

SHORT-TERM TOXICITY OF FLUORIDE ION (F^-) IN SOFT WATER
TO RAINBOW TROUT (*Salmo gairdneri*)
AND BROWN TROUT (*Salmo trutta fario*)

by

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SUMMARY: Short-term static bioassays were conducted to determine the toxicity of fluoride ions (F^-) in soft water (hardness average value of 22 ppm $CaCO_3$) to *Salmo gairdneri* Richardson and *Salmo trutta fario* Linnaeus. Fry of each trout species were exposed to five different concentrations of sodium fluoride (NaF) and a high concentration of sodium chloride (800 ppm NaCl for *S. gairdneri* and 1000 ppm NaCl for *S. trutta fario*) for 8 days. No significant effect on the fish was observed with NaCl. Toxic effects caused by NaF were fundamentally due to F^- ions. The LC_{50} at 96, 120, 144, 168 and 192 h were 107.5, 94.4, 85.1, 73.4 and 64.1 ppm F^- for rainbow trout and 164.5, 135.6, 118.5, 105.1 and 97.5 ppm F^- for brown trout, respectively. Fry showed hypoexcitability, darkened backs and a decrease in respiration before their death. *S. gairdneri* was significantly ($p < 0.05$) more sensitive to F^- than *S. trutta fario*. A MATC of 27.6 ppm F^- has been determined for rainbow trout.

KEY WORDS: Fluoride ion; *Salmo gairdneri*; *Salmo trutta fario*; Short-term toxicity; Soft water.

Introduction

The fluoride concentration in sea waters normally ranges from 1.2 to 1.4 ppm (1) and most fresh waters contain less than 0.2 ppm F^- (2). However, the fluoride concentration in surface waters is increasing as a result of industrial pollution (3), which may generate an acute or chronic toxicity to biological communities. In this respect, McClurg (4) has indicated that fresh water organisms may be far more sensitive to fluoride pollution than those living in sea waters, because the toxicity of fluoride is decreased by the formation of innocuous complexes with one or more ions of sea water (5).

Toxic effects of fluoride compounds have been described in aquatic invertebrates as *Daphnia magna* (2,6), *Artemia salina* (7), *Penaeus indicus* (4,8) and *Hydropsyche* spp. (9). It appears that soft water species are more sensitive to fluoride than those in hard or sea water. In fish, the fluoride toxicity may be influenced not only by such common factors as size (10), species (11,12), and physiological state (13,14), but also by the physicochemical characteristics of the water. Thus, the tolerance of fish to fluoride is increased by low temperatures (15,16) and high levels of calcium hardness (17-19). To this effect, Pimentel and Bulkley (20) found that the 96-hour LC_{50} values for *Salmo gairdneri* increased from 51 to 193 ppm F^- as water hardness rose

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from 17 to 385 ppm $CaCO_3$. *Gasterosteus aculeatus* and *Pimephales* hardness due to the precipitate (MgF_2).

The principal purpose of toxicity of fluoride ions (F^-) to *Salmo trutta fario*, common in the Iberian Peninsula, and to study whether these two trout species in soft water.

Fry of rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*) were obtained from a disease-free stock at our CIT-INIA. In the laboratory, fry were used in the exposure bioassays. *Salmo gairdneri* and 123.6 \pm 20.9 mg

Laboratory bioassays were conducted in 20 L. of dechlorinated Madrid water. Light and turbulence were controlled. A photoperiod was utilized, and a cooling unit with thermometers was used. Sodium fluoride (NaF) was used in a concentration with an approximate

Hardness, alkalinity, pH, water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity were monitored daily using an Orion model 9610. Fish were exposed to sodium fluoride

Methods for these static bioassays for standardized laboratory fluoride concentration aqua bioassays were performed tested using ten fish per aqua

Test organisms were acclimated prior to fluoride bioassays during toxicity bioassays. Fish were removed daily during bioassays and checked by comparing with control aquarium.

The LC_{50} values at 96 h, limits and χ^2 values were calculated using Wilcoxon (24), using mortality in duplicate for each treatment. Fish was floating upside down and

from 17 to 385 ppm $CaCO_3$. Smith *et al.* (12) concluded that LC_{50} values *Gasterosteus aculeatus* and *Pimephales promelas* varied with the initial water hardness due to the precipitation of calcium and magnesium salts (CaF_2 and MgF_2).

The principal purpose of this study has been to determine the short-term toxicity of fluoride ions (F^-) in soft water to fry of *Salmo gairdneri* and *Salmo trutta fario*, common species in cold-water streams from the Iberian Peninsula, and to study whether there are significant differences between these two trout species in relation to their respective sensitivity to fluoride ions.

Materials and Methods

Fry of rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta fario*) were obtained from a Spanish ICONA trout hatchery and were certified as disease free at our CIT-INIA laboratories. No fish died during the transportation. In the laboratory, fish were randomly distributed into test aquaria. Those fry used in the experiments were about two months old and, after fluoride toxicity bioassays, weighed (dry weight) 118.9 ± 14.9 mg for *S. gairdneri* and 123.6 ± 20.9 mg for *S. trutta fario*.

Laboratory bioassays were conducted in glass aquaria each containing 20 L. of dechlorinated Madrid tap water (Figure 1). Necessary water oxygenation and turbulence were produced by an air pump per aquarium. Natural photoperiod was utilized, and water temperature was maintained by means of a cooling unit with thermostat. Test fluoride solutions were prepared from sodium fluoride (NaF *pro analysi*, Merck), geometrically increasing the concentration with an approximate factor of 1.6.

Hardness, alkalinity, chlorine, chloride, sodium, potassium, ammonia, nitrite, pH, water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and conductivity were analyzed at the start and at the end of each toxicity bioassay, using analytical methods described by APHA (21) and Rodier (22). Fluoride concentrations were monitored daily using an Orion model 94-09 specific ion electrode. The trout fry were exposed to sodium fluoride solutions for 8 days.

Methods for these static acute toxicity bioassays were those recommended for standardized laboratory toxicity test (21,23). A control and five different fluoride concentration aquaria were used per bioassay (Figure 1). Fluoride bioassays were performed in duplicate. Each trout species was separately tested using ten fish per aquarium.

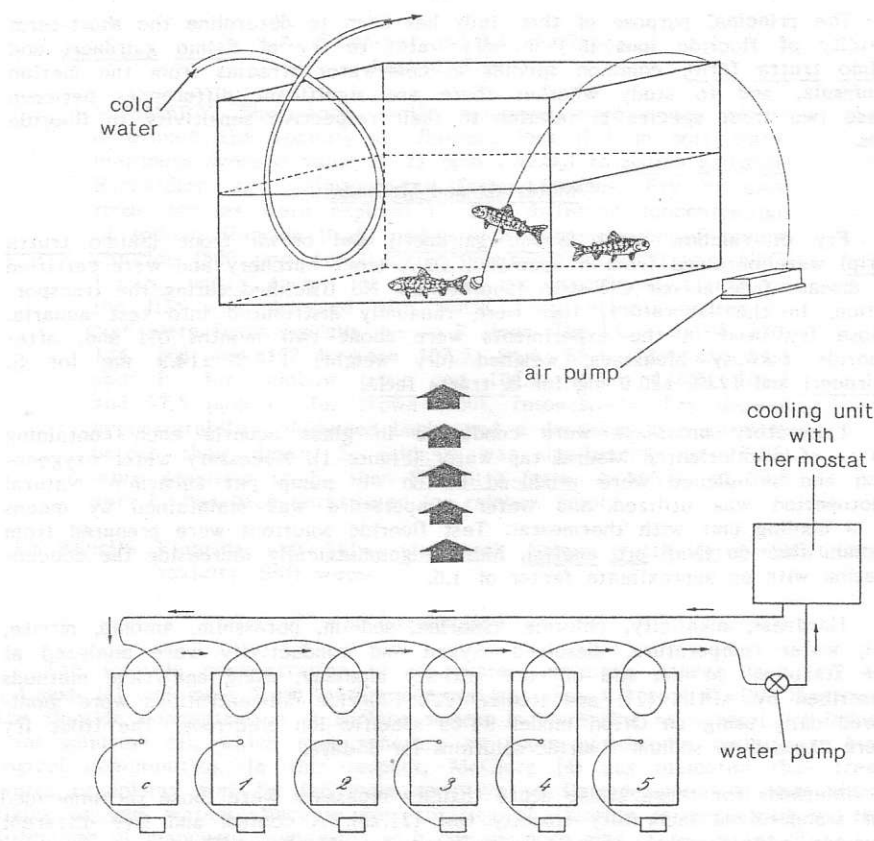
Test organisms were acclimatized to water quality conditions for 4 days prior to fluoride bioassays and were not fed during the acclimatization nor during toxicity bioassays. No fish died during the acclimatization. Dead fish were removed daily during fluoride toxicity bioassays. Sublethal effects were daily checked by comparing fish in fluoride aquaria with those in control aquarium.

The LC_{50} values at 96, 120, 144, 168 and 192 hour, their 95% confidence limits and χ^2 values were determined by the method of Litchfield and Wilcoxon (24), using mortalities and mean assay F^- concentrations obtained in duplicate for each trout species. Death of fish was defined as the fish was floating upside down and not operculating.

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Figure 1

Diagram of Experimental Aquaria System Used for Fluoride Toxicity Bioassay.
c = control aquaria; 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 = fluoride aquaria.



The formula of factors (21,24) was applied for obtaining significant ($p < 0.05$) differences between two test trout species. The Maximum Acceptable Toxic Concentration (MATC) was interpolated as the geometric mean of the lowest concentration having a toxic effect and the highest concentration having no toxic effect (25) after 8 days exposure to fluoride solutions.

To find out whether the toxicity of sodium fluoride was due to fluoride ions, sodium and conductivity toxicity tests were conducted parallel to fluoride toxicity bioassays using sodium chloride (NaCl *pro analysi*, Merck). For this purpose, 10 fry of each test trout species were exposed to a high sodium chloride concentration for 196 hours: 800 ppm NaCl for rainbow trout and

1000 ppm NaCl for brown trout. Physicochemical parameters of each toxicity test using trout and sublethal effects were checked.

Mean values of water parameters for toxicity tests are presented in Table 1. Fry showed no mortality at first, returning to their normal respiration were not observed. Lethal effects such as hypoxia did not differ appreciably from control assays.

Mean values of water parameters for bioassay are presented in Table 2 for aquatic organisms (26). No mortality, start, and no precipitation were observed.

Mean concentrations of water parameters

Mean Values of Water Parameters Obtained During NaCl Toxicity Bioassay

| Parameter | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Water Temperature (°C) | |
| Alkalinity (ppm CaCO ₃) | |
| Hardness (ppm CaCO ₃) | |
| Dissolved oxygen (ppm) | |
| Chlorine (ppm Cl ₂) | |
| Ammonia (ppm N) | |
| Nitrite (ppm N) | |
| Fluoride (ppm F ⁻) | |
| Potassium (ppm K ⁺) | |
| pH | |
| Chloride (ppm) | |
| Sodium (ppm Na ⁺) | |
| Conductivity (µmhos/cm) | |
| Mortality (%) | |

N.D. = Not Detected

1000 ppm NaCl for brown trout. These tests were performed in duplicate. Physicochemical parameters were analyzed at the start and at the end of each toxicity test using the same analytical techniques. Possible mortality and sublethal effects were checked every day.

Results

Mean values of water parameters estimated during sodium and conductivity toxicity tests are presented in Table 1. No fish died after 196 hours of exposure to NaCl. Fry showed symptoms of hyperexcitability and hyperventilation at first, returning to their normal state after about 10 hours. However, sublethal effects such as hypoexcitability, darkened backs and a decrease in respiration were not observed during these tests. Values of water parameters did not differ appreciably from those reported for the fluoride toxicity bioassay.

Mean values of water quality parameters analyzed during fluoride toxicity bioassay are presented in Table 2. All values are within water quality criteria for aquatic organisms (26). Ammonia and nitrite were not detected at the start, and no precipitation of fluoride salts was observed during these bioassays.

Mean concentrations of fluoride and sodium, conductivity, and the mortality

Table 1

Mean Values of Water Parameters (Means \pm S.D., $n = 4$) and Species Mortality Obtained During NaCl Toxicity Tests.

| Parameter | Salmo gairdneri | Salmo trutta fario |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Water Temperature ($^{\circ}$ C) | 15.6 \pm 0.07 | 15.9 \pm 0.14 |
| Alkalinity (ppm CaCO ₃) | 37.1 \pm 1.91 | 29.2 \pm 1.27 |
| Hardness (ppm CaCO ₃) | 22.3 \pm 1.16 | 21.7 \pm 1.72 |
| Dissolved oxygen (ppm) | 10.4 \pm 0.14 | 10.4 \pm 0.07 |
| Chlorine (ppm Cl ₂) | N.D. | N.D. |
| Ammonia (ppm N) | 0.13 \pm 0.170 | 0.08 \pm 0.110 |
| Nitrite (ppm N) | 0.01 \pm 0.010 | 0.01 \pm 0.006 |
| Fluoride (ppm F ⁻) | 0.09 \pm 0.005 | 0.08 \pm 0.011 |
| Potassium (ppm K ⁺) | 0.11 \pm 0.060 | 0.12 \pm 0.010 |
| pH | 7.58 \pm 0.060 | 7.64 \pm 0.040 |
| Chloride (ppm) | 511.4 \pm 26.9 | 608.7 \pm 27.3 |
| Sodium (ppm Na ⁺) | 299.5 \pm 21.9 | 379.0 \pm 15.6 |
| Conductivity (μ mhos/cm) | 705.0 \pm 21.2 | 1175.0 \pm 35.4 |
| Mortality (%) | N.D. | N.D. |

N.D. = Not Detected.

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Table 2
Mean Values of Water Quality Parameters (Means \pm S.D., n = 24) Analyzed During NaF Toxicity Bioassays.

| Parameter | <i>Salmo gairdneri</i> | <i>Salmo trutta fario</i> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Water Temperature (°C) | 15.3 \pm 0.22 | 16.1 \pm 0.13 |
| Alkalinity (ppm CaCO ₃) | 37.5 \pm 2.09 | 32.2 \pm 1.92 |
| Hardness (ppm CaCO ₃) | 22.4 \pm 1.79 | 21.2 \pm 2.55 |
| Chlorine (ppm Cl ₂) | N.D. | N.D. |
| Chloride (ppm) | 10.0 \pm 1.22 | 10.8 \pm 0.43 |
| Dissolved oxygen (ppm) | 10.1 \pm 0.28 | 10.1 \pm 0.20 |
| Ammonia (ppm N) | 0.15 \pm 0.157 | 0.12 \pm 0.121 |
| Nitrite (ppm N) | 0.01 \pm 0.009 | 0.01 \pm 0.008 |
| Potassium (ppm K ⁺) | 0.08 \pm 0.020 | 0.14 \pm 0.016 |
| pH | 7.58 \pm 0.179 | 7.63 \pm 0.185 |

N.D. = not detected

obtained during fluoride short-term toxicity bioassays are presented in Table 3. Standard deviations were lower than 10% of their respective mean values. There was no mortality in control aquaria. For the experimental group, the mortality increased with increase in fluoride concentrations. Fry in the fluoride aquaria showed hyperexcitability and hyperventilation at first and, at alternate times during test, hypoexcitability, darkened backs and a decrease in respiration before their death. However, these sublethal symptoms were not observed in fry exposed to a mean concentration of 22.3 ppm F⁻.

The LC₅₀ values at 96, 120, 144, 168 and 192 hours, their 95% confidence limits, and χ^2 values obtained for each test trout species are presented in Table 4. All χ^2 values were lower than those for p = 0.005, indicating that the data are not significantly heterogeneous. The Maximum Acceptable Toxic Concentration (MATC) after 8 days' exposure to fluoride solutions was 27.6 ppm F⁻ for rainbow trout.

The significant differences between LC₅₀ values are shown in Table 4. LC₅₀ values for brown trout were significantly (p < 0.05) higher than those for rainbow trout to sodium fluoride for 96, 120, 144 and 192 hours. This indicates that *Salmo gairdneri* is a more sensitive species to F⁻ ions than *Salmo trutta fario*.

Discussion

Although it has already been indicated that among the metallic ions, Na⁺ ion has the lowest toxicity for aquatic organisms (27), this study has demonstrated the toxic effect of sodium fluoride on trout species is fundamentally due to fluoride ions.

On the other hand, rainbow trout is more resistant to fluoride ions than since Camargo and Tarazona (1988) for F⁻ in soft water to be 26.3 ppm for *H. bulbifera*, *H. exocellata*, *H. p...* larvae, respectively.

Because a range of widely used fluoride in fish and a direct comparison with previous studies is not fit because

Mean Values of Conductivity, Sodium, Fluoride and Mortality in NaF Toxicity Bioassays for Rainbow Trout. c = control aquarium; 1, 2, 3, 4

| <i>Salmo gairdneri</i> | c-c | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----|
| Conductivity (μ mhos/cm) | 32.5-30.0 | 14 |
| Sodium (ppm Na ⁺) | 4.8-5.1 | 26 |
| Fluoride (ppm F ⁻) | 0.08-0.09 | 22 |
| Mortality | | |
| 96 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 120 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 144 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 168 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 192 hrs | 0-0 | |
| <i>Salmo trutta fario</i> | c-c | |
| Conductivity (μ mhos/cm) | 42.5-40.0 | 2 |
| Sodium (ppm Na ⁺) | 7.3-8.3 | 48 |
| Fluoride (ppm F ⁻) | 0.08-0.08 | 33 |
| Mortality | | |
| 96 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 120 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 144 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 168 hrs | 0-0 | |
| 192 hrs | 0-0 | |

On the other hand, rainbow trout and brown trout appear significantly more resistant to fluoride ion than freshwater benthic microinvertebrates, since Camargo and Tarazona (9) have estimated the 96 hour LC₅₀ values for F⁻ in soft water to be 26.3, 26.5, 38.5, 48.2 and 44.9 ppm for *Hydropsyche bulbifera*, *H. exocellata*, *H. pellucidula*, *H. lobata*, and *Chimarra marginata* larvae, respectively.

Because a range of widely divergent LC₅₀ values has been reported for fluoride in fish and a direct comparison of LC₅₀ values obtained during different studies is not fit because of the several methods used to report toxic

Table 3

Mean Values of Conductivity, Sodium and Fluoride Obtained in Duplicate During NaF Toxicity Bioassays for Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout.

c = control aquarium; 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 = fluoride aquaria

| <i>Salmo gairdneri</i> | c-c | 1-1 | 2-2 | 3-3 | 4-4 | 5-5 |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Conductivity (μmhos/cm) | 32.5-30.0 | 142-145 | 202-202 | 325-335 | 485-495 | 635-640 |
| Sodium (ppm Na ⁺) | 4.8-5.1 | 26.1-26.4 | 46.3-44.1 | 69.7-71.1 | 114-113 | 190-190 |
| Fluoride (ppm F ⁻) | 0.08-0.09 | 22.3-22.3 | 34.4-34.2 | 57.6-57.3 | 91.4-91.0 | 144-146 |
| Mortality | | | | | | |
| 96 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 10-10 | 20-30 | 50-30 | 60-70 |
| 120 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 10-10 | 20-30 | 50-40 | 70-80 |
| 144 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 10-10 | 20-30 | 60-40 | 70-90 |
| 168 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 20-10 | 20-30 | 60-60 | 90-90 |
| 192 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 20-10 | 20-40 | 70-70 | 90-100 |
| <i>Salmo trutta fario</i> | c-c | 1-1 | 2-2 | 3-3 | 4-4 | 5-5 |
| Conductivity (μmhos/cm) | 42.5-40.0 | 218-213 | 318-315 | 485-495 | 650-665 | 1075-1025 |
| Sodium (ppm Na ⁺) | 7.3-8.3 | 48.2-48.8 | 68.2-69.3 | 111-113 | 189-190 | 293-291 |
| Fluoride (ppm F ⁻) | 0.08-0.08 | 33.9-35.0 | 55.4-53.8 | 90.3-90.6 | 146-150 | 236-228 |
| Mortality | | | | | | |
| 96 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 10-0 | 20-20 | 40-30 | 70-80 |
| 120 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 10-0 | 20-30 | 50-30 | 80-90 |
| 144 hrs | 0-0 | 0-0 | 10-10 | 30-30 | 60-40 | 80-90 |
| 168 hrs | 0-0 | 0-10 | 10-10 | 30-40 | 60-50 | 100-90 |
| 192 hrs | 0-0 | 10-10 | 20-10 | 40-40 | 60-50 | 100-100 |

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Table 4

LC₅₀ values, their 95% confidence limits and χ^2 values obtained for each test trout species.

X = rainbow trout; Y = brown trout

| | | LC ₅₀ (ppm F ⁻) | 95% c.l. (ppm F ⁻) | χ^2 values |
|---------|---|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 96 hrs | X | 107.5 | 138.0-83.7 | 2.53 |
| | Y | 164.5* | 205.1-131.9 | 3.41 |
| 120 hrs | X | 92.4 | 116.0-73.6 | 1.47 |
| | Y | 135.6* | 161.2-114.0 | 5.40 |
| 144 hrs | X | 85.1 | 106.5-68.0 | 2.88 |
| | Y | 118.5* | 149.2-94.1 | 4.79 |
| 168 hrs | X | 73.4 | 96.4-55.9 | 2.90 |
| | Y | 105.1* | 134.9-81.8 | 6.63 |
| 192 hrs | X | 64.1 | 82.2-50.0 | 3.15 |
| | Y | 97.5* | 123.8-76.8 | 6.90 |

* p < 0.05.

effects, maximum safe criteria of fluoride ion for fish in natural ecosystems have not yet been achieved (26). However, it is evident that rainbow trout and other species of freshwater fish may bear higher fluoride concentrations in hard water than in soft water (12,20). In this sense, it has been reported (16) that fluoride ion may form stable complexes with calcium in blood and bone, and Pimental and Bulkley (20) have suggested that a reservoir of calcium in the water surrounding fish tends to compensate for this loss of calcium and thereby delays toxic effects of fluoride on the organism.

Further research on the toxicity of fluoride ion to freshwater fish should, therefore, be conducted under conditions of highest toxicity, namely, soft water, for obtaining a suitable safe level of F⁻. The estimated 8-day MATC might furnish a preliminary safe criterion for trout species. Nevertheless, chronic toxicity bioassay is needed to improve fluoride quality criteria. To this end, the data obtained from the present work may provide the background for future long-term toxicity research to establish safe fluoride standards for freshwater fish.

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