Methylation of Guanine in vivo by the Organophosphorus Insecticide Methamidophos*

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Dedicated to Professor Erich Hecker on the occasion of his 60th birthday  
DNA, RNA, Alkylation, Insecticides, Methamidophos

The methylating capability of methamidophos, assayed by the formation of \([7-^{14}C]\)methylguanine in mouse liver, was investigated using a \([14C]\)-insecticide labelled at the O—CH\(_3\) group. Following i.p. administration of the toxicant, \([7-^{14}C]\)methylguanine could be isolated from liver nucleic acids of treated mice. The amount of \(^{14}C\)-label reached its maximum 6 h following administration of the insecticide. At maximum \(^{14}C\)-labelling, the amount of 7-methylguanine calculated as fraction of applied dose, was \(20—22 \times 10^{-4}\) and \(98—104 \times 10^{-4}\), for DNA and RNA, respectively. The results obtained indicate also, that an appreciable amount of \(^{14}C\)-activity is incorporated via the C-1 pool.

Introduction

Methamidophos (O,S-dimethyl phosphoramidothioate (I) is an important broad spectrum insecticide with pronounced systemic properties [1] and is sold under the brand names monitor (Chevron Chemical Co. USA) and Tamaron (Bayer Chemical Co. Germany). It possesses high mammalian toxicity [2] and is a potent inhibitor for plasma and RBC-cholinesterase [3—5]. It was recently reported [6] that methamidophos induces different types of chromosome aberrations in root tips of *Vicia faba* plant.

A number of organophosphorus insecticides were classified as alkylating agents [7] and the methylating capability of some of the 0,0-dimethylester type was reported recently [8—10]. In the present study, the *in vivo* alkylating capability of methamidophos towards N-7 of guanine of mouse liver nucleic acids was investigated. For this study an \(^{14}C\)CH\(_3\)-labelled preparation was used.

Materials and Methods

**Chemicals**

All chemicals were of analytical grade. \([^{14}C]\)Methamidophos had a specific activity of 4.16 mCi/g and a radiometric purity over 98%. Methylated bases (Sigma) were used as markers.

\([\mathrm{OCH}_3]^{14}C\)Methamidophos

Methamidophos was prepared from S-methyl phosphorodichloridothioate mainly according to procedures described [11] (Scheme 1). The dichloridothioate was allowed to react with one equivalent of \([^{14}C]\)methanol in chloroform at 0—2 °C. After stirring for 30 min, the reaction mixture was saturated with dry ammonia at temperatures below 10 °C. The isolated product was purified by partitioning between chloroform and water.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{H}_3\text{C} &\quad \text{–} \quad \text{S} \quad \text{–} \quad \text{P} \quad \text{–} \quad \text{CL} \quad \overset{14\text{C}}{\text{–}} \quad \text{CH}_2 \text{–} \\
\text{CH}_3 \quad \text{O} &\quad \text{–} \\
\text{Cl} &\quad \text{I}
\end{align*}
\]

Scheme 1. Synthesis of \([\mathrm{O-methyl}]^{14}C\)methamidophos.
**Animals**

Males of randomly bred Swiss mice, 20–30 g of weight and 3–4 months of age were given standardized food and water ab libitum. A solution of \(^{14}\text{C}\)methamidophos was injected intraperitoneally into the mouse. The doses used were 1.6, 4.4 and 5.3 mg/kg body weight. Doses were chosen in such a way to avoid signs of severe intoxications. At different time intervals, mice were killed with chloroform and organs were removed and stored at \(-20 \, ^\circ\text{C}\) till analysis.

**Isolation of liver macromolecules**

The radioactivity in mouse liver was determined at 3, 6, 24 and 48 h following treatment of mice. Total cell RNA and DNA were isolated from the liver homogenate in 0.03 M phosphate buffer, pH 6.8 using a phenol-extraction method based on techniques described earlier [12–15]. Nucleic acids were precipitated from the combined aqueous phases by addition of 2 volumes of ethanol and keeping overnight at \(-20 \, ^\circ\text{C}\). Protein was isolated from phenolic phases by addition of methanol followed by centrifugation at 1000 \(\times\) \(g\) for 10 min [15]. The separated protein was washed in succession with water, 5% TCA, ethanol:chloroform (1:1), acetone, ethanol:ether (1:1) and finally with ether.

**Base analyses**

The nucleic acids were hydrolyzed with 1 n HCl at 100 °C for 1 h and the hydrolysate was fortified with guanine, adenine and 7-methylguanine (200 μg each). Released bases were then fractionated on an ionexchanger column (10 × 1 Cm) of Dowex 50WX-12(H\(^+\)), 100–200 mesh using a gradient elution with 1–4 n HCl. The peak of 7-methylguanine was isolated and rechromatographed using the same system. The eluted fractions (5 ml each) were then measured for their UV absorption at 260 nm on a CE-595 Double Beam Spectrophotometer. Fractions were then dried over \(\text{P}_2\text{O}_5\) in a desiccator. Residues were taken in 2 ml methanol and diluted with 10 ml scintillator for counting of the radioactivity.

**Radiommeasurements**

Solutions of radioactive samples were analyzed for \(^{14}\text{C}\)-activity in a Nuclear Enterprises “Model 8310” liquid scintillation spectrometer. Tissues and protein samples were combusted in a Packard-Oxidizer system 306 and then assayed for radioactivity. The scintillation cocktail consisted of permabland (5.5 g) and naphthalene (120 g) in one liter dioxan.

**Results and Discussion**

The \(^{14}\text{C}\)-activity in mouse liver following i.p. injection of different doses of the radioactive insecticide into male mice is shown in Fig. 1. The highest
radioactivity in liver was reached to 6 h following administration of the labelled insecticide.

The isolated nucleic acids and protein contained $^{14}$C-activity. Table I shows the time course of $^{14}$C-labelling in relation to time and dosage. In general, the specific activity of the isolated macromolecules increased with increase of applied dose and reached its maximum 6 h following administration of methamidophos. The data obtained indicate a tendency of the insecticide to react with RNA than with DNA.

Base analyses were carried out so as to differentiate between $^{14}$C-incorporation and alkylation. Fig. 2 shows the elution curve and radioactivity profile obtained from chromatography of the HCl-hydrolysate of DNA on Dowex 50WX-12.

Analysis of RNA-hydrolysate using the same system as in DNA gave a comparable picture. In both cases, $^{14}$C-activity was found to be present in the adenine, guanine and 7-methylguanine fractions of the column effluent. Rechromatography of the 7-methylguanine fractions on Dowex 50WX-12 showed that about 76–80% of the chromatographed radiodose was associated with 7-methylguanine. The amount of 7-methylguanine formed contributed to about 9% and 13% of the radioactivity in DNA and RNA, respectively. At maximum $^{14}$C-labelling, the amount of 7-methylguanine formed, calculated as fraction of total applied dose, was $20–22\times10^{-4}$ and $98–104\times10^{-4}$, for DNA and RNA, respectively.

**Table I. Amount of $^{14}$C as dpm and µg methamidophos/mg nucleic acid or protein in liver of male mice following i.p. administration of different doses of [OCH$_3$-$^{14}$C]methamidophos.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time [hrs]</th>
<th>RNA [dpm/mg material]</th>
<th>RNA [µg methamidophos/mg material]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>540 (0.1)</td>
<td>700 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70 (0.012)</td>
<td>3200 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1250 (0.23)</td>
<td>340 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3560 (0.64)</td>
<td>4100 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>240 (0.042)</td>
<td>7070 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4400 (0.78)</td>
<td>420 (0.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>300 (0.054)</td>
<td>390 (0.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>400 (0.072)</td>
<td>1200 (0.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3170 (0.57)</td>
<td>630 (0.114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>40 (0.008)</td>
<td>17 (0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>135 (0.024)</td>
<td>440 (0.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>370 (0.07)</td>
<td>320 (0.057)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data are mean of three replicates.

$^{a}$ $D_1$ = 1.6 mg/kg body weight.

$^{b}$ $D_2$ = 5.3 mg/kg body weight.
The extent of $^{14}$C-labelling in RNA was higher than in DNA.

The alkylating properties of organophosphorus insecticides are well recognized and were already reviewed since 1967 [16]. A number of them were reported as potential alkylating agents [7], where the N-7 of guanine was considered to be the preferable site of alkylation [8, 9, 17–19]. The formation of labelled 7-methylguanine may be taken as indication for chemical alkylation of guanine moieties. On the other hand, the isolation of labelled guanine and adenine suggests incorporation of radioactivity, via C-1 pool in the biosynthesis of these nucleotides.

The decrease in $^{14}$C-label in DNA with time in vivo finds analogy with results previously reported for genotoxic alkylating agents [20–22] and some organophosphorus insecticides [8, 10, 12]. This may be attributed to fresh synthesis of nucleic acids and/or to repair mechanisms. The latter, however, is known to be a slow process.

The results obtained indicate a fair methylating capability of methamidophos, as compared with other organophosphorus insecticides. Methamidophos was reported to be readily dealkylated in vivo to give S-methyl phosphoramidothioic acid [23]. Alkylation of N-7 of guanine with small groups, such as methyl or ethyl groups, was reported not to correlate with carcinogenic or mutagenic effects [24, 25]. In a test battery, however, alkylation of nucleic acids may be of significance in evaluation of the genotoxic potential of a chemical, since it provides an indication that the toxicant could reach and react with the target with the formation of an alkylated product.

### Table II. Extent of $^{14}$C-labelling in macromolecules of mouse liver 6 h following i.p. administration of [OCH$_3$-$^{14}$C]methamidophos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Applied dose [µg/mouse]</th>
<th>Extent of $^{14}$C-labelling [as fraction of total dose $\times 10^{-4}$] in macromolecules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DNA$^a$</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>160</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNA$^a$</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>160</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein$^a$</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>160</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Data are mean of 3 experiments.