

# Aerosol Radioactivity Monitoring at the Jungfrauoch

Sybille Estier<sup>1</sup> (project leader), Pierre Beuret<sup>1</sup>, Matthias Müller<sup>1</sup>, Philipp Steinmann<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bundesamt für Gesundheit, Sektion für Umweltradioaktivität, Bern, Switzerland

pierre.beuret@bag.admin.ch; matthias.mueller@bag.admin.ch; philipp.steinmann@bag.admin.ch

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## 1. Alpha-Beta monitoring using the FHT59S monitor

An automatic aerosol radioactivity monitor FHT59S for the continuous detection of total alpha and total beta-activity is operated at Jungfrauoch research station by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. This monitor is part of the URAnet Network and has the following particular features:

- Real-time (30 min) detection of any increase of radioactivity in the air at the altitude of 3400 m above sea level.
- A detection limit for artificial beta radioactivity as low as 0.1 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>. Such a high sensitivity is possible due to the very low Radon daughter concentration at this altitude.

Additional aerosol samples are taken using a Digital High-Volume-Sampler. These samples are sent to the laboratory in Berne and are analysed for radioisotopes using HPGe-Gamma-spectrometry.

### 1.1 Comments on the alpha/beta measurements 2019

Figure 1 (Jungfrauoch) and Figure 2 (Weissfluhjoch, the second high-altitude station operated by the FOPH, 2685 m a.s.l.) show the natural alpha radioactivity, the calculated artificial beta radioactivity and the moving average of the ratio of total  $\alpha$ -activity to total (natural)  $\beta$ -activity for the period January 1 to December 31, 2019.

This figure highlights that:

- Natural alpha radioactivity – i.e. Radon daughter products - is mainly transported up to the Jungfrauoch by air masses from the lowlands, since the highest values are usually observed in summer (from Mai to October) when thermal air convection is higher than in winter. It is the inverse from what is observed at the lowland sites. During autumn and winter, the Radon daughter products are kept below the Jungfrauoch altitude due to the thermic inversion in the lowlands. (See upper part of Figure 1).

- The highest values of artificial beta mean concentration, about 0.2 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>, occur during fast increases or decreases of the alpha concentration. This is an artefact due to the delay of the automatic compensation (see below).
- The highest ratios of total  $\beta$ -activity to total  $\alpha$ -activity are observed when the (natural) alpha radioactivity concentrations are the lowest.
- These same effects are also observed at the station of the Weissfluhjoch.

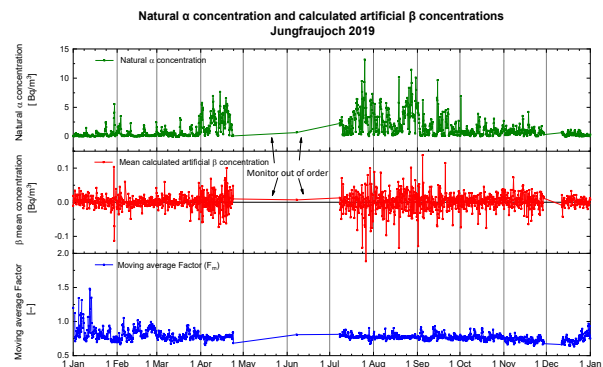


Figure 1. Results of RADAIR measurements in 2019 at the Jungfrauoch. Top: total (natural)  $\alpha$ -activity concentration; mid: calculated artificial  $\beta$ -activity concentration; bottom: moving average of total  $\alpha$  to total (natural)  $\beta$ -activity. For a better readability, only 4 points per day are represented.

A zoom of the Figure 1 for January 1 to April 23 shows that the peaks of the natural alpha radioactivity come when the atmospheric pressure decreases. This phenomenon of a strong pressure gradient causes a displacement of air masses. This new air coming from the lowland, contains Radon daughter products, which are measured a few hours later at the Jungfrauoch. There are the corresponding peaks of wind at that time. (See Figure 3)

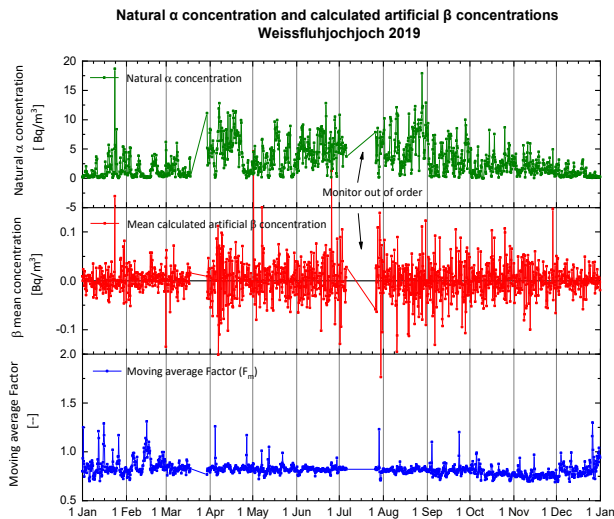


Figure 2. Results of RADAIR measurements in 2019 at the Weissfluhjoch. Top: total (natural)  $\alpha$ -activity concentration; mid: calculated artificial  $\beta$ -activity concentration; bottom: moving average of total  $\alpha$  to total (natural)  $\beta$ -activity. For a better readability, only 4 points per day are represented.

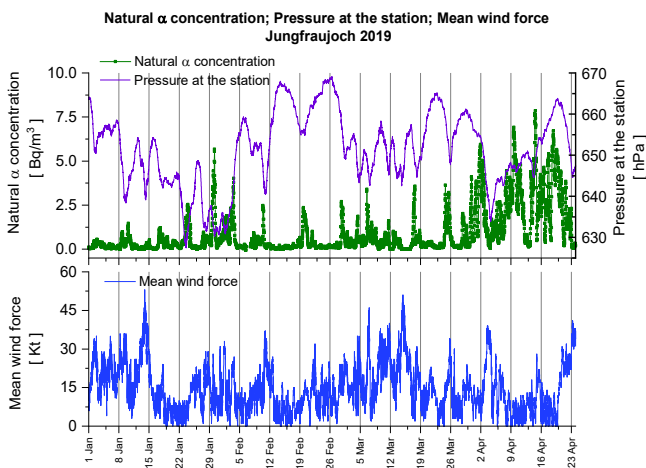


Figure 3. Results Jungfrauojch 2019. Top: The peaks of the natural  $\alpha$  concentration and the pressure variation; bottom: The wind mean force during this period.

Figure 4 shows the histogram of the calculated artificial beta radioactivity in aerosol for 2019 (and 2018). The calculation is done automatically by the monitor by applying an  $\alpha/\beta$ -compensation technique (see below for more details).

- No calculated artificial beta concentration above the detection limit (i.e. the background signal) was observed;
- 95 percent of the beta concentrations recorded in 2019 was below 0.05 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>.
- The histogram recorded for 2019 is very symmetric; this shows that the automatic compensation technique was very good.
- Note that there are some values are greater than 0.10 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>, (See Figure 1)

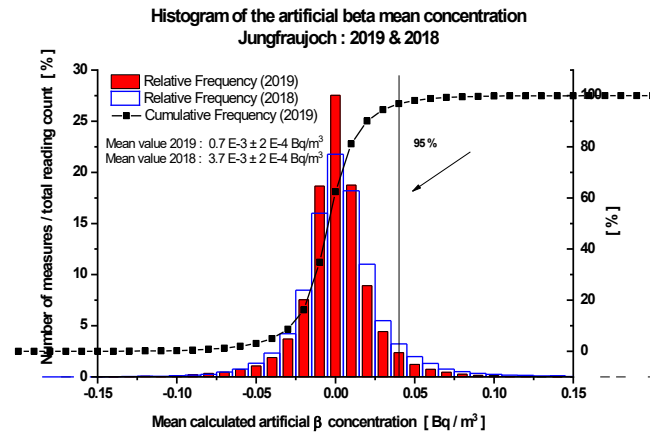


Figure 4. Histogram of calculated artificial beta concentrations at Jungfrauojch 2019.

In most cases, when the alpha concentration increases slowly, the beta concentration is correctly compensated.

For normal situations, i.e. with no artificial radioactivity in the air, the net beta radioactivity at the Jungfrauojch, calculated using the alpha-beta compensation technique, is less than 0.10 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>. At the top of Europe, a radiation incident causing an increase of the artificial beta radioactivity in the atmosphere of as low as 0.10 Bq/m<sup>3</sup> would therefore be detected within 30 minutes.

### 1.2 Calculation of the artificial Beta-activity

*Automatic  $\alpha/\beta$ -compensation:* this technique applied by our aerosol monitoring stations is based on the simultaneous measurements of gross alpha ( $A_g$ ) and gross beta ( $B_g$ ) radioactivity of the aerosols collected on a filter. The net (artificial) beta radioactivity ( $B_n$ ) is then calculated by the following formula:

$$B_n = B_g - (A_g / F)$$

The ratio ( $A_g/B_g$ ) corresponds to the slope of the curve of the  $\alpha$ -activities as a function of  $\beta$ -activities. The experience has shown that it is relatively constant and yields approximately 0.75.

With the current version of the software, the monitor calculates the average of the  $n$  ( $n > 10$ ) last ratios ( $A_g/B_g$ ), as long as this latter is included between thresholds values (here 0.6 and 1.5). This mean ratio will give the factor  $F_m$  with which the net (artificial) Beta radioactivity ( $B_n$ ) will be calculated.

This gives a new correction equation:  $B_n = B_g - (A_g / F_m)$

### 1.3 Comments on technical aspects (RADAIR)

There were less power failures than the previous years. At end of April, despite the heating of the suction line, an ice plug formed in the suction line for several days and consequently the measurements were interrupted. Later there was a problem with the winding of the filter, and then with the computer, therefore, there are no measurements between Mai and June.

## 2. Digitel Jungfrauojch 2019

### 2.1 Digitel High-Volume-Sampler: Introduction

The Digitel DHA-80 High Volume Sampler (HVS) is an automatic air sampler with a typical air flow rate of 0.6 m<sup>3</sup>/min. Aerosols are collected on glass fibre filters of 150 mm in diameter. The pump maintains a constant flow rate independent of dust load on the filter. Filter change intervals are programmed in advance and the sampler is controlled remotely by an internet connection.

The filters are automatically changed once a week and are measured at the end of the month in the laboratory using a coaxial HPGe gamma-ray detector during 1-2 days. Thereafter, activities of radioactive isotopes are corrected by considering the corresponding half-lives and the time between sampling and measuring.

$^7\text{Be}$  and  $^{210}\text{Pb}$  are naturally occurring nuclides.  $^7\text{Be}$  has a cosmogenic origin. Around 70% of  $^7\text{Be}$  is produced in the stratosphere by spallation of carbon, nitrogen and oxygen.  $^{210}\text{Pb}$  is a long-lived decay product of uranium series ( $^{238}\text{U}$ ) which gets into the air from radioactive noble gas  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  exhaled from the Earth's Crust.

## 2.2 Results

Figure 5 shows the concentration ( $\mu\text{Bq}/\text{m}^3$ ) of  $^7\text{Be}$ ,  $^{210}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{131}\text{I}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  between 2011 and 2019.

Concentrations of  $^7\text{Be}$  and  $^{210}\text{Pb}$  remained quasi constant. A slight increase of  $^{210}\text{Pb}$  during summer can be observed, which is due to convection of  $^{210}\text{Pb}$ -rich air masses from the Plateau.  $^7\text{Be}$  concentration seems to be slightly increased during summer, too. This is related to the tropopause thinning at mid-latitudes resulting in air exchange between stratosphere and troposphere.

As a consequence of the nuclear accident of Fukushima in March 2011, filters were measured directly after changing (once a week) in order to detect radioactive isotopes released by the nuclear power plant more quickly. Therefore, time between sampling and measuring was significantly smaller than before.

The increased concentration of  $^{131}\text{I}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  in 2011 can be clearly related to the nuclear accident of Fukushima. First increased concentrations were measured by the end of March 2011 and achieved a maximum at the beginning of April.  $^{131}\text{I}$  could never be detected at Jungfrauoch before the nuclear accident and has not

been since the end of April 2011.  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  was occasionally detected also before March 2011.

Between Mai and August 2013 and 2019, the filters were measured once a week in order to better follow possible inputs of stratospheric air over this time period.

Note that due to a technical problem, sampling in November and December was not continuous.

### Internet data bases

<http://www.radair.ch>  
<http://www.radenviro.ch>  
<http://www.bag.admin.ch/ura>

### Collaborating partners / networks

Gilles Durieux, MeteoSwiss, Payerne  
 Frédéric de Rutté, Abisenvironnement SA, Lonay

### Address

Bundesamt für Gesundheit  
 Sektion Umweltradioaktivität  
 Schwarzenburgstrasse 157  
 CH-3003 Bern

### Contacts

Dr. Sybille Estier  
 Tel.: +41 58 465 1910  
 e-mail: [sybille.estier@bag.admin.ch](mailto:sybille.estier@bag.admin.ch)

Dr. Philipp Steinmann  
 Tel.: +41 58 465 1911  
 e-mail: [philipp.steinmann@bag.admin.ch](mailto:philipp.steinmann@bag.admin.ch)

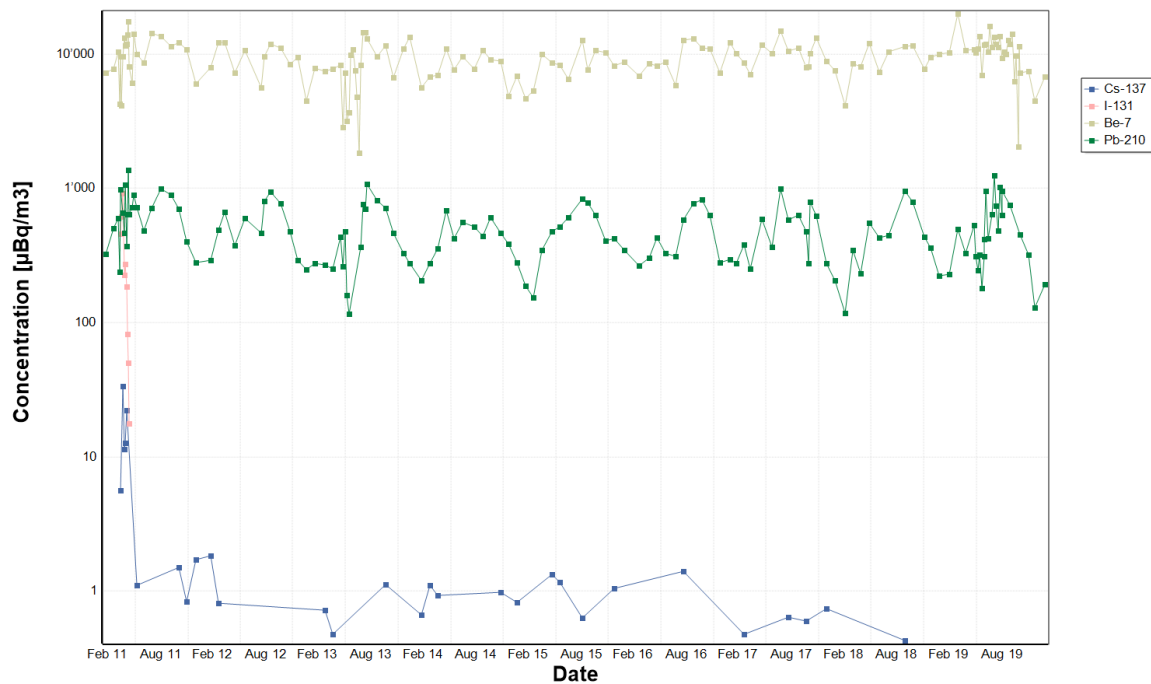


Figure 5. Concentration ( $\mu\text{Bq}/\text{m}^3$ ) of  $^7\text{Be}$ ,  $^{210}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{131}\text{I}$  and  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  between 2011 and 2019, Station Jungfrauoch.