# Online monitoring of bromate in treated wastewater:

# **Implications for potable water reuse**

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#### 1 Abstract

Continuous monitoring of bromate ions, a disinfection by-product of the ozonation of 2 wastewater, may improve the safety of recycled water for potable use. A recently developed 3 4 elemental analyzer can determine bromate ion concentrations online. However, dissolved 5 organics present in wastewater interfere with the detection of bromate ions. The aim of this study 6 was to develop a nanofiltration (NF) membrane-based pre-treatment system to remove the 7 interfering substances present in treated wastewater prior to the online analysis. The NF pre-8 treatment system was optimized to ensure the removal of the interfering substances from the 9 membrane bioreactor (MBR)-treated wastewater without altering the bromate ion concentration. 10 We determined a permeate flux of 1 L/m<sup>2</sup> h and a feed temperature of 35 °C as optimal pre-11 treatment conditions for online analysis. Furthermore, the continuous monitoring of MBR-treated 12 wastewater, containing different bromate ion concentrations (0-12 µg/L), for three days revealed 13 a strong correlation between the concentrations determined using the online analyzer and liquid 14 chromatography coupled with tandem mass spectrometry. Thus, this study demonstrates the 15 potential utility of the online bromate ion analyzer coupled with NF pre-treatment system to 16 monitor the rate of bromate ion formation during ozonation.

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18 Keywords: Online bromate ion analyzer; nanofiltration; potable water use; disinfection by-19 product; ozone.

#### 21 **1 Introduction**

22 Ozonation is a reliable water treatment process that reduces the concentrations of trace organic chemicals and pathogens, such as viruses and bacteria, in water and wastewater, as 23 24 ozone is a strong oxidant. Therefore, ozonation, followed by treatment with biologically 25 activated carbon, can be implemented prior to advanced wastewater treatment processes 26 (AWTPs), such as microfiltration or ultrafiltration, reverse osmosis (RO) membrane, and 27 advanced oxidation, for potable use.<sup>1, 2</sup> However, the ozonation of wastewater results in the 28 formation of bromate ions (BrO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>), carcinogenic disinfection by-products (DBPs) that are 29 generated from the reaction between ozone and bromide ions in wastewater (~300 µg-Br<sup>-</sup>/L),<sup>3</sup> at higher concentrations than the guideline-prescribed value (10 µg-BrO<sub>3</sub><sup>-/</sup>L).<sup>4,5</sup> Bromate ions are 30 31 one of the six major contaminants identified in chemical monitoring programs under potable reuse projects which pose a health risk.<sup>6</sup> However, thus far, RO membrane treatment has 32 remained as the only reliable process used for the removal of bromate ions from wastewater.<sup>7,8</sup> 33 34 Therefore, controlling bromate ion formation is a significant challenge for AWTPs without an RO membrane treatment process, which has gained attention as an alternative of RO-based 35 AWTP for potable reuse in inland locations.<sup>9-11</sup> 36

Online monitoring of bromate ion concentrations after ozonation can help improve the safety of recycled water, which will aid the implementation of countermeasures such as reduction of ozone doses up to the guideline-prescribed values. However, the bromate ion concentrations in parts-per-billion (µg/L) are analyzed using laboratory-based analytical techniques such as ion chromatography coupled with suppressed conductivity followed by a post-column reaction<sup>12, 13</sup> and liquid chromatography coupled with tandem mass spectrometry (LC–MS/MS).<sup>14</sup> Recently, a novel online technology<sup>15</sup> based on fluorescence estimation at excitation (EX) and emission (EM) wavelengths of 300 and 400 nm, respectively, has been developed to monitor bromate ion
concentration in drinking water. Nevertheless, wastewater contains a high concentration of
dissolved organic compounds that exhibit autofluorescence at 300–400 nm and interfere with the
analysis.

48 The interfering substances in wastewater can be separated from bromate ions using 49 nanofiltration (NF) membranes. Polymeric NF membranes, with a molecular weight cut-off (MWCO) of 200–400 Da,<sup>16, 17</sup> filter out a considerable portion of the organic matter ( $\geq$  500 Da) 50 51 and a small proportion of bromate ions  $(10\%-50\%)^{18}$  from water. The NF pre-treatment system 52 coupled with the online elemental analyzer ensures a high rejection rate for interfering substances and a low rejection rate for bromate ions. However, the NF pre-treatment system has 53 54 not been used with the online bromate ion analyzer. Thus, the efficiency of NF pre-treatment 55 system for the separation of both bromate ions and interfering substances remains to be 56 determined.

57 The aim of this study was to develop an NF pre-treatment system to enable the continuous 58 monitoring of bromate ion concentrations in treated wastewater by decreasing the permeation of 59 interfering substances. Furthermore, the effects of the pre-treatment conditions on the permeation 60 of interfering substances and bromate ions in the treated wastewater were assessed to maximize 61 the removal of interfering substances. Additionally, the efficiency of the optimized NF pre-62 treatment system was evaluated by continuously monitoring the bromate ion concentrations in 63 the treated wastewater for three days, and the split samples were analyzed using LC-MS/MS to 64 compare the online-monitored bromate ion concentrations with those obtained via LC-MS/MS.

#### 66 2 Methods

#### 67 2.1 Materials

68 The standard solution of bromate ions (2,008 mg BrO<sub>3</sub>-/L) was obtained from FUJIFILM Wako Pure Chemical Corp. (Osaka, Japan), and a bromate stock solution (1 mg/L) was prepared 69 70 in pure water. Trifluoperazine dihydrochloride (TFP) was obtained from Tokyo Chemical 71 Industry Co. Ltd. (Tokyo, Japan), and a TFP stock solution (150 µmol/L) was prepared in pure 72 water. Membrane bioreactor (MBR)-treated wastewater samples, produced using hollow fiber 73 ultrafiltration membranes with a nominal pore size of  $0.05 \,\mu m$ , were collected from a municipal 74 wastewater treatment plant in Japan. In addition, samples of effluent produced through primary 75 wastewater treatment (i.e., screens followed by sedimentation) were collected at another 76 municipal wastewater treatment plant in Japan.

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#### 78 2.2 Analytical methods

79 Bromate ion concentrations were determined using a prototype online bromate ion analyzer (METAWATER Co. Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) based on the changes in fluorescence intensities, 80 resulting from the reaction between TFP and bromate ions.<sup>15</sup> The overall procedure is depicted in 81 82 Fig. 1. First, approximately 150 mL auto-collected wastewater samples, which were subjected to 83 acidification with 0.5 M HCl, were mixed with 3.0 µM TFP stock solution for 1 min. 84 Subsequently, fluorescence intensities were estimated at EX and EM of 300 nm and 400 nm, 85 respectively. Second, the wastewater samples were analyzed via a method similar to the 86 abovementioned method, using  $10 \mu g/L$  of bromate ions. The bromate ion concentrations were 87 then determined using the fluorescence intensity estimates of the two analyses (that is, with and 88 without the bromate ion standard solution). Each analysis duration was 90 min, and a sample 89 volume of approximately 450 mL was used. A standard curve was generated using bromate



90 solutions (in pure water) with concentrations of 0, 2.5, 5.0, and 10  $\mu$ g/L.

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Fig. 1 Flow diagram of the online process used to determine bromate ion concentration.

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94 Bromate ion concentrations in the manually-collected samples were determined using LC-95 MS/MS (ACQUITY UPLC system and ACQUITY TQD MS/MS, Waters Co.; Milford, MA, 96 USA) equipped with an ACQUITY UPLC BEH Amide column (2.1  $\times$  150 mm, 1.7  $\mu$ m, Waters 97 Co.; Milford, MA, USA) (Supplementary Table S1). Water samples were diluted with 98 acetonitrile (LC-MS grade, FUJIFILM Wako Pure Chemical; Osaka, Japan) since the BEH 99 Amide is a hydrophilic interaction chromatography column, and an 80/20 (v/v) mixture of 100 acetonitrile and the water sample was injected into the analytical system. A binary gradient with 101 a flow rate of 0.3 mL/min was used. The mobile phases A and B were 50 mM ammonium 102 formate and acetonitrile, respectively. The mass spectrometer was operated using electrospray 103 ionization in negative ion mode. Multiple reaction monitoring (MRM) mode was used to 104 quantify ions in the samples, with precursor and product ion transitions corresponding to 127 m/z and 111 m/z, respectively. Moreover, the concentrations of the interfering substances in the
wastewater samples were characterized using the excitation–emission matrix (EEM) spectra
obtained using the RF-6000 spectrophotometer (Shimadzu Co., Kyoto, Japan).

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# 2.3 The NF pretreatment system

Spiral-wound polyamide NF membrane elements (NF270-1812-250; Pure-Pro Water Corporation, Kaohsiung, Taiwan; effective membrane area = 0.6 m<sup>2</sup>) were installed in an NF pre-treatment system (**Supplementary Fig. S1**) to separate the interfering substances from the bromate ions. The NF membrane elements were assembled using the NF membranes (NF270, DuPont Water Solutions, Wilmington, DE, USA) with an MWCO of 300 Da, according to the manufacturer's instructions.

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#### 117 2.4 Experimental protocols

118 Prior to each test, the NF pre-treatment system with the NF membrane module was 119 conditioned by conducting filtration of pure water for two days. After replacing pure water with 120 22.5 L of MBR-treated wastewater, the rate of inflow to the membrane module was set at 700 mL/min. The permeate flux and feed temperature were adjusted to  $1-10 \text{ L/m}^2$  h and 10-35 °C. 121 122 respectively. The bromate stock solution was added into the feed tank in a stepwise manner from 123  $0 \mu g/L$  to  $12 \mu g/L$ , and the permeate was collected in an equipped collection tank. The permeate 124 was transferred from the collection tank to the online bromate ion analyzer using a 1/8" 125 polytetrafluoroethylene pipe. Both the permeate and the concentrate were recirculated during the 126 test period. The entire volume of the feed was replaced after 1.3 and 2.8 d. Feed and permeate 127 samples collected from the feed and permeate collection tanks, respectively, were manually analyzed using LC–MS/MS and the RF-6000 spectrophotometer. When bromate ion concentrations were analyzed in the primary wastewater treatment effluent samples, the permeate flux and feed temperature during the NF pre-treatment were adjusted to 1 L/m<sup>2</sup> h and 35 °C, respectively. A bromate stock solution was added into the primary wastewater treatment effluent at a concentration of 4  $\mu$ g/L.

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134 **3** Results and Discussion

#### 135 3.1 Importance of the NF pre-treatment system

136 The inconclusive direct online analysis of bromate ions in the MBR-treated wastewater 137 samples could be attributed to the high concentrations of interfering substances that emitted autofluorescence at EX300/EM400, which exceeded the detection limit of the online analyzer. The 138 139 major sources of the interference at these wavelengths were humic acid-like fluorophores, with 140 EX/EM of 320-360 nm/400-450 nm (denoted as peak C) (Supplementary Fig. S2a).<sup>19</sup> The 141 intensity of humic acid-like fluorophores can be considerably reduced by conducting NF pre-142 treatment (Supplementary Fig. S2b). NF pre-treatment can remove many interfering substances 143 in the MBR-treated wastewater because the NF270 membrane has an MWCO of approximately 144 300 Da, and humic substances, including humic acids and humic acid-like substances, have 145 molecular weights > 350 Da.<sup>20, 21</sup>

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#### 147 3.2 Optimization of pre-treatment conditions

The permeate flux and feed temperature during the NF pre-treatment were optimized by assessing the permeation of bromate ions and interfering substances, indicated by the fluorescence intensities EX300/EM400, in the MBR-treated wastewater. A permeate flux of 1.0

151 L/m<sup>2</sup> h at a feed temperature of 35 °C helped achieve 99% permeation of bromate ions (that is, 152 almost no bromate ions were removed) and 28% permeation of the interfering substances (that is, 153 72% of the interfering substances were removed) (Fig. 2a). No errors were observed with the use 154 of the online bromate ion analyzer, and this was attributable to the NF-treated wastewater, 155 indicating an adequate removal of the interfering substances. A permeate flux  $< 1.0 \text{ L/m}^2 \text{ h}$  could 156 not be achieved because of the friction loss in the NF pre-treatment system to maintain a crossflow rate of 700 mL/min. Although increasing the permeate flux to 5 L/m<sup>2</sup> h decreased the 157 158 permeation of the interfering substances up to 21%, bromate ion permeation also decreased 159 (89%), suggesting that 11% of the bromate ions were rejected by the NF membrane. The changes 160 in solute permeation occur owing to the changes in solute and solution permeation; solute 161 permeation through membranes is less affected by changes in the permeate flux.<sup>22</sup>

162 Furthermore, increased feed temperatures affected the permeation of both bromate ions and 163 interfering substances. An increase in feed temperature from 20 °C to 35 °C resulted in an 164 increase in the permeation of interfering substances from 21% to 28%, while increasing the 165 permeation of bromate ions from 94% to 99% (Fig. 2b). The changes in solute permeation are 166 affected by temperature variations because of the changes in the membrane pore size and the 167 permeability of solutes; at high temperatures, the pore size of the NF membrane and the permeability coefficient of solutes increase.<sup>23, 24</sup> The permeation of bromate ions and interfering 168 169 substances revealed a similar increasing trend based on the changes in permeate flux and feed 170 temperature (Fig. S3). Thus, complete separation of bromate ions from the interfering substances 171 using the NF270 membrane was impossible. As the minimum removal of bromate ions by the 172 NF membrane is a preferred pre-treatment approach, the lowest permeate flux  $(1.0 \text{ L/m}^2\text{h})$  and 173 the highest feed temperature (35 °C) can be selected as the optimal conditions.



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Fig. 2 Effects of (a) permeate flux and (b) feed temperature of the NF pre-treatment system on the permeation of bromate ions and the interfering substances in the MBR-treated wastewater represented by the fluorescence intensities (EX300/EM400). The standard permeate flux and feed temperature were 1 L/m<sup>2</sup> h and 35 °C, respectively. Bromate ion concentrations were adjusted to 12  $\mu$ g/L.

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Bromate ion concentrations in the primary wastewater treatment effluent were also analyzed to assess the versatility of the NF pre-treatment system and identify its optimal treatment conditions (i.e., permeate flux of 1.0 L/m<sup>2</sup> h and feed temperature of 35 °C). Results showed that the permeation of bromate ions and interfering substances was 100% and 28%, respectively, during the NF pre-treatment, which was comparable to that of the MBR-treated wastewater. The 186 online bromate ion analyzer did not show instrumental errors, despite high concentrations of 187 interfering substances in the primary wastewater effluent. The intensity of humic acid-like 188 fluorophores was substantially reduced using the NF pre-treatment system (Supplementary Fig. 189 S4). For a primary wastewater treatment effluent sample with bromate ion concentrations of 0.0 190 or 5.0 µg/L, determined using LC-MS/MS, the online analyzer coupled with the optimized NF 191 pre-treatment system provided similar bromate ion concentrations (0.3 and 4.3 µg/L). Therefore, a permeate flux of 1 L/m<sup>2</sup> h and a feed temperature of 35 °C were selected as the optimal 192 193 conditions in this study because removing approximately 70 % of the interfering substances was 194 adequate to eliminate instrumental errors.

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#### Validations in the online analysis results

197 The efficiency of the online analyzer coupled with the optimized NF pre-treatment system 198 was successfully demonstrated by monitoring MBR-treated wastewater, containing variable 199 concentrations of bromate ions, over a course of three days (16 analyses/d) (Fig. 3a). During the 200 experimental period, small variations were observed in bromate ion concentrations determined 201 by using the online analyzer. For example, when an MBR-treated wastewater sample, containing 202 a low target concentration of 3.0  $\mu$ g/L, was analyzed from 0.2 d to 0.7 d, a variation of 3.1  $\pm$  0.5 203  $\mu$ g/L was observed. Similar variations were observed at three different target concentrations (6.0, 204 9.0, and 12.0 µg/L).

205 The accuracy of the online analytical data was determined by analyzing bromate ion 206 concentrations in the split samples using LC–MS/MS. A strong linear correlation ( $R^2 = 0.95$ ) was 207 observed between bromate ion concentrations of 0 and 12  $\mu$ g/L (Fig. 3b). Moreover, stable 208 permeation rates for bromate ions  $(94\% \pm 7\%)$  (Supplementary Fig. S5) and the interfering substances (approximately 20%) (Supplementary Fig. S6) were observed. Based on the efficiency and accuracy of the online analyzer, the online-determined bromate ion concentration can be used to continuously monitor changes in bromate ion concentrations in treated wastewaters.



Fig. 3 (a) Bromate ion concentrations determined using liquid chromatography coupled with tandem mass spectrometry (LC–MS/MS) and the online bromate ion analyzer coupled with the NF pretreatment system (feed temperature: 35 °C; permeate flux: 1 L/m<sup>2</sup> h; transmembrane pressure: 30 kPa) and (b) correlation of the bromate ion concentrations analyzed using the two methods.

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220 However, further investigations are warranted to determine the potential of the NF pre-221 treatment system to estimate the quality parameters of different types of wastewater. For 222 example, a 20%-30% decrease in the level of interfering substances may not be sufficient for 223 wastewater samples containing high concentrations of the interfering substances. Therefore, 224 altering the permeation of bromate ions using the NF membrane (such as, a higher permeate flux 225 leading to an increased removal of both bromate ions and inferencing substances) may be 226 necessary. Additionally, the minimal interference in the online bromate ion analyzer can be 227 ensured by identifying NF membranes that can be used to remove humic acid-like substances 228 without affecting the permeation of bromate ions. Another concern is the long-term stability of 229 the NF pre-treatment system. The permeate flux in this study (1 L/m<sup>2</sup> h) was much lower than 230 those used in representative NF treatment systems (20-40 L/m<sup>2</sup> h), inducing less membrane 231 fouling. In addition, the transmembrane pressure of the NF pre-treatment system remained 232 constant over three days, suggesting that membrane fouling was negligible. However, long-term 233 operation over several months may gradually promote membrane fouling, affecting the 234 permeation of bromate ions and interfering substances. To ensure that the NF pre-treatment is 235 continuous, stable, and efficient, membranes must be periodically replaced or membrane foulants 236 must be removed by chemical cleaning. Therefore, on-site, long-term monitoring is warranted to 237 assess the long-term viability of the NF pre-treatment system.

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- 239 3.4 Implications for on-site use

240 This study demonstrated the potential utility of an online bromate ion analyzer in combination241 with an NF pre-treatment system for detecting high bromate ion concentrations in treated

242 wastewater. High bromate ion concentrations after ozonation can result from: (a) ozone 243 generator or ozone-dosing control system failures (e.g., high ozone doses), (b) unpredictable 244 increases in bromide ion concentrations in untreated wastewater, and (c) unpredictable formation 245 of bromate ions, resulting from changes in the water quality of the ozonation influent, such as 246 spikes in dissolved organic matter concentrations. Therefore, monitoring bromate ion 247 concentrations immediately after ozonation will allow plant operators to implement 248 countermeasures, such as ozone dose reductions. It is important to note that polymeric NF 249 membranes and many components of the online bromate ion analyzer are not ozone-resistant. 250 Therefore, residual ozone needs to be quenched by adding reducing agents (e.g., sodium 251 thiosulfate) before it is measured by the online bromate ion analyzer.

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#### 253 4 Conclusion

254 To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study demonstrating the potential of the NF pre-255 treatment system coupled with an online analyzer for monitoring bromate ion concentrations in 256 MBR-treated wastewater samples. In contrast with the conventional table-top analytical methods 257 used, such as LC–MS/MS, the online analyzer provides a continuous profile of the bromate ions 258 concentrations during water recycling. Although the accuracy of the online analyzer may be 259 lower than that of the conventional table-top analytical methods, the online-monitored data can 260 be utilized as an indicator of high bromate ion concentrations exceeding the guideline-prescribed 261 value (10  $\mu$ g/L). The detection of high bromate ion concentrations can serve as a cautionary 262 measure and may help improve the safety of potable water.

#### 264 Acknowledgements

265 The authors thank METAWATER Co. Ltd. (Dr. Kyungju Kim, Mr. Naoki Kanekawa, and Dr.

266 Dabide Yamaguchi) for loaning an online bromate ion analyzer and providing technical 267 assistance.

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# 269 **Conflicts of interest**

270 The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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### 272 Supplementary Information

- 273 Table S1. LC-MS/MS conditions for bromate analysis
- 274 Figure S1. Description of nanofiltration pre-treatment system
- 275 Figure S2. Excitation and emission spectra of membrane bioreactor effluent
- Figure S3. The relationship between bromate ion permeation and EX300/EM400 permeation
- 277 Figure S4. Excitation and emission spectra of primary wastewater treatment effluent
- Figure S5. Bromate concentrations before and after NF pre-treatment
- 279 Figure S6. Permeation of interfering substances
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