



## Phytoscreening for vinyl chloride in groundwater discharging to a stream

Ottosen, Cecilie Bang; Rønde, Vinni Kampman; Trapp, Stefan; Bjerg, Poul Løgstrup; Broholm, Mette Martina

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1           Phytoscreening for vinyl chloride in groundwater  
2                           discharging to a stream

3           **Cecilie B. Ottosen, Vinni Rønde, Stefan Trapp, Poul L. Bjerg and Mette M.**  
4                           **Broholm<sup>1</sup>**

5           <sup>1</sup>Department of Environmental Engineering, Technical University of Denmark, Bygningstorvet,  
6                           building 115, 2800 Kgs. Lyngby, Denmark.

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13

14 **Abstract**

15 This study applies an optimized phytoscreening method to locate a chlorinated ethene plume  
16 discharging into a stream. To evaluate the conditions most suitable for successful phytoscreening, trees  
17 along the stream bank were monitored through different seasons with different environmental  
18 conditions and hence different uptake/loss scenarios. Vinyl chloride (VC) as well as cis-  
19 dichloroethylene (cis-DCE), trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE) were detected in  
20 the trees, documenting that phytoscreening is a viable method to locate chlorinated ethene plumes,  
21 including VC, discharging to streams. The results reveal, that phytoscreening for VC is more sensitive  
22 to environmental conditions affecting transpiration than for the other chlorinated ethenes detected.  
23 Conditions leading to higher groundwater uptake by transpiration than contaminant loss by diffusion  
24 from the tree trunks are optimal (e.g. low relative humidity, plentiful hours of sunshine and an  
25 intermediate air temperature). Additionally, low precipitation prior to the sampling event is beneficial,  
26 as uptake of infiltrating precipitation dilutes the concentration in the trees. All chlorinated ethenes were  
27 sensitive to dilution by clean precipitation and in some months, this resulted in no detection of  
28 contaminants in the trees at all. Under optimal environmental conditions the tree cores allowed  
29 detection of chlorinated solvents and their metabolites in the underlying groundwater. Whereas, for less  
30 ideal conditions there was a risk of no detection of the more volatile VC. This study is promising for  
31 the future applicability of phytoscreening to locate groundwater contamination with the degradation  
32 products of chlorinated solvents.

33 **Keywords:** chlorinated solvents; groundwater; surface water; tree coring

## 34 **1. Introduction**

35 Phytoscreening is a method where samples from trees are used as indicators to characterize subsurface  
36 contamination. This method exploits the fact that trees take up contaminated porewater when they  
37 transpire, and thereby reflect the underlying pore water chemistry (Burken et al. 2011). The earliest  
38 phytoscreening study was conducted in the late 1990's, where headspace analysis of sapwood tree  
39 cores was used to delineate groundwater contamination with the chlorinated ethenes TCE and cis-DCE  
40 (Vroblesky et al. 1999).

41 Groundwater contamination with chlorinated ethenes has, in recent studies, shown to be a matter of  
42 concern for stream water quality (Rasmussen et al. 2016; McKnight et al. 2012; Weatherill et al. 2014).  
43 When groundwater discharges into streams, contaminant plumes appear close to the surface. This is  
44 promising for the use of phytoscreening as a rapid and inexpensive method to locate plumes  
45 discharging into streams. On the other hand, uptake of the less contaminated water from the stream  
46 could dilute the contaminants in the trees to such an extent, that contaminant concentrations are  
47 undetectable. Limited studies exist that apply phytoscreening to reflect contaminated groundwater with  
48 chlorinated ethenes in the vicinity of a surface water (e.g. Vroblesky et al. 2004).

49 Phytoscreening has been shown to successfully locate groundwater contamination with chlorinated  
50 ethenes (Sorek et al. 2008; Larsen et al., 2008; Limmer et al., 2011); however, these studies have  
51 mainly focused on the parent compounds (PCE and TCE) and the degradation products (cis-DCE and  
52 VC) have rarely been detected in trees. A need to include VC, the most hazardous of the chlorinated  
53 ethenes (Jennings 2011; European Council 1998) remains to be demonstrated.

54 Phytoscreening studies have shown that concentrations of chlorinated ethenes in trees vary in all three  
55 dimensions (Limmer et al. 2013; Vroblesky et al. 2004; Holm and Rotard 2011). Further, seasonal  
56 variation in contaminant concentrations has been observed, where concentrations increased with  
57 increasing transpiration (Limmer et al. 2014) and increasing groundwater level (Wittlingerova et al.  
58 2013). Transpiration is positively correlated with environmental conditions such as temperature and  
59 hours of sunshine, and negatively correlated with the relative air humidity (Stern 2006). Additionally,  
60 an important factor influencing the concentrations in the trees is precipitation, as an uptake of the clean  
61 infiltrating precipitation will dilute the concentrations of contaminants in the trees (Vroblesky et al.  
62 2004; Holm and Rotard 2011).

63 Once taken up in a tree, the chlorinated ethenes behave differently due to their different physical-  
64 chemical properties. Diffusional loss of volatile organic compounds from trees is inversely related to  
65 their molecular weight (Baduru et al. 2008), and the partitioning coefficient between wood and water is  
66 positively correlated to  $K_{ow}$  (Trapp et al. 2001). The lighter and less hydrophobic degradation products  
67 (Cwiertny and Scherer 2010) thus have a shorter residence time within the trees than the parent  
68 compounds. The best sampling time for detection of PCE and TCE in trees is after a period with high  
69 uptake of contaminated water and low diffusional loss from the tree due to decreased temperatures,  
70 resulting in high concentrations in the trees (Wittlingerova et al. 2013). Since cis-DCE and VC have  
71 considerable lower residence time in the tree trunk (the half-times of loss from the stem are: PCE =  
72 5.6d, TCE = 6.65d, cis-DCE = 3.72d and VC = 0.25d - calculated by the model of Trapp (2007) using  
73 the original parameters), their presence in wood is more likely to be dependent on uptake at the time of  
74 tree core sampling.

75 To investigate this hypothesis and add to the knowledge related to phytoscreening for degradation  
76 products, the aims of this study were:

- 77 I. To assess the ability of phytoscreening to detect VC in trees.
- 78 II. To evaluate phytoscreening as a method to screen for subsurface groundwater  
79 contamination discharging into a stream.
- 80 III. To determine the optimal environmental conditions when screening for cis-DCE and, in  
81 particular, VC in trees.

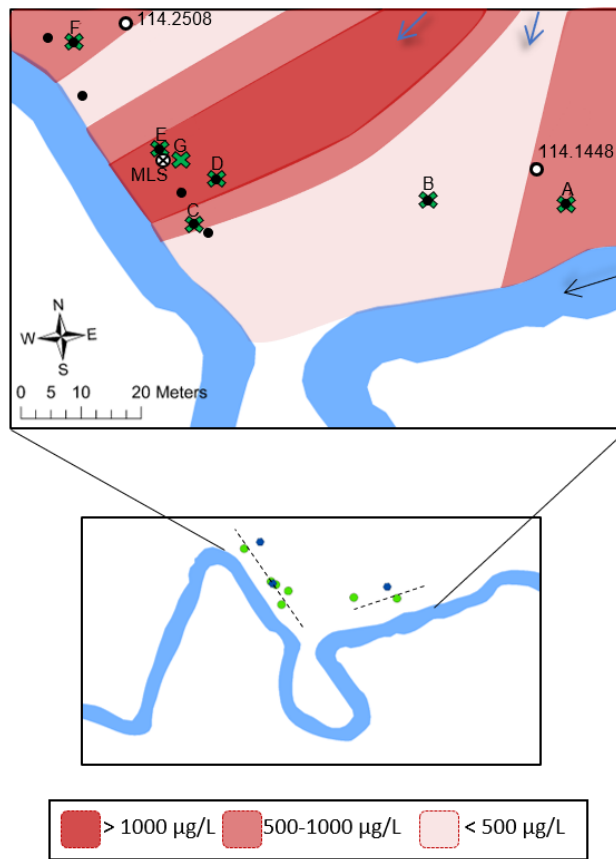
82 These aims are addressed by applying an optimized tree core sampling method, compared to the  
83 common sampling method, on black alder trees along the bank of a stream influenced by groundwater  
84 contaminated with chlorinated ethenes, at different times of the year representing different  
85 environmental conditions.

## 86 **2. Study site**

87 The study site is a 250 m section along the bank of Grindsted stream running through Grindsted town  
88 in southern Jutland, Denmark (Figure 1). The stream has a width of 8-12 m and a depth of 1-2.5 m. The  
89 catchment is dominated by sand and sandy clay and is approximately 200 km<sup>2</sup>. The stream flow ranges  
90 from 1151 to 2249 L/s, and the stream is gaining along this specific section (Rasmussen et al. 2016). A  
91 plume of chlorinated ethenes and other contaminants migrates from the former Grindsted factory site,  
92 located 1.5 km north of the stream, towards the stream. PCE, TCE and their degradation products cis-  
93 DCE and VC have been detected in the surface water (Rasmussen et al. 2016; Sonne et al. 2017; Rønde  
94 et al. 2017). The diverse composition of contaminants in the plume enables natural degradation of the  
95 chlorinated solvents by reductive dechlorination on its way to the stream. The main components in a

96 transect of the groundwater plume near the stream are cis-DCE and VC in concentrations > 5000 µg/L  
97 at some locations, while in comparison the PCE and TCE groundwater concentrations were < 200  
98 µg/L. The contaminant mass discharge to the stream has been shown to be relatively constant with time  
99 along this stretch of the stream (Rønde et al. 2017).

100 For this investigation, six black alder trees (*Alnus glutinosa*), diameter 0.32-0.48 m, were selected  
101 along or nearby the transect of the groundwater plume (Figure 1). Trees of the same species were  
102 selected to eliminate variation associated with tree species. Black alder commonly inhabits wet areas  
103 (Claessens et al. 2010) and is for that reason believed to be optimal as test tree for screening along  
104 streams and rivers. The root system of *Alnus glutinosa* is unique as it can grow deep into wet and even  
105 anaerobic soils (Claessens et al. 2010). However, the main part of tree roots (90%) can typically be  
106 found in the upper 0.6 m of the soil (Dobson and Moffat 1995). Black alder trees have little control  
107 over their stomata mechanism and therefore cannot control transpiration, hence the transpiration is  
108 controlled by the weather conditions only (Claessens et al. 2010; Eschenbach and Kappen 1999).



109

110 *Figure 1: Map of the study site at Grindsted stream with the location of the sampling trees (✕)*  
 111 *(denoted A-G), the groundwater sampling points (●), the multilevel sampler (MLS) (⊗), the*  
 112 *groundwater level monitoring points (○) (114.2508 and 114.1448) and the stream flow direction (black*  
 113 *arrow). A sketch of the contaminant plume of total chlorinated ethenes is illustrated (using*  
 114 *measurements from groundwater samplings from the water table to 3 m below). The approximate flow*  
 115 *direction of the plume (shown as blue arrows) is derived from isopotential curves and groundwater*  
 116 *flow modeling carried out at the site (Balbarini et al. 2017; Rønne et al. 2017). The dashed lines at the*  
 117 *bottom map indicate the location of the cross sections described in the Methods section and Figure 6.*  
 118 *The trees, MLS and groundwater monitoring points have been inserted for placement indication.*

119 **3. Methods**



### 120 **3.1 Tree coring**

121 Tree cores were collected during six campaigns: late February and early May 2015 and in mid-July,  
122 mid-August, mid-September and mid-October 2016. The tree cores were collected with an increment  
123 borer (Haglöf) approximately one meter above ground level, as explained by Algreen et al. (2015). In  
124 subsequent sampling campaigns the samples were collected below the previous sample locations to  
125 minimize the impact from the formerly drilled holes. In the last sampling campaign, an additional tree  
126 (Tree G), where phytoscreening had not previously been applied, was additionally sampled and  
127 compared with Tree E, to confirm or reject whether the holes had a substantial impact on detection of  
128 chlorinated ethenes. Four samples were collected around the tree trunk for each tree in every campaign,  
129 except in February where only the two sides parallel to the flow direction were sampled. Tree F, which  
130 has the largest diameter (48 cm), was sampled at six points around the stem in May, to investigate the  
131 horizontal variation more accurately. In September, it was not possible to collect a tree core at the  
132 western side of Tree A, as the cores were stuck in the drilling tool. A total of 24 samples (containing  
133 two tree cores each) were collected during most sampling campaigns. Average concentrations for the  
134 compounds were calculated for a simpler comparison, and concentrations below the quantification limit  
135 were treated as values of zero. Tree cores were collected at two heights in May, to examine if  
136 extracting tree cores just above terrain was beneficial for the more volatile degradation products. To  
137 optimize the method, with regards to detection of cis-DCE and VC, minor changes were made to the  
138 method presented by Algreen et al. (2015):

- 139 I. Two tree cores (drilled ~ 3 cm from each other) were added to each vial, instead of one.
- 140 II. 12 ml of demineralized water was added, instead of 4 ml, reducing the headspace volume to up-  
141 concentrate compounds in the headspace. Additionally, this decreased the potential diffusion

142 loss from the cores during the sampling of the second core, as the tree cores were completely  
143 covered by water.

144 III. The samples were incubated for two hours at 80°C before analysis to ensure compound transfer  
145 from the wood to the headspace. This step compensates for the lower diffusion rate caused by  
146 step II.

147 Additionally, each vial was weighed before and after sampling to obtain the concentration per mass of  
148 wood. Thereby taking into account the variations in the size of the cores. The information about  
149 environmental conditions was collected from the Danish Meteorological Institute.

### 150 **3.2 Groundwater measuring points and sampling**

151 The stream and groundwater levels were measured during each sampling campaign to assess: the  
152 stability of the groundwater discharge to the stream, and the availability of the groundwater for the tree  
153 roots. A thorough investigation of the groundwater contamination by non-permanent drive point  
154 piezometers in a transect parallel to the stream was performed by Rønne et al. (2017). The western  
155 cross-section in Figure 1 represents the shallow part of this transect. To evaluate the comparison with  
156 previous investigations, and to support comparison of phytoscreening results from 2015 and 2016  
157 repeated sampling was performed. A multilevel sampler (MLS) was installed as described by Rügge et  
158 al. (1999), next to a previous sampling point. Samples were taken in intervals of 0.25 m at depths from  
159 1.25 to 3.0 mbgs (meters below ground surface) and in intervals of 1.0 m at depths from 4.0 to 6.0  
160 mbgs. Shallow non-permanent drive point piezometers were further installed close to each tree, except  
161 Tree G, at depths between 1.20 – 2.20 mbgs. Two cross-sections were constructed to present data from  
162 these locations, as Tree A and B are further upstream than the remaining trees (Figure 1). A peristaltic  
163 pump was used for purging and sampling, and samples were filled in 40 ml glass vials with

164 polypropylene screw cap and silicone/PTFE septum. The samples were preserved with 3 drops of 4M  
165 sulfuric acid and stored in a cooler until analysis. Groundwater samples from the piezometers close to  
166 the trees were collected in May 2015, and from the MLS in September 2016. Data from selected  
167 piezometers installed by Rønde et al. (2017), the piezometers close to the trees and the MLS (the  
168 groundwater sampling points) were used to construct an image of total chlorinated ethenes present in  
169 the shallow groundwater system (Figure 1). The concentrations in the specific sampling points were  
170 depth-averaged over the total depth (from the groundwater table to 3 m below). Data from the  
171 groundwater sampling points were additionally utilized to illustrate the mole fractions in the shallow  
172 groundwater (Figure 6).

### 173 **3.3 Chemical analysis**

174 The tree cores and groundwater samples were analyzed using a HS-GC-MS (Headspace Gas  
175 Chromatography with Mass Spectrometry) as detailed by Algreen et al. (2015). An Agilent 5975C  
176 electron impact (70eV) triple-axis mass-selective detector was used for detection and a HP-PLOT/Q  
177 capillary column was used for separation. Before analysis, the tree core samples were incubated at  
178 80°C for two hours. Detection limits were 0.25-5.99 ng/g for PCE, 0.18-1.20 ng/g for TCE, 0.20-1.30  
179 ng/g for DCE and 0.23-1.51 ng/g for VC. The detection limit for the separate compounds for each  
180 analysis are listed in Table S1.

## 181 **4. Environmental conditions**

182 The environmental conditions, that are expected to influence the uptake of contaminants by trees are  
183 presented in Table 1. Given the residence time of the compounds in the trees, it is assumed that the  
184 conditions two weeks prior to the sampling event will influence the measured concentrations. However,

185 for precipitation it is expected that the influence time is longer, because precipitation is delayed by  
 186 infiltration before it is taken up by the trees, a period of one month is therefore used for precipitation.  
 187 The temperature and hours of sunshine were lowest in February and highest in September. The relative  
 188 humidity was relatively uniform but highest in February and lowest in May. The hours of sunshine and  
 189 the temperature is assumed to have the biggest influence on the uptake, and the relative humidity is  
 190 expected less relevant due to the small variation. The months with the highest expected uptake of  
 191 groundwater, are thus May and September, and the months with lowest expected uptake are February  
 192 and October.

193 *Table 1: Environmental conditions, from DMI (2016). Conditions determined for a period of two weeks*  
 194 *prior to each sampling campaign, however for precipitation data a period of one month was used.*  
 195 *Additionally, the measured surface and groundwater level at each campaign is stated as meters above*  
 196 *sea level (masl).*

Campaign	Feb. 2015	May 2015	Jul. 2016	Aug. 2016	Sep. 2016	Oct. 2016
* Average temperature (°C) (2 weeks)	3.1	8.1	15	15	18	8.5
Average relative humidity (%) (2 weeks)	91	79	84	82	83	83
Sum of sunlight hours (2 weeks)	16	93	63	68	101	46
Sum of precipitation (mm) (4 weeks)	53	41	138	53	58	28
Stream water level (masl)	34.1	33.6	33.8	33.9	33.9	33.9
Groundwater level (114.1448) (masl)	34.3	34.2	-	34.8	34.8	34.7
** Groundwater level (114.2508) (masl)	34.0	34.1	-	34.2	34.2	34.1

197 *\* The average temperature and total precipitation (no snow events) data are measurements*  
 198 *from Billund Airport weather station, 15 km from the site. The total hours of sunlight and the*  
 199 *average relative humidity are data from the entire region of southern Jutland. \*\* Well 114.2508*

200 *did not exist in 2015 and groundwater levels from nearby points in the transect are given*  
201 *instead. Terrain level is 35.9 masl for 114.1448 and 35.2 masl for 114.2508. Terrain for trees is*  
202 *between 34.0 and 34.8 masl.*

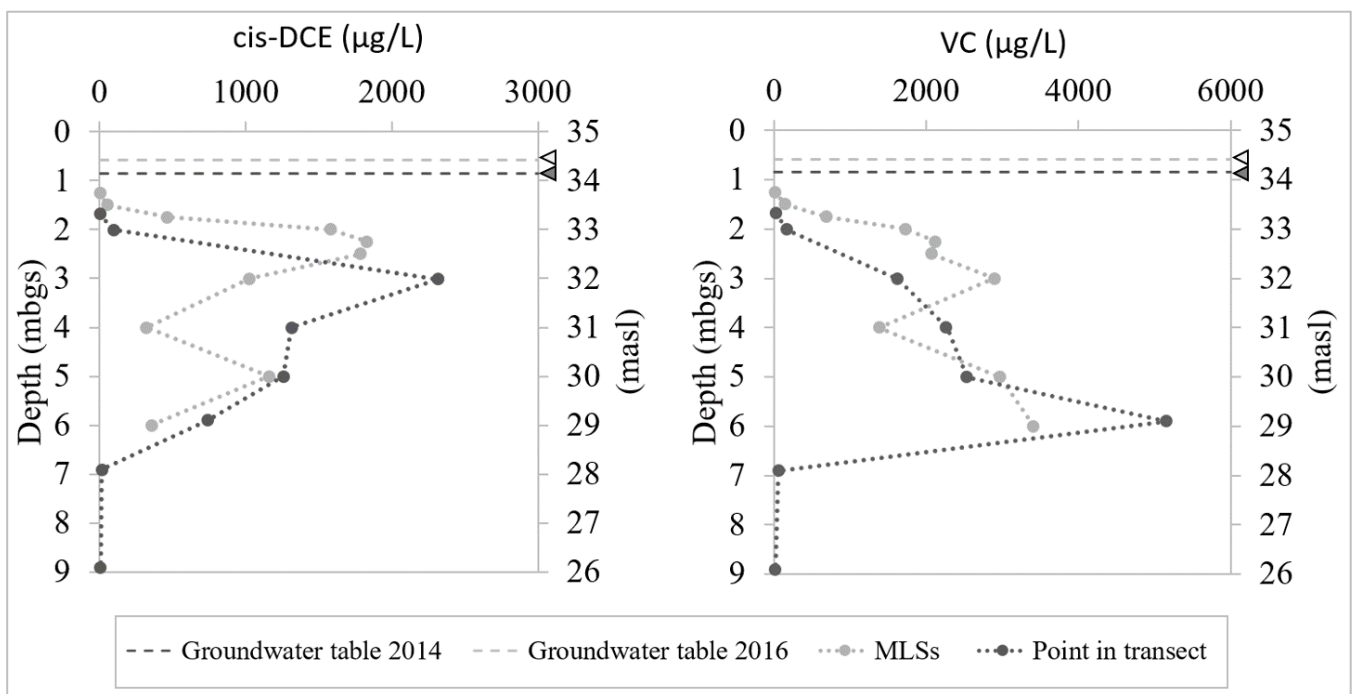
203 The groundwater levels were monitored continuously in two wells (114.1448 and 114.2508, Table 1).  
204 The measurements showed that the groundwater table was generally shallow, with a maximum depth  
205 below terrain of approximately 0.6 m near Tree B in May. It is thus assumed that groundwater was  
206 always available for some of the tree roots. Generally, the flow direction was towards the stream as  
207 also shown in previous investigations (Rønne et al. 2017; Sonne et al. 2017). Thus, the concentration in  
208 the trees is not expected to have been significantly diluted by the uptake of the less contaminated  
209 surface water in the stream, and only uptake of infiltrating precipitation is expected to dilute the  
210 concentrations.

## 211 **5. Results**

### 212 **5.1 Chlorinated ethenes concentrations in the groundwater**

213 Analysis for all chlorinated ethenes were conducted for the groundwater samples from the MLS points.  
214 As anticipated the main constituents in the groundwater were cis-DCE and VC. The concentrations of  
215 PCE and TCE were < 1µg/L for all measured depths, which was also observed by Rønne et al. (2017)  
216 at comparable locations. The concentration profiles and magnitudes for cis-DCE and VC from the MLS  
217 compares well with the results obtained by Rønne et al. (2017) at the corresponding point within the  
218 transect, considering the change in the groundwater level (Figure 2). Based on the results from Rønne  
219 et al. (2017), the groundwater contaminant mass discharge is approximately constant during the entire  
220 period when phytoscreening was conducted. This supports the comparison of phytoscreening results

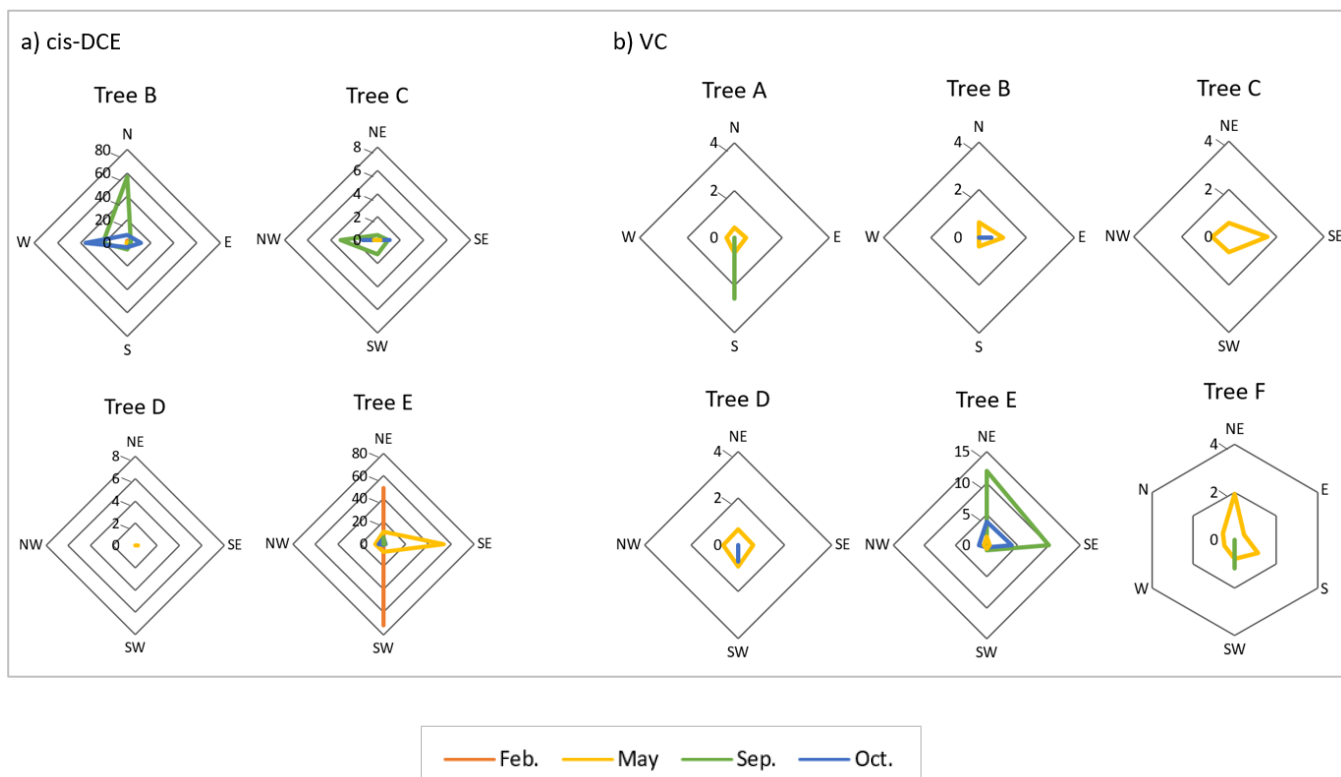
221 over the relatively long sampling period. The concentration gradients in the plume transect are very  
 222 steep vertically (Figure 2) and horizontally (Figure 1) and a slight alteration in the water level and the  
 223 flow direction of the plume could thereby result in a significant difference in the exposure of the tree  
 224 roots. Here the results reveal that an increase in groundwater level will increase the exposure of  
 225 contamination for the roots, as the intensity of roots decrease with increasing depth below ground  
 226 surface.



227  
 228 *Figure 2: Comparison between the concentrations of cis-DCE (left) and VC (right) in the MLS*  
 229 *(sampled in fall 2016) and a corresponding point in the transect (depth 1.68-5 m sampled in fall 2014*  
 230 *and depth 5.9-8.2 m sampled in spring 2015). Note the different x-axis for the two compounds. The*  
 231 *groundwater table data are derived from well 114.1448.*

232 **5.2 Contaminants in the tree cores**

233 The horizontal variation of contaminant concentration in the trees is assessed by comparing the  
 234 measurements around the tree trunk. No correlation was found between the inflow direction and the  
 235 horizontal variation in the stem. The concentrations of cis-DCE and VC measured in trees are  
 236 illustrated in Figure 3. PCE and TCE were detected to a lesser extent both temporally and spatially  
 237 (Figure S1). The quantity of drilled holes in the tree stem does not appear to have had a significant  
 238 influence on detection of chlorinated ethenes in the trees, as Tree G (only sampled in October) and Tree  
 239 E (sampled in all campaigns), which are located a few meters from each other, had similar  
 240 concentration levels (see Figure S1 for concentration variation in Tree G). Additionally, the increase of  
 241 concentrations in the last sampling events indicates that the previously drilled holes had not  
 242 significantly affected the flow at the location of the new hole. Hence, the results are considered valid  
 243 for comparison.



244  
245

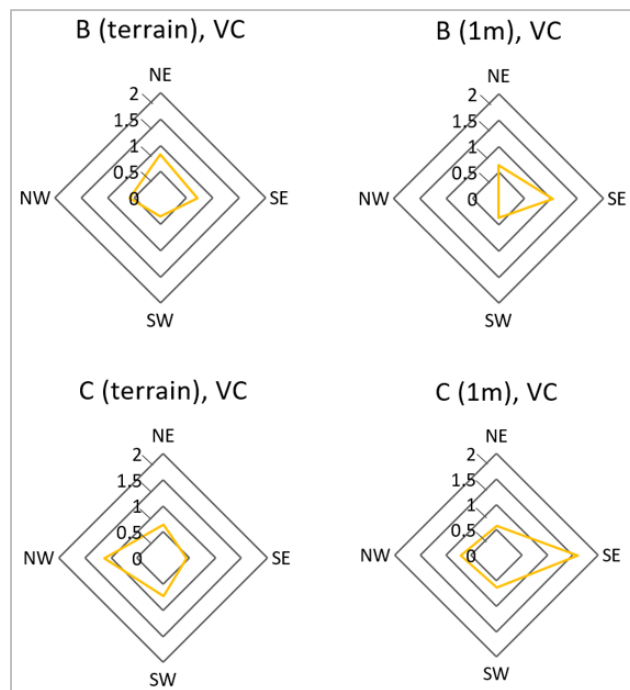
246 *Figure 3: cis-DCE (a) and VC (b) concentrations (ng/g) around the stem from each sampling event*  
247 *illustrating the horizontal variation at each tree. Note different scales. For months or trees not*  
248 *included the concentrations were below the quantification limit or not detected (except Tree G, see*  
249 *Figure S1). No contaminants were found in the trees in July and August. The stream is located south*  
250 *(S) of Tree A and B, and southwest (SW) of Tree C-F, see Figure 1.*

251 The highest concentration of VC was found to be 11.9 ng/g in Tree E in September. VC was detected  
252 in all trees in May, where the highest concentration, out of all sampling months, was also found for  
253 most trees (0.91-1.93 ng/g for Tree B, C, D and F). cis-DCE was detected in most sampling trees (Tree  
254 B, C, D, E, G) with the highest concentration of 71.8 ng/g in Tree E in February and the second highest  
255 of 56.6 ng/g in Tree B in September. TCE was found only in October in Tree B with a highest  
256 concentration of 6.50 ng/g. PCE was detected in two of the trees, B and F, with the highest  
257 concentration of 31.0 ng/g in October and 1.29 ng/g in May, respectively. No chlorinated ethenes were  
258 detected in the trees in July and August 2016. The results demonstrate that the horizontal concentration  
259 in the trees varies for VC and cis-DCE, as have been observed for the other chlorinated ethenes in  
260 previous studies (Limmer et al. 2013; Holm and Rotard 2011). The variation, expressed as standard  
261 deviation, around the stem for an individual compound is high, clarifying the importance of sampling  
262 several points around the stem in each sampling event.

263 No clear trends were observed in VC concentrations over height (Figure 4), contrary to what have  
264 previously been observed for the parent compound TCE (Vroblesky et al. 2004; Vroblesky et al. 1999).  
265 The average concentration of VC decreased 18 % with height in Tree B and increased 19 % in Tree C,  
266 demonstrating that diffusional loss out of the stem is not the only important factor for concentrations of  
267 VC at different heights. The average concentrations increased with height in both trees for cis-DCE,



268 but based on fewer points of detection (Figure S2). As no clear advantage of sampling for VC near  
269 terrain was observed, the tree cores were only sampled at the usual and more convenient height of one  
270 meter above terrain in the subsequent sampling events. Nevertheless, sampling near terrain could be  
271 beneficial in areas with higher ambient temperatures than Denmark and thus with more dominating  
272 diffusional losses.



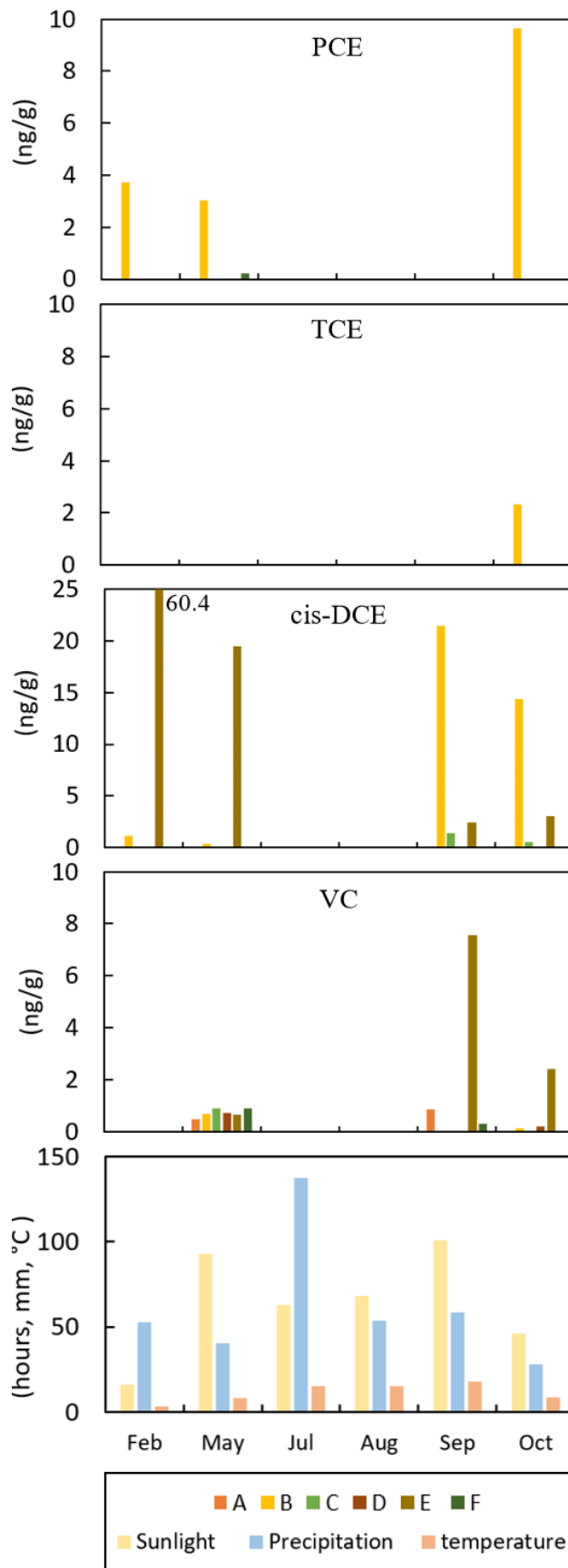
273

274 *Figure 4: The concentration of VC (ng/g) in tree B and C around the stem at two heights (terrain and*  
275 *one meter above terrain), measured in May 2015.*

## 276 6. Discussion

### 277 6.1 Influence of environmental factors on uptake of chlorinated ethenes into trees

278 To investigate trends in detection of chlorinated ethenes in the trees over time, average concentrations  
279 were calculated for each individual contaminant, see Table S1. The temporal average concentrations  
280 are illustrated in Figure 5.



282 *Figure 5: Average concentrations of the chlorinated ethenes in trees and environmental conditions for*  
283 *each sampling month. The weather data is from Table 1. Unit for sunlight is hours, for precipitation is*  
284 *mm, and for temperature is °C. Tree G is not included as it was only sampled in October. Note the*  
285 *different y-axis for cis-DCE.*

286 The results indicate, as expected, that the presence of VC in the trees is more sensitive to the  
287 transpiration than cis-DCE and PCE. This is illustrated by the absence of VC in the trees in February  
288 where the transpiration was low, in contrary VC was detected in all trees in May, while cis-DCE and  
289 PCE were detected in trees in both months. When the transpiration is minimal only contaminants  
290 retarded in the trees by sorption are likely to be seen, and less retarded and lighter compounds have  
291 been lost by diffusion out of the stem (Banduru et al. 2008). The indication that detection of VC is only  
292 possible when the uptake is high, is consistent with the fact that VC has a lower sorption to wood than  
293 the other chlorinated ethenes (Trapp et al. 2001). Despite the significantly lower groundwater  
294 concentrations for PCE and TCE, the magnitudes in the trees were the same as for cis-DCE and VC in  
295 low transpiration periods, consistent with their higher adsorption to wood.

296 The inter-annual trends can be explained by two scenarios: A) where the uptake (dependent on  
297 temperature, relative humidity, sunshine hours and precipitation) by the tree is larger than the loss  
298 (dependent on temperature and physical-chemical properties of the compounds), and B) where the  
299 uptake by the tree is smaller than the loss. Since VC has a short lifetime (due to volatile loss) in trees, it  
300 is only found in Scenario A. Therefore, Scenario B must have been present in February, July and  
301 August. In February, it was simply a matter of minimal uptake due to limited transpiration. In July and  
302 August, the loss out of the stem must have been significantly higher than the uptake, in contrast to in  
303 May and September. Which could primarily be explained by the smaller amount of sunshine hours, the

304 availability of water in the unsaturated zone originating from infiltrating precipitation, and an increased  
305 diffusion out of the stem due to the relatively high temperatures. Scenario A was present in May,  
306 September and October. The small amount of precipitation in October was beneficial for uptake of  
307 groundwater into trees, and the lower temperature resulted in decreased diffusion out of the stem. VC  
308 was found in all trees in May and likely is a result of the requirement of large amounts of water due to  
309 long sunshine hours, which is also the case for September. In areas or at times where porewater is  
310 limited, trees take up water from below the groundwater table and translocate it to the unsaturated zone  
311 by night (Lubczynski 2009) and thereby they may relocate the groundwater contamination. The  
312 groundwater table was lowest in May, and translocation of the groundwater could thus explain the  
313 lower but more evenly distributed VC concentrations observed (VC being the most volatile and mobile  
314 of the chlorinated ethenes). Additionally, in May the low relative air humidity and the lower  
315 temperature were beneficial for transpiration and decreased the diffusional loss, respectively. The  
316 detection of PCE and cis-DCE in the trees in February, where transpiration is negligible, must have  
317 been due to uptake in preceding months and their longer lifetime in the trees than VC.

318 The inter-annual variation in the detection of chlorinated ethenes in trees illustrates some important  
319 patterns that the influence the environmental conditions have on the uptake. First, Limmer et al. (2014)  
320 found a correlation between the transpiration and tree concentrations, however in this study we  
321 illustrate that the uptake of groundwater contamination is not the only parameter influencing the  
322 detection in the trees. We found that also the loss out of the stem and the precipitation is of high  
323 importance, explaining the lack of contaminant detection in the summer months with a relatively high  
324 temperature and wet weather. When the loss out of the stem was larger than the uptake, VC was not  
325 detected in the trees, and the best time to screen for VC is therefore while the uptake is high. Whereas

326 detection of cis-DCE was not as sensitive documented by the detection in February. Second, rainfall  
327 will decrease concentrations in trees, which has previously been documented for some of the  
328 chlorinated ethenes (Vroblesky et al. 2004; Holm and Rotard 2011), and here we also show the same  
329 for VC by the lack of detection (especially July). Even the lack of detection in August could be due to  
330 remaining water in the top soil from July's weather events. It is therefore recommended that screening  
331 for all chlorinated ethenes be conducted during dry periods with many sunshine hours and not after  
332 intense and/or prolonged rainfall. Third, that VC appears most sensitive to spreading in the unsaturated  
333 zone by diffusion in pore air when trees relocate groundwater during dry periods, causing a more  
334 evenly distributed contaminant concentration. This spreading is important to consider when using  
335 phytoscreening to delineate VC groundwater plumes. If the uptake by the trees is high enough the  
336 plume will appear broader than it is, in contrast there is a risk of no contaminant detection as the  
337 spreading will result in lower water concentrations.

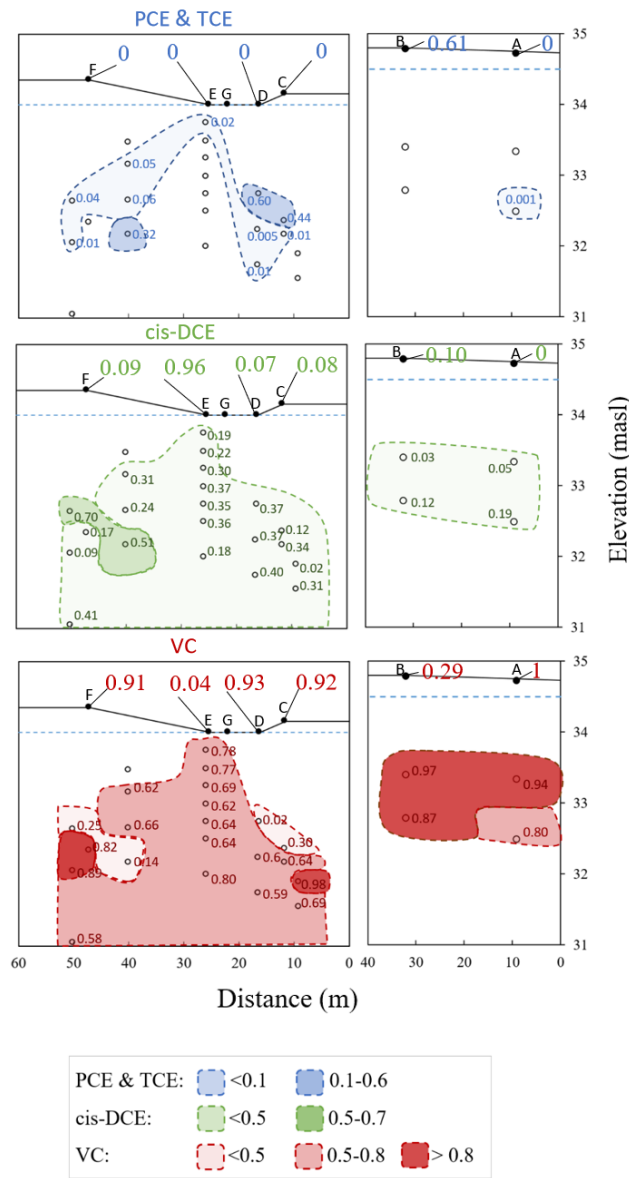
## 338 **6.2 Comparison of contamination in groundwater and trees**

339 The uptake of water by trees is gradient driven. The water-potential gradient between the groundwater  
340 table and the dry air above the ground surface is very steep (Larcher 1995), therefore, trees take up the  
341 water available closest to the surface (i.e. in the vadose zone or shallow groundwater zone).

342 Consequently, shallow groundwater is most relevant for comparison with trees. The shallow  
343 groundwater composition in mole fractions is compared to the composition in the trees in May in  
344 Figure 6, and the compositions in the trees in the remaining months are presented in Table 2. May was  
345 selected for comparison to represent a month with favorable environmental conditions for uptake.

346 These results demonstrate that when the uptake was low (February and October) the lower lifetime in  
347 the trees for VC was reflected in lower or no detection compared to months with higher uptake (i.e.

348 Tree A and F). This confirms the greater sensitivity of VC tree coring to factors affecting transpiration.  
349 Generally, it can be concluded that the groundwater measurement points were not shallow enough to  
350 allow a correlation between groundwater and tree core data. However, the results reveal that under  
351 favorable conditions the tree coring method is useful as a screening tool to provide a depiction of the  
352 underlying groundwater contaminants, including the degradation products. Phytoscreening can thus be  
353 used to locate, but not quantify, shallow groundwater contaminated with cis-DCE and VC discharging  
354 into a stream. However, this is only the case when the uptake by the trees is higher than the loss and  
355 given that no intense and/or prolonged rainfall events occur prior to the sampling. Dilution by the  
356 cleaner stream water did not appear to influence the detection of the chlorinated ethenes in the trees,  
357 even for those trees standing close to the bank (within few meters). Detection of underlying  
358 groundwater contaminants in trees has been documented before for the parent compounds and cis-DCE  
359 (Sorek et al. 2008; Larsen et al. 2008; Limmer et al. 2011); however, our results emphasize that  
360 detection can also be obtained for the degradation product VC under favorable uptake conditions.



361

362 *Figure 6: Mole fractions in the groundwater and in the trees (in May where the transpiration was*  
 363 *high). The trees are projected into the cross sections shown in Figure 1. Points in white areas indicate*  
 364 *that the contaminant was not detected or that the concentration was below detection limit.*

365 *Table 2: Mole fractions of chlorinated ethenes in the trees. July and August measurements are not*  
 366 *included as no contaminants were detected in the trees. The color coding is the same as in Figure 6.*



		Tree A	Tree B	Tree C	Tree D	Tree E	Tree F	Tree G
Feb.	PCE cis-DCE VC	N.D.	0.65 0.35 N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D. 1 N.D.	N.D.	N.M.
May	PCE cis-DCE VC	0 0 1	0.61 0.10 0.29	0 0.08 0.92	0 0.07 0.93	0 0.96 0.04	0.09 0 0.91	N.M.
Sep.	PCE cis-DCE VC	0 0 1	0 1 0	0 1 0	<QL	0 0.17 0.83	0 0 1	N.M.
Oct.	PCE cis-DCE VC	<QL	0.35* 0.64 0.01	0 1 0	0 0 1	0 0.44 0.56	<QL	0 0.55 0.45

\* includes both PCE and TCE as it was the only point where TCE was also detected.

367

## 368 7. Conclusion

369 Phytoscreening for chlorinated ethenes along the bank of Grindsted stream (Denmark) strongly  
370 impacted by groundwater contamination revealed maximum concentrations in black alder trees of 31.0  
371 ng/g for PCE, 6.50 ng/g for TCE, 71.8 ng/g for cis-DCE and 11.9 ng/g for VC. Composition of  
372 environmental factors influencing transpiration (temperature, relative humidity and hours of sunshine)  
373 proved to be crucial for detection of vinyl chloride in the trees. VC, having the shortest lifetime in the  
374 trees (due to diffusional loss), was only detected in periods with low precipitation and many sunshine  
375 hours. Hence, to detect VC in trees it is required that the trees transpire VC contaminated groundwater  
376 at the time sampled. High precipitation resulted in dilution of in-tree concentrations. Therefore, it is  
377 recommended to avoid screening for any of the compounds after the occurrence of intense and/or  
378 prolonged rainfall events. The favorable environmental conditions prior to and during sampling, to  
379 reflect all of the chlorinated ethenes, are thus: low relative air humidity, low amount of  
380 precipitation/dry vadose zone soils, moderate temperatures and plentiful hours of sunshine. Under these  
381 conditions the trees uptake of contaminants is assessed higher relative to the diffusive loss. This study

382 demonstrates that phytoscreening can be used to detect shallow groundwater contamination with  
383 chlorinated ethenes, including cis-DCE and VC, in the vicinity of a stream under optimal  
384 environmental conditions.

385

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