SUPPRESSION OF LOW STRAIN RATE NONPREMIXED FLAMES BY AN AGENT

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The extinction and structure of non-premixed methane/air flames were investigated in normal gravity and microgravity through the comparison of experiments and calculations using a counterflow configuration. From a fire safety perspective, low strain rate conditions are important for several reasons. In normal gravity, many fires start from small ignition sources where the convective flow and strain rates are weak. Fires in microgravity conditions, such as a manned spacecraft, may also occur in near quiescent conditions where strain rates are very low. When designing a fire suppression system, worst-case conditions should be considered. Most diffusion flames become more robust as the strain rate is decreased. The goal of this project is to investigate the extinction limits of non-premixed flames using various agents and to compare reduced gravity and normal gravity conditions.

Experiments at the NASA Glenn Research Center’s 2.2-second drop tower were conducted to attain extinction and temperature measurements in low-strain non-premixed flames. Extinction measurements using nitrogen added to the fuel stream were performed for global strain rates from 7 s\(^{-1}\) to 50 s\(^{-1}\). The results confirmed the “turning point” behavior observed previously by Maruta et al. in a 10 s drop tower. The maximum nitrogen volume fraction in the fuel stream needed to assure extinction for all strain rates was measured to be 0.855 ± 0.016, associated with the turning point determined to occur at a strain rate of 15 s\(^{-1}\). The critical nitrogen volume fraction in the fuel stream needed for extinction of 0-g flames was measured to be higher than that of 1-g flames.

Flame temperature measurements were attained in the high temperature region of the flame (T > 1200 K) using visible emission from a (12.5 ± 0.5) µm filament positioned axially along the burner centerline. This method was used to obtain the time varying temperatures as the flame transitioned to microgravity conditions and as the flame extinguished. Temperature measurements showed that a peak flame temperature of approximately 1400 (± 100) K for a global strain rate of 20 s\(^{-1}\) for conditions when the flame was very near extinction (99% of the required nitrogen volume fraction for extinction in microgravity). The measured flame temperature profiles were a function of the strain rate, the concentration of N\(_2\) and the presence of buoyancy forces. The lower the global strain rate, the greater the changes in the flame as it transitioned from 1-G to μ-G.

A two-dimensional flame simulation using a three step chemical mechanism was developed here and compared favorably to the extinction and temperature measurements in both normal and microgravity. One-dimensional flame computations using OPDIFF could not predict the flame shape or the extinction limits accurately at low strain rates in 0-G or 1-G due to multi-dimensional heat loss and the effects of buoyancy. The two-dimensional model (see Figure below) showed that at low strain rates, the 1-G flame extinguishes from the outer flame edge inwards towards the central axis, whereas the 0-G flame
extinguishes from the centerline out. Differences in the details of 0-G and 1-G flame structure are important in interpreting the results of the microgravity extinction experiments.

Figure 1. Comparison of photograph and simulation of a near-extinction counterflow diffusion flame at a strain rate of 20 s⁻¹ in 1-G with the fuel stream composed of 79 % N₂ and 21 % CH₄ flowing from the bottom duct. The right hand side of the simulation shows the calculated heat release rate and streamlines and the left hand side shows the calculated temperature and velocity contours.
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Supported by the NASA Microgravity Combustion Research Program;
Dr. Sandra L. Olson, Technical Monitor.
Motivation
• unwanted fires are typically non-premixed
• low strain rate flame conditions prevail for a fire on a space platform

Objective
Investigate the structure and suppression limits of low strain rate non-premixed flames.

Experimental Variables
suppressant type: N₂, CO₂, CF₃Br
configuration (suppressant in fuel or air stream)
buoyancy (1-g and µ-g)
global strain rate
air/fuel velocity ratio

counterflow configuration
**Approach: numerical**

- 1D *Oppdif* simulations of 0-g flame structure and suppression
- 2D simulations of 0-g and 1-g flame structure and suppression

**1D Model: Oppdif**  
- detailed chemistry & transport
- **no** buoyancy term
- optically thin radiation model
- predicts extinction

**2D Model * **  
- 3 step global reaction
- buoyancy term
- optically thin radiation
- predicts extinction

**Approach:** experimental

- 2.2 s drop tower experiments
- measurements of flame temperature & critical agent requirements
- comparison of simulations and measurements
Flame Extinction Limits in 0-g and 1-g Agent (N₂) added to Fuel (CH₄) Stream

- 2D model results agree with 0-g and 1-g measurements.
- 0-g flames are more robust than 1g flames at low strain.
- Multi-dimensional effects exist at low strain rate, which effects extinction limit.

\[ a_g = \frac{2|u_O|}{L} \left( 1 + \frac{|u_F| \sqrt{\rho_F}}{|u_O| \sqrt{\rho_O}} \right) \]
1-g Flame Shape and Temperature Profile

**Experiment**

Fuel \( \Rightarrow \) \( \text{CH}_4: \text{N}_2 = 21:79 \) by volume, \( a_g = 20 \text{ (1/s)} \), \( V_r = 3 \)

**Computation**

LHS : Temperature and Velocity Vector  
RHS : Heat Release Rate and Stream Line

Comparison of Centerline Temperature
**Extinction Process in 0-g Flame; \( a_g = 20 \) (1/s)**

Nitrogen fuel stream volume fraction increasing from 0.79 \( \rightarrow \) 0.855
Extinction Process in 1-g Flame; $a_g = 20$ (1/s)

Nitrogen fuel stream volume fraction increasing from 0.79 $\Rightarrow$ 0.825

Extinguishes from the Outer Edge

LHS: Temp. (K)
- 1480
- 1360
- 1240
- 1120
- 1000
- 880
- 760
- 640
- 520
- 400

RHS: HRR (W/cm$^3$)
- 112
- 100
- 88
- 76
- 64
- 52
- 40
- 28
- 16
- 4

(a) 0.0 s
(b) 0.30 s
(c) 0.34 s
(d) 0.35 s
Conclusions

• 2D computations of 0-g and 1-g flames are in good agreement with experimental results.

• At low strain rate, 1g flame extinguishes from the outer flame edge, while 0g flame extinguishes from the centerline.

• 1D computations cannot predict the flame shape and extinction limit reasonably at low strain rates due to multi-dimensional heat loss.

• New extinction measurements in 2.2 s reported here are in good agreement with 10 s JAMIC results (Maruta et al, 1998).

• Critical nitrogen volume fraction in the fuel stream needed for extinction of 0-g flames is higher than that of 1-g flames.