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Rasmussen, Rie Romme; Hedegaard, Rikke Susanne Vingborg; Herbst, M. Birgitte Koch; Sloth, Jens Jørgen

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A novel speciation alternative for the determination of inorganic arsenic in marine samples

Rasmussen RR, Hedegaard RV, Herbst BK and Jens J. Sloth*
National Food Institute, Technical University of Denmark
Division of Food Chemistry, Markhej Bygade 19, DK-2860 Seborg, Denmark
*corresponding author, email: jis@food.dtu.dk

Simple, inexpensive and fast methods for determination of the toxic inorganic arsenic species are called upon for the monitoring and control of food and feed samples. A simplified approach based on Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE) - Solid Phase Extraction (SPE) – has been developed, where inorganic arsenic is separated from organoarsenic compounds by Strong Anion Exchange (SAX) SPE followed by determination of arsenic content by Hydride Generation (HG) Atomic Absorption Spectrometry (AAS).

Introduction
The total contents of the trace elements lead, cadmium and mercury in food and feed are regulated by EU directives (EC) Nos 466/2001/EC, 78/2005/EC, 2002/32/EC and 2003/100/EC. However, for some heavy metals the chemical form (i.e. their speciation) is important in terms of food and feed safety. More than 50 different arsenic species have been found in the marine environment – including lipid-soluble arsenic compounds, however it is the inorganic arsenic forms that are most toxic, whereas organoarsenic compounds are considered to have only low to intermediate toxicity. Since seafood is the major dietary source for arsenic exposure in the European population, arsenic speciation analysis of marine feed and seafood commodities of great interest.

Selective separation of inorganic arsenic

Following extraction of the sample the separation of inorganic arsenic in the form of As(V) (pKa ~ 2.3/6.7/11.6) from organoarsenic compounds is done by sequential elution using a silica-based Strong Anionic Exchange (SAX) SPE column (Phenomenex). Organoarsenic compounds, including e.g. arsenobetaine (AB) and dimethylarsinate (DMA) are quantitatively eluted in the sample load step and washing step (using dilute acetic acid) without simultaneous elution of inorganic arsenic (as As(V)) from organoarsenic compounds. Importantly, no degradation/conversion of other arsenic species such as arsenobetaine (AB), which is usually the predominant species in fish, methylarsonate (MA) or dimethylarsinate (DMA) was observed under the chosen conditions.

Method performance

The method has been in-house validated and figures of merit have been established. Validation included samples spiked at three different concentration levels as well as naturally incurred samples (table 1). Limit of detection was determined at 0.08 mgKg⁻¹ as three times the standard deviation at intra-laboratory reproducibility conditions (SDₐ), both based on results from the lowest spike level (0.5 mg/kg).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spike level (mg/kg)</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>TORT-2</th>
<th>DORM-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.5-1.5</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (N)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean recovery (%)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeatability RSD (%)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeatability RSD (%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Target level established by measurements with reference method HPLC-ICP/MS.

Table 1. Figures of merit obtained in the validation study.

Detection by HG-AAS

An Atomic Absorption Spectrometer (ICE-3300) coupled with a Continuous Flow Vapour Generator (VP100) (Thermo Scientific) (picture 1) is used for the determination of the arsenic content in the eluate from the SPE separation. The samples are pre-reduced with potassium iodide and ascorbic acid reducing As(V) to As(III) prior to analysis, due to the better hydride generating capacity of As(III).

Future use and impact

The method presents a novel alternative allowing speciation analysis of inorganic arsenic with inexpensive equipment and can be used for control of inorganic arsenic concentrations in food and feed of marine origin. This will enable a more correct risk assessment compared to classical chemical analysis on the total arsenic content.

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