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Emerging investigator series: Photocatalysis for MBR Effluent Post-Treatment: Assessing the Effects of Effluent Organic Matter Characteristics

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Complete List of Authors:	Maghsoodi, Mostafa; Louisiana State University, Civil and Environmental Engineering Jacquin, Céline; Institut Europeen des Membranes Teychené, Benoit; Institut de Chimie des Milieux et Materiaux de Poitiers Heran, Marc; Institut Europeen des Membranes Tarabara, Volodymyr; Michigan State University, Civil and Environmental Engineering Lesage, Geoffroy; Institut Europeen des Membranes, Snow, Samuel; Louisiana State University, Civil and Environmental Engineering

This work addresses critical challenges to applying photooxidation processes to waters with significant organic matter content. Fractionation and characterization tools were used to better understand the effects of organic matter on these oxidation pathways. The results guide wastewater reuse efforts by identifying critical impediments to photooxidation processes in wastewater and demonstrating the potential use of membranes to overcome the challenges.

Emerging investigator series: Photocatalysis for MBR Effluent Post-Treatment: Assessing the Effects of Effluent Organic Matter Characteristics

Authors:

Mostafa Maghsoodi[1T], Céline Jacquin[2T], Benoit Teychené[3], Marc Heran[2], Volodymyr V. Tarabara[4], Geoffroy Lesage[*2], Samuel D. Snow[*1]

[1]Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Louisiana State University, 3255 Patrick Taylor Hall, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, United States.

[2]IEM (Institut Européen des Membranes), UMR 5635 (CNRS-ENSCM-UM), Université de Montpellier, Place E. Bataillon, F- 34095, Montpellier, France.

[3]Institut de Chimie des Milieux et Matériaux de Poitiers (IC2MP – UMR CNRS 7285), Université de Poitiers, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Ingénieurs de Poitiers, 7 rue Marcel Doré, Bâtiment 16, TSA 41105, 86073 Poitiers Cedex 9, France.

[4]Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Michigan State University, 428 S. Shaw Lane, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, United States.

[T]These authors contributed equally.

*Corresponding authors: SSnow@lsu.edu; Geoffroy.Lesage@umontpellier.fr;

Abstract: Dissolved organic matter (DOM) poses a serious challenge to applied photocatalysis. Membranes may offer a promising synergistic opportunity to enable efficient photocatalysts in

the presence of DOM. Membrane bioreactor (MBR) effluent from a municipal treatment plant was studied to elucidate the effects of filtration and organic matter composition on photocatalysis. Effluent samples were collected from MBR units during routine operation and before/after chemical cleaning. Additional DOM samples from the bulk supernatant were separated into colloidal, hydrophobic and transphilic fractions, providing a novel examination of the inhibition potential of DOM. These DOM fractions and the effluent organic matter (EfOM) samples were then characterized utilizing three-dimensional excitation–emission matrix (3DEEM) fluorescence spectroscopy and assayed for their potential to inhibit TiO_2-mediated photocatalytic degradation of a probe compound, *para*-chlorobenzoic acid (*p*CBA). The colloidal fraction of DOM was found to exert the strongest inhibition, followed by the transphilic, then the hydrophobic fractions; at 5 mgC/L, these fractions reduced the photodegradation rates by approximately 75%, 27%, and 17%, respectively. Of the effluent samples, EfOM from the recently-cleaned membrane caused the greatest inhibition of photocatalysis (~100% reduction at 0.5 to 2.0 mgC/L), whereas the effluent from the fouled membrane provided the least inhibition (~33% reduction at 2.0 mgC/L). The 3DEEM analysis predicted inhibitory action of both DOM and EfOM, based on total fluorescence volumes. Results here demonstrate the prospective utility of combining membrane technologies with photocatalytic processes.

1. Introduction

As the human population continues to grow, careful utilization of natural resources becomes increasingly more important. Water usage, and particularly reuse, is a critical topic for many communities.[1, 2] The development of membrane bioreactor (MBR) technology has been an important step towards wastewater reuse, given substantial advantages over conventional activated sludge systems in terms of improved efficiency and effluent quality.[3] Despite these benefits that stem from the use a physical barrier (membranes), several types of contaminants can pass through the membranes and pose significant health risks upon release of the effluent into the environment. Indeed, viruses have been found in the effluents of state-of-the-art MBR treatment plants.[4, 5] In addition, pharmaceuticals[6, 7] and, more recently, antibiotic resistant genes have drawn attention as significant concerns posing environmental and health risks.[8] Thus, MBR systems require a disinfection step post-filtration to provide a safeguard. Although UV disinfection can be used in lieu of chlorination, and thereby avoid the necessity for an added dechlorination step, there are disadvantages: UV treatment does not significantly degrade antibiotic resistant genes[8] and many pollutants are recalcitrant to UV at commonly applied UV doses.[9]

Given these post-filtration challenges, an integration of innovative technologies could provide the key functionality to eliminate the remaining hazards from MBR effluent. In particular,

photocatalytic materials applied in conjunction with existing UV dosing systems could produce reactive oxygen to destroy these contaminants via advanced oxidation processes.[9-12] Germicidal UV radiation, a subset of the spectrum of short-wavelength UV light, often called UVC,[13, 14] can be enhanced by the addition of photocatalytic processes to promote the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS). These ROS are known to be particularly effective at inactivating viruses compared to bacteria which have protective cell membranes.[15-18] For example, the inactivation kinetics *Escherichia coli* by hydroxyl radicals (·OH) or by singlet oxygen ($^1O_2$) have been shown to have a lag-phase where the cell membrane protects the bacteria's intracellular components against ROS attack,[15, 16, 18] whereas the genetic and essential components of viruses, such as MS2 bacteriophage, have very little protection and therefore no delay in their inactivation kinetics.[15, 16]A combined UVC-photocatalytic system is a plausible conception that could serve as an advanced oxidation process to oxidize pharmaceutical compounds in addition to providing disinfection activity.[10]

Application of photocatalytic processes to natural or waste waters faces a significant challenge in the form of non-target organic matter interferences. In the case of MBRs, effluent organic matter (EfOM) contains a variety of molecules that are known to quench hydroxyl radicals (·OH),[19] which are generally the most important ROS in any advanced oxidation—including TiO_2 mediated photocatalysis. MBR EfOM is a complex mixture of organic molecules such as

proteins, polysaccharides, humic substances and nucleic acids.[20-23] These molecules originate primarily from microbial activity (soluble microbial products, SMPs), produced during secondary biological treatment (via suspended or attached growth processes) , and are typically found at concentrations ranging from 3 to 25 mgC/L.[21, 22, 24-27] EfOM can interfere with photocatalytic treatment through different inhibitory mechanisms. First, EfOM absorbs significant amounts of UV light, limiting the amount of photons available for catalyst excitation.[28] Second, EfOM quenches ROS, preventing reactions with the target compounds or microorganisms.[29, 30] This competition for ROS between the non-target EfOM and the target constituents can occur in two ways: scavenging of surface-bound ROS by EfOM and quenching of bulk phase ROS.[15, 29, 31, 32] Within the complex mixture of EfOM, less than 2% of the dissolved and colloidal organic materials are considered target contaminants, such as viruses or pharmaceuticals that originate from the influent wastewater;[33] thus, most photocatalytically generated ·OH radicals will be quenched by reactions with non-target EfOM. Indeed, EfOM has been reported to scavenge between 65 and 95% of ·OH in conventional effluents and is considered the most important ·OH-scavenger in such systems.[34, 35] EfOM constituents, such as fulvic acid and humic acid (HA), have a net negative charge above pH 3 due to the presence of phenolic and carboxylic groups.[36, 37] These molecules can therefore

interact favorably with and adsorb onto the polar surface of TiO_2, reacting directly with ROS production sites.

It is important to understand the factors that control surface and bulk quenching mechanisms; ROS-EfOM reactivity and EfOM-photocatalyst adsorption affinities drive bulk and surface quenching routes, respectively. Different ROS have differential reactivities; for example, singlet oxygen ($^1O_2$) is less reactive and more selective than ·OH.[38] Likewise, EfOM constituents may also vary in propensity to react with ROS, with some compounds being recalcitrant to strong oxidants, while others readily react with weaker ROS, such as $^1O_2$.[30, 39] With regard to adsorption interactions, the nature of the photocatalyst surface will determine the type of EfOM molecules that will adsorb onto the photocatalyst surface. These types of interactions have been studied in depth for the case of membrane fouling by organic matter,[40-42] and offer potential insights into DOM-photocatalyst interactions.

Membrane technology can be used to selectively remove fractions of organic matter. In the case of an MBR treating municipal wastewater, the membrane's material, pore size, and fouling state affect its selectivity and, therefore, the composition of the EfOM.[43] It is known that, in general, hydrophilic macromolecular and colloidal portions of organic matter cause more reversible membrane fouling than other fractions in MBR systems by forming a cake layer.[41, 44, 45] Fouling changes the effective pore size and surface characteristics of membranes;

consequently, permeate quality changes over the operational timeline, since the last chemical cleaning event.[46-48] Membrane operation may control DOM retention and thereby the composition of DOM that passes through (EfOM); therefore, the time since last cleaning event could be an important parameter when considering the use of effluent disinfection strategies. The extent to which membrane operation time can be used as a control EfOM quality is not well known. A better understanding of the variability of EfOM constituents as a function of membrane operational parameters is critical for applying post-filtration disinfection technologies. Elucidating the effects of membrane operation on EfOM content provides an excellent opportunity to scrutinize the effects of EfOM constituents on photocatalytic processes, a significant area of need for the field of photocatalytic water treatment.

While TiO_2 systems have been studied extensively, the mechanisms driving ROS inhibition by DOM are poorly understood. A recent literature review quantified the number of research articles investigating “photocatalysis” and “natural organic matter” and found that of the 17,500 papers found when searching for photocatalysis, only 0.8% (137) also referenced DOM.[49] The segregation of DOM into fractions to discern phenomenological effects of constituents on photocatalytic processes is therefore a critical step towards practical application of photocatalysts. A study completed in 2014 on the effects of size-fractionation of DOM on the photocatalytic degradation of DOM by TiO_2 is perhaps the first report to scrutinize the inhibitory

mechanism by analyzing fractionated DOM samples.[50] The approach in the present study utilizes EfOM from differentially fouled bioreactor membranes and functionally fractionated bioreactor DOM to provide a novel assessment of inhibitory mechanisms of DOM in TiO_2 photocatalysis.

Bulk supernatant DOM and EfOM samples collected in 2015 and 2016 from an operational MBR in a municipal wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) are studied here. Fractionation of samples in terms of DOM size and hydrophobicity, a method commonly used to isolate organics, was applied to MBR bulk supernatant. Here, the effects of different fractions of bulk supernatant DOM and EfOM samples on photocatalytic processes are assessed to identify the most important fractions to reject during filtration. Three-dimensional fluorescence excitation-emission matrix (3DEEM) analysis is employed to characterize the resultant DOM from fractionation procedures and the MBR effluent samples, to better forecast and understand their effect on photocatalysis processes. 3DEEM is increasingly employed to understand DOM evolution in wastewater systems.[51, 52] A recent study also highlighted that 3DEEM can be used to distinguish proteins from biopolymers and humic substances and to quantify building blocks, with potential use as an on-line indicator to describe DOM fate and behavior.[53] Further, this technique has distinguished the effects of different types of DOM on water treatment technologies (i.e., membrane fouling, UV attenuation, and disinfection byproduct formation).[43, 54-56] Inhibitory profiles of the DOM fractions and EfOM samples are established by measuring the photodegradation of a

146 molecular probe as a function of total organic carbon (TOC) concentration. Inhibition
147 mechanisms are discussed in the context of an experimentally validated model that accounts
148 for surface and bulk phase quenching processes simultaneously.[29] Finally, comments are
149 made on the prospective utility of photocatalytic membrane reactors (PMRs)[57-59] as a combined
150 treatment process.

151

152 ## 2. Materials and methods

153

154 ### 2.1. Chemicals

155 Humic acid and 4-chlorobenzoic acid were obtained from Alfa Aesar (Haverhill, MA). Titanium
156 dioxide (99.9% Anatase) was purchased from Alfa Aesar with a nominal particle size of 32 nm
157 and surface area of 45 m^2/g. Ultrapure water (>18.2 MΩ-cm) was produced using a Nanopure
158 Infinity system (Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc., Waltham, MA). HPLC solvents were HPLC-grade
159 and obtained from Alfa Aesar.

160 ### 2.2. EfOM sampling

161 EfOM samples were collected from a full-scale MBR wastewater treatment plant (La Grande
162 Motte, France), which treats municipal wastewater and serves a population of approximately
163 60,000. The plant performs biological removal of nitrogen (nitrification and denitrification) and
164 phosphorus. The plant comprises four MBR tanks, each equipped with KUBOTA Submerged

Membrane Units® (SMUs, KUBOTA, Japan), which are flat sheet microporous membranes made of chlorinated polyethylene with an average pore size of 0.2 μm and a nominal pore size of 0.4 μm. Only two MBR tanks were studied. Here we define MBR1 as the unit which underwent chemical cleaning and MBR2 as a reference unit that did not undergo chemical cleaning during the sampling period. MBR2 was two months into a three- to four-month cycle and therefore was chosen to represent a membrane during normal operation. To assess the cleaning effect, activated sludge (AS) and permeate samples were taken from MBR1 and MBR2 one day before and one day after the cleaning procedure took place for MBR1 (June 2016). After sampling, AS samples were filtered with a 1.2 μm glass microfiber filters (Whatman GF/C) to collect the dissolved portion of the AS, labeled as the bulk supernatant (BSN). Hence, four samples from the MBR1 cleaning campaign and two samples from MBR2 were collected and analyzed for this study: and each sample was given a reference name as shown in Table 1.

In addition to the samples taken to assess the effects of membrane cleaning, 500 L of AS were also collected from MBR1 in June 2015 to perform DOM fractionation using dialysis and XAD-resins. Prior to fractionation the AS was filtered successively through 50 μm and 2 μm polypropylene filters to collect BSN. Next, softening was performed using a sodium cation-exchange resin (Purolite, France) to remove calcium and magnesium ions, to avoid ion

183 complexation with DOM and scaling during the following step: reverse osmosis (RO).[60] DOM
184 in the BSN sample was concentrated via RO in order to minimize the time required for the
185 fractionation step. A Filmtec TW 30 membrane was used for the RO process, since it is known
186 to be more resistant to DOM adsorption.[61] The RO process effectively concentrated the BSN
187 by 100-fold which was subsequently used to perform DOM fractionation.

188 ### 2.3. DOM fractionation

189 The first fractionation step consisted of isolating the colloidal portion of DOM by size exclusion,
190 using dialysis (3.5 kDa, Spectra/Por 6 Dialysis Membrane) against HCl (0.01 mol/L, pH 2).
191 Next, organic colloids were separated from colloidal silica and precipitated salts by dialysis
192 (3.5 kDa) against 0.2 mol/L HF.[62] The dialysate, approximately 30 L of HCl solution containing
193 DOM compounds with a molecular weight smaller than 3.5 kDa, was then passed through
194 XAD8 and XAD4 resins (Amberlite, Sigma Aldrich) arranged in tandem. This step allowed for
195 the collection of hydrophobic (HPO) and transphilic (TPI) fractions.[42, 63] The hydrophilic (HPI)
196 fraction, composed of low molecular weight hydrophilic DOM and salts, was collected in the
197 outlet of the resins tandem. This fraction, however, was not used in the study because the
198 solution contained highly concentrated salts, which co-precipitate with the organic matter.
199 Removing these salts, while possible, would have required a complex purification step called
200 azeotrophic distillation.[64] To collect HPO and TPI fractions adsorbed onto XAD resins, elution

201 with an acetonitrile/MQ water solution (75/25% v/v) was performed, followed by evaporation
202 and freeze-drying of the respective organic matter samples.

203

204 Table 1. Nomenclature of samples and fractions based on their respective MBR units, sampling
205 period, or fractionation procedure.

Label	Collection	Description
BSNf-MBR1	MBR1, Bulk Supernatant	Fouled membrane (Pre-wash)
BSNw-MBR1	MBR1, Bulk Supernatant	Washed membrane (Post-wash)
BSN-MBR2	MBR2, Bulk Supernatant	Midpoint between chemical cleaning events
Pf-MBR1	MBR1, Permeate	Fouled membrane (Pre-wash)
Pw-MBR1	MBR1, Permeate	Washed membrane (Post-wash)
P-MBR2	MBR2, Permeate	Midpoint between chemical cleaning events
C	MBR1, Bulk Supernatant	Colloidal fraction
HPO	MBR1, Bulk Supernatant	Hydrophobic fraction
TPI	MBR1, Bulk Supernatant	Transphilic fraction

206

207 ### 2.4. DOM characterization

208 #### 2.4.1 TOC and UV_{254} absorbance measurements

209 TOC analysis was performed using a TOC-VCSH Shimadzu analyzer (Shimadzu Japan). The
210 UV_{254} absorbance was measured in a 1 cm quartz cuvette using a UV-VIS spectrophotometer
211 (UV-2401PC, Shimadzu, Japan). The specific UV absorbance ($SUVA_{254}$) was then calculated
212 as the ratio of UV_{254} absorbance and TOC value.[65] These analyses are reported in Table S1.

213 #### 2.4.2. 3DEEM analysis

214 Fluorescence spectra were obtained using a Perkin-Elmer LS-55 spectrometer (USA) and a
215 procedure described elsewhere.[53] Spectra were divided into five regions as defined by Chen

et al.,[54] corresponding to different groups of fluorophores. The regions were categorized by excitation-emission ranges, as noted in Table 2. Region I is associated with aromatic protein-like fluorophores type I (tyrosine type); Region II is associated to aromatic protein-like fluorophores type II (tyrosine type); Region III corresponds to fulvic acid-like fluorophores; and Region IV and V are associated with SMP-like fluorophores tryptophane type) and humic acid-like fluorophores, respectively.

Table 2. Excitation and emission wavelength classifications of fluorophores.

	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V
Excitation, nm	200 – 250			250 – 350	250 – 500
Emission, nm	280 – 330	300 – 350	380 – 600	280 – 380	380 – 600

For qualitative analysis, spectra are represented in A.U. (Arbitrary Unit) and rejected fraction spectra (R) were calculated by subtracting permeate spectra from the BSN spectra, in order to better visualize the constituents that are rejected by the membrane. For semi-quantitative analysis, the volume of fluorescence Φ(i) (Raman Unit.nm^2) normalized by the Raman spectra,[66] consisting of the integration of the spectral regions, was calculated in the different spectral regions using the following equation taken from the fluorescence regional integration (FRI)[54] method:

$$\Phi(i) = MF(i)\sum_{ex}\sum_{em} I(\lambda_{ex}\lambda_{em})\Delta\lambda_{ex}\Delta\lambda_{em} \quad \text{(Eq. 1)}$$

where MF(i) is a multiplication factor, $\Delta\lambda_{ex}$ is the excitation wavelength interval (2 nm), $\Delta\lambda_{em}$ is the emission wavelength interval (0.5 nm) and $I(\lambda_{ex}\lambda_{em})$ is the fluorescence intensity at each excitation-emission pair (Raman units). $\Phi(i)$ normalization was necessary to compare values from different regions of the 3DEEM response. To do so, $MF(i)$ was calculated using Equation 2.

$$MF(i) = \frac{Total\ spectra\ area}{Specific\ region\ area(i)} \quad \text{(Eq. 2)}$$

For percentage analysis, the ratio between the volume of fluorescence of each region and the total volume was used.

2.5. Photochemical experiments

Photochemical experiments were conducted in an enclosed UV cabinet with a magnetically stirred photoreactor at room temperature. A 15 W low pressure mercury lamp (Sankyo Denki Co.,) was used as a UVC light source. The distance between the light source and reaction vessel was 20 cm. The irradiance at 254 nm at the location of the vessel was measured to be 295 μW/cm^2 with a BLUE-Wave UVNb-25 Spectrometer (StellarNet Inc., Tampa, FL). The UV/Vis emission spectrum for the lamp, shown in Figure S1, was also recorded. The DOM fractions and EfOM samples described above, along with HA, were used to show the inhibitory effect of organic matter on photocatalytic degradation of target pollutants. Experiments utilized

15 ml of solution, containing 5 μg/L TiO_2 with 10 μM para-chlorobenzoic acid (*p*CBA) as a probe compound that has a known reaction rate constant with •OH.[30] HA, DOM fractions, or EfOM samples in various concentrations were added to the reaction solutions to assess the quenching potential of each fraction. Sample aliquots of 0.5 mL were taken at fixed time points and analyzed for *p*CBA concentration via HPLC, according to methods reported elsewhere.[67] Briefly, this analysis was conducted with an Agilent HPLC (Agilent technology, 1260 infinity) using a C18 (125 mm) column using acetonitrile and 10 mM phosphoric acid as mobile phase solvents (60:40). The flow rate was 0.5 mL/min and the detection wavelength was 234 nm. For all photochemical reactions, *p*CBA degradation rates were obtained by linear regression of plots of *p*CBA concentration versus radiant fluence (μJ/cm^2). Fluence values were calculated according to Bolton and Linden (2003),[68] as described previously.[57] Importantly, these calculations account for reductions in UV_{254} transmission by using sample-specific UV_{254} absorbance values and the transmission distance inside the reactor. The resulting observed photodegradation rates (k_{obs}) were, to a good approximation, first order with respect to radiant exposure (H, μJ/cm^2) such that the units of k_{obs} are reported as (cm^2/μJ), according to equations (3-6):

$$\frac{dC}{dt} = k'_{obs}C, \quad \text{(Eq. 3)}$$

$$\frac{1}{H(\mu J/cm^2)}\frac{dC}{dt} = \frac{1}{H(\mu J/cm^2)}k'_{obs}C, \quad \text{(Eq. 4)}$$

$$\frac{dC}{dH} = k_{obs}C, \quad \text{(Eq. 5)}$$

and

$$k_{obs}\left(\frac{cm^2}{\mu J}\right) = \frac{k'_{obs}\left(\frac{1}{s}\right)}{E\left(\frac{\mu W}{cm^2}\right)}. \quad \text{(Eq. 6)}$$

Here, k'_{obs} (s^{-1}) is the first-order degradation rate constant of *p*CBA, C is the molar concentration of *p*CBA, and E is the irradiance ($\mu W/cm^2$) at 254 nm. The differences in the k_{obs} in the presence or absence of organic compounds were used to quantify the inhibitory effect of these compounds. Control experiments were also conducted in the absence of organic matter, TiO_2, or light.

3. Results

3.1. Isolated DOM fractions

Prior to performing photocatalytic experiments, DOM fractions were characterized using 3DEEM to identify molecular characteristics of DOM within each fraction. The 3DEEM spectra compiled for the fractions are available elsewhere[23] and were used here to quantify the volume of fluorescence and the percentage of fluorescence of each region in Figure 1.

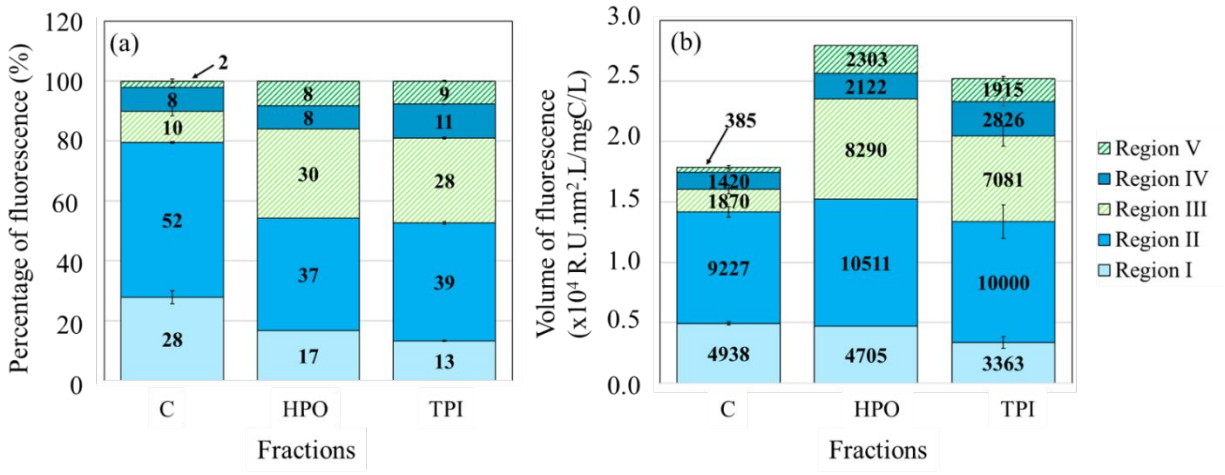


Figure 1. (a) Percentage of fluorescence and (b) Volume of fluorescence of the colloidal (C), HPO and TPI fractions prepared at 1 mgC/L. Region I, Region II, Region III, Region IV and Region V correspond to aromatic proteins-like type I, aromatic proteins-like type II, fulvic-like, SMP-like and humic-like fluorophores, respectively.

3DEEM analysis showed that each of the three DOM fractions contained both classes of fluorescent compounds: proteins (Regions I, II and IV) and humic substances (Region III and V). However, as seen in Figure 1a, DOM fractions exhibited different fluorescent properties, reflecting differences in their compositions. The percentages of fluorescence of HPO and TPI fractions were similar for all regions and had a dominant proportion of aromatic protein-like type II and fulvic-like fluorophores (Figure 1a). That HPO and TPI compositions did not vary significantly in terms of fluorophore content expected; a study on EfOM of wastewater treatment plants also found that these fractions were similar in terms of fluorophore composition.[69] For the colloidal fraction, 80% of the fluorescent compounds were aromatic protein-like type I and II fluorophores. Recent studies showed that both protein-like and humic-

like fluorophores impact photocatalytic performance. Protein-like constituents were found to react with •OH radicals in bulk solution,[55] with reported reaction rate constants of amino acids, proteins, and peptides with •OH ranging from 1.7×10^{7} to 1.05×10^{10} M^{-1} s^{-1} (the rate constant between *p*CBA and •OH is similar at 5.2×10^{9} M^{-1} s^{-1}),[70-72] while humic-like compounds, having a large number of carboxylic groups, adsorbed onto TiO_2 surfaces, particularly at low pHs.[73] Thus, the high proportion of fluorescing compounds in Region I and II in colloids, suggests that the colloids may be more reactive with •OH than HPO and TPI. On the contrary, HPO and TPI are expected to exhibit more surface-phase quenching by adsorbing more strongly onto TiO_2 and than the colloids.

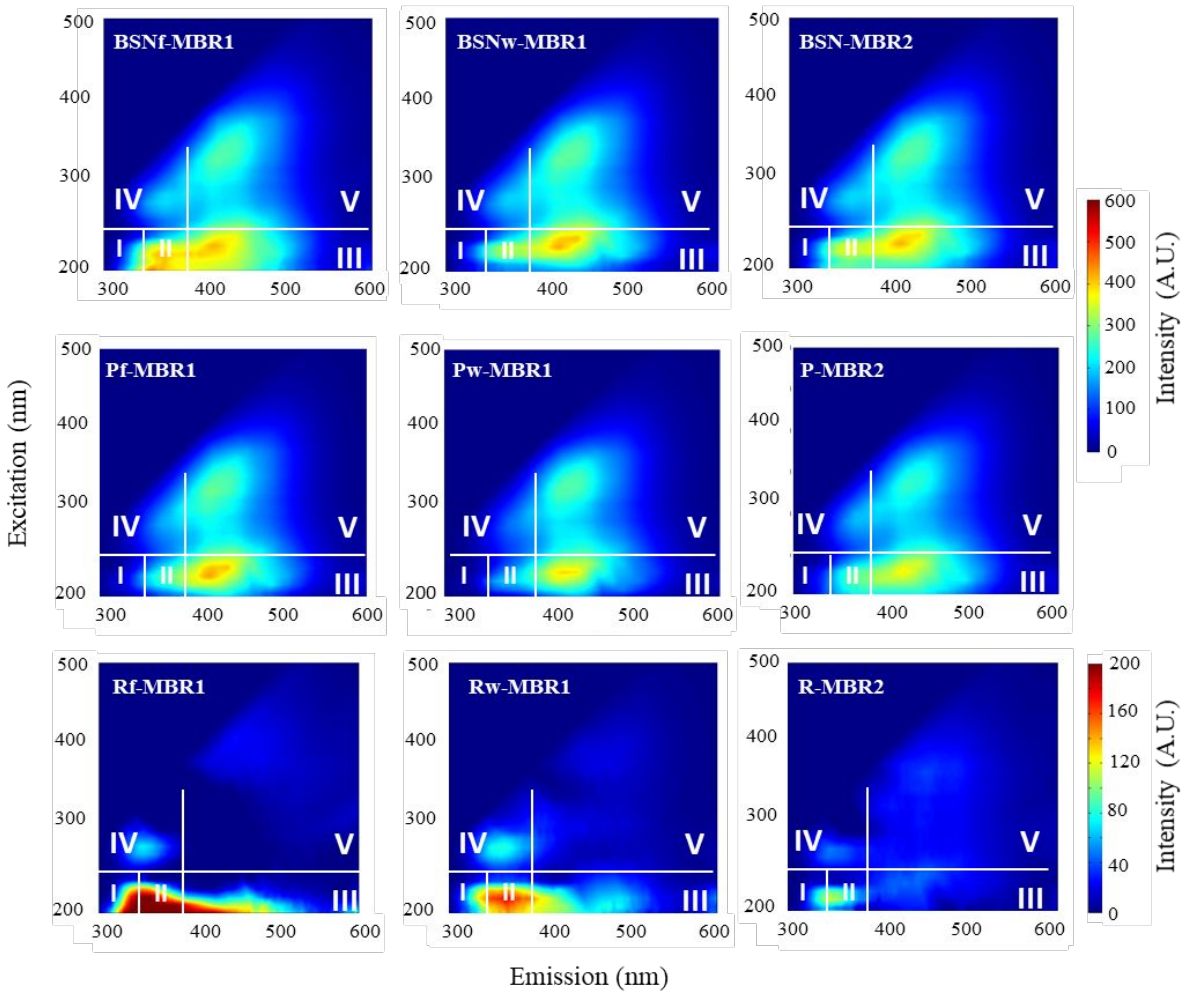
The volume of fluorescence is an indicator proportional to the concentration of fluorophores contained in each region. The higher electron density of fluorophores compared with other moieties could yield higher reactivity with ROS, and it would follow, then, that the higher the volume of fluorescence, the higher the quenching of photocatalysis. Thus, from Figure 2b, and hypothesizing that surface-phase quenching is the most problematic for photocatalysis, the DOM quenching potency could be expected in the following order: HPO>TPI>C. A similar analysis can be conducted by measuring the $SUVA_{254}$ values as a representation of average aromatic moiety content, which is known to loosely indicate DOM hydrophilicity.[74] In general, DOM compounds with higher $SUVA_{254}$ values are considered to be more hydrophobic than

317 those with lower values.[75] In addition, higher $SUVA_{254}$ values correspond to more aromaticity,
318 which could indicate higher reactivity with ROS, given the electron rich moieties. The $SUVA_{254}$
319 values for the colloidal, HPO, and TPI fractions were measured to be 1.8, 2.2, and 1.6 $L.mg^{-1}.m^{-1}$,
320 respectively. Based on this method of analysis, and assuming that electron-dense
321 functional groups are the primary factor in determining ROS quenching, the inhibition capacity
322 of the fractions could be expected in this order: HPO>C>TPI. Neither of these methods are
323 expected to conclusively predict the true inhibition potential, given the many additional factors
324 involved with quenching mechanisms.

325 ### 3.2. EfOM composition and effect of membrane fouling

326 To estimate the effect of membrane fouling and cleaning on the retention of fluorophores,
327 3DEEM spectra of MBR bulk supernatant and permeate were compared (Figure 2). The
328 membranes rejected most compounds from Regions I and II in the three MBR cases studied.
329 This selectivity was apparent in the 3DEEM spectra obtained by subtracting the permeate
330 spectrum from the BSN spectrum. It is likely that most of these aromatic-like fluorophores were
331 associated with organic colloids since they represented 80% of the overall colloidal
332 content. This observation is consistent with a previous study that demonstrated that colloids
333 were major membrane foulants.[23]

334



335

336 Figure 2. Fluorescence spectra of DOM from BSN and EfOM from permeate samples, with I, II, III, IV,
337 V corresponding to Region I (aromatic proteins-like type I), Region II (aromatic proteins-like type II),
338 Region III (fulvic-like), Region IV (SMP-like) and Region V (humic-like). R spectra correspond to the
339 mathematical subtraction of the permeate spectra from the bulk supernatant spectra allowing the
340 identification of compounds retained by the membrane. Note the different color scale for the R spectra.

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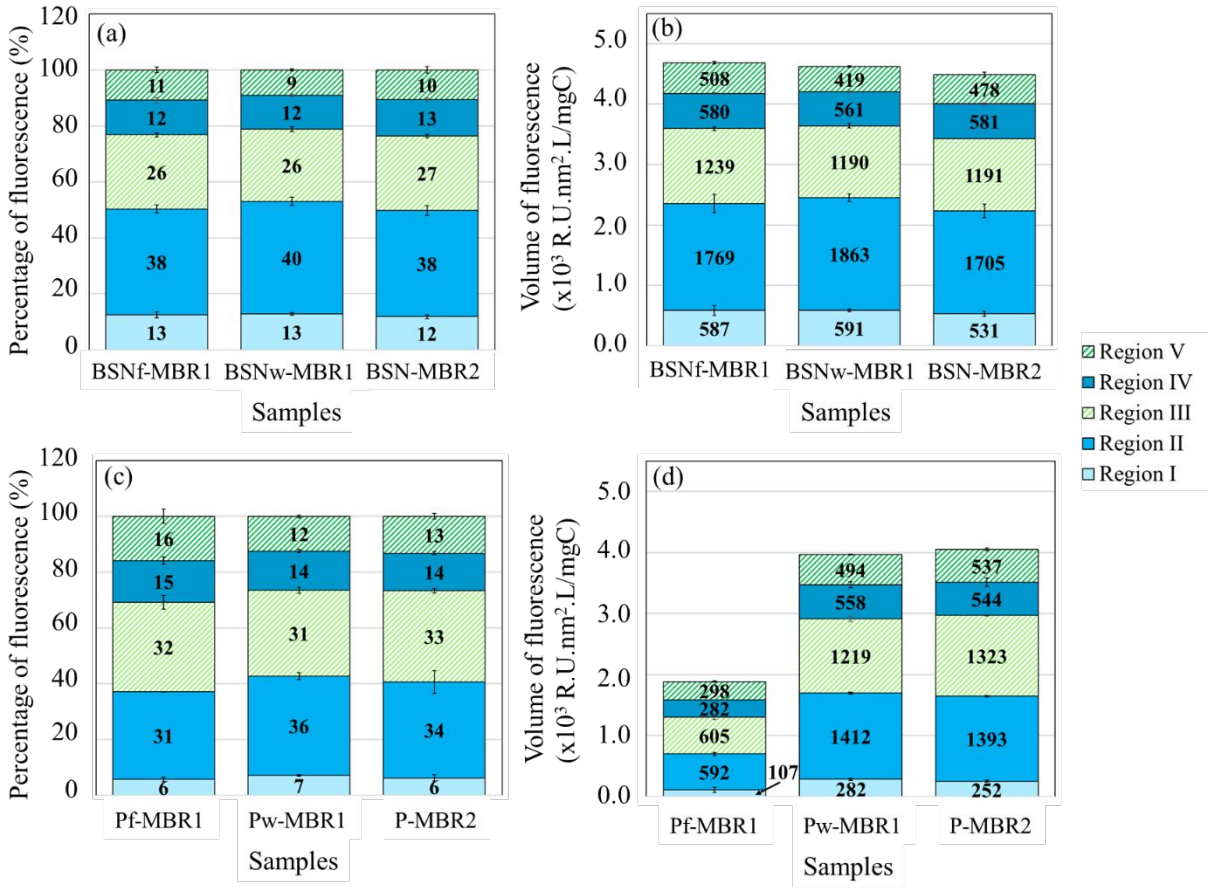


Figure 3. Percentage (a, c) and volume (b, d) fluorescence values for bulk supernatant (a, b) and permeate (c, d) samples.

Figures 3a and 3c show the fluorophore compositions in EfOM samples as percentages of the different regions; these data showed a preferential rejection of the fluorophores from Region I and Region II. Indeed, for the three samples, the membrane reduced the fluorescence by 11 ± 2 % in both Region I and II. This reduction corresponded to an increase of fluorescence percentage of the Regions III and V in the permeate. The relative increase of the humic substance-related fluorophores confirmed that the membrane preferentially retains colloids, since they are typically high molecular weight molecules associated with protein-like fluorophores (Figure 1a).[53] Membrane fouling clearly affected the type of fluorophores retained

in the MBR (Figure 3b and Figure 3d). The three fouling stages present similar bulk supernatant volumes of fluorescence (Figure 3b) and permeate percentage of fluorescence profiles (Figure 3c), but different volumes of fluorescence in the permeate (Figure 3d). The TOC normalized volume of fluorescence for Pf-MBR1 was reduced by 60% (Figure 3b and Figure 3d), while the volume of fluorescence was only reduced by 14% and 10% for P-MBR2 and Pw-MBR1, respectively (Figure 3b and Figure 3d). Membrane fouling therefore has a clear effect on fluorophore quantity, via restricting EfOM permeation (Figure 3b). Indeed, more fluorescent compounds are retained, on a per carbon basis, by a fouled membrane. This result shows that the fouling layer on the membrane surface selectively removes compounds rich in functional groups with high electron density, which are more reactive with ROS than other moieties. Pw-MBR1 and P-MBR2 are therefore expected to quench photocatalysis to a greater extent. This assumption is supported by the $SUVA_{254}$ data: values for the Pf-MBR1, Pw-MBR1, and P-MBR2 samples were measured to be 0.8, 2.0, and 2.0 $L \cdot mg^{-1} \cdot m^{-1}$, respectively. Pf-MBR1, having a $SUVA_{254}$ value of 0.8 $L \cdot mg^{-1} \cdot m^{-1}$, is characterized by non-aromatic organic compounds and therefore fewer potential functional groups reactive with ROS. On the contrary, Pw-MBR1 and P-MBR2, with $SUVA_{254}$ values of 2.0 $L \cdot mg^{-1} \cdot m^{-1}$, contain more aromatic compounds, which may preferentially compete with ROS.

374 Control of membrane fouling may provide an opportunity to increase photocatalysis process
375 efficiency by regulating the chemical makeup and concentration of EfOM. Less frequent
376 cleaning events could be ideal, since the fouled membranes provided the highest DOM
377 retention. From the fluorescence volumes, it is expected that TiO_2 photocatalysis would be
378 quenched to a greater extent by Pw-MBR1 and P-MBR2, than by Pf-MBR1.

379 3.3. Inhibition of •OH by DOM Fractions

380 Segregation of MBR DOM into functional categories allowed for a unique examination of the
381 inhibition potential of these functional classes of compounds. Colloidal, HPO, and TPI fractions
382 were each examined for concentration-dependent inhibitory activity. Control tests confirmed
383 the photocatalytic action of TiO_2 and differentiated the role of ROS from the direct photolysis
384 by UV_{254} light (Figure S3). The action by UV_{254} alone represented the lower bound of $k_{obs,pCBA}$,
385 where •OH radicals were completely quenched by DOM. Likewise, the case of TiO_2 and *p*CBA
386 in pure water served as the upper bound of photocatalytic efficiency, with no interfering
387 quenching agents. The $k_{obs,pCBA}$ values plotted in Figure 4 showed that of the three DOM
388 fractions, colloids exerted the strongest inhibition by far. The corresponding k'_{obs} (s^{-1}) data is
389 shown in Figure S4. The TPI and HPO portions were similar in their effect on $k_{obs,pCBA}$, and
390 exerted mild inhibition at low TOC concentrations. Interestingly, for both TPI and HPO, the
391 $k_{obs,pCBA}$ increased from 7.5 to 10 mgC/L. This increase in photodegradation efficacy was

392 surprising but not unprecedented; it was recently reported that Natural Organic Matter (NOM)
393 actually enhanced the TiO_2-driven photodegradation of carbamazepine, pharmaceutical
394 compound, at specific TiO_2:NOM ratios, by up to 8%.[76] Favorable NOM-carbamazepine
395 interactions explained the increased effectiveness; these interactions draw the compound
396 closer to the active surface sites of TiO_2, where •OH are present at higher concentrations. The
397 colloidal fraction did not increase the photoactivity at any concentration. Examination of the
398 inhibition profiles of the three DOM fractions in the context of 3DEEM analysis (Figure 1)
399 suggested that the quenching action of the DOM fractions is correlated to higher concentration
400 of colloids, which are characterized by a higher proportion of fluorescence in Region I and
401 Region II (Figure 1a). This observation suggests that despite higher volumes of fluorescence,
402 HPO and TPI are less potent inhibitors of photocatalysis than the colloids. The surface
403 interactions, and therefore inhibition mechanism, of the colloids with the TiO_2 surface could be
404 fundamentally different from that of the HPO and TPI fractions, because the colloidal fraction
405 was not segregated based on surface character, but rather by size only. Control of membrane
406 surface properties and fouling could reduce the colloidal content—much of which consists of
407 high molecular weight molecules that can be preferentially retained—in EfOM and thereby
408 mitigate the quenching of photocatalytic processes by DOM.[23]

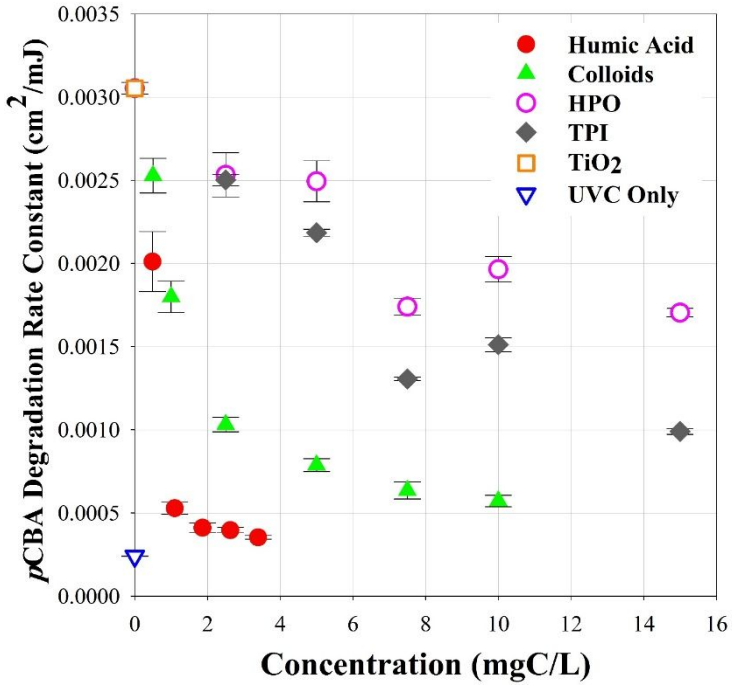


Figure 4: *p*CBA degradation rate constants in the presence of 5 mg/L TiO_2 and various concentrations of colloids, TPI, HPO, and HA are depicted here. The rate constant for *p*CBA degradation by UVC without TiO_2 is also shown. Ambient temperature was measured at 24 °C.

3.4. Inhibition of •OH by EfOM

The EfOM of the three MBR permeate samples, as described above, was tested for inhibition potential of •OH-mediated *p*CBA degradation. The samples were examined on a TOC basis to discern changes in inhibition potential caused by qualitative differences in EfOM composition. A low concentration of TiO_2, relative to that used in similar studies on photocatalyst-DOM interactions,[29, 38, 77, 78] was selected to avoid the effects of EfOM

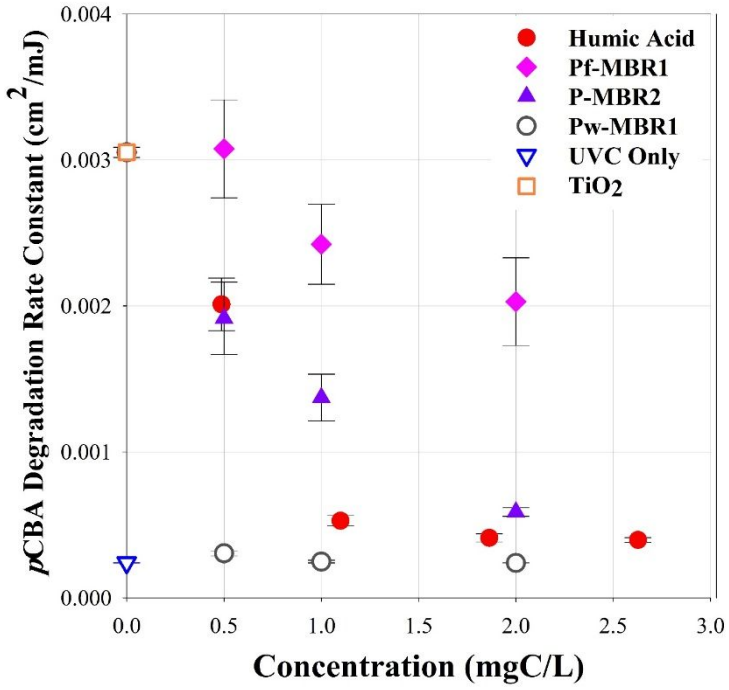
421 transformation by oxidation. Hour-long UVC irradiation experiments with 10 mg/L HA and
422 various concentrations of TiO_2 showed that *p*CBA photodegradation kinetics were linear for
423 the TiO_2 concentration of 5 mg/L. Tests with TiO_2 concentrations of 100 mg/L or higher showed
424 accelerating kinetics and suggested that HA was itself being degraded by •OH radicals so that
425 its inhibition potential changed with time.

426 The inhibition capacities of MBR EfOM samples were evaluated by measuring $k_{obs,pCBA}$ as a
427 function of individual EfOM sample concentrations. These rates were calculated across
428 concentrations ranging from 0 to 2.3 mgC/L (Figure 5). The corresponding k'_{obs} (1) data is
429 shown in Figure S5. Comparing $k_{obs,pCBA}$ values for the same TOC content reveals that the
430 state of membrane fouling drove clear distinctions in inhibitory activity of the EfOM. While it
431 was expected that a fouled membrane would reject more DOM than a clean membrane, the
432 inhibition capacity on a per carbon basis was not known. Here, it was observed that EfOM from
433 a fouled membrane system inhibited the photocatalytic process much less than EfOM from a
434 cleaned membrane. At just 0.5 mgC/L, Pw-MBR1 quenched the photocatalytic process
435 completely, while no quenching was observed by Pf-MBR1 EfOM at the same concentration.
436 This result provides evidence that the changes in EfOM composition caused by membrane
437 fouling; the reduction of colloid concentration and total fluorophores is especially beneficial for
438 photocatalytic operation. 3DEEM confirmed that molecules containing fluorescent groups in

439 Regions I and II impact photocatalytic performance more than other compounds. Qualitative
440 changes in DOM retention by the membrane, therefore, impacted the photocatalytic quenching
441 process. Considering these results in the context of the DOM fractions analysis, retention of
442 organic colloids by the fouled membrane was likely enhanced by the formation of a fouling
443 layer.[3, 22] Inhibition by P-MBR2, sourced from a membrane at the midpoint between chemical
444 cleanings, was between the two extremes of Pw- and Pf-MBR1, with a ~75% reduction in
445 $k_{obs,pCBA}$ at 0.5 mgC/L. Alternatively, it may be possible to choose or modify membrane
446 materials to selectively reject the organic colloidal materials regardless of the fouling state. HA
447 served as a reference material, which represents NOM found in drinking water sources more
448 closely than EfOM, and exhibited stronger quenching than the P-MBR2 case but less inhibition
449 than Pw-MBR1. It is noteworthy that HA inhibits TiO_2 driven photocatalysis to a greater extent
450 than EfOM from a fouled MBR on a carbon basis. This finding contradicts a 'common sense'
451 assumption that could be made based solely on TOC values: that photocatalysis would be
452 more applicable for drinking water applications than for WWTP effluent.

453 The 3DEEM analyses (Figure 3) of the MBR EfOM samples predicted that the fouled
454 membrane would reduce the quantity of fluorescent compounds in the EfOM and therefore
455 lead to less inhibition of photocatalysis. However, for cases of similar fluorescence volumes,
456 as for Pw-MBR1 and P-MBR2 in particular, the use of 3DEEM did not explain differences in

457 inhibitory action. In these cases, other factors, such as the hydrophobic/hydrophilic character
458 of the EfOM, may have been altered by the membrane fouling but not detected by 3DEEM or
459 TOC analysis. It is well known that membrane fouling affects rejection of DOM components[41, 43, 79] and that the mechanism of action is not simply size exclusion alone: changes in the
460
461 surface characteristics (i.e. charge and hydrophobicity), due to fouling layer formation, are also
462 important.[3, 22]



463

464 Figure 5: *p*CBA degradation rate constants in the presence of various concentrations of HA,
465 effluents from Pf-MBR1, from Pw-MBR1, and from P-MBR2 with 5 mg/L TiO_2 are depicted
466 here. The rate constant for pCBA degradation by UVC without TiO_2 is also shown.

467

468 3.5. Inhibitory mechanisms for DOM samples

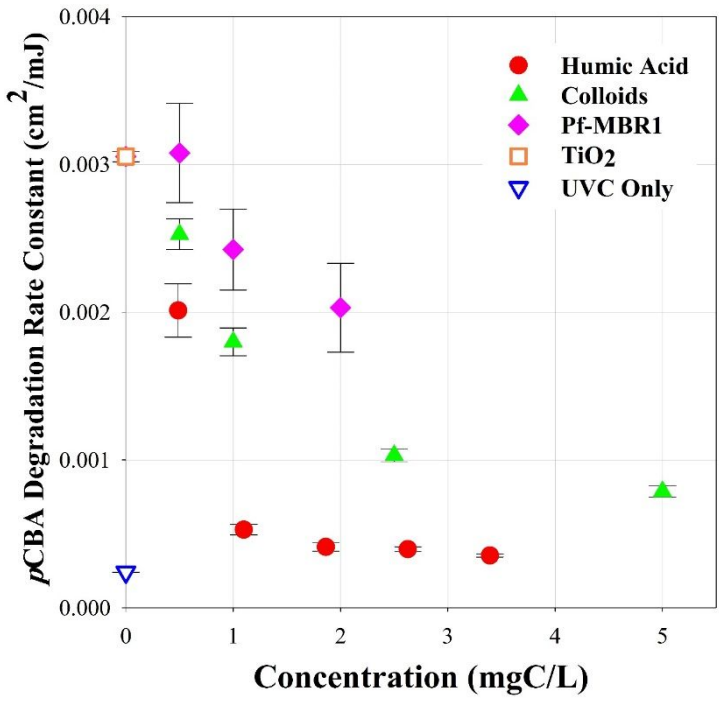
469 Identification of the mechanism of inhibition by DOM on TiO_2 photocatalysis is the key to
470 designing processes to overcome the problem of ROS quenching. Numerous studies have
471 evaluated the adsorption interactions of NOM onto TiO_2, fitting experimental findings to
472 Freundlich[80] or Langmuir-Hinshelwood[32, 77, 81] isotherms. Only recently, however, was a model
473 developed that accounted for both bulk- and surface-phase quenching interactions.[29] In their
474 work, Brame et al. experimentally validated a model that combined a multi-solute Langmuir
475 model[82] with bulk phase competitive reaction rates by assuming steady-state ROS
476 concentrations.[29] Based on this dual-phase model, the mode of inhibition (bulk or surface
477 reactions) was successfully predicted by analysis of the dependency of k_{obs} on TOC. A linear
478 dependence of $k_{obs,}$ on TOC implied that inhibition primarily occurred in the bulk phase and
479 surface interactions were unimportant; alternatively, an exponential decay of k_{obs} with
480 increasing TOC indicated that surface sorption and reactions played a significant role in the
481 inhibitory process.[29] Note that the aforementioned report used Suwannee River humic acid as
482 an NOM source, which consists of a wide range of molecules;[29] applying Brame's model in
483 experiments with fractionated DOM samples is an important extension of the earlier work
484 allowing for a discriminating analysis of inhibition mechanisms across the DOM spectrum.
485 Here, all experiments were performed with the same probe compound, photocatalyst
486 concentration, and UV_{254} lamp, so normalization of $k_{obs,pCBA}$ was not necessary. The inhibition

profile for HA was non-linear and therefore depended on surface interactions, in line with previous reports for TiO_2 inhibition by NOM.[29, 38, 83, 84] Upon examination of the inhibitory profiles of the MBR effluents, trends for Pf-MBR1 and P-MBR2 were noted to be nearly linear, whereas Pw-MBR1 showed an exponential relationship. These observations suggest that the membrane fouling layer played a critical role by rejecting DOM that adsorbs favorably onto the surface of TiO_2, thereby exerting a strong quenching effect on photocatalytic processes. These observations correlate well with the observed inhibition profiles of the fractionated DOM.

As discussed, the colloidal fraction of BSN DOM exerted the strongest inhibitory action of any of the fractions (Figure 4). The $k_{obs,pCBA}$ inhibition profiles of the DOM fractions reveal that the colloids quenched the photocatalytic process via sorption onto the TiO_2 surface and reacting with surface-bound •OH. The HPO and TPI fractions, however, displayed a linear dependence—if the spurious enhancement of $k_{obs,pCBA}$ at the 10 mgC/L mark is neglected—on TOC. The HPO and TPI samples, therefore, primarily reduced $k_{obs,pCBA}$ through bulk phase reactions limited by diffusion and relative reaction rates. Note that these remarks on quenching mechanisms are generalizations: even the fractionated DOM samples contain a wide variety of molecules, each with specific adsorption affinities and reaction rates. Still, results of both fractionation and membrane fouling conditions showed significant changes to inhibitory action of DOM. The inhibitory action of the colloidal fraction was particularly interesting, given the lack

505 of inhibitory action by effluent from the fouled membrane. These observations taken together
506 in Figure 6 (data replotted from Figures 4 and 5) suggest that fouled membranes reject key
507 organic colloids that would otherwise adsorb strongly to TiO_2 surfaces and greatly reduce
508 photodegradation rates. The corresponding k'_{obs} (s^{-1}) data is shown in Figure S6. The
509 prospective utility of a membrane for pretreatment is clearly demonstrated by these results: if
510 a membrane can be selected or optimized to reject problematic colloids, photocatalysis may
511 indeed be effective for disinfection of MBR effluent.

512



513

514 Figure 6: $k_{obs,pCBA}$ inhibition profiles of HA, Pf-MBR1, and the colloidal fraction. Data from
515 Figures 3 and 4 are used here.

516

4. Conclusions

The challenge of unwanted ROS-DOM reactions has long plagued photocatalysis, particularly for applications dealing with high TOC concentrations such as in a typical MBR effluent. 3DEEM can be used to predict the inhibitory effects of DOM composition, and the experiments shed new light on the quenching of photocatalysts by DOM. First, the total fluorescence volume correlated well with the extent of photocatalytic inhibition on a carbon basis, further the DOM fractionation demonstrated that the colloidal fraction of DOM exerted stronger quenching action than HPO and TPI. The membrane fouling status showed that fouled membrane showed very little inhibitory action compared to permeate from clean and moderately fouled membranes. In fact, DOM from fouled membrane appeared to quench •OH primarily via bulk-phase scavenging, whereas DOM from a clean membrane showed an inhibition profile consistent with surface-phase reactions,[28] suggesting that the membrane fouling layer rejected materials that would otherwise adsorb strongly to the TiO2 surface. To enhance photocatalysis efficiency, it might be possible to select a membrane with a “built-in” selectivity similar to that of the fouled membrane in order to remove the problematic colloidal fraction. Analysis of the inhibition profiles of the EfOM described here suggests that for the operation of a PMR a trade-off can be made between the operational pressure and the photocatalytic efficiency; by reducing the (chemical) cleaning frequency and thereby maintaining a minimal level of fouling,

535 inhibition of photocatalysis by organic colloidal inhibitors would be mitigated at a cost of higher
536 trans-membrane pressures. Further, the surface coverage of TiO_2 on PMRs can be tuned to
537 optimize photocatalyst surface area[85] and may not be limited to the DOM:TiO_2 ratios explored
538 here.
539 Further research on the fundamental surface interactions between these organic colloidal
540 materials and photocatalyst or membrane surfaces should be pursued in order to develop
541 mitigation strategies for DOM-related ROS inhibition. Specifically, the assessment of the
542 potential effects of the hydrophilic fraction and dissolved ions (i.e., multivalent cations and
543 halides), which were not retained by the fractionation processes, should be examined. The
544 results of the present study may be applicable to the use of photocatalytic materials in systems
545 containing other DOM sources, therefore additional investigations on systems such as potable
546 water supplies or industrial waste streams would be timely and important.
547

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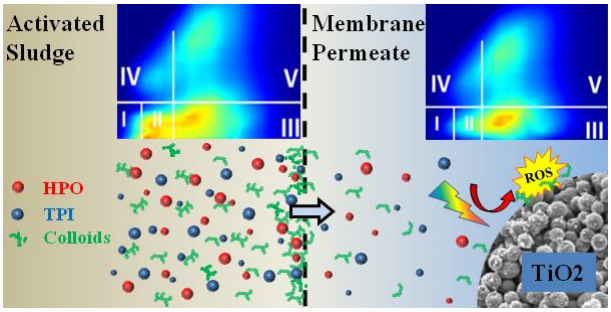

Organic matter from a membrane bioreactor is fractionated and characterized in novel ways to understand component-specific inhibition of photooxidation reactions.