Evaluation of Aquatic Toxicity of Nanoscale Silver, Zinc Oxide, Titanium Dioxide and Cadmium Selenide Quantum Dots, and Their Ionic Particulates to the MetPLATE™ Bioassay

Brajesh Dubey, Lok Pokhrel, Amro El Badawy and Thabet Tolaymat

Current understanding on potential toxicity upon exposure of aquatic microorganisms to engineered nanoparticles (NP) is limited for risk assessment and management. Rapid screening test such as MetPLATE™ bioassay is envisioned as a promising tool for screening potential toxicity of NPs to aquatic microorganisms. We tested five types of NPs (citrate-nAg, PVP-nAg, nZnO, nTiO₂, and nCdSe Quantum Dots) using MetPLATE™ bioassay. MetPLATE™ bioassay is a simple, rapid and cost effective test that uses a mutant strain of Escherichia coli assay - the enzymatic activity of which is measured as the percentage inhibition compared to the untreated negative control. Toxicity of NPs was also compared with their corresponding dissolved ionic chemicals. The physicochemical properties of the NPs were characterized using dynamic light scattering (DLS), UV-Vis Spectrophotometry, Inductively Coupled Plasma-Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS), and electron microscopy. Results showed that ionic Ag, Zn, and Cd were highly toxic than their corresponding NPs suspensions to the MetPLATE bacteria. However, both nano- and ionic-particulates of TiO₂ were not toxic at concentration as high as 2.5 g/L. Moreover, fractionating nAg using 10 KD polysulfone hollow fiber membranes allowed us to distinguish nAg-specific toxicity from dissolved Ag ions toxicity. We found that ionic-Ag toxicity was 16X and 2.25X more toxic than clean citrate-nAg and polyvinylpyrrolidone-nAg, respectively. As the dilution and bioassay matrix constituted moderately hard water, the NPs stability was evaluated as a measure of particle size distributions (PSD) using DLS method. The observed nanotoxicity is explained based on the particle size distributions (PSD), zeta potential values, and sedimentation of the particles in the suspensions. Although we found that the tested NPs are relatively less toxic than their ionic forms, we caveat to disposing NPs into the receiving waters as physicochemical properties of NPs may change with changeable water chemistry which may alter NPs toxicity.

Brajesh Dubey
East Tennessee State University, Department of Environmental Health, Johnson City, Tennessee, United States of America 37614, dubeyb@etsu.edu, 423-747-0231

Lok Pokhrel
East Tennessee State University, Department of Environmental Health, Johnson City, Tennessee, United States of America 37614, lokraj123@gmail.com, 4237730138

Amro El Badawy
University of Cincinnati, Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, Cincinnati, Ohio, United States of America 45224, elbadaam@mail.uc.edu, 5137024117

Thabet Tolaymat
USEPA, Office of Research and Development, National Risk Management Laboratory, 26 West Martin Luther King Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio, United States of America 45224, tolaymat.thabet@epa.gov, 513-487-2860

Presenting Author: Lok Pokhrel