Investigating ozone sources in California using AJAX airborne measurements and models: Implications for stratospheric intrusion and long range transport

Ju-Mee Ryoo¹,², Matthew S. Johnson³, Laura T. Iraci¹, Emma L. Yates¹,⁴, R. Bradley Pierce⁵, Tomoaki Tanaka¹,⁴, Warren Gore¹

¹ Atmospheric Science Branch, NASA Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, CA, USA ² Oak Ridge Associated Universities, Oak Ridge, TN, USA ³ Biospheric Science Branch, NASA Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, CA, USA ⁴ Bay Area Environmental Research Institute, Moffett Field, CA, USA ⁵ NOAA/NESDIS Advanced Satellite Products Branch, Madison, WI, USA

Abstract

High ozone concentrations at low altitudes near the surface were detected from airborne Alpha Jet Atmospheric eXperiment (AJAX) measurements on May 30, 2012. We investigate the causes of the elevated ozone concentrations using the airborne measurements and various models. GEOS-chem and WRF-STILT model simulations show that the contribution from local sources is small. From MERRA reanalysis, it is found that high potential vorticity (PV) is observed at low altitudes. This high PV appears to be only partially coming through the stratospheric intrusions because the air inside the high PV region is moist, which shows that mixing appears to be enhanced in the low altitudes. Considering that diabatic heating can also produce high PV in the lower troposphere, high ozone is partially coming through stratospheric intrusion, but this cannot explain the whole ozone concentration in the target areas of the western U.S.

A back-trajectory model is utilized to see where the air masses originated. The air masses of the target areas came from the lower stratosphere (LS), upper (UT), mid- (MT), and lower troposphere (LT). The relative number of trajectories coming from LS and UT is low (7.7% and 7.6%, respectively) compared to that from LT (64.1%), but the relative ozone concentration coming from LS and UT is high (38.4% and 20.95%, respectively) compared to that from LT (17.7%). The air mass coming from LT appears to be mostly coming from Asia. Q diagnostics show that there is sufficient mixing along the trajectory to indicate that ozone from the different origins is mixed and transported to the western U.S.

This study shows that high ozone concentrations can be detected by airborne measurements, which can be analyzed by integrated platforms such as models, reanalysis, and satellite data.
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Ju-Mee Ryoo1, Matthew S. Johnson1, Laura T. Iraci1, Emma L. Yates1, Warren Gore1, Bradley Pierce2, Tomoki Tanaka1
1 Atmospheric Science Branch, NASA Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, CA
2 Advanced Satellite Products Branch, Cooperative Research Program, NOAA/NESSDIS center for SaTellite Applications and Research, WI

Introduction

- On May 30, 2012 19Z, High O3 is observed offshore near the Bay Area, detected by Alpha Jet Atmospheric xperiment Flight (AJAX).

- The ozone is a secondary pollutant and influenced by local as well as background hemispheric concentrations through transboundary transport.

- The current background O3 mixing ratios are estimated to be in the range of 15-35 ppbv, contributing up to 47% towards the current U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) O3 target of 70 ppbv. There are also strong exceedances and evidence of air aloft impacting surface O3 in the western U.S. [e.g. Fiore et al., 2003; Yates et al., 2014]

- The Alpha Jet aircraft data was used on May 30, 2012, to measure spatial and temporal profiles of O3 over Instrumentation in Starboard Wing Pod: - Ozone: 2B Tech (0.1Hz) - Greenhouse Gases (CO2, CH4): Picarro 2301-m (3Hz) Tested to date up to 25000 ft and down to 1000 ft.

- NASA GSFC Lagrangian trajectory model (Schoeberl and Sparling, 1995).

- GMAO MERRA reanalysis data [Bosilovich et al., 2011]

- WRF-STILT [Netherton et al., 2010]

- GEOS-Chem [Bey et al., 2001]

Data

Results

1) Local Source

A) Comparison with GEOS-chem model

- 1 minute averaged AJAX O3(red), total O3 simulated from GEOS-chem (black), and GEOS-chem simulated, but only local O3 with no inflow of O3 from boundary (green).

- Shows that local source plays a little role in O3 formation, explaining about 10-20% of the observed high O3.

- The elevated O3 is observed around 2 – 4 km above the surface.

- Thus, it is necessary to clarify the distributions and variations of O3 sources using the high-precision data through in-situ aircraft measurement, satellite, and various models.

B) Footprint from WRF-STILT model

- Particles were released over the altitude corresponding to A, B, C covering the aircraft vertical level shown in the time series plots. The scale is the logarithm (base 10) of the footprint

- The red in footprints indicate the large surface impact on concentration change at the receptor for a unit surface flux persisting over a given time interval [mol/m2s]; thus, high O3 at the given altitudes are not largely associated with local source.

2) Stratospheric Intrusion into Troposphere

- Vertical & Horizontal profiles (36.5 – 38.5N & 850 hPa (1.5 km))

- High MERRA O3 around 30-40N from 200 to 400 hPa is closely linked to the high PV in the upper troposphere and lower stratosphere. Very low MERRA-H2O supports this.

- The descent motions can be related to the formation of high lower-level PV as it brings air with high PV values to the lower troposphere.

- However, this still cannot explain fully why O3 is so high because H2O is not so low. H2O should be very low (i.e. the portion inside PV should be dry) if the high PV comes directly from the stratosphere, indicating that there appears to be mixing between upper- and lower-level airs.

Implications

3) Implication of Long range transport

- Showing that air parcels are transported from the Northern Asia across the Pacific.

(a) CO averaged over May 21-30, 2012 obtained from MOPITT (Measurement of Pollution in the Troposphere) data

(b) Horizontal pathways of back trajectories overlaid by burned area from the Global Fire Emission Database (GFED)

(c) Vertical evolutions of back trajectories releasing data at 305K using MERRA reanalysis coming to California (day = 0).

- CO from emission and wildfire can be one of the source of ozone precursor.

- Where u, v, w is zonal, meridional wind, and vertical, respectively.

- Positive Q: efficient mixing (the fluid elements are stretched, associated with the regions of Rossby wave breaking)

- Indicating there are significant sources in the Asia across the Pacific, and they are “transported” through the mixing across the Pacific.

- High O3 is detected by the in-situ aircraft measurement.

- The elevated O3 concentrations near the coast of the Bay Area (37.5N, 122.5W) detected by AJAX attribute to

1) local source (LT) - 15%

2) transport from upper troposphere (UT)/ lower stratosphere (LS) - 67%

3) long-range transport from the Asia (MT) - 18%

Relative number (percentage) of O3 from different origins

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References

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- 1) Local Source

- 2) Stratospheric Intrusion into Troposphere

- 3) Implication of Long range transport