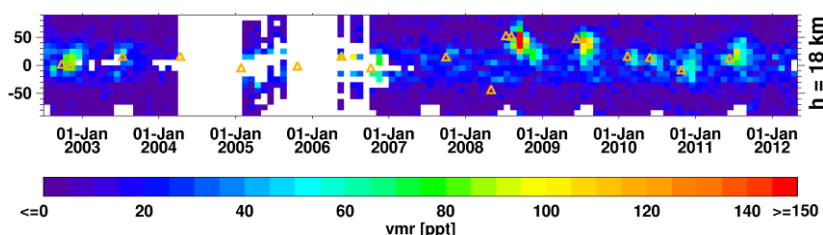


Volcanoes Cause Climate Gas Concentrations to Vary

First Comprehensive Analysis of Sulfur Dioxide Concentration in the Stratosphere/10 Years Measurements on Board of ENVISAT/No Identifiable Anthropogenic Sources of Sulfur Dioxide



MIPAS data confirm the correlation between high sulfur dioxide concentrations (yellow-red) and high-reaching volcano eruptions (triangles). (Figure: KIT/M. Höpfner)

Trace gases and aerosols are major factors influencing the climate. With the help of highly complex installations, such as MIPAS on board of the ENVISAT satellite, researchers try to better understand the processes in the upper atmosphere. Now, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology presents the most comprehensive overview of sulfur dioxide measurements in the journal of *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics* (doi:10.5194/acpd-13-12389-2013).

"Sulfur compounds up to 30 km altitude may have a cooling effect," Michael Höpfner, the KIT scientist responsible for the study, says. For example, sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and water vapor react to sulfuric acid that forms small droplets, called aerosols, that reflect solar radiation back into universe. "To estimate such effects with computer models, however, the required measurement data have been lacking so far." MIPAS infrared spectrometer measurements, however, produced a rather comprehensive set of data on the distribution and development of sulfur dioxide over a period of ten years.

Based on these results, major contributions of the sulfur budget in the stratosphere can be analyzed directly. Among others, carbonyl sulfide (COS) gas produced by organisms ascends from the oceans, disintegrates at altitudes higher than 25 km, and provides for a basic concentration of sulfur dioxide. The increase in the stratospheric aerosol concentration observed in the past years is caused mainly by sulfur dioxide from a number of volcano eruptions. "Variation of the concentration is mainly due to volcanoes," Höpfner explains.



KIT Climate and Environment Center:
For an environment worth living in

Monika Landgraf
Chief Press Officer

Kaiserstraße 12
76131 Karlsruhe, Germany
Phone: +49 721 608-47414
Fax: +49 721 608-43658
E-mail: presse@kit.edu

**For further information,
please contact:**

Kosta Schinarakis
PKM – Science Scout
Phone: +49 721 608 41956
Fax: +49 721 608 43658
E-mail: schinarakis@kit.edu

Devastating volcano eruptions, such as those of the Pinatubo in 1991 and Tambora in 1815, had big a big effect on the climate. The present study also shows that smaller eruptions in the past ten years produced a measurable effect on sulfur dioxide concentration at altitudes between 20 and 30 km. "We can now exclude that anthropogenic sources, e.g. power plants in Asia, make a relevant contribution at this height," Höpfner says.

"The new measurement data help improve consideration of sulfur-containing substances in atmosphere models," Höpfner explains. "This is also important for discussing the risks and opportunities of climate engineering in a scientifically serious manner."

MIPAS (Michelson Interferometer for Passive Atmospheric Sounding) was one of the main instruments on board of the European environmental satellite ENVISAT that supplied data from 2002 to 2012. MIPAS was designed by the KIT Institute of Meteorology and Climate Research. All around the clock, the instrument measured temperature and more than 30 atmospheric trace gases. It recorded more than 75 million infrared spectra. KIT researchers, together with colleagues from Forschungszentrum Jülich, have now developed the MIPAS successor GLORIA that may be the basis of a future satellite instrument for climate research.

Höpfner, M., Glatthor, N., Grabowski, U., Kellmann, S., Kiefer, M., Linden, A., Orphal, J., Stiller, G., von Clarmann, T., and Funke, B.: Sulfur dioxide (SO₂) as observed by MIPAS/Envisat: temporal development and spatial distribution at 15–45 km altitude, *Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss.*, 13, 12389-12436, doi:10.5194/acpd-13-12389-2013, 2013.

The KIT Climate and Environment Center develops strategies and technologies to secure the natural bases of life. For this purpose, 660 employees of 32 institutes produce fundamental and application-oriented knowledge relating to climate and environmental change. It is not only aimed at eliminating the causes of environmental problems, but increasingly at adapting to changed conditions.

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is a public corporation according to the legislation of the state of Baden-Württemberg. It fulfills the mission of a university and the mission of a national research center of the Helmholtz Association. Research activities focus on energy, the natural and built environment as well as on society and technology and cover the whole range extending from fundamental aspects to application. With about

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