Transport in Porous Media

Objective: Use a tracer study to estimate the dispersion coefficient, pore velocity and porosity of a sediment column.

Background: Material carried by a fluid flowing through a porous medium is dispersed by several processes; e.g. a) molecular diffusion, b) mechanical dispersion, c) stagnation in pore spaces, and e) spatial variation in hydraulic conductivity. In this lab you will observe dispersion in a porous media by observing its effect on a slug of tracer, M, released into a column of soil. The concentration of tracer at the end of the column is given by the 1-D advection-dispersion equation. The tracer travels at the mean pore velocity, $\bar{v}$ such that the arrival time of the peak is $L/\bar{v}$. In this lab you will use conductivity as a surrogate for concentration, and assume that there is a linear relationship between the concentration and conductivity, here $C$. Then, correcting for the background conductivity, $C_B$, the observed conductivity, $C_O$, should be,

$$C_O - C_B = [C_{max} - C_B] \exp\left(-\frac{(L \bar{v} t)^2}{4Dt}\right)$$

Here, $C_{max}$ is the maximum observed conductivity, D is the dispersion coefficient, and $L$ is the length of the column between the injection port and the measurement position.

Pre-Laboratory Activity: Prepare an EXCEL spread sheet that plots $C_O(t)$ based on the above equation. Allow the variables $C_{max}$, L, $\bar{v}$, and D to be adjusted with ease to produce new $C_O(t)$ curves. Using the following test values plot $C_O(t)$ versus $t$ for $t = 1$ to 20 seconds at 0.5 second intervals. Show that the peak arrival time and the duration of the peak are correctly reproduced on the graph. [See Chapter 3, Instantaneous Point Source in web notes].

You will hand in a copy of this graph at the beginning of class.

Test Values: $D = 0.1 \text{ cm}^2\text{s}^{-1}$, $L = 10 \text{ cm}$, $C_B = 5$, $C_{max} = 40$ and $\bar{v} = 1 \text{ cm} \text{s}^{-1}$.

Outline for Lab Report
1. Record the experimental set-up and procedure in sufficient detail that you could recreate the experiment ten years hence.
2. Describe the analyses used to estimate the dispersion coefficient, D, the mean pore velocity, $\bar{v}$, and the effective porosity, $n_e$.
3. Table of observed conductivity and a plot comparing observations to ‘best fit’
4. Clearly state your estimates for D, $\bar{v}$, and $n_e$, with uncertainty.
5. Discussion points:
   5.1 How do you know that turbulent diffusion is not contributing?
   5.2 Describe the processes that determine the observed spread of tracer.

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