Gravity Effects in Condensing and Evaporating Films

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Strategic Research to Enable NASA’s Exploration Missions
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Research Overview

● Objective
  – Understand film condensation/evaporation behavior (and implications for heat transfer) in variable gravity environments

● Problems studied
  – Film condensation and evaporation on planar surfaces at normal gravity (+1g, -1g) and reduced gravity ≈ 0.01g (aircraft)
  – 2-3 minutes of low-gravity testing desirable
NASA Recognizes Critical Need for Condensation & Evaporation Research to Enable Human Exploration of Space

Condensation and Evaporation Research in Reduced Gravity is Enabling for AHST Technology Needs

- **Humidity Control**
  - Mechanisms which inhibit or exacerbate liquid film motion
  - Condensate control in ducts
  - Condensers/evaporators for crew atmosphere

- **Air Revitalization** *(O₂ production via electrolysis)*
  - Control of water transport
  - Separation of dissolved gases from water

- **Water Purification** *(Potable Water via VCD)*
  - Stability of large area condensed liquid films
  - Mechanisms for shedding condensed films in reduced gravity

- **Environmental Control and Heat Rejection**
  - Evaporation and condensation heat transfer
  - Stability of evaporating/condensing films
Differing Role of Surface Tension on Condensing/Evaporating Film Stability

Evaporating film - surface tension variations de-stabilizing

Condensing film - surface tension variations stabilizing
Fluid Mechanisms in Condensing and Evaporating Films in Reduced Gravity

Condensing film in low-g

Evaporating film in low-g
Research Plan

- 1-g (normal gravity) laboratory experiments (UW/WPI)
- Reduced gravity experiments on board NASA parabolic-trajectory aircraft (NASA Glenn Research Center)
- Numerical modeling using unsteady Navier-Stokes equations by a finite element method based on a front tracking technique (Prof. A.N. Alexandrou, University of Cyprus)
Experimental Configurations for Condensing Films

- Geometries
  1) Stabilizing gravitational body force (+1g, condensing surface “upwards”)
  2) De-stabilizing gravitational body force (-1g, “downwards”)
  3) Reduced gravity with external perturbation

- Fluid configurations
  1) Condensing film (thermal plus mass addition effects)
  2) “Pumped” film with isothermal mass addition through porous substrate
Experimental Configurations for Evaporating Films

- **Geometries**
  1) Stabilizing gravitational body force (+1g, evaporating surface “upwards”)
  2) De-stabilizing gravitational body force (-1g, “downwards”)

- **Fluid configurations**
  1) Evaporating film (thermal and mass removal effects)
  2) Heated, non-volatile film (thermal effects only)
Laboratory Condensation Test Cell
Aircraft Experiment

Aircraft rig with volume control system

A/C rig test cell with dual thermoelectric elements
Condensation Study
Current Test Conditions

- **Condensation experiments**
  - 10 cm diameter cooled brass plate
  - Fluids: Methanol and n-pentane
  - Enclosed test cell, typical operating pressure 50-70 kPa
  - Subcooling range $T_{sat} - T_{wall} = 4 - 16$ C

- **“Pumped film” experiments**
  - 10 cm diameter perforated stainless plates
  - Fluids: Silicone oil (125 and 50 cSt)
  - Pumping rates 2-12 ml/min
Diagnostics

- **Double-pass shadowgraph imaging**
  - Synchronized with data acquisition
  - Disturbance wavelengths
  - Time to drop formation/break off (condensation) or dry-out (evaporation)

- **Thermal measurements**
  - Thermocouples (surface, vapor temperatures)
  - Imbedded heat transfer sensors
  - Numerical inverse method employed to determine surface heat flux

- **Ultrasound gauging**
  - Single and multiple sensors
  - Film thickness and growth rate
Shadowgraph Images of Condensing $n$-pentane Film in Unstable (-1g) Configuration

$T_{\text{wall}} = 11 \, \text{C}, \quad T_{\text{sat}} = 17 \, \text{C}, \quad P_{\text{sat}} = 50 \, \text{kPa}$

At start of condensation

37 s after the start of condensation
Condensing n-Pentane Film in Normal Gravity (-1g) at Constant Pressure

\[ P_{\text{sat}} = 50 \text{ kPa}, \ T_{\text{sat}} = 16.5 \text{ C}, \ T_{\text{wall}} = 11 \text{ C} \]

Video real time
Condensing n-Pentane Film in Normal Gravity (-1g) with Cyclic Pressure

\[ P_{\text{sat}} = 36-48 \text{ kPa} \; T_{\text{sat}} = 8.8-15.5 \text{ C}, \; T_{\text{wall}} = 11 \text{ C} \]

Cycle period 180 s; video rate 2.4 x real time
Non-condensing “Pumped” Film in Normal Gravity (-1g)

50 cSt Silicone Oil

Pumping rate 4 ml/min

→ average film growth rate = 8.2 μm/s

Video rate 0.4 x real time
Non-condensing “Pumped” Film in Normal Gravity (-1g)

50 cSt Silicone Oil

Pumping rate 12 ml/min
→ average film growth rate = 24.7 µm/s
Video rate 0.4 x real time
Non-condensing “Pumped” Film in Normal Gravity (-1g)

Silicone Oil

Time to first droplet break-off decreases with increasing pumping rate

Film thickness at first droplet break-off increases with increasing pumping rate
Heat Transfer Coefficient in Developing, Unstable Condensing Film in Normal Gravity

Unstable (-1g) condensing n-pentane film

\[ T_{\text{wall}} = 11 \, \text{C}, \quad T_{\text{sat}} = 17 \, \text{C}, \quad P_{\text{sat}} = 50 \, \text{kPa} \]
Heat Transfer for Unsteady Condensing Film (-1g)

$P_{sat} = 36-48 \text{ kPa}$  $T_{sat} = 8.8-15.5 \text{ C}$,  $T_{wall} = 11 \text{ C}$
Ultrasound Measurement of Film Thickness

N-pentane Film, Stable (+1g) Configuration
Ultrasound Measurement of Film Thickness

N-pentane Film, Unstable (-1g) Configuration
Summary

- Condensation and evaporation research is critical to meeting the technology needs of the AHST development effort
  - Evaporation and condensation heat transfer and film stability and phase separation phenomena are strongly dependent on gravity level
  - Development of empirical correlations, theoretical models, CFD codes for these processes are all important to the success AHST technology development

- Research conducted to date in the current project includes
  - Film imaging and heat transfer measurements of steady and unsteady condensing films in the laboratory
  - Ultrasound gauging to determine the thickness of stable condensing and non-condensing films and in recording fluctuations in unstable films
  - The use of non-condensing, mechanically pumped films which simulate the growth and instability associated with unstable condensing films in the absence of thermal effects
Questions?

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