Real-world laboratories for studying anthropogenic aerosol impacts on clouds and Earth’s climate

Thanks to:
Nicolas Bellouin, Reading
Matt Christensen, Oxford
Johannes Quaas, Leipzig
Santiago Gassó, Maryland

Velle Toll
velle.toll@ut.ee
and Heido Trofimov,
Jorma Rahu

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Institute of Physics
Real-world laboratories beyond ship tracks

**Type 1**
Ship-track-like linear cloud perturbations. Possible aerosol sources inducing such tracks include volcanoes, factories, towns, fires. 10 to few tens of km wide perturbations.

**Type 2**
100 to few hundred km wide cloud perturbations. Possible aerosol sources inducing such tracks include large cities, large wildfire outbreaks.

**Type 3**
Thousand(s) km wide cloud perturbations. Possible aerosol sources inducing such tracks are large industrial regions (like SE Asia, Eastern US etc)

**Type 4**
Increases in cloud droplet number at air pollution hot spots are recorded in long-term average of satellite-derived cloud properties.

Blue crosses mark polluted cloud areas.

Clouds polluted by aerosols in these images are brighter compared to nearby unpolluted clouds due to increased cloud droplet number.
What can polluted cloud tracks tell us?

1) Local CDNC response
\[ \frac{\Delta \ln(\text{CDNC})}{\Delta \ln(\text{SO}_4)} \]

2) Local LWP, CF response
\[ \frac{\Delta \ln(\text{LWP})}{\Delta \ln(\text{CDNC})} \]
\[ \frac{\Delta \ln(\text{CF})}{\Delta \ln(\text{CDNC})} \]

3) Meteorological dependence of aerosol indirect forcing, processes-level understanding

By sampling local cloud responses via natural experiments for many regions and cloud types (ocean, land, Sc, low-level Cu etc), we can estimate global aerosol indirect radiative forcing more reliably.
The cloud droplet effective radius ($R_e$) is strongly decreased in the polluted clouds.

On average, liquid water path (LWP) is only slightly decreased in the polluted clouds.

Comparison between polluted and unpolluted clouds

(Toll et al 2019 *Nature*)
Meteorological dependence of cloud water response

LWP response dependence on cloud droplet size supports suppression of precipitation.

LWP response dependence on relative humidity supports aerosol-enhanced entrainment.

There is a lot of variability in the responses under all conditions: processes controlling LWP increases and decreases need to be better understood.

(Toll et al. 2017 GRL)
Increased cloud fraction

Closing open cells

Longer lifetime

Decreased cloud fraction

Shorter lifetime

Norilsk, Russia

European part of Russia
Conclusions

Contrast between clouds polluted by anthropogenic aerosols and nearby unpolluted clouds at various spatial scales has been visually detected in satellite images.

Both smaller-scale ship-track-like cloud perturbations and larger scale hundreds of kilometres wide cloud perturbations show that cloud water decreases and increases in the polluted clouds act to compensate each other.

Polluted cloud tracks show that on average there is relatively weak decrease in cloud water due to anthropogenic aerosols. This decrease in cloud water off-sets part of the Twomey effect.

Cloud droplet number and cloud fraction responses to aerosols can be studied further using observations of polluted clouds at air pollution hot-spots at various spatial and temporal scales.
References

[https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1423-9](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1423-9)


Large-scale industrial cloud perturbations confirm bidirectional cloud water responses to anthropogenic aerosols. Trofimov, H., Bellouin, N., & Toll, V. (2020). *JGR Atmospheres* (under review)

Satellite images used in this presentation are MODIS and VIIRS images from NASA GIBS  