIVE SUITS

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## INTRODUCTION

Wearing chemical protective suits (CPSs) involves the danger of heat stress. At normal protection levels, CPSs combining water vapor and air permeability with NBC-filter characteristics (permeable CPSs = PCPSs) may be able to reduce heat stress. At high protection levels, impermeable chemical protective suits (ICPSs) that lead to a high heat stress are indispensable.

In order to improve heat flow from the body to the environment, new permeable materials have been developed (Table 1), and for impermeable suits, technical aids are available (Table 2). Current research in our laboratory for clothing physiology will be presented for the materials and methods marked (\*) in Tables 1 and 2 and the consequences for a possible future development will be discussed.

**Table 1. Materials for PCPSs to diminish heat stress**

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- charcoal impregnated foam \*
  - spherical adsorbers \*
  - carbonized knitted fabrics \*
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**Table 2. Diminution of heat stress in ICPSs by technical aids**

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- stationary cooling system (not for mobile use)
  - ventilation with air from a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) \*
  - ventilation with ambient air supplied by a portable battery ventilator \*
  - ice-cooled vest
  - liquid-cooled undergarment
  - portable cooling system (refrigerator unit as rucksack) \*
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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To investigate different materials for PCPSs, 9 male volunteers worked on a treadmill (45 min, 4 km·h<sup>-1</sup>, 0% incline) in a climatic chamber (28°C dry bulb (t<sub>db</sub>), 50% relative humidity(RH) 0.2 m·s<sup>-1</sup> air velocity) after informed consent had been obtained. The subjects wore 5 different PCPSs made from new materials (charcoal impregnated foam, 3 x spherical adsorbers, carbonized knitted fabrics)

and 1 conventional standard PCPS (charcoal impregnated foam) in random sequence. Underneath, they wore work clothes (underwear with short sleeves and legs, shirt, trousers, socks and boots; ICL = 0.7 clo). Work clothes only were used as control. Heart rate (ECG) and mean skin temperature (1) were measured. Sweat volume was obtained by weighing. The volunteers' self-perceived stress, heat and sweat sensations were ascertained.

Three examples of technical aids for ICPSs were studied:

Air (5 L·min<sup>-1</sup>) from a SCBA was used to ventilate an overall ICPS combined with a SCBA. Eight male volunteers worked with and without this ventilation on a treadmill (4 km·h<sup>-1</sup>, 3% incline) in a climatic chamber at 18°C tdb and 50% RH (30 min stay, 15 min walk) after informed consent had been obtained. Heart rate, mean skin temperature were recorded, and sweat volume was obtained. The volunteers' self-perceived stress, heat and sweat sensations were ascertained.

The possible benefits of a higher ventilation with filtered ambient air (80 l·min<sup>-1</sup>) supplied by a portable battery ventilator were investigated with a 2-piece ICPS. Four male volunteers walked on a treadmill (5 km·h<sup>-1</sup>, 0% incline) in a climatic chamber (35°C tdb, 20-40% RH, 150 kJ·m<sup>-2</sup>·h<sup>-1</sup> heat radiation) after informed consent had been obtained. Every subject worked with and without ventilation of the ICPS in random sequence. Heart rate, rectal and mean skin temperatures were measured, and sweat volume was obtained. The volunteers' self-perceived stress, heat and sweat sensations were ascertained.

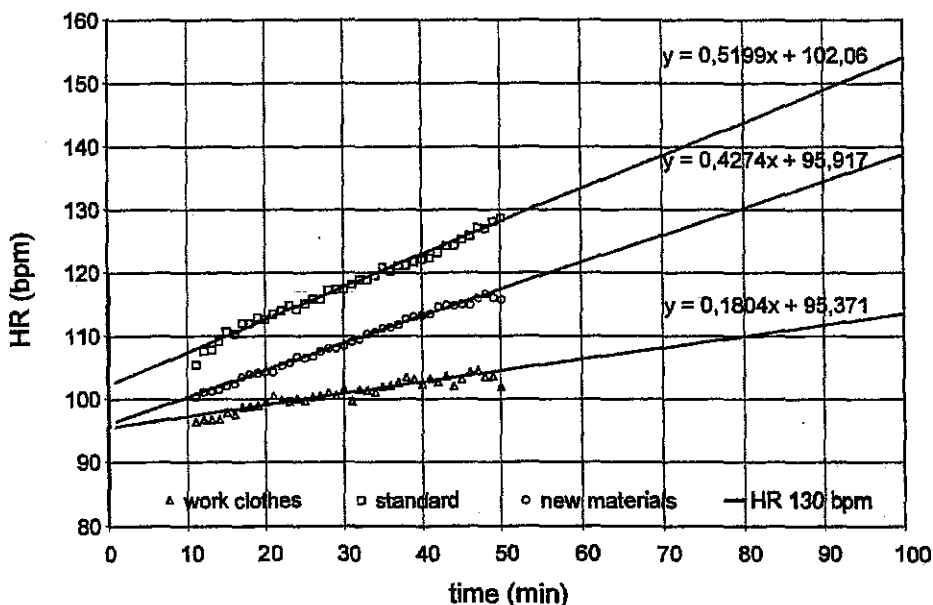
In addition, first orientating examinations using a portable cooling system (refrigerator unit) as rucksack, which blows cooled ambient air into a 2-piece ICPS, were carried out.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results were obtained by the examination of the different materials for PCPSs:

The differences in between the PCPSs made out of 5 different new materials were only of marginal biological or statistical importance. However, all of them showed an improvement in comparison with the standard PCPS. Heart rates (mean ± SD) rose from 114.3 ± 9.1 bpm to 117.2 ± 11.5 bpm (new materials), to 128.7 ± 10.3 bpm (standard) and to 102.0 ± 12.9 bpm (work clothes) at the end of work. Mean skin temperatures were 36.1 ± 0.12°C to 36.3 ± 0.33°C (new materials), 36.7 ± 0.21°C (standard) and 35.4 ± 0.51°C (work clothes) while sweat losses were 358 ± 202 g to 444 ± 75 g (new materials), 536 ± 144 g (standard) and 337 ± 63 g (work clothes). The results were also reflected in the volunteers' self-perceived sensations of stress, heat and sweat. With the new PCPSs, they were lower than with the standard PCPS, though higher than with the work clothes only. Extrapolating the linear increase of heart rate (Fig. 1) observed during the climatic stress up to a limit of 130 bpm showed a prolonged tolerance time with the new PCPSs (80 min; standard: 54 min).

Thus all new materials for PCPSs show better qualities to reduce the wearers heat stress than the suit with spherical adsorber of a former investigation



**Figure 1.** Extrapolation of the heart rate observed during the climatic stress, indicating the prolonged tolerance with the new materials.

reported on ICEE 6 (2) The examination of technical aids for ICPSs revealed the following results:

During work with the overall ICPS, mean skin temperature rose to  $36.2 \pm 0.6^\circ\text{C}$  and sweat loss was  $229 \pm 83 \text{ g}\cdot 30\text{-min}^{-1}$ . Ventilation with air from the SCBA gave no relief for the volunteers' physiology nor for their self-perceived sensations of stress, heat and sweat. To reach effective sweat evaporation the ventilation should have been approximately 90 times higher. Due to the restricted air stock of the SCBA, a higher ventilation rate isn't possible. Therefore this method seems not to be meaningful for future development.

In the 2-piece ICPS, heart rate rose to 130 bpm after  $12.5 \pm 3.0 \text{ min}$ , maximum rectal temperature was  $38.1 \pm 0.29^\circ\text{C}$ , maximum mean skin temperature was  $38.03 \pm 0.36^\circ\text{C}$  and the subjects lost  $612 \pm 170 \text{ g}$  sweat. They had to stop after  $21.25 \pm 7.8 \text{ min}$  because of exhaustion. When  $80 \text{ l}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}$  filtered ambient air was blown into the suit by a portable battery ventilator, tolerance time ( $23.75 \pm 10.9 \text{ min}$ ) was only insignificantly longer while maximum rectal temperature ( $38.2 \pm 0.52^\circ\text{C}$ ), maximum mean skin temperature ( $37.87 \pm 0.45^\circ\text{C}$ ) and sweat loss ( $755 \pm 308 \text{ g}$ ) showed no relief. Only time to reach HR 130 bpm was prolonged ( $16.0 \pm 4.7 \text{ min}$ ). Differences in the subjects' self-perceived sensations of stress, heat and sweat were not observed. Thus the use of  $80 \text{ l}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}$  ambient filtered air to dissipate heat from the ICPS was not successful probably because of the small volume and an uneven distribution (3). Furthermore the system will be less effective at high ambient temperatures and humidities.

If supplied by a stationary cooling system, a wearer of an ICPS doesn't have to carry the weight of the cooling unit and its energy source. However the system is only for limited use, because a working man cannot move freely and problems like damage or knots of the tubing umbilical may occur.

The effectiveness of ice-cooled vests and liquid-cooled undergarments has been verified frequently in the literature. We count this, however, a provisional solution since sweat evaporation as the most important mechanism of heat dissipation of a worker is not supported. Local cooling might cause cutaneous vasoconstriction.

It is our long-term aim to support human heat dissipation by dry, moderately chilled air. Thereby sweat evaporation can be augmented without reducing dry heat dissipation by vasoconstriction.

At the moment, such technical systems are not available. Instead we collected experiences with a portable cooling system (refrigerator unit) as rucksack, which blows cooled ambient air into a two-piece ICPS. The benefits weren't promising because the additional weight (primarily the energy source) causes an additional metabolic heat production.

## CONCLUSIONS

New materials for PCPSs offer a better possibility to reduce the wearers heat stress. Effective work time, however, is still significantly reduced.

It is our long-term aim to support human heat dissipation from ICPCs by dry, moderately chilled air. Suitable technical aids are still not available. The development of a lightweight energy source for portable use is especially unpredictable.

## REFERENCES

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