

**INDOOR AIR QUALITY: RESIDENTIAL
COOKING EXPOSURES**

FINAL REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	viii
Abstract.....	xi
Executive Summary.....	xii
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Study Objectives	1
1.3 Study Design and Project Overview	2
1.4 Pre-Test Summary	4
2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	6
2.1 Overview	6
2.2 Description of the Test House and Appliances	6
2.3 Description of the Tests and Cooking Protocols	11
2.4 Measurement Methods and Performance	23
2.4.1 Test House and Appliance Measurement Parameters	23
2.4.2 Pollutant Measurement Parameters and Instrumentation.....	25
2.4.2.1 Carbon Monoxide (CO) Monitoring.....	25
2.4.2.2 Nitric Oxide (NO) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO ₂) Monitoring.....	25
2.4.2.3 Real-Time Particle Monitoring.....	27
2.4.2.4 Integrated Sampling for PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀	29
2.4.2.5 PAH Sampling and Analysis Method.....	29
2.4.2.6 Elemental Analyses	31
2.4.2.7 Aldehydes.....	31
2.5 Data Analysis and Emission Rate Calculation	32
2.5.1 Analysis Objectives and Analysis Plan.....	32
2.5.2 Summary Statistics.....	33
2.5.3 Emission Rates	33

3.0	RESULTS.....	36
3.1	Test Descriptions.....	36
3.2	PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ Integrated Mass Measurements	43
3.3	Particle Concentrations and Size Distributions Measured with the ELPI.....	43
3.4	Particle Element Concentrations	60
3.5	PAH Measurement Results	66
3.6	Aldehyde Measurement Results.....	66
3.7	CO, NO, and NO ₂ Concentrations During Cooking Tests.....	66
3.8	Air Exchange Rates and Environmental Monitoring Data	91
3.9	Estimated Emission Rates.....	91
3.10	QA Data Summary.....	118
	3.10.1 Data Quality Indicator Goals for Critical Measurements	118
	3.10.1.1 Air Exchange Rates.....	118
	3.10.1.2 Particulate Matter.....	120
	3.10.1.3 Continuous Emissions Monitors (CO, NO _x).....	124
	3.10.1.4 Elemental Analysis.....	124
	3.10.1.5 PAH and Aldehydes.....	125
	3.10.2 Duplicate Cooking Tests.....	128
4.0	DISCUSSION	129
4.1	Indoor Pollutant Concentrations and Exposures During Cooking.....	129
	4.1.1 Particulate Matter Concentrations-Integrated Mass Measurements.....	130
	4.1.1.1 PM Concentrations during Typical Cooking Events with Gas and Electric Ranges	130
	4.1.1.2 Variability of PM Concentrations in Replicate Cooking Tests	134
	4.1.1.3 PM Concentrations during Worst Case Tests	137
	4.1.1.4 Comparison of PM Concentrations to Standards, Guidelines, and other Studies.....	137
	4.1.2 Continuous PM Measurement Results.....	140
	4.1.3 Comparison of Cook Personal PM Exposures and Kitchen PM Area Samples...	152
	4.1.4 PM Element Concentrations	153
	4.1.5 CO, NO, and NO ₂ Measurement Results	154
	4.1.5.1 CO, NO, and NO ₂ Air Concentrations during Standard Cooking Tests.....	154

4.1.5.2	Variability of CO, NO, and NO ₂ Concentrations during Replicate Tests	161
4.1.5.3	CO, NO, and NO ₂ Concentrations during Worst Case Cooking Tests	165
4.1.5.4	Relationship of CO, NO, and NO ₂ Concentrations in Cooking Tests to Guidelines and Standards	166
4.1.6	PAH Concentrations.....	166
4.1.7	Aldehyde Concentrations	168
4.2	Impact of Appliance Type, Cooking Method, and Type of Food on Pollutant Concentrations	171
4.3	Impact of Cooking Utensil	174
4.4	Exposure Reduction Methods.....	174
4.5	Emission Rates	179
4.5.1	PM Mass Emissions	179
4.5.2	Gaseous Combustion Pollutant Emission Rates (CO, NO, NO ₂)	183
4.5.3	PM Emission Rates Measured with the ELPI.....	186
4.5.4	Aldehyde Emission Rates	186
4.5.5	Element Emission Rates	187
4.5.6	PAH Emission Rates.....	187
5.0	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	189
6.0	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	194
7.0	REFERENCES	196
APPENDIX A Literature Review - Bibliography		
APPENDIX B Technical Review Group Members		
APPENDIX C Cooking Protocols		
APPENDIX D Gas Stove Tuning Methods		

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1	Floor Plan of the Test House (Not to Scale).....	8
Figure 2-2	Front Elevation of the Test House.....	9
Figure 2-3	Test House Gas Range and Cooking Utensils.....	11
Figure 2-4	Relationship between $PM_{2.5}$ Gravimetric Measurements and ELPI Measurements.....	28
Figure 4-1	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Concentration Indoors and Outdoors during the Seven Standard Cooking Tests with the Gas Range.....	132
Figure 4-2	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Concentration Indoors and Outdoors during the Seven Standard Cooking Tests with the Electric Range.....	132
Figure 4-3	PM_{10} Mass Concentrations Indoors and Outdoors during the Seven Standard Cooking Tests with the Gas Range.....	133
Figure 4-4	PM_{10} Mass Concentrations Indoors and Outdoors during the Seven Standard Cooking Tests with the Electric Range.....	133
Figure 4-5	$PM_{2.5}$ Gravimetric Mass Measurements in Replicate Tests with the Gas Range.....	135
Figure 4-6	PM_{10} Gravimetric Mass Measurements in Replicate Tests with the Gas Range.....	135
Figure 4-7	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Measurements in Standard and Worst Case Tests.....	138
Figure 4-8	PM_{10} Mass Measurements in Standard and Worst Case Tests.....	138
Figure 4-9	Particle Size Distribution during Gas Range Cooking Tests and Baseline Measurements.....	142
Figure 4-10	Particle Size Distributions during the Standard Cooking Tests with the Electric Range.....	142
Figure 4-11	Particle Mass Distributions during the Standard Cooking Tests with the Gas Range.....	143
Figure 4-12	Particle Mass Distributions during the Standard Cooking Tests with the Electric Range.....	143
Figure 4-13	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Measured with the ELPI during Self-cleaning of the Gas Oven (SC = Start cooking period; EC = End cooking period; ET = End total exposure period).....	145
Figure 4-14	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Stovetop Stir Fry Test on the Gas Range.....	145
Figure 4-15	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Bacon Test on the Gas Range.....	146
Figure 4-16	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Tortillas Test on the Gas Range.....	146
Figure 4-17	$PM_{2.5}$ Mass Measured with the ELPI during the French Fry Test on the Gas Range.....	147

Figure 4-18	PM _{2.5} Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Broil Fish Test with the Gas Oven.....	147
Figure 4-19	PM _{2.5} Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Bake Lasagna Test with the Gas Oven.....	148
Figure 4-20	PM _{2.5} Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Gas Range Top Burner Baseline Test.....	148
Figure 4-21	PM _{2.5} Mass Measured with the ELPI during the Gas Oven Baseline Test.....	149
Figure 4-22	Particle Mass Distribution during the Gas Range Stovetop Stir Fry Test (No. 2).....	149
Figure 4-23	Particle Mass Distribution during the Electric Range Stovetop Stir Fry Test (No. 9)	150
Figure 4-24	Particle Mass Distribution during the Electric Range Tortillas Test (No. 11)	150
Figure 4-25	Particle Mass Distribution during the Gas Range Tortilla Test (No. 4).....	151
Figure 4-26	CO Concentrations during Cooking and in Baseline Measurements with the Gas Range	156
Figure 4-27	CO Concentrations during Cooking Tests With the Electric Range	156
Figure 4-28	NO Concentrations during Cooking and Baseline Measurements with the Gas Range.....	158
Figure 4-29	NO Concentrations during Cooking With the Electric Range	158
Figure 4-30	NO ₂ Concentrations during Cooking and Baseline Measurements with the Gas Range.....	159
Figure 4-31	NO ₂ Concentrations during Cooking with the Electric Range	159
Figure 4-32	NO and NO ₂ Concentrations during French Fries Test with the Gas Range	162
Figure 4-33	CO Concentrations during the French Fries Test with the Gas Range	162
Figure 4-34	NO and NO ₂ Concentrations during the Broil Fish Test with the Gas Range	163
Figure 4-35	CO Concentrations during the Broil Fish Test with the Gas Range.....	163
Figure 4-36	NO and NO ₂ Concentrations during Full Meal Test.....	164
Figure 4-37	CO Concentrations during Full Meal Test	164
Figure 4-38	Concentrations of Aldehydes during Selected Cooking Tests	169
Figure 4-39	PM _{2.5} Mass in the Kitchen during Gas and Electric Tests	172
Figure 4-40	ELPI PM _{2.5} Measurements in the Kitchen during Gas and Electric Tests	172
Figure 4-41	Impact of Exposure Reduction Methods during Frying of Ground Beef.....	175
Figure 4-42	Impact of Exposure Reduction Methods during Cooking Pork Roast in Oven	175
Figure 4-43	Impact of Range Hood Exhaust on PM _{2.5} Concentrations	176
Figure 4-44	Impact of Range Hood Exhaust on PM ₁₀ Concentrations	176
Figure 4-45	PM _{2.5} Emission Rates (mg/kg food)	180
Figure 4-46	PM ₁₀ Emission Rates (mg/kg food).....	180
Figure 4-47	CO Emission Rates (mg/kg food)	185
Figure 4-48	NO ₂ Emission Rates (mg/kg food)	185

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1	List of Cooking Tests	12
Table 2-2	Cooking Times and Test Durations	18
Table 2-3	Summary of the Cooking Protocols.....	22
Table 2-4	Test House Environmental Measurement Parameters and Instrumentation	24
Table 2-5	Appliance Measurement Parameters and Instrumentation.....	24
Table 2-6	Pollutant Measurement Parameters and Instrumentation.....	26
Table 2-7	Minimum Detection Limits for Elements Analyzed by XRF.....	32
Table 2-8	Data Analysis Objectives and Plan.....	33
Table 3-1	Summary of the Cooking Tests	37
Table 3-2	Concentrations ($\eta\text{g/g}$) of PAHs in Cooking Oils	39
Table 3-3	Cooking Temperatures and Energy Use during Cooking Tests	41
Table 3-4	$\text{PM}_{2.5}$ Mass Concentrations ($\mu\text{g/m}^3$) during Cooking Tests	44
Table 3-5	PM_{10} Mass Concentrations ($\mu\text{g/m}^3$) during Cooking Tests.....	45
Table 3-6	Average Particle Concentrations in 12 Size Fractions during the Cooking Period.....	46
Table 3-7	Average Particle Concentrations in 12 Size Fractions during the Total Exposure Period of Cooking Events.....	48
Table 3-8	Average Particle Concentrations [dN/dlog (Dp)] in 12 Size Fractions during the Cooking Period.....	50
Table 3-9	Average Particle Concentrations [dN/dlog (Dp)] in 12 Size Fractions during the Total Exposure Period of Cooking Events	52
Table 3-10	Average Estimated Particle Mass Concentrations in 12 Size Fractions during the Cooking Period.....	54
Table 3-11	Average Estimated Particle Mass Concentrations in 12 Size Fractions during the Total Exposure Period	56
Table 3-12	ELPI Estimated PM Mass Concentrations in Background Samples Prior to Cooking Tests and Outdoors at the End of the Tests	58
Table 3-13	Concentrations (cg/m^3) of Selected Elements Measured in PM_{10} Samples	60
Table 3-14	Summary Statistics for Element Measurements Indoors.....	64
Table 3-15	Summary Statistics for Element Measurements Outdoors	65
Table 3-16	PAH Concentrations (cg/m^3) Measured during Cooking Tests.....	66
Table 3-17	Summary Statistics for PAH measurements.....	73
Table 3-18	Aldehyde Measurement Results.....	76
Table 3-19	Average CO Concentrations (ppm) Measured at Four Locations during the Cooking Period.....	78

Table 3-20	Average CO Concentrations (ppm) Measured at Four Locations during the Total Exposure Period	80
Table 3-21	Average NO Concentrations (ppb) Measured at Four Locations during the Cooking Period	82
Table 3-22	Average NO Concentrations (ppb) Measured at Four Locations during the Total Exposure Period	84
Table 3-23	Average NO ₂ Concentrations (ppb) Measured at Four Locations during the Cooking Period	86
Table 3-24	Average NO ₂ Concentrations (ppb) Measured at Four Locations during the Total Exposure Period	88
Table 3-25	Air Exchange Rates (hr ⁻¹) during the Cooking Tests	92
Table 3-26	Average Temperature (°C) during Cooking Tests	94
Table 3-27	Average Relative Humidity (%) during the Cooking Tests	96
Table 3-28	CO Emissions Rates during the Cooking Tests	98
Table 3-29	NO Emission Rates during Cooking Tests	100
Table 3-30	NO ₂ Emissions Rates during Cooking Tests	102
Table 3-31	PM _{2.5} Mass Emission Rates during Cooking Tests	104
Table 3-32	PM ₁₀ Mass Emission Rates during Cooking Tests	106
Table 3-33	Particle Emission Rates Measured with the ELPI during Cooking Tests	108
Table 3-34	Estimated Mass Emission Rates Measured with the ELPI during Cooking Tests	110
Table 3-35	Aldehyde Emission Rates	112
Table 3-36	PAH Emission Rates	114
Table 3-37	Element Emission Rates (µg/hr)	117
Table 3-38	DQI Goals for Critical Measurements	119
Table 3-39	Linear Regressions for 6-Point SF ₆ Calibrations	119
Table 3-40	SF ₆ Daily Calibration Checks for 100 ppb Standard	119
Table 3-41	Precision Summary of Duplicate Particulate Filters	120
Table 3-42	Variation in PM _{2.5} Sampler Pump Flow Rates during the Cooking Tests	121
Table 3-43	Variation in PM ₁₀ Sampler Pump Flow Rates during the Cooking Tests	122
Table 3-44	CO CEM Daily QC Checks	125
Table 3-45	NO _x Monitor Daily QC Checks	126
Table 3-46	Calculated Precision for Elemental Analysis of Duplicate Sample	126
Table 3-47	Calculated Precision for PAH Analysis of Duplicate Samples	127
Table 3-48	Calculated Accuracy for Aldehydes Analysis of QC Samples	128
Table 4-1	PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ Emission Rates during Replicate Tests	136

Table 4-2	Average and Median PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ Concentrations during the Six Standard Cooking Activities.....	139
Table 4-3	Summary Statistics for Average Concentrations of Particles Measured with the ELPI during the Cooking Period (Particles/cm ³).....	141
Table 4-4	Summary Statistics for Average Particle Mass Concentrations (µg/m ³) of Particles Measured with the ELPI during the Cooking Period	141
Table 4-5	Comparison of Cook Personal Exposure and Room Air Measurements of PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀	152
Table 4-6	Element Concentrations (çg/m ³) in this Study Compared to PTEAM.....	154
Table 4-7	Average and Peak Concentrations of CO, NO, and NO ₂ during Replicate Cooking Tests.....	165
Table 4-8	Impact of Worst Case Cooking Activities on Average Concentrations of CO, NO, and NO ₂ during the Cooking Period	166
Table 4-9	PAH Concentrations (çg/m ³) Measured in This Study Compared to the ARB Northern California Study and PTEAM/CARB Study	168
Table 4-10	PAH Concentrations Measured during Cooking Tests	170
Table 4-11	Comparison of Average Concentrations of CO, NO, and NO ₂ during the Six Standard Tests with Gas and Electric Ranges	173
Table 4-12	Impact of Exposure Reduction Methods on Average Combustion Pollutant Concentrations in the Kitchen during the Cooking Period.....	178
Table 4-13	Calculated Emission Rates for PM _{2.5} Mass (Gravimetric Samples).....	182
Table 4-14	Calculated Emission Rates for PM ₁₀ Mass (Gravimetric Samples)	182
Table 4-15	Formaldehyde and Acetaldehyde Emission Rates.....	187

ABSTRACT

A study was performed in a Test House in California to collect data that will provide a better understanding of the impact of residential cooking activities on exposure to particles and gaseous Toxic Air Contaminants. Particulate matter (PM), carbon monoxide (CO), nitric oxide (NO), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), elements, and aldehydes were measured. Thirty-two tests were performed to measure the impact of cooking during typical cooking activities with gas and electric ranges and to evaluate variables that might impact emissions. The study also included tests of worst-case cooking conditions and of potential exposure reduction methods. The study demonstrated that cooking can produce high concentrations of particles and gases. PM_{2.5} concentrations were over 1000 µg/m³ during stovetop stir-frying, frying of tortillas in oil on the range top burner, and baking lasagna in the gas oven. PM₁₀ concentrations measured in the kitchen, living room, and bedroom ranged from below the detection limit to 3660 µg/m³ in the 32 tests. Combustion pollutants were elevated in the house primarily during use of the gas range. CO concentrations during cooking periods were generally less than 4 ppm, but exceeded 9 ppm during preparation of a full meal and during oven cleaning. NO₂ concentrations were greater than 50 ppb during some tests with the gas range and averaged 400 ppb during the 5-hr oven cleaning test, exceeding the ARB Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Guideline of 250 ppb over one hour, and representing a significant source of exposure. Formaldehyde concentrations exceeded the ARB action level of 0.1 ppm (124 µg/m³) during oven cleaning and broiling of fish. Several PAH compounds were found in the fresh cooking oils used in the study, but the concentrations were low in the house during cooking. The data, however, suggest that additional study is warranted to fully evaluate the impact of cooking on PAH exposure. The results of the study demonstrated the significance of cooking as a source of exposure to particles and Toxic Air Contaminants. Because of the high variability of the emissions during cooking, it was difficult, however, to quantitatively determine the impact of variables such as food type, cooking method, pan material, or the impact of simple exposure reduction methods.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Cooking has been identified as a potentially significant source of indoor air pollution and personal exposure to Toxic Air Contaminants. Results of a number of studies suggest that cooking may be a major source of exposure to particulate matter (PM), combustion pollutants, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and other organic compounds. Epidemiological studies have found significant associations between increased respiratory symptoms and the presence of, or cooking with, a gas range. Despite the recognition that cooking may be an important source of air contaminants in residential dwellings, emissions from cooking and the resultant exposures have not been well characterized.

The current study was performed for the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to gain a better understanding of the impact of cooking on indoor air concentrations and personal exposures to air contaminants generated by cooking in residences. This study represents the first large-scale study of cooking emissions and the resultant exposures in a residential setting under semi-controlled conditions. The study included thirty-two cooking tests with a variety of cooking methods and foods. It addressed various factors that may impact emissions from cooking and evaluated simple exposure reduction methods.

Methods

To meet the study objectives, a test house was rented in Rohnert Park, California. The house was a small, single-story ranch style home constructed in the 1970s. The small size of the house (less than 1000 ft²) and the layout of the rooms, consisting of a kitchen, adjacent living room, and three bedrooms, resulted in good air mixing in the house even though the house air handler was not operated during testing. The house had an attached garage where a laboratory was set up. The test house was instrumented for the following measurements:

- CO, NO, and NO₂ with continuous pollutant monitors,
- Real-time PM concentrations and size distributions (12 size fractions from 0.04 to 8.4 μm, aerodynamic mean diameter) with an electrical low pressure impactor (ELPI) that recorded data continuously,
- PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ mass, collected on Teflon® filters with size selective inlets,
- Air exchange rates,
- Temperature and relative humidity (RH) indoors and outdoors,
- Range top burner and oven temperatures,
- Gas or electric use during cooking, and
- PAHs, elements, and aldehydes, in a subset of tests.

Following a pre-test and refinement of the study design and test protocols, a main study was performed that consisted of 32 cooking tests at the test house. The tests involved cooking with an electric range, gas range, and microwave oven. The electric range was used for seven cooking tests. These same seven cooking activities were performed with the gas range for comparison.

The microwave was used in three tests to compare emissions with the gas and electric ranges. All other tests were performed with the gas range.

Realistic cooking activities were performed during the study. They involved cooking activities such as stovetop stir-frying on the range top burner, frying tortillas in oil, broiling fish in the oven, and baking a pre-packaged frozen lasagna in the oven. The amount of food cooked was larger than would be typical in a residential setting, and the duration of cooking was generally longer than typical, in order to obtain sufficient pollutant mass for analysis.

Results

Average PM_{2.5} mass concentrations in the kitchen, living room, and bedroom ranged from below the method detection limit (3 µg/m³) to 3,880 µg/m³ during 32 cooking tests. PM₁₀ concentrations ranged from below the method detection limit to 3660 µg/m³. Indoor concentrations during cooking were substantially higher than the outdoor concentrations, which ranged up to 13.6 µg/m³ during the study. The highest concentrations occurred during operation of the self-cleaning feature of an intentionally dirtied gas oven. During routine cooking, the concentrations of PM_{2.5} were over 1000 µg/m³ during stovetop stir-frying, frying of tortillas in oil on the range top burner, and baking lasagna in the gas oven. Continuous, real-time PM measurements with an electrical low-pressure impactor (ELPI) showed that the particles emitted during cooking were primarily in the size fractions of less than 1 µm.

The median and average PM_{2.5} concentrations during the six standard (typical) cooking tests, which ranged from approximately 1.5 to 5 hours in duration, exceeded the federal National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) level of 65 µg/m³ (24 hour average). The median and average PM₁₀ concentrations would be expected, under typical indoor conditions, to cause indoor levels to exceed the State PM₁₀ Ambient Air Quality Standard and ARB IAQ Guideline of 50 µg/m³ over 24 hours. The data indicated that cooking can be a significant source of exposure to PM.

Element concentrations measured in indoor air PM₁₀ samples during the cooking tests exceeded outdoor concentrations for most elements. Of potential importance were elevated concentrations of chromium, titanium, nickel, and zinc during the oven self-cleaning tests. Due to the short test periods and low mass levels in the samples, element measurements were below the method detection limit in many samples.

As expected, combustion pollutants were elevated in the house primarily during use of the gas range. Average CO concentrations during cooking periods were generally less than 4 ppm, although concentrations higher than the ARB IAQ Guideline of 9 ppm (8 hr.) were measured during preparation of a full meal and during oven cleaning. NO₂ concentrations were greater than 50 ppb during four of six standard cooking tests with the gas range and averaged over 400 ppb in all three rooms during the 5-hr oven cleaning test, exceeding the ARB IAQ Guideline of 250 ppb (1 hour).

A number of PAHs, which ARB has identified as Toxic Air Contaminants under the grouping of Polycyclic Organic Matter, were identified by gas chromatography/mass spectrometry

analyses of bulk samples of cooking oils used in the study. During cooking tests with these oils, PAHs were measured in air samples collected in the kitchen. However, there was not a clear relationship between the presence of PAHs in the oils and the concentrations of the PAHs in the air samples. The concentrations of PAHs in the air samples collected in the kitchen during the cooking tests were within the range of concentrations measured in other indoor air studies. The indoor concentrations were generally higher than concurrent outdoor concentrations indicating that cooking was a source of PAHs. The data suggest that additional testing and analyses are warranted to more fully evaluate the impact of cooking on exposure to PAHs.

Formaldehyde and acetaldehyde, Toxic Air Contaminants identified by the ARB, were present in air samples collected during oven cleaning, broiling fish, and oven pork roast tests. During the 5-hr oven cleaning tests, the formaldehyde concentrations of 417 and 224 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ with the gas and electric ranges, respectively, substantially exceeded the Acute Reference Exposure Level (REL) of 94 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ (1 hour) (OEHHA, 1999) and the Action Level of 0.10 ppm (124 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) from the ARB IAQ Guideline (CARB, 1991). During the broiling fish test, the formaldehyde concentration of 129 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ also exceeded the action level. Acetaldehyde concentrations of 434 and 92 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ were measured during oven cleaning and fish broiling tests with the gas range. Although the aldehyde measurements were limited in scope, they indicated that cooking might have a significant impact on aldehyde exposures.

Oven cleaning resulted in the highest concentrations of the measured air contaminants in the house during the study. Of the six standard cooking tests performed with both the gas and electric range, the highest emissions of PM occurred during frying of tortillas in oil on the electric range and baking a frozen lasagna in the gas oven. Broiling fish also produced high PM emissions.

In worst-case tests that involved realistic activities such as heating cooking oils too hot or slightly burning food, indoor air concentrations and emission rates were generally higher than in the standard tests. With the exception of the oven-cleaning tests, the highest PM concentrations were measured during the worst-case stovetop stir-frying test.

The impact of variables such as type of cooking method, type of food, or pan material could not be determined quantitatively in this study. The concentrations of the air contaminants measured in the rooms and the emission rates calculated with the mass balance model were too variable to determine the significance of differences between different cooking activities. Adjusting the emission rates for the food mass lost or the energy used during cooking did not change the observed trends.

Tests with the microwave demonstrated that emissions of PM and combustion pollutants were lowest with this cooking method. It was the most effective exposure reduction method evaluated in the study. Tests with the range hood exhaust and range hood side shields resulted in lower concentrations of some of the air contaminants, but there was not a dramatic reduction in indoor air pollutant concentrations.

Conclusions

The data collected in the study successfully addressed the project objectives. The results provide a better understanding of the impact of cooking on indoor air pollutant concentrations and

exposure. The data indicated that cooking is a significant, although highly variable, source of PM indoors. Exposure to PM due to cooking may be substantial for many individuals, depending on the amount of cooking that is done and the duration of time spent in the home following cooking. With a gas range, exposures to NO₂ and CO are increased substantially. Exposure to formaldehyde can be significant during some cooking activities using either gas or electric ovens.

Oven cleaning was identified as the largest source of emissions of PM, CO, NO, NO₂, formaldehyde, and acetaldehyde. Data from the oven cleaning tests suggest that guidance should be developed to help reduce exposure to air contaminants during operation of the self-cleaning feature of gas and electric ovens.

The results of the study cannot be used to quantitatively assess the impact of different types of cooking methods, different foods, or other parameters related to cooking methods and utensils due to the high variability in the emissions. To evaluate the impact of these parameters, a much larger number of tests would need to be performed. These tests could be performed under highly controlled conditions in environment test chambers or in field studies under realistic cooking conditions.

The results of the study suggest that additional research is warranted to more fully characterize the impact of cooking on exposure to Toxic Air Contaminants, such as PAHs and aldehydes and to evaluate exposure reduction techniques under realistic conditions in residences.