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OECD GUIDELINES FOR THE TESTING OF CHEMICALS

Freshwater Alga and Cyanobacteria, Growth Inhibition Test

INTRODUCTION

1. OECD Guidelines for Testing of Chemicals are periodically reviewed and updated in the light of scientific progress. With respect to Guideline 201, Alga, Growth Inhibition Test (adopted June 1984), the need to extend the Guideline to include additional species and update it to meet the requirements for hazard assessment and classification of chemicals has been identified. The revision has been completed on the basis of extensive practical experience, scientific progress in the field of algal toxicity studies, and extensive regulatory use, which has occurred since the original adoption.

2. Definitions used are given in Annex 1.

PRINCIPLE OF THE TEST

3. The purpose of this test is to determine the effects of a substance on the growth of freshwater microalgae and/or cyanobacteria. Exponentially growing test organisms are exposed to the test substance in batch cultures over a period of normally 72 hours. In spite of the relatively brief test duration, effects over several generations can be assessed.

4. The system response is the reduction of growth in a series of algal cultures (test units) exposed to various concentrations of a test substance. The response is evaluated as a function of the exposure concentration in comparison with the average growth of replicate, unexposed control cultures. For full expression of the system response to toxic effects (optimal sensitivity), the cultures are allowed unrestricted exponential growth under nutrient sufficient conditions and continuous light for a sufficient period of time to measure reduction of the specific growth rate.

5. Growth and growth inhibition are quantified from measurements of the algal biomass as a function of time. Algal biomass is defined as the dry weight per volume, e.g. mg algae/litre test solution. However, dry weight is difficult to measure and therefore surrogate parameters are used. Of these surrogates, cell counts are most often used. Other surrogate parameters include cell volume, fluorescence, optical density, etc. A conversion factor between the measured surrogate parameter and biomass should be known.

6. The test endpoint is inhibition of growth, expressed as the logarithmic increase in biomass (average specific growth rate) during the exposure period. From the average specific growth rates recorded in a series of test solutions, the concentration bringing about a specified x % inhibition of growth rate (e.g. 50%) is determined and expressed as the E_rC_x (e.g. E_rC_{50}).

7. An additional response variable used in this Guideline is yield, which may be needed to fulfil specific regulatory requirements in some countries. It is defined as the biomass at the end of the exposure

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period minus the biomass at the start of the exposure period. From the yield recorded in a series of test solutions, the concentration bringing about a specified x % inhibition of yield (e.g., 50 %) is calculated and expressed as the E_yC_x (e.g. E_yC_{50}).

8. In addition, the lowest observed effect concentration (LOEC) and the no observed effect concentration (NOEC) may be statistically determined.

INFORMATION ON THE TEST SUBSTANCE

9. Information on the test substance which may be useful in establishing the test conditions includes structural formula, purity, stability in light, stability under the conditions of the test, light absorption properties, pKa, and results of studies of transformation including biodegradability in water.

10. The water solubility, octanol water partition coefficient (P_{ow}) and vapour pressure of the test substance should be known and a validated method for the quantification of the substance in the test solutions with reported recovery efficiency and limit of detection should be available.

VALIDITY OF THE TEST

11. For the test to be valid, the following performance criteria should be met:

- The biomass in the control cultures should have increased exponentially by a factor of at least 16 within the 72-hour test period. This corresponds to a specific growth rate of 0.92 day^{-1}. For the most frequently used species the growth rate is usually substantially higher (see Annex 2). This criterion may not be met when species that grow slower than those listed in Annex 2 are used. In this case, the test period should be extended to obtain at least a 16-fold growth in control cultures, while the growth has to be exponential throughout the test period. The test period may be shortened to at least 48 hours to maintain unlimited, exponential growth during the test as long as the minimum multiplication factor of 16 is reached.

- The mean coefficient of variation for section-by-section specific growth rates (days 0-1, 1-2 and 2-3, for 72-hour tests) in the control cultures (See Annex 1 under "coefficient of variation") must not exceed 35%. See paragraph 49 for the calculation of section-by-section specific growth rate. This criterion applies to the mean value of coefficients of variation calculated for replicate control cultures.

- The coefficient of variation of average specific growth rates during the whole test period in replicate control cultures must not exceed 7% in tests with *Pseudokirchneriella subcapitata* and *Desmodesmus subspicatus*. For other less frequently tested species, the value should not exceed 10%.

REFERENCE SUBSTANCE

12. Reference substance(s), such as 3,5-dichlorophenol used in the international ring test (1), may be tested as a means of checking the test procedure. Potassium dichromate can also be used as a reference substance for green algae. It is desirable to test a reference substance at least twice a year.

APPLICABILITY OF THE TEST

13. This Guideline is most easily applied to water-soluble substances which, under the conditions of the test, are likely to remain in the water. For testing of substances that are volatile, strongly adsorbing,

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coloured, having a low solubility in water or substances that may affect the availability of nutrients or minerals in the test medium, certain modifications of the described procedure may be required (e.g., closed system, conditioning of the test vessels). Guidance on some appropriate modifications is given in (2) (3) and (4).

DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD

Apparatus

14. Test vessels and other apparatus which will come into contact with the test solutions should be made entirely of glass or other chemically inert material. The items should be thoroughly washed to ensure that no organic or inorganic contaminants may interfere with the algal growth or composition of the test solutions.

15. The test vessels will normally be glass flasks of dimensions that allow a sufficient volume of culture for measurements during the test and a sufficient mass transfer of CO_2 from the atmosphere (see paragraph 30). Note that the liquid volume must be sufficient for analytical determinations (see paragraph 37).

16. In addition some or all of the following equipment may be required:

- Culturing apparatus: a cabinet or chamber is recommended, in which the chosen incubation temperature can be maintained at ± 2°C.

- Light measurement instruments: it is important to note that the method of measurement of light intensity, and in particular the type of receptor (collector), may affect the measured value. Measurements should preferably be made using a spherical (4 π) receptor (which responds to direct and reflected light from all angles above and below the plane of measurement), or a 2 π receptor (which responds to light from all angles above the measurement plane).

- Apparatus to determine algal biomass. Cell count, which is the most frequently used surrogate parameter for algal biomass, may be made using an electronic particle counter, a microscope with counting chamber, or a flow cytometer. Other biomass surrogates can be measured using a flow cytometer, fluorimeter, spectrophotometer or colorimeter. A conversion factor relating cell count to dry weight is useful to calculate. In order to provide useful measurements at low biomass concentrations when using a spectrophotometer, it may be necessary to use cuvettes with a light path of at least 4 cm.

Test organisms

17. Several species of non-attached microalgae and cyanobacteria may be used. The strains listed in Annex 2 have been shown to be suitable using the test procedure specified in this Guideline.

18. If other species are used, the strain and/or origin should be reported. Confirm that exponential growth of the selected test alga can be maintained throughout the test period under the prevailing conditions.

Growth medium

19. Two alternative growth media, the OECD and the AAP medium, are recommended. The compositions of these media are shown in Annex 3. Note that the initial pH value and the buffering

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capacity (regulating pH increase) of the two media are different. Therefore the results of the tests may be different depending on the medium used, particularly when testing ionising substances.

20. Modification of the growth media may be necessary for certain purposes, e.g. when testing metals and chelating agents or testing at different pH values. Use of a modified medium should be described in detail and justified (3) (4).

Initial biomass concentration

21. The initial biomass in the test cultures must be the same in all test cultures and sufficiently low to allow exponential growth throughout the incubation period without risk of nutrient depletion. The initial biomass should not exceed 0.5 mg/L as dry weight. The following initial cell concentrations are recommended:

Pseudokirchneriella subcapitata:	$5 \times 10^3 - 10^4$	cells/mL
Desmodesmus subspicatus	$2\text{-}5 \times 10^3$	cells/mL
Navicula pelliculosa	10^4	cells/mL
Anabaena flos-aquae	10^4	cells/mL
Synechococcus leopoliensis	$5 \times 10^4 - 10^5$	cells/mL

Concentrations of test substance

22. The concentration range in which effects are likely to occur may be determined on the basis of results from range-finding tests. For the final definitive test at least five concentrations, arranged in a geometric series with a factor not exceeding 3.2, should be selected. For test substances showing a flat concentration response curve a higher factor may be justified. The concentration series should preferably cover the range causing 5-75 % inhibition of algal growth rate.

Replicates and controls

23. The test design should include three replicates at each test concentration. If determination of the NOEC is not required, the test design may be altered to increase the number of concentrations and reduce the number of replicates per concentration. The number of control replicates must be at least three, and ideally should be twice the number of replicates used for each test concentration.

24. A separate set of test solutions may be prepared for analytical determinations of test substance concentrations (see paragraphs 36 and 38).

25. When a solvent is used to solubilise the test substance, additional controls containing the solvent at the same concentration as used in the test cultures must be included in the test design.

Preparation of inoculum culture

26. In order to adapt the test alga to the test conditions and ensure that the algae are in the exponential growth phase when used to inoculate the test solutions, an inoculum culture in the test medium is prepared 2-4 days before start of the test. The algal biomass should be adjusted in order to allow exponential growth to prevail in the inoculum culture until the test starts. Incubate the inoculum culture under the same conditions as the test cultures. Measure the increase in biomass in the inoculum culture to ensure that growth is within the normal range for the test strain under the culturing conditions. An example of the procedure for algal culturing is described in Annex 4. To avoid synchronous cell divisions during the test a second propagation step of the inoculum culture may be required.

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Preparation of test solutions

27. All test solutions must contain the same concentrations of growth medium and initial biomass of test alga. Test solutions of the chosen concentrations are usually prepared by mixing a stock solution of the test substance with growth medium and inoculum culture. Stock solutions are normally prepared by dissolving the substance in test medium.

28. Solvents, e.g. acetone, t-butyl alcohol and dimethyl formamide, may be used as carriers to add substances of low water solubility to the test medium (2)(3). The concentration of solvent should not exceed 100 µl/L, and the same concentration of solvent should be added to all cultures (including controls) in the test series.

Incubation

29. Cap the test vessels with air-permeable stoppers. The vessels are shaken and placed in the culturing apparatus. During the test it is necessary to keep the algae in suspension and to facilitate transfer of CO_2. To this end constant shaking or stirring should be used. The cultures should be maintained at a temperature in the range of 21 to 24°C, controlled at ± 2°C. For species other than those listed in Annex 2, e.g. tropical species, higher temperatures may be appropriate, providing that the validity criteria can be fulfilled. It is recommended to place the flasks randomly and to reposition them daily in the incubator.

30. The pH of the control medium should not increase by more than 1.5 units during the test. For metals and compounds that partly ionise at a pH around the test pH, it may be necessary to limit the pH drift to obtain reproducible and well defined results. A drift of < 0.5 pH units is technically feasible and can be achieved by ensuring an adequate CO_2 mass transfer rate from the surrounding air to the test solution, e.g. by increasing the shaking rate. Another possibility is to reduce the demand for CO_2 by reducing the initial biomass or the test duration.

31. The surface where the cultures are incubated should receive continuous, uniform fluorescent illumination e.g. of «cool-white» or «daylight» type. Strains of algae and cyanobacteria vary in their light requirements. The light intensity should be selected to suit the test organism used. For the recommended species of green algae, select the light intensity at the level of the test solutions from the range of 60-120 $\mu E \cdot m^{-2}\ s^{-1}$ when measured in the photosynthetically effective wavelength range of 400-700 nm using an appropriate receptor. Some species, in particular *Anabaena flos-aquae*, grow well at lower light intensities and may be damaged at high intensities. For such species an average light intensity in the range 40-60 $\mu E \cdot m^{-2} \cdot s^{-1}$ should be selected. (For light-measuring instruments calibrated in lux, an equivalent range of 4440 – 8880 lux for cool white light corresponds approximately to the recommended light intensity 60-120 $\mu E \cdot m^{-2} \cdot s^{-1}$). Maintain the light intensity within ±15% from the average light intensity over the incubation area.

Test duration

32. Test duration is normally 72 hours. However, shorter or longer test durations may be used provided that all validity criteria in paragraph 11 can be met.

Measurements and analytical determinations

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33. The algal biomass in each flask is determined at least daily during the test period. If measurements are made on small volumes removed from the test solution by pipette, these should not be replaced.
34. Measurement of biomass is done by manual cell counting by microscope or an electronic particle counter (by cell counts and/or biovolume). Alternative techniques, e.g. flow cytometry, *in vitro* or *in vivo* chlorophyll fluorescence (5) (6), or optical density can be used if a satisfactory correlation with biomass can be demonstrated over the range of biomass occurring in the test.

35. Measure the pH of the solutions at the beginning and at the end of the test.

36. Provided an analytical procedure for determination of the test substance in the concentration range used is available, the test solutions should be analysed to verify the initial concentrations and maintenance of the exposure concentrations during the test.

37. Analysis of the concentration of the test substance at the start and end of the test of a low and high test concentration and a concentration around the expected EC_{50} may be sufficient where it is likely that exposure concentrations will vary less than 20% from nominal values during the test. Analysis of all test concentrations at the beginning and at the end of the test is recommended where concentrations are unlikely to remain within 80-120 % of nominal. For volatile, unstable or strongly adsorbing test substances, additional samplings for analysis at 24 hour intervals during the exposure period are recommended in order to better define loss of the test substance. For these substances, extra replicates may be needed. In all cases, determination of test substance concentrations need only be performed on one replicate vessel at each test concentration (or the contents of the vessels pooled by replicate).

38. The test media prepared specifically for analysis of exposure concentrations during the test should be treated identically to those used for testing, i.e. they should be inoculated with algae and incubated under identical conditions. If analysis of the dissolved test substance concentration is required, it may be necessary to separate algae from the medium. Separation should preferably be made by centrifugation at a low g-force, sufficient to settle the algae.

39. If there is evidence that the concentration of the substance being tested has been satisfactorily maintained within ± 20 % of the nominal or measured initial concentration throughout the test, analysis of the results can be based on nominal or measured initial values. If the deviation from the nominal or measured initial concentration is not within the range of ± 20 %, analysis of the results should be based on geometric mean concentration during exposure or on models describing the decline of the concentration of the test substance (3) (7).

40. The alga growth inhibition test is a more dynamic test system than most other short-term aquatic toxicity tests. As a consequence, the actual exposure concentrations may be difficult to define, especially for adsorbing substances tested at low concentrations. In such cases, disappearance of the test substance from solution by adsorption to the increasing algal biomass does not mean that it is lost from the test system. When the result of the test is analysed, it should be checked whether a decrease in concentration of the test substance in the course of the test is accompanied by a decrease in growth inhibition. If this is the case, application of a suitable model describing the decline of the concentration of the test substance (7) may be considered. If not, it may be appropriate to base the analysis of the results on the initial (nominal or measured) concentrations.

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Other observations

41. Microscopic observation should be performed to verify a normal and healthy appearance of the inoculum culture and to observe any abnormal appearance of the algae (as may be caused by the exposure to the test substance) at the end of the test.

Limit test

42. Under some circumstances, e.g. when a preliminary test indicates that the test substance has no toxic effects at concentrations up to 100 mg/L or up to its limit of solubility in the test medium (whichever is the lower), a limit test involving a comparison of responses in a control group and one treatment group (100 mg/L or a concentration equal to the limit of solubility), may be undertaken. It is strongly recommended that this be supported by analysis of the exposure concentration. All previously described test conditions and validity criteria apply to a limit test, with the exception that the number of treatment replicates should be at least six. The response variables in the control and treatment group may be analysed using a statistical test to compare means, e.g. a Student's t-test. If variances of the two groups are unequal, a t-test adjusted for unequal variances should be performed

DATA AND REPORTING

Plotting growth curves

43. The biomass in the test vessels may be expressed in units of the surrogate parameter used for measurement (e.g. cell number, fluorescence).

44. Tabulate the estimated biomass concentration in test cultures and controls together with the concentrations of test material and the times of measurement, recorded with a resolution of at least whole hours, to produce plots of growth curves. Both logarithmic scales and linear scales can be useful at this first stage, but logarithmic scales are mandatory and generally give a better presentation of variations in growth pattern during the test period. Note that exponential growth produces a straight line when plotted on a logarithmic scale, and inclination of the line (slope) indicates the specific growth rate.

45. Using the plots, examine whether control cultures grow exponentially at the expected rate throughout the test. Examine all data points and the appearance of the graphs critically and check raw data and procedures for possible errors. Check in particular any data point that seems to deviate by a systematic error. If it is obvious that procedural mistakes can be identified and/or considered highly likely, the specific data point is marked as an outlier and not included in subsequent statistical analysis. (A zero algal concentration in one out of two or three replicate vessels may indicate the vessel was not inoculated correctly, or was improperly cleaned). State reasons for rejection of a data point as an outlier clearly in the test report. Accepted reasons are only (rare) procedural mistakes and not just bad precision. Statistical procedures for outlier identification are of limited use for this type of problem and cannot replace expert judgement. Outliers (marked as such) should preferably be retained among the data points shown in any subsequent graphical or tabular data presentation.

Response variables

46. The purpose of the test is to determine the effects of the test substance on the growth of algae. This Guideline describes two response variables, as member countries have different preferences and regulatory needs. In order for the test results to be acceptable in all member countries, the effects should be evaluated using both response variables (a) and (b) described below.

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(a) Average specific growth rate: this response variable is calculated on the basis of the logarithmic increase of biomass during the test period, expressed per day

(b) Yield: this response variable is the biomass at the end of the test minus the starting biomass.

47. It should be noted that toxicity values calculated by using these two response variables are not comparable and this difference must be recognised when using the results of the test. EC_x values based upon average specific growth rate (E_rC_x) will generally be higher than results based upon yield (E_yC_x) if the test conditions of this Guideline are adhered to, due to the mathematical basis of the respective approaches. This should not be interpreted as a difference in sensitivity between the two response variables, simply that the values are different mathematically. The concept of average specific growth rate is based on the general exponential growth pattern of algae in non-limited cultures, where toxicity is estimated on the basis of the effects on the growth rate, without being dependent on the absolute level of the specific growth rate of the control, slope of the concentration-response curve or on test duration. In contrast, results based upon the yield response variable are dependent upon all these other variables. E_yC_x is dependent on the specific growth rate of the algal species used in each test and on the maximum specific growth rate that can vary between species and even different algal strains. This response variable should not be used for comparing the sensitivity to toxicants among algal species or even different strains. While the use of average specific growth rate for estimating toxicity is scientifically preferred, toxicity estimates based on yield are also included in this Guideline to satisfy current regulatory requirements in some countries.

Average growth rate

48. The average specific growth rate for a specific period is calculated as the logarithmic increase in the biomass from the equation for each single vessel of controls and treatments [1]:

$$\mu_{i-j} = \frac{\ln X_j - \ln X_i}{t_j - t_i} \ (\text{day}^{-1}) \quad \text{-----} \ [1],$$

where:
μ_{i-j} is the average specific growth rate from time i to j;
X_i is the biomass at time *i*;
X_j is the biomass at time *j*

For each treatment group and control group, calculate a mean value for growth rate along with variance estimates.

49. Calculate the average specific growth rate over the entire test duration (normally days 0-3), using the nominally inoculated biomass as the starting value rather than a measured starting value, because in this way greater precision is normally obtained. If the equipment used for biomass measurement allows sufficiently precise determination of the low inoculum biomass (e.g. flow cytometer) then the measured initial biomass concentration can be used. Assess also the section-by-section growth rate, calculated as the specific growth rates for each day during the course of the test (days 0-1, 1-2 and 2-3) and examine whether the control growth rate remains constant (see validity criteria, paragraph 11). A significantly lower specific growth rate on day one than the total average specific growth rate may indicate a lag phase. While a lag phase can be minimised and practically eliminated in control cultures by proper propagation of the pre-culture, a lag phase in exposed cultures may indicate recovery after initial toxic stress or reduced

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exposure due to loss of test substance (including sorption onto the algal biomass) after initial exposure. Hence the section-by-section growth rate may be assessed in order to evaluate effects of the test substance occurring during the exposure period. Substantial differences between the section-by-section growth rate and the average growth rate indicate deviation from constant exponential growth and that close examination of the growth curves is warranted.

50. Calculate the percent inhibition of growth rate for each treatment replicate from equation [2]:

$$\%I_r = \frac{\mu_C - \mu_T}{\mu_C} \times 100 \text{ ----- [2]},$$

where:

$\%I_r$: percent inhibition in average specific growth rate;
μ_C mean value for average specific growth rate (μ) in the control group;
μ_T average specific growth rate for the treatment replicate.

51. When solvents are used to prepare the test solutions, the solvent controls rather than the controls without solvents should be used in calculation of percent inhibition.

Yield

52. Yield is calculated as the biomass at the end of the test minus the starting biomass for each single vessel of controls and treatments. For each test concentration and control, calculate a mean value for yield along with variance estimates. The percent inhibition in yield ($\%I_y$) may be calculated for each treatment replicate as follows:

$$\%\ I_y = \frac{(Y_c - Y_T)}{Y_c} \times 100 \text{ ----- [3]}$$

where:

$\%\ I_y$: percent inhibition of yield;
- Y_C: mean value for yield in the control group;
- Y_T: value for yield for the treatment replicate.

Plotting concentration response curve

53. Plot the percentage of inhibition against the logarithm of the test substance concentration and examine the plot closely, disregarding any such data point that was singled out as an outlier in the first phase. Fit a smooth line through the data points by eye or by computerised interpolation to get a first impression of the concentration-response relationship, and then proceed with a more detailed method, preferably a computerised statistical method. Depending on the intended usage of data; the quality (precision) and amount of data as well as the availability of data analysis tools, it may be decided (and sometimes well justified) to stop the data analysis at this stage and simply read the key figures EC_{50} and EC_{10} (and/or EC_{20}) from the eye fitted curve (see also section below on stimulatory effects). Valid reasons for not using a statistical method may include:

- Data are not appropriate for computerised methods to produce any more reliable results than can be obtained by expert judgement - in such situations some computer programs may even fail to produce a reliable solution (iterations may not converge etc.)

- Stimulatory growth responses cannot be handled adequately using available computer programs (see below).

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Statistical procedures

54. The aim is to obtain a quantitative concentration-response relationship by regression analysis. It is possible to use a weighted linear regression after having performed a linearising transformation of the response data - for instance into probit or logit or Weibull units (8), but non-linear regression procedures are preferred techniques that better handle unavoidable data irregularities and deviations from smooth distributions. Approaching either zero or total inhibition, such irregularities may be magnified by the transformation, interfering with the analysis (8). It should be noted that standard methods of analysis using probit, logit, or Weibull transforms are intended for use on quantal (e.g. mortality or survival) data, and must be modified to accommodate growth or biomass data. Specific procedures for determination of EC_x values from continuous data can be found in (9) (10) and (11). The use of non-linear regression analysis is further detailed in Annex 5.

55. For each response variable to be analysed, use the concentration-response relationship to calculate point estimates of EC_x values. When possible, the 95% confidence limits for each estimate should be determined. Goodness of fit of the response data to the regression model should be assessed either graphically or statistically. Regression analysis should be performed using individual replicate responses, not treatment group means. If, however nonlinear curve fitting is difficult or fails because of too great scatter in the data, the problem may be circumvented by performing the regression on group means as a practical way of reducing the influence of suspected outliers. Use of this option should be identified in the test report as a deviation from normal procedure because curve fits with individual replicates did not produce a good result.

56. EC_{50} estimates and confidence limits may also be obtained using linear interpolation with bootstrapping (13), if available regression models/methods are unsuitable for the data.

57. For estimation of the LOEC and hence the NOEC, for effects of the test substance on growth rate, it is necessary to compare treatment means using analysis of variance (ANOVA) techniques. The mean for each concentration must then be compared with the control mean using an appropriate multiple comparison or trend test method. Dunnett's or Williams' test may be useful (12)(14)(15)(16)(17). It is necessary to assess whether the ANOVA assumption of homogeneity of variance holds. This assessment may be performed graphically or by a formal test (17). Suitable tests are Levene's or Bartlett's. Failure to meet the assumption of homogeneity of variances can sometimes be corrected by logarithmic transformation of the data. If heterogeneity of variance is extreme and cannot be corrected by transformation, analysis by methods such as step-down Jonkheere trend tests should be considered. Additional guidance on determining the NOEC can be found in (11).

58. Recent scientific developments have led to a recommendation of abandoning the concept of NOEC and replacing it with regression based point estimates EC_x. An appropriate value for x has not been established for this algal test. A range of 10 to 20 % appears to be appropriate (depending on the response variable chosen), and preferably both the EC_{10} and EC_{20} should be reported.

Growth stimulation

59. Growth stimulation (negative inhibition) at low concentrations is sometimes observed. This can result from either hormesis ("toxic stimulation") or from addition of stimulating growth factors with the test material to the minimal medium used. Note that the addition of inorganic nutrients should not have any direct effect because the test medium should maintain a surplus of nutrients throughout the test. Low dose stimulation can usually be ignored in EC_{50} calculations unless it is extreme. However, if it is extreme, or an EC_x value for low x is to be calculated, special procedures may be needed. Deletion of stimulatory responses from the data analysis should be avoided if possible, and if available curve fitting software

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cannot accept minor stimulation, linear interpolation with bootstrapping can be used. If stimulation is extreme, use of a hormesis model may be considered (18).

Non toxic growth inhibition

60. Light absorbing test materials may give rise to a growth rate reduction because shading reduces the amount of available light. Such physical types of effects should be separated from toxic effects by modifying the test conditions and the former should be reported separately. Guidance may be found in (2) and (3).

Test report

61. The test report must include the following:

Test substance:
- physical nature and relevant physical-chemical properties, including water solubility limit;
- chemical identification data (e.g., CAS Number), including purity (impurities).

Test species:
- the strain, supplier or source and the culture conditions used.

Test conditions:
- date of start of the test and its duration;
- description of test design: test vessels, culture volumes, biomass density at the beginning of the test;
- composition of the medium;
- test concentrations and replicates (e.g., number of replicates, number of test concentrations and geometric progression used);
- description of the preparation of test solutions, including use of solvents etc.
- culturing apparatus;
- light intensity and quality (source, homogeneity);
- temperature;
- concentrations tested: the nominal test concentrations and any results of analyses to determine the concentration of the test substance in the test vessels. The recovery efficiency of the method and the limit of quantification in the test matrix should be reported.;
- all deviations from this Guideline;
- method for determination of biomass and evidence of correlation between the measured parameter and dry weight;

Results:
- pH values at the beginning and at the end of the test at all treatments;
- biomass for each flask at each measuring point and method for measuring biomass;
- growth curves (plot of biomass versus time);
- calculated response variables for each treatment replicate, with mean values and coefficient of variation for replicates;
- graphical presentation of the concentration/effect relationship;
- estimates of toxicity for response variables e.g., EC_{50}, EC_{10}, EC_{20} and associated confidence intervals. If calculated, LOEC and NOEC and the statistical methods used for their determination;

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- if ANOVA has been used, the size of the effect which can be detected (e.g. the least significant difference);
- any stimulation of growth found in any treatment;
- any other observed effects, e.g. morphological changes of the algae;
- discussion of the results, including any influence on the outcome of the test resulting from deviations from this Guideline.

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ANNEX 1

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions and abbreviations are used for the purposes of this Guideline:

Biomass is the dry weight of living matter present in a population expressed in terms of a given volume; e.g., mg algae/litre test solution. Usually "biomass" is defined as a mass, but in this test this word is used to refer to mass per volume. Also in this test, surrogates for biomass, such as cell counts, fluorescence, etc. are typically measured and the use of the term "biomass" thus refers to these surrogate measures as well.

Coefficient of variation is a dimensionless measure of the variability of a parameter, defined as the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean. This can also be expressed as a percent value. Mean coefficient of variation of average specific growth rate in replicate control cultures should be calculated as follows:

1. Calculate % CV of average specific growth rate out of the daily/section by section growth rates for the respective replicate;
2. Calculate the mean value out of all values calculated under point 1 to get the mean coefficient of variation of the daily/section by section specific growth rate in replicate control cultures.

EC_x is the concentration of the test substance dissolved in test medium that results in an x % (e.g. 50%) reduction in growth of the test organism within a stated exposure period (to be mentioned explicitly if deviating from full or normal test duration). To unambiguously denote an EC value deriving from growth rate or yield the symbol "E_rC" is used for growth rate and "E_yC" is used for yield.

Growth medium is the complete synthetic culture medium in which test algae grow when exposed to the test substance. The test substance will normally be dissolved in the test medium.

Growth rate (average specific growth rate) is the logarithmic increase in biomass during the exposure period.

Lowest Observed Effect Concentration (LOEC) is the lowest tested concentration at which the substance is observed to have a statistically significant reducing effect on growth (at $p < 0.05$) when compared with the control, within a given exposure time. However, all test concentrations above the LOEC must have a harmful effect equal to or greater than those observed at the LOEC. When these two conditions cannot be satisfied, a full explanation must be given for how the LOEC (and hence the NOEC) has been selected.

No Observed Effect Concentration (NOEC) is the test concentration immediately below the LOEC.

Response variable is a variable for the estimation of toxicity derived from any measured parameters describing biomass by different methods of calculation. For this guideline growth rates and yield are response variables derived from measuring biomass directly or any of the surrogates mentioned.

Specific growth rate is a response variable defined as quotient of the difference of the natural logarithms of a parameter of observation (in this Guideline, biomass) and the respective time period

Yield is the value of a measurement variable at the end of the exposure period minus the measurement variable's value at the start of the exposure period to express biomass increase during the test.

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ANNEX 2

STRAINS SHOWN TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE TEST

Green algae

- *Pseudokirchneriella subcapitata,* (formerly known as *Selenastrum capricornutum*) , ATCC 22662, CCAP 278/4, 61.81 SAG
- *Desmodesmus subspicatus* (formerly known as *Scenedesmus subspicatus*) 86.81 SAG

Diatoms

- *Navicula pelliculosa,* UTEX 664

Cyanobacteria

- *Anabaena flos-aquae,* UTEX 1444, ATCC 29413, CCAP 1403/13A
- *Synechococcus leopoliensis,* UTEX 625, CCAP 1405/1

Sources of Strains

The strains recommended are available in unialgal cultures from the following collections (in alphabetical order):

ATCC: American Type Culture Collection
10801 University Boulevard
Manassas, Virginia 20110-2209
USA

CCAP, Culture Collection of Algae and Protozoa
Institute of Freshwater Ecology,
Windermere Laboratory
Far Sawrey, Amblerside
Cumbria LA22 0LP
UK

SAG: Collection of Algal Cultures
Inst. Plant Physiology
University of Göttingen
Nicholausberger Weg 18
D-3400 Göttingen
GERMANY

UTEX Culture Collection of Algae
Section of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology
School of Biological Sciences
the University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712
USA.

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Appearance and characteristics of recommended species

	P. subcapitata	*D. subspicatus*	*N. pelliculosa*	*A. flos-aquae*	*S. leopoliensis*
Appearance	Curved, twisted single cells	Oval, mostly single cells	Rods	Chains of oval cells	Rods
Size (L x W) µm	8-14 x 2-3	7-15 x 3-12	7.1 x 3.7	4.5 x 3	6 x 1
Cell volume (μm^3/cell)	40-60[1]	60-80[1]	40-50[1]	30-40[1]	2.5[2]
Cell dry weight (mg/cell)	$2\text{-}3 \times 10^{-8}$	$3\text{-}4 \times 10^{-8}$	$3\text{-}4 \times 10^{-8}$	$1\text{-}2 \times 10^{-8}$	$2\text{-}3 \times 10^{-9}$
Growth rate[3] (day^{-1})	1.5 -1.7	1.2-1.5	1.4	1.1-1.4	2.0 - 2.4

[1] Measured with electronic particle counter
[2] Calculated from size
[3] Most frequently observed growth rate in OECD medium at light intensity approx. 70 $\mu E\ m^{-2}\ s^{-1}$ and 21 °C

Specific Recommendations on Culturing and Handling of Recommended Test Species

Pseudokirchneriella subcapitata and *Desmodesmus subspicatus*

These green algae are generally easy to maintain in various culture media. Information on suitable media is available from the culture collections. The cells are normally solitary, and cell density measurements can easily be performed using an electronic particle counter or microscope.

Anabaena flos-aquae

Various growth media may be used for keeping a stock culture. It is particularly important to avoid allowing the batch culture to go past log phase growth when renewing, recovery is difficult at this point.

Anabaena flos-aquae develops aggregates of nested chains of cells. The size of these aggregates may vary with culturing conditions. It may be necessary to break up these aggregates when microscope counting or an electronic particle counter is used for determination of biomass.

Sonication of sub-samples may be used to break up chains to reduce count variability. Longer sonication than required for breaking up chains into shorter lengths may destroy the cells. Sonication intensity and duration must be identical for each treatment.

Count enough fields on the hemocytometer (at least 400 cells) to help compensate for variability. This will improve reliability of microscopic density determinations.

An electronic particle counter can be used for determination of total cell volume of *Anabaena* after breaking up the cell chains by careful sonification. The sonification energy has to be adjusted to avoid disruption of the cells.

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Use a vortex mixer or similar appropriate method to make sure the algae suspension used to inoculate test vessels is well mixed and homogeneous.

Test vessels should be placed on an orbital or reciprocate shaker table at about 150 revolutions per minute. Alternatively, intermittent agitation may be used to reduce the tendency of *Anabaena* to form clumps. If clumping occurs, care must be taken to achieve representative samples for biomass measurements. Vigorous agitation before sampling may be necessary to disintegrate algal clumps.

Synechococcus leopoliensis

Various growth media may be used for keeping a stock culture. Information on suitable media is available from the culture collections.

Synechococcus leopoliensis grows as solitary rod-shaped cells. The cells are very small, which complicates the use of microscope counting for biomass measurements. Electronic particle counters equipped for counting particles down to a size of approximately 1 µm are useful. *In vitro* fluorometric measurements are also applicable.

Navicula pelliculosa

Various growth media may be used for keeping a stock culture. Information on suitable media is available from the culture collections. Note that silicate is required in the medium.

Navicula pelliculosa may form aggregates under certain growth conditions. Due to production of lipids the algal cells sometimes tend to accumulate in the surface film. Under those circumstances special measures have to be taken when sub-samples are taken for biomass determination in order to obtain representative samples. Vigorous shaking, e.g. using a vortex mixer may be required.

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ANNEX 3

GROWTH MEDIA

One of the following two growth media may be used:

OECD medium: Original medium of OECD TG 201, also according to ISO 8692
US. EPA medium AAP also according to ASTM.

When preparing these media, reagent or analytical-grade chemicals should be used and deionised water.

Composition of The AAP-medium (US. EPA) and the OECD TG 201 medium.

Component	AAP		OECD	
	mg/L	mM	mg/L	mM
$NaHCO_3$	15.0	0.179	50.0	0.595
$NaNO_3$	25.5	0.300		
NH_4Cl			15.0	0.280
$MgCl_2 \cdot 6(H_2O)$	12.16	0.0598	12.0	0.0590
$CaCl_2 \cdot 2(H_2O)$	4.41	0.0300	18.0	0.122
$MgSO_4 \cdot 7(H_2O)$	14.6	0.0592	15.0	0.0609
K_2HPO_4	1.044	0.00599		
KH_2PO_4			1.60	0.00919
$FeCl_3 \cdot 6(H_2O)$	0.160	0.000591	0.0640	0.000237
$Na_2EDTA \cdot 2(H_2O)$	0.300	0.000806	0.100	0.000269*
H_3BO_3	0.186	0.00300	0.185	0.00299
$MnCl_2 \cdot 4(H_2O)$	0.415	0.00201	0.415	0.00210
$ZnCl_2$	0.00327	0.000024	0.00300	0.0000220
$CoCl_2 \cdot 6(H_2O)$	0.00143	0.000006	0.00150	0.00000630
$Na_2MoO_4 \cdot 2(H_2O)$	0.00726	0.000030	0.00700	0.0000289
$CuCl_2.2(H_2O)$	0.000012	0.00000007	0.00001	0.00000006
pH	7.5		8.1	

- The molar ratio of EDTA to iron slightly exceed unity. This prevents iron precipitation and at the same time, chelation of heavy metal ions is minimised.

In test with the diatom *Navicula pelliculosa* both media must be supplemented with $Na_2SiO_3 \cdot 9H_20$ to obtain a concentration of 1.4 mg Si/L.

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The pH of the medium is obtained at equilibrium between the carbonate system of the medium and the partial pressure of CO_2 in atmospheric air. An approximate relationship between pH at 25 °C and the molar bicarbonate concentration is:

$$pH_{eq} = 11.30 + \log[HCO_3]$$

With 15 mg $NaHCO_3$/L, pH_{eq} = 7.5 (U.S. EPA medium) and with 50 mg $NaHCO_3$/L, pH_{eq} = 8.1 (OECD medium).

Element composition of test media

Element	AAP	OECD
	mg/L	mg/L
C	2.144	7.148
N	4.202	3.927
P	0.186	0.285
K	0.469	0.459
Na	11.044	13.704
Ca	1.202	4.905
Mg	2.909	2.913
Fe	0.033	0.017
Mn	0.115	0.115

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Preparation of OECD medium

Nutrient	Concentration in stock solution
Stock solution 1: macro nutrients	
NH_4Cl	1.5 g/L
$MgCl_2 \cdot 6H_2O$	1.2 g/L
$CaCl_2 \cdot 2H_2O$	1.8 g/L
$MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$	1.5 g/L
KH_2PO_4	0.16 g/L
Stock solution 2: iron	
$FeCl_3 \cdot 6H_2O$	64 mg/L
$Na_2EDTA \cdot 2H_2O$	100 mg/L
Stock solution 3: trace elements	
H_3BO_3	185 mg/L
$MnCl_2 \cdot 4H_2O$	415 mg/L
$ZnCl_2$	3 mg/L
$CoCl_2 \cdot 6H_2O$	1.5 mg/L
$CuCl_2 \cdot 2H_2O$	0.01 mg/L
$Na_2MoO_4 \cdot 2H_2O$	7 mg/L
Stock solution 4: bicarbonate	
$NaHCO_3$	50 g/L
$Na_2SiO_3 \cdot 9H_20$	

Sterilize the stock solutions by membrane filtration (mean pore diameter 0.2 μm) or by autoclaving (120 °C, 15 min). Store the solutions in the dark at 4 °C.
Do not autoclave stock solutions 2 and 4, but sterilise them by membrane filtration.

Prepare a growth medium by adding an appropriate volume of the stock solutions 1-4 to water:

Add to 500 ml of sterilised water:

- 10 ml of stock solution 1
- 1 ml of stock solution 2
- 1 ml of stock solution 3
- 1 ml of stock solution 4

Make up to 1 000 mL with sterilised water.

Allow sufficient time for equilibrating the medium with the atmospheric CO_2, if necessary by bubbling with sterile, filtered air for some hours.

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Preparation of U.S. EPA medium

1. Add 1 mL of each stock solution in *2.1–2.7* to approximately 900 mL of deionized or distilled water and then dilute to 1 litre.

2. Macronutrient stock solutions are made by dissolving the following into 500 mL of deionised or distilled water. Reagents *2.1, 2.2, 2.3,* and *2.4* can be combined into one stock solution.

2.1 $NaNO_3$—12.750 g.
2.2 $MgCl_2 \cdot 6H_2O$—6.082 g.
2.3 $CaCl_2 \cdot 2H_2O$—2.205 g.
2.4 *Micronutrient Stock Solution*—(see 3).
2.5 $MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$—7.350 g.
2.6 K_2HPO_4—0.522 g.
2.7 $NaHCO_3$—7.500 g.
2.8 $Na_2SiO_3 \cdot 9H_2O$—See Note 1.

NOTE 1: Use for diatom test species only. May be added directly (202.4 mg) or by way of stock solution to give 20 mg/L Si final concentration in medium.

3. The micronutrient stock solution is made by dissolving the following into 500 mL of deionised or distilled water:

3.1 H_3BO_3—92.760 mg.
3.2 $MnCl_2 \cdot 4H_2O$—207.690 mg.
3.3 $ZnCl_2$—1.635 mg.
3.4 $FeCl_3 \cdot 6H_2O$—79.880 mg.
3.5 $CoCl_2 \cdot 6H_2O$—0.714 mg.
3.6 $Na_2MoO_4 \cdot 2H_2O$—3.630 mg.
3.7 $CuCl_2 \cdot 2H_2O$—0.006 mg.
3.8 $Na_2EDTA \cdot 2H_2O$—150.000 mg. [Disodium (Ethylenedinitrilo) tetraacetate].
3.9 $Na_2SeO_4 \cdot 5H_2O$—0.005 mg See Note 2.

NOTE 2: Use only in medium for stock cultures of diatom species.

4. Adjust pH to 7.5± 0.1 with 0.1 *N* or 1.0 *N* NaOH or HCl.

5. Filter the media into a sterile container through either a 0.22 µm membrane filter if a particle counter is to be used or a 0.45 µm filter if a particle counter is not to be used.

6. Store medium in the dark at approximately 4°C until use.

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ANNEX 4

EXAMPLE OF A PROCEDURE FOR THE CULTURING OF ALGAE

General observations

The purpose of culturing on the basis of the following procedure is to obtain algal cultures for toxicity tests.

Use suitable methods to ensure that the algal cultures are not infected with bacteria. Axenic cultures may be desirable but unialgal cultures must be established and used.

All operations must be carried out under sterile conditions in order to avoid contamination with bacteria and other algae.

Equipment and materials

See under Test Guideline: Apparatus.

Procedures for obtaining algal cultures

Preparation of nutrient solutions (media):

All nutrient salts of the medium are prepared as concentrated stock solutions and stored dark and cold. These solutions are sterilised by filtration or by autoclaving.

The medium is prepared by adding the correct amount of stock solution to sterile distilled water, taking care that no infection occurs. For solid medium 0.8 per cent of agar is added.

Stock culture:

The stock cultures are small algal cultures that are regularly transferred to fresh medium to act as initial test material. If the cultures are not used regularly they are streaked out on sloped agar tubes. These are transferred to fresh medium at least once every two months.

The stock cultures are grown in conical flasks containing the appropriate medium (volume about 100 ml). When the algae are incubated at 20°C with continuous illumination, a weekly transfer is required.

During transfer an amount of "old" culture is transferred with sterile pipettes into a flask of fresh medium, so that with the fast-growing species the initial concentration is about 100 times smaller than in the old culture.

The growth rate of a species can be determined from the growth curve. If this is known, it is possible to estimate the density at which the culture should be transferred to new medium. This must be done before the culture reaches the death phase.

Pre-culture:

The pre-culture is intended to give an amount of algae suitable for the inoculation of test cultures. The pre-culture is incubated under the conditions of the test and used when still exponentially growing, normally after an incubation period of 2 to 4 days. When the algal cultures contain deformed or abnormal cells, they must be discarded.

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ANNEX 5

DATA ANALYSIS BY NONLINEAR REGRESSION

General considerations

The response in algal tests and other microbial growth tests - growth of biomass - is by nature a continuous or metric variable – a process rate if growth rate is used and its integral over time if biomass is selected. Both are referenced to the corresponding mean response of replicate non-exposed controls showing maximum response for the conditions imposed - with light and temperature as primary determining factors in the algal test. The system is distributed or homogenous and the biomass can be viewed as a continuum without consideration of individual cells. The variance distribution of the type of response for a such system relate solely to experimental factors (described typically by the log-normal or normal distributions of error). This is by contrast to typical bioassay responses with quantal data for which the tolerance (typically binomially distributed) of individual organisms are often assumed to be the dominant variance component. Control responses are here zero or background level.

In the uncomplicated situation, the normalized or relative response, r, decreases monotonically from 1 (zero inhibition) to 0 (100 per cent inhibition). Note, that all responses have an error associated and that apparent negative inhibitions can be calculated as a result of random error only.

Regression analysis

Models

A regression analysis aims at quantitatively describing the concentration response curve in the form of a mathematical regression function Y = f (C) or more frequently F(Z) where Z = log C. Used inversely $C = f^{-1}$ (Y) allows the calculation of, EC_x figures, including the EC_{50}, EC_{10} and EC_{20}, and their 95% confidence limits. Several simple mathematical functional forms have proved to successfully describe concentration - response relationships obtained in algal growth inhibition tests. Functions include for instance the logistic equation, the nonsymmetrical Weibul equation and the log normal distribution function, which are all sigmoid curves asymptotically approaching zero for C → 0 and one for C → infinity.

The use of continuous threshold function models (e.g. the Kooijman model "for inhibition of population growth" Kooijman et al. 1996) is a recently proposed or alternative to asymptotic models. This model assumes no effects at concentrations below a certain threshold EC_{0+} that is estimated by extrapolation of the response concentration relationship to intercept the concentration axis using a simple continuous function that is not differentiable in the starting point.

Note that the analysis can be a simple minimization of sums of residual squares (assuming constant variance) or weighted squares if variance heterogeneity is compensated

Procedure

The procedure can be outlined as follows: Select an appropriate functional equation, Y = f(C), and fit it to the data by non-linear regression. Use preferably the measurements from each individual flask rather than means of replicates, in order to extract as much information from the data as possible. If the variance is high, on the other hand, practical experience suggests that means of replicates may provide a more robust mathematical estimation less influenced by systematic errors in the data, than with each individual data point retained.

Plot the fitted curve and the measured data and examine whether the curve fit is appropriate. Analysis of residuals may be a particular helpful tool for this purpose. If the chosen functional relationship to fit the concentration response does not describe well the whole curve or some essential part of it, such as the response at low concentrations, choose another curve fit option - e.g., a non-symmetrical curve like the Weibul function instead of a symmetrical one. Negative inhibitions may be a problem with for instance the

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log - normal distribution function likewise demanding an alternative regression function. It is not recommended to assign a zero or small positive value to such negative values because this distorts the error distribution. It may be appropriate to make separate curve fits on parts of the curve such as the low inhibition part to estimate $EC_{low\ x}$ figures. Calculate from the fitted equation (by "inverse estimation", $C = f^{-1}(Y)$), characteristic point estimates EC_x´s, and report as a minimum the EC_{50} and one or two $EC_{low\ x}$ estimates. Experience from practical testing has shown that the precision of the algal test normally allows a reasonably accurate estimation at the 10 % inhibition level if data points are sufficient - unless stimulation occurs at low concentrations as a confounding factor. The precision of an EC_{20} estimate is often considerably better than that of an EC_{10}, because the EC_{20} is usually positioned on the approximately linear part of the central concentration response curve. Sometimes EC_{10} can be difficult to interpret because of growth stimulation. So while the EC_{10} is normally obtainable with a sufficient accuracy it is recommended to report always also the EC_{20}.

Weighting factors

The experimental variance generally is not constant and typically includes a proportional component, and a weighted regression is therefore advantageously carried out routinely. Weighting factors for a such analysis are normally assumed inversely proportional to the variance:

$$W_i = 1/Var(r_i)$$

Many regression programs allow the option of weighted regression analysis with weighting factors listed in a table. Conveniently weighting factors should be normalized by multiplying them by $n/\Sigma\ w_i$ (n is the number of datapoints) so their sum be one.

Normalizing responses

Normalizing by the mean control response gives some principle problems and gives rise to a rather complicated variance structure. Dividing the responses by the mean control response for obtaining the percentage of inhibition, one introduces an additional error caused by the error on the control mean. Unless this error is negligibly small, weighting factors in the regression and confidence limits must be corrected for the covariance with the control (Draper and Smith, 1981). Note that high precision on the estimated mean control response is important in order to minimize the overall variance for the relative response. This variance is as follows:

(Subscript i refers to concentration level i and subscript 0 to the controls)

$$Yi = \text{Relative response} = r_i/r_0 = 1 - I = f(C_i)$$

with a variance $Var(Y_i) = Var(r_i/r_0) \cong (\partial Yi / \partial r_i)^2 \cdot Var(r_i) + ((\partial Y_i / \partial r_0)^2 \cdot Var(r_0)$

and since $(\partial Y_i / \partial r_i) = 1/r_0$ and $(\partial Y_i / \partial r_0) = r_i/r_0^{\ 2}$

with normally distributed data and m_i and m_0 replicates: $Var(r_i) = \sigma^2/m_i$

the total variance of the relative responseY_i thus becomes

$Var(Y_i) = \sigma^2/(r_0^{\ 2} \cdot m_i) + r_i^{\ 2} \cdot \sigma^2/r_0^{\ 4} \cdot m_0$

The error on the control mean is inversely proportional to the square root of the number of control replicates averaged, and sometimes it can be justified to include historic data and in this way greatly reduce the error. An alternative procedure is not to normalize the data and fit the absolute responses including the control response data but introducing the control response value as an additional parameter to be fitted by non linear regression. With a usual 2 parameter regression equation, this method necessitates the fitting of 3 parameters, and therefore demands more data points than non-linear regression on data that are normalized using a pre-set control response .

Inverse confidence intervals

The calculation of non-linear regression confidence intervals by inverse estimation is rather complex and not an available standard option in ordinary statistical computer program packages. Approximate confidence limits may be obtained with standard non-linear regression programs with re-parameterisation (Bruce and Versteeg, 1992), which involves rewriting the mathematical equation with the desired point estimates, e.g. the EC_{10} and the EC_{50} as the parameters to be estimated. (Let the function be $I = f(\alpha, \beta,$

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Concentration) and utilize the definition relationships f (α, β, EC_{10}) = 0.1 and f (α, β, EC_{50}) = 0.5 to substitute f (α, β, concentration) with an equivalent function g(EC_{10}, EC_{50}, concentration).
A more direct calculation (Andersen et al, 1998) is performed by retaining the original equation and using a Taylor expansion around the means of r_i and r_0.
Recently "boot strap methods" have become popular. Such methods use the measured data and a random number generator directed frequent re-sampling to estimate an empirical variance distribution.

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