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The Atmospheric Fate of Monoethanolamine: Enhancing New-particle Formation of Sulfuric Acid as an Important Removal Process

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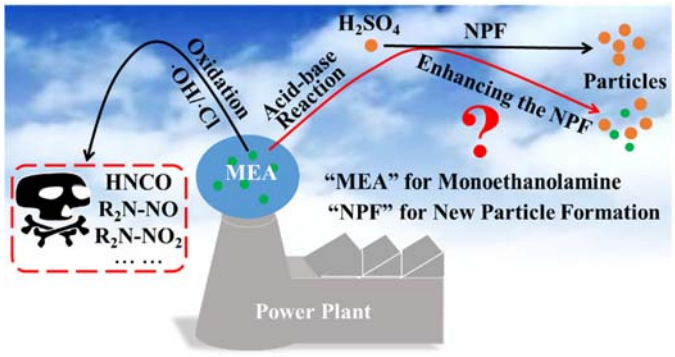


ABSTRACT. Monoethanolamine (MEA), a potential atmospheric pollutant from capture unit of a leading CO_2 capture technology, could be removed by participating H_2SO_4-based new particle formation (NPF) as simple amines. Here we evaluated the enhancing potential of MEA on H_2SO_4-based NPF by examining the formation of molecular clusters of MEA and H_2SO_4 using a combined quantum chemistry

calculations and kinetics modeling. The results indicate that MEA at ppt-level can enhance H_2SO_4-based NPF. The enhancing potential of MEA is < dimethylamine (DMA), one of the strongest enhancing agents, and ≫ methylamine (MA), in contrast to the order suggested solely by their basicity (MEA < MA < DMA). The unexpectedly high enhancing potential is attributed to the role of -OH of MEA in increasing cluster binding free energies by acting as both hydrogen bond donor and acceptor. After the initial formation of one H_2SO_4 and one MEA cluster, the cluster growth mainly proceeds by first adding one H_2SO_4, and then one MEA, which differs from growth pathways in H_2SO_4-DMA and H_2SO_4-MA systems. Importantly, the effective removal rate of MEA due to participation in NPF is comparable to that of oxidation by hydroxyl radicals at 278.15 K, indicating NPF as an important sink for MEA.

INTRODUCTION

Monoethanolamine (MEA, $NH_2CH_2CH_2OH$) is a benchmark and widely utilized solvent in amine-based postcombustion CO_2 capture (PCC) technology.[1-9] Given the possible large-scale implementation of amine-based PCC, it is likely that there will be relatively significant emissions of MEA or other alkanolamines to the atmosphere from PCC units due to their relatively high vapor pressure.[10] It has been estimated that a CO_2 capture plant which removes 1 million tons CO_2 per year from flue gas using MEA as solvent could potentially emit 80 tons MEA into the atmosphere.[11,12] Therefore, in recent years concern about the atmospheric fate of the representative amine MEA has been increasing,[6,13-22] as MEA could potentially form an environmental risk.[11,12,17]

Several studies have addressed the removal of MEA by atmospheric oxidation.[6,13-22] The oxidation by hydroxyl radicals (·OH) has been considered to be its main degradation pathway, followed by chlorine radicals (·Cl) at daytime.[13] The nitrate radical may play a significant role in MEA oxidation at night, though very little is known about this pathway. The reaction rate constants of MEA with ·OH and ·Cl are in the order of 10^{-11} and 10^{-10} cm^3 $molecule^{-1}$ s^{-1}, respectively, translating to 2.6-3.6 hours atmospheric lifetime.[6,13,14,18,19] More importantly, atmospheric oxidation of MEA by ·OH and ·Cl can produce potentially hazardous compounds (such as isocyanic acid, HNCO, nitramine and nitrosamine),[6,13,19] which can increase the environmental risk of MEA emission. Besides oxidation, acid-base reaction could be another important sink for MEA. However, the atmospheric fate related to the basicity of MEA has received little attention until now.

Atmospheric aerosol particles, at least 50% of which originates from new-particle formation (NPF), are known to affect human health and remain one of the leading uncertainties in global climate modeling and prediction.[23-27] Many studies have shown that atmospheric bases such as ammonia and amines stabilize sulfuric acid clusters in the lower troposphere via acid-base reactions, and therefore enhance H_2SO_4-based NPF rates.[25,28-42] Compared to ammonia, amines, including monomethylamine (MA), dimethylamine (DMA) and trimethylamine (TMA), can bind much more strongly to sulfuric acid molecules [29,40-43] and thus can efficiently enhance clustering sulfuric acid.[43] Recent work by Almeida et al. performed at the CLOUD chamber at CERN

62 shows that 5 ppt of dimethylamine can enhance NPF rates more than 10000 times
63 compared with the case of 5 ppt ammonia, and is sufficient to produce particle
64 formation rates of the same order of magnitude as observed in the atmosphere.[25]
65 Besides ammonia, MA, DMA and TMA, atmospheric diamines were recently found to
66 efficiently enhance NPF.[44,45]

67 In a similar fashion to simple alkylamines, MEA can potentially influence NPF
68 via acid-base reactions and therefore participating in NPF could be another atmospheric
69 sink of MEA. A recent study highlighted the possible role of emitted amines from CO_2
70 capture unit of PCC in enhancing NPF.[25] The basicity of MEA is higher than that of
71 ammonia and lower than that of methylamine and dimethylamine (pK_b values of MEA
72 4.50, MA 3.36, DMA 3.29, ammonia 5.7).[46] If judged solely by the basicity, MEA
73 should have a higher enhancing effect on H_2SO_4-based NPF than NH_3, and lower effect
74 than MA and DMA when atmospheric concentration of MEA is assumed to be similar
75 to that of NH_3, MA and DMA. From the point of molecular structure, MEA has
76 additional -OH compared to ammonia, MA and DMA. When forming clusters between
77 MEA and H_2SO_4, the -OH group in MEA can form additional hydrogen bonds (H-
78 bonds), which increase the binding energy of MEA with H_2SO_4. The conflicting effects
79 of one favorable (more H-bonds) and one unfavorable factor (decreased basicity
80 compared with methylamine and dimethylamine) could make it difficult to estimate
81 how strong the enhancing effect of MEA will be. No previous studies have considered
82 the potential role of alkanolamines in NPF involving H_2SO_4. An additional -OH in the

amine may lead to a different NPF pathway and rate compared to the ammonia/MA/DMA-H_2SO_4 systems. Therefore, to obtain a complete view of the atmospheric fate of MEA and extend the current knowledge of NPF involving amines and H_2SO_4, information about the potential of MEA to participate in atmospheric NPF is crucial.

In this study, we investigate the initial step of atmospheric H_2SO_4-based NPF by examining the formation of molecular clusters of MEA and sulfuric acid using a combination of quantum chemistry calculations and kinetics modeling employing the Atmospheric Cluster Dynamics Code[47,48] (ACDC). Via systematic conformational searches, we have obtained minimum free energy structures of clusters of composition $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$ (m=0-4 and n=1-4, "SA" represents H_2SO_4). The corresponding thermodynamic data and previously reported results for pure sulfuric acid $(SA)_{1-4}$ clusters[49] are used in ACDC to obtain cluster formation pathways and kinetics in the MEA-H_2SO_4 system. In addition, the effect of hydration on the cluster formation kinetics of MEA and H_2SO_4 is considered.

COMPUTATIONAL DETAILS

Electronic Structure Calculations. The most critical parameters in identifying cluster formation pathways and kinetics are the cluster formation free energies. Both minimum free energy structures of clusters $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$ (m=0-4 and n=0-4) and computational method will determine the reliability of calculated cluster formation free energies. Here, a global minimum sampling technique (Figure 1), which has previously been applied

to study atmospheric cluster formation,[45,50,51] was used to search for the global minima of clusters $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$(m=1-4 and n=0-4). The pure $(SA)_{1-4}$ clusters were taken from the work of Ortega et al.[49] In Figure 1, all optimizations, frequency or single point energy calculations with density functional theory and semiempirical PM6 level have been performed in GAUSSIAN 09.[52] The ωB97X-D functional was selected as the core optimization and frequency calculation method in Figure 1, since it has shown good performance for studying the formation of atmospheric molecular clusters.[53,54] Single point energy calculations at DLPNO-CCSD(T) (Domain-based local pair natural orbital coupled cluster[55,56])/aug-cc-pVTZ level have been performed in ORCA version 3.0.3.[57] Recent studies indicated that the DLPNO-CCSD(T) method can be used to calculate atmospheric acid-base clusters up to 10 molecules[58] and the utilized DLPNO-CCSD(T)/aug-cc-pVTZ method has been shown to yield a mean absolute error of 0.3 kcal/mol compared to CCSD(T) complete basis set estimates, based on a test set of 11 small atmospheric cluster reactions[54]. The MEA monomer has 13 conformations[6,59] and each was used as a starting point for forming the molecular clusters. For the global minimum search, more than 10000 randomly oriented configurations were built for each cluster. We have estimated the Gibbs free energies for all obtained global minima at 298.15 K by combining the single point energies at the DLPNO-CCSD(T)/aug-cc-pVTZ level and Gibbs free energy correction terms at the ωB97X-D/6-31++G(d,p) level. The formation free energies for each cluster were obtained by subtracting Gibbs free energy of the constituent molecules from that of the cluster at 298.15 K. The

formation free energies at other temperatures were calculated under the assumption that enthalpy and entropy change remain constant in the tropospheric temperature range.

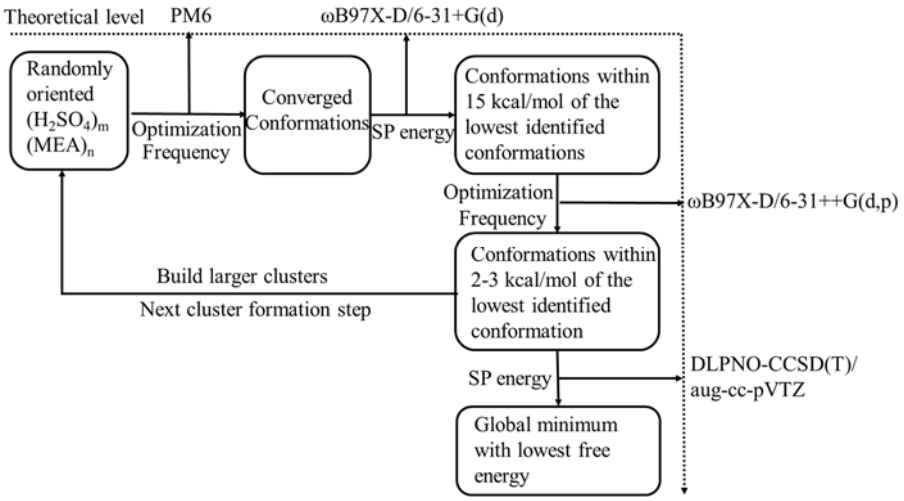


Figure 1. Flowchart for the multistep global minimum sampling method. "SP" represents a single point energy calculation.

To consider the effect of hydration, the $(MEA)_m(SA)_nW_x$ (m=0-2, n=0-2, x=1-3, "W" represents H_2O) clusters were investigated. For their global minimum search, a similar scheme as for the clusters without water molecules was used. In addition, to directly compare the enhancing effect of MEA to ammonia, MA and DMA, we re-evaluated their formation free energies at the same theoretical level, based on reported cluster structures, or new lower energy structures (presented in Figure S1).[48, 49, 60] It should be noted that for global minimum of the unhydrated MA-SA clusters, only $(MA)_{0-3}(SA)_{0-3}$ is available[41,60] and therefore formation free energy data for MA are only for $(MA)_{0-3}(SA)_{0-3}$.

ACDC model. We used ACDC to study the formation pathways, steady-state concentrations and formation rates of clusters. The detailed theory behind the ACDC

was present in a study by McGrath et. al.[47] Briefly, the code generates equations for the time derivatives of the concentrations of all studied clusters, and uses the Matlab ode15s routine to solve differential equations and simulate the time-dependent cluster concentrations. The differential equations, also called birth-death equations, include source terms from collisions of smaller clusters and evaporations from larger clusters, and sink terms from collisions with other clusters and evaporations into smaller clusters. In addition, the cluster formation rate in ACDC is defined as the flux of clusters outside the system. Whether a cluster is allowed to be outside the system or not is judged by the boundary condition. The hydration effect was considered in ACDC by taking H_2O molecule as an environment to affect the collision or evaporation of base-acid cluster.[61] The simulated system is a "4 × 4 box" for unhydrated system, where 4 is the maximum number of H_2SO_4 or MEA molecules in the clusters. The $(MEA)_4(SA)_5$ and $(MEA)_5(SA)_5$ were allowed to grow out of the system and all other clusters crossing the box edge are brought back to the simulation box by monomer evaporations (see boundary condition in Supporting Information (SI)). The ACDC simulations were primarily run at 278.15 K, with additional runs performed at 258.15, 268.15, 288.15 and 298.15 to study the temperature effect. A constant coagulation sink coefficient of 2.6×10^{-3} s^{-1} was used as sink term. This value corresponds to typical one observed in boreal forest environments.[48] The sulfuric acid concentration was set to be 10^5, 10^6, 10^7, 10^8 and 10^9 cm^{-3}, a range relevant to atmospheric NPF.[25,48,62] Atmospheric MEA concentrations were set to be 1, 10, and 100 ppt, a range relevant to atmospheric NPF

for DMA.[25] It should be mentioned that the acid concentration [H_2SO_4] was defined as the total concentration of all neutral clusters containing one acid and any number of base molecules, as in a previous study.[48] When hydration effect was considered, the simulated system is "2 × 2 box". Average collision and evaporation coefficients over the hydrate distribution for each cluster of $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$ (m=0-2, n=0-2) were used in the birth-death equations for [H_2SO_4] = 10^6 and [MEA] = 10 ppt and at 278.15 K. The equilibrium hydrate distribution for each cluster was calculated by the equilibrium constant for the formation of the respective hydrate.[61] Similar to the definition of boundary condition of unhydrated MEA-SA cluster, the $(MEA)_2(SA)_3$ and $(MEA)_3(SA)_3$ were allowed to grow out of the system. As a comparison, we also preformed ACDC simulation for MA-H_2SO_4 and DMA-H_2SO_4 systems at 278.15 K. The simulated system is a "3 × 3 box" for MA since only $(MA)_{0-3}(SA)_{0-3}$ is available, and "4 × 4 box," for DMA. The $(MA)_3(SA)_4$ and $(MA)_4(SA)_4$, and $(DMA)_4(SA)_5$ and $(DMA)_5(SA)_5$ were allowed to grow out of the simulation box for MA-H_2SO_4 and DMA-H_2SO_4 system (see SI), respectively. Other ACDC simulation details are similar to those for MEA. In addition, ACDC simulation was performed for MEA-H_2SO_4 with 3 × 3 box, to compare with MA-H_2SO_4 system with a similar simulation box size.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structures and Thermodynamic Data. We use $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$ to represent the cluster formed by m MEA molecules and n H_2SO_4 molecules to avoid explicitly specifying the proton transfer status. Since previous studies have discussed the structures of pure

183 H_2SO_4 clusters,[49] here, we mainly focus on the clusters $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$(m=1-4 and n=0-
184 4). The structures of $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$(m=1-4 and n=0-4) are shown in Figure 2. Generally,
185 in the homo-molecular clusters $(MEA)_m$(m=1-4), no proton transfer has occurred and
186 clusters are stabilized mainly by H-bonds. In all hetero-molecular clusters, proton
187 transfer is observed, and clusters are stabilized by both H-bonds and electrostatic
188 interaction between positive and negative species. When $n \geq m$, the amine ($–NH_2$)
189 groups of all MEA molecules are protonated by H_2SO_4. In this case H_2SO_4 only
190 transfers a single proton and in no cases a sulphate ion is formed. When $n < m$, there
191 are two different proton transfer pattern. For $(MEA)_2(SA)$, $(MEA)_3(SA)$ clusters, none
192 or one of the protons of H_2SO_4 are donated, and therefore not all MEA molecules are
193 protonated. For $(MEA)_4(SA)$, $(MEA)_4(SA)_2$, $(MEA)_4(SA)_3$ and $(MEA)_3(SA)_2$, H_2SO_4
194 can donate two protons, and therefore all MEAs are protonated in the case of $m – n$ =1
195 (($(MEA)_4(SA)_3$ and $(MEA)_3(SA)_2$), while MEA is not completely protonated in the case
196 of $m – n$ >1 (($(MEA)_4(SA)$ and $(MEA)_4(SA)_2$). The above proton transfer patterns for
197 H_2SO_4-MEA clusters are similar to those of H_2SO_4-DMA clusters.[48,49]

198 Another structural feature in all clusters except $(MEA)(SA)_3$ is that -OH
199 groups of all MEAs can form at least one H-bond with H_2SO_4 as H-bond donors. In
200 many cases such as $(MEA)_3$, $(MEA)_4$, $(MEA)(SA)_4$, $(MEA)_2(SA)_3$, $(MEA)_2(SA)_4$,
201 $(MEA)_3(SA)_1$, $(MEA)_3(SA)_2$, $(MEA)_3(SA)_4$, $(MEA)_3(SA)_2$, $(MEA)_4(SA)_2$ and
202 $(MEA)_4(SA)_3$ clusters, the -OH group of MEA can form another H-bond with the -OH
203 group of H_2SO_4, ammonium cation ($-RNH_3^+$) of protonated MEA or -OH of MEA as a

H-bond acceptor. The involvement of the -OH group of MEA leads to a preference for a spherical three-dimensional structure, especially for the large studied cluster sizes. As an exception $(MEA)(SA)_3$, we also located a low-energy minimum (Figure S2) involving H-bonds where -OH group of MEA acts as both a hydrogen bond donor and acceptor. However, the configuration is not the global minimum for the Gibbs free energy. The binding energy of this minimum is about 1 kcal/mol lower than that of the free energy global minimum shown in Figure 2, and thus unfavorable entropy effects are taking place in this configuration.

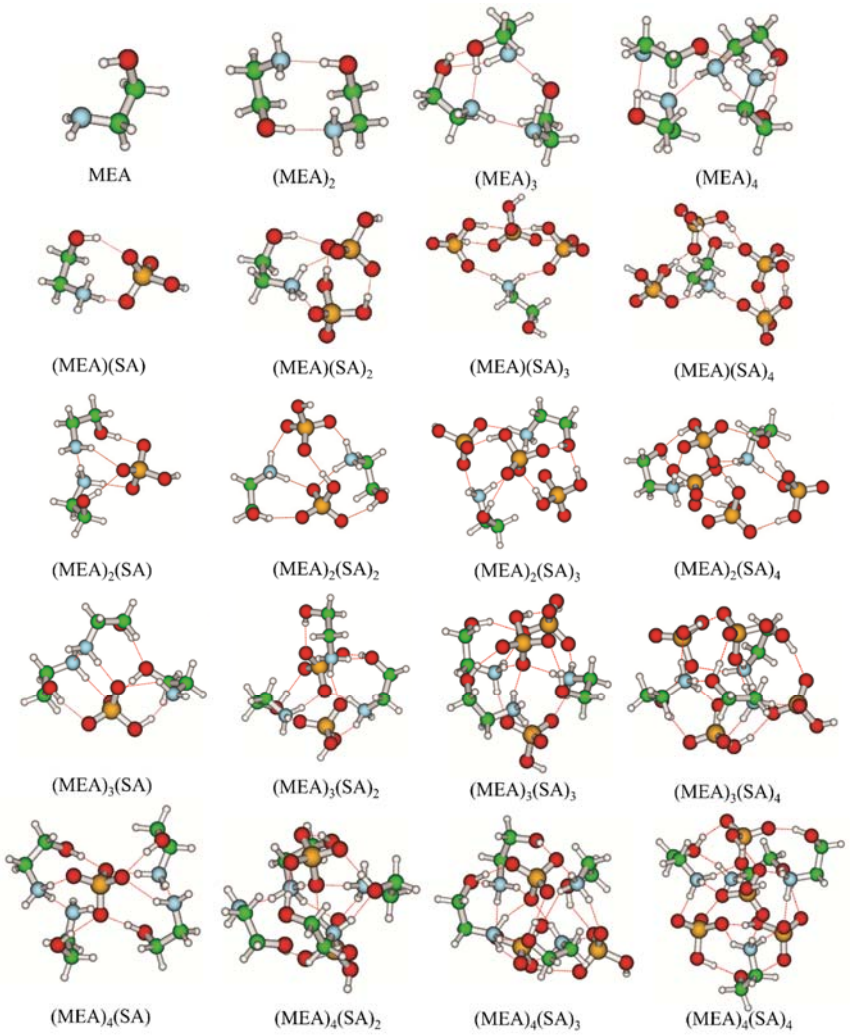


Figure 2. The Structures of global free energy minima for $(MEA)_m(H_2SO_4)_n$(m=1-4 and

214 *n*=0-4) at the ωB97X-D/6-31++G(d,p) level of theory. The red ball represents oxygen
215 atom, blue is nitrogen atom, green is carbon atom and white is hydrogen atom.

216 It is known that DMA is one of the strongest agents for enhancing atmospheric
217 H_2SO_4-based NPF.[25,29,43] Here, we take formation free energies of the H_2SO_4-DMA
218 system as a reference to discuss the formation free energies of H_2SO_4-MEA. The free
219 energy data at 298.15 K for the formation of the clusters from their constituent
220 molecules for the MEA/DMA-H_2SO_4 system are presented in Figure 3, and the
221 corresponding thermodynamical quantities ΔH and ΔS are presented in Table S1. For
222 the pure base clusters, formation free energy of all MEA clusters is lower than that of
223 corresponding DMA clusters. This results from the fact that there is one more H-bond
224 bonding agent (-OH) in MEA compared with DMA, which leads to more H-bonds in
225 the pure MEA clusters than that in the corresponding DMA clusters. The formation free
226 energy for most hetero-molecular H_2SO_4-MEA clusters is 0.2-5.6 kcal/mol higher than
227 that of corresponding H_2SO_4-DMA clusters. However, the formation free energy for
228 $(MEA)_2SA$, $(MEA)_3SA$ and $(MEA)_4SA$ and $(MEA)_4(SA)_4$ is lower than that of the
229 corresponding clusters from DMA. The difference in formation free energies of MEA
230 clusters, compared with DMA clusters, originates from the competition between the
231 unfavorable (lower basicity of MEA than that of DMA) and favorable factor (the
232 formation of more H-bonds from the -OH group of MEA) for forming clusters. In
233 addition, we noted that formation free energies of MEA-H_2SO_4 clusters are lower than
234 those of the corresponding MA-H_2SO_4 clusters (Figure S3) although basicity of MEA

is much lower than that of MA, indicating that the -OH group in MEA does indeed play an important role in the cluster formation between MEA and H_2SO_4. In recent study, Chen et al. revealed that besides the basicity, the hydrogen-bonding capacity of -NH_x (x = 1-3) group in amine/ammonia can play an important role in enhancing methanesulfonic acid driven NPF.[63] Our findings and Chen et al.'s study[63] together show the importance of molecular interactions involving -NH_x (x = 1-3) group and other functional groups of amines in NPF. In addition, similar to MA and DMA, the formation free energies for MEA are much lower than those of NH_3 (Figure S3) with H_2SO_4.

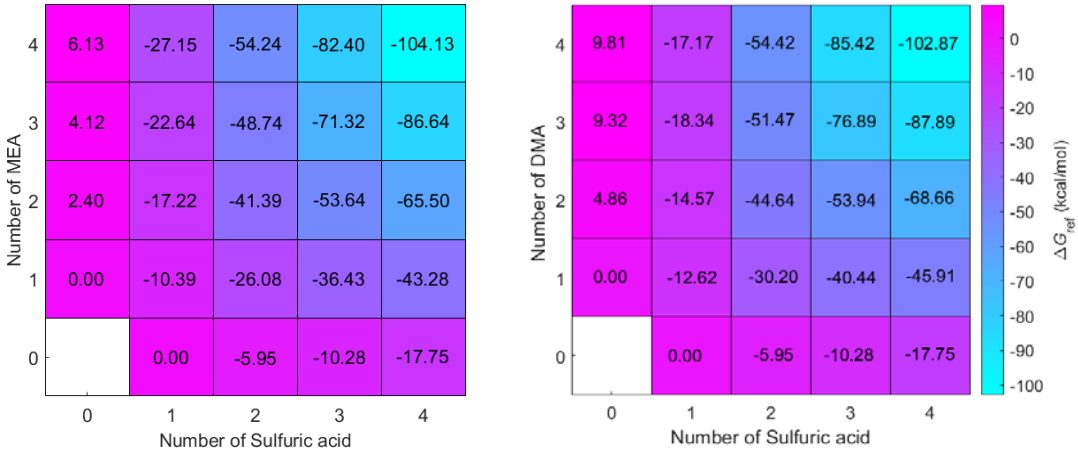


Figure 3. Calculated formation free energies for $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$ (left panel) and $(DMA)_m(SA)_n$ (right panel) clusters (m=0-4 and n=0-4) at the DLPNO-CCSD(T)/aug-cc-pVTZ//ωB97X-D/6-31++G(d,p) level and 298.15 K and 1 atm (reference pressure of acid and base).

Evaporation Rates. In view of the acid-base cluster growth, the stability of the cluster can be deduced by comparing the evaporation rate with the collision rate, which mainly depends on the collision rate constant and the concentration of the acid and base

molecules. However, the collision rate constants for the studied clusters are very close to each other and thus difference in the evaporation rate can be used to represent the stability of clusters at the given acid and base concentration. The evaporation rates for $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$(m=0-4 and n=0-4) on the MEA-SA grid at 278.15 are presented in Figure 4. Generally, evaporation rates for clusters $(MEA)_2(SA)_2$, $(MEA)_1(SA)_2$, $(MEA)_3(SA)_3$, $(MEA)_3(SA)_4$ and $(MEA)_4(SA)_4$ are of the order of 10^{-3}-10^{-5} s^{-1}, which is much lower than those for other studied cluster sizes. When the concentration of MEA or H_2SO_4 is around or above ppt level, those clusters with evaporation rate 10^{-3}-10^{-5} s^{-1} can be considered to be stable and $(MEA)_3(SA)_3$ and $(MEA)_4(SA)_4$ are the most stable clusters (see discussion on stability of clusters in SI). By checking all evaporation pathways (see Table S2), evaporation of a H_2SO_4 or MEA monomer is found to be the main decay route for all clusters studied here. If m and n are unequal, evaporation of species with greater number of molecules is always preferred. For clusters with $m = n > 2$, evaporation of MEA is faster than that of H_2SO_4. In addition, when there is equal number of molecules in two clusters, the evaporation rate of MEA abundant cluster is higher than corresponding H_2SO_4 abundant cluster, indicating that the bonding ability of H_2SO_4 to the cluster is stronger than that of MEA. A similar phenomena concerning the stronger bonding ability of acid is also found in other acid-base cluster systems, such as DMA-SA, NH_3-H_2SO_4, and NH_3-HNO_3.[49,64]

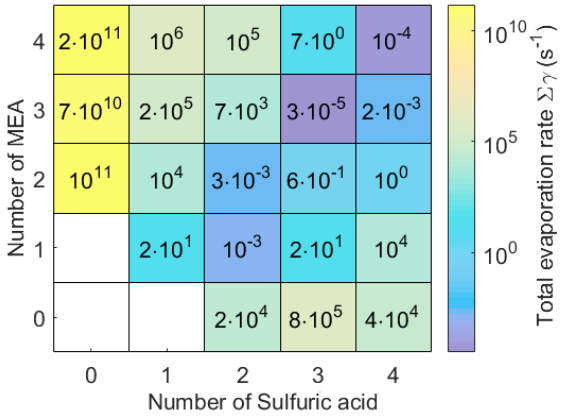


Figure 4. The evaporation rates for $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$(m=0-4 and n=0-4) on the MEA-SA grid at 278.15.

It is also interesting to compare cluster evaporate rates for the different amines (MA, DMA and MEA) at the same simulation condition. For most of the clusters, including hetero-molecular and pure base clusters, the evaporation rates for MEA clusters are lower than corresponding ones for MA (Figure S4) and DMA (Figure S4) clusters. However, it is not straightforward to conclude which amine can form the most stable clusters as evaporation rates for a couple of clusters with MA and DMA are lower than those of MEA clusters. If the initially formed one SA and one base cluster (which are crucial for cluster growth at relevant H_2SO_4 and base concentration for MEA, MA and DMA as discussed in the Growth Pathways section) are compared, evaporate rate of (MEA)(SA) is lower than that of (MA)(SA) and higher than that of (DMA)(SA). Therefore, the stability of initially formed clusters for the three types of amine-H_2SO_4 clusters follows the trend (DMA)(SA) > (MEA)(SA) > (MA)(SA) at the given acid and base concentrations. In addition, in accordance with a previous study,[47] the evaporation of small clusters is found to be the main decay route for some of DMA-H_2SO_4 clusters.

This is not the case for MEA-SA and MA-SA clusters, where monomer evaporation is dominant. This results from the higher stability of the small DMA-H_2SO_4 clusters.

Steady-state Cluster Concentrations and Formation Rates. The steady-state sulfuric acid dimer concentration (all clusters including sulfuric acid dimer) and the formation rate of clusters growing out of the simulation box can be taken as two important quantities characterizing the stabilization potential of a given base in H_2SO_4-based NPF.[25,43,60] Figure 5 shows the steady-state sulfuric acid dimer concentration and the cluster formation rate as a function of monomer concentration (H_2SO_4 concentration in the range 10^5 - 10^9 cm^{-3}, MEA mixing ratios of 1-100 ppt) at 278.15 K for MEA-H_2SO_4 clusters, along with DMA-H_2SO_4 and MA-H_2SO_4 clusters as a comparison. Generally, the sulfuric acid dimer concentration and the cluster formation rate increase with increasing the concentrations of MEA and H_2SO_4 at the considered condition. The MEA concentration dependence of the sulfuric acid dimer concentration and the cluster formation rate weakens with increasing H_2SO_4 concentration, indicating that the system gradually approaches saturation with respect to MEA at a high H_2SO_4 concentration. Similar behavior is also found in the simulations with MA and DMA as base. More importantly, MEA yields roughly 10–10^2-fold dimer concentration and 10^2–10^3-fold formation rate compared to the simulations with MA as a base, and 0.02-0.2-fold dimer concentration and 0.02–1-fold formation rate as compared to the simulations with DMA as a base, indicating the order of the stabilization potential of these three amines follows: DMA > MEA > MA. It deserves mentioning that MEA-H_2SO_4 formation rates

compared to MA-H_2SO_4 become even higher if the same simulation box size is used for MEA and MA (3 × 3) (formation rate of MEA-H_2SO_4 will increase 1.1-6 times, compared with 4 × 4 box). However, the difference in sulfuric acid dimer concentration was similar with different simulation box sizes. As experimental evidence has shown that DMA and MA have an enhancing effect on H_2SO_4-based NPF at ppt level,[25,43] it can be expected that MEA will have a similar effect with magnitude in between DMA and MA. Therefore, we can conclude that MEA can enhance NPF of H_2SO_4 when the atmospheric concentration of MEA reaches ppt level. The higher stabilization potential of MEA, compared with MA, further verifies the important role of the -OH group of MEA in enhancing NPF involving H_2SO_4, as the basicity of MEA is lower than that of MA. In addition, both the sulfuric acid dimer concentration and the formation rate present negative temperature dependence in the range of 260-300 K, relevant to tropospheric conditions as shown in Figure S5. The negative temperature dependence effect is more prominent at lower MEA (1 ppt) and lower H_2SO_4 concentrations (10^6 cm^{-3}).

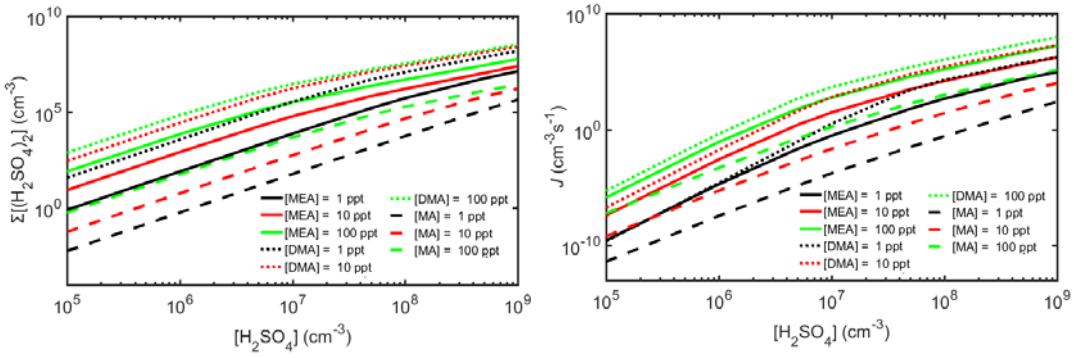
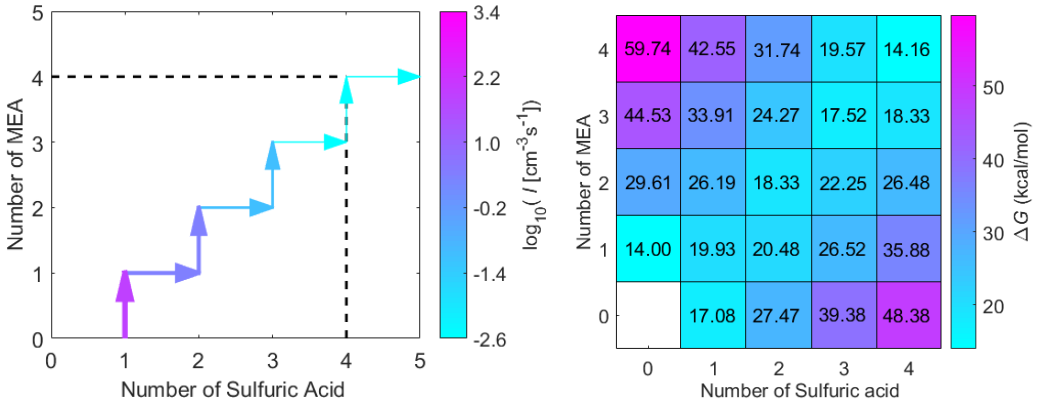


Figure 5. Simulated steady-state H_2SO_4 dimer concentration $\Sigma[(H_2SO_4)_2]$ (cm^{-3}) (left panel) and the cluster formation rate J ($cm^{-3}s^{-1}$) out of the simulation system (right

326 panel) as a function of monomer concentration at 278.15 K.

327 **Growth Pathways.** Figure 6 presents the growth pathway and the actual Gibbs free
328 energy surface[47] for MEA and H_2SO_4 clusters at $[H_2SO_4] = 10^6$ cm^{-3}, [MEA] = 10 ppt
329 and 278.15 K. The actual Gibbs free energy surface was obtained by converting the
330 change of free energy from 1 atm to the actual vapor pressures of the components.[47] As
331 can be seen in Figure 6 (left panel), the first step in the growth is the binding of one
332 H_2SO_4 molecule to a MEA molecule. After the initial step, the growth mainly proceeds
333 by firstly adding one H_2SO_4, and then one MEA. The main flux out of the system is the
334 $(MEA)_4(SA)_5$ cluster. Combining the growth pathway with the actual Gibbs free energy
335 surface (right panel in Figure 6), two features can be observed. First, clusters do not
336 follow the lowest free energy pathways ($(MEA)_1(SA)_1 \rightarrow (MEA)_2(SA)_2 \rightarrow (MEA)_3(SA)_3$
337 $\rightarrow (MEA)_4(SA)_4$), which would involve the cluster collision with $(MEA)_1(SA)_1$ cluster.
338 This results from fact that the concentration of the $(MEA)_1(SA)_1$ cluster (5.73×10^3 cm^{-3})
339 is much lower than that of the H_2SO_4 monomer (9.94×10^5 cm^{-3}). Secondly, the
340 addition of H_2SO_4 monomers involves a small free energy barrier, but the addition of
341 MEA does not. Furthermore, combining the growth pathway with the evaporation rate
342 of the clusters, we can conclude that the formation of initial cluster $(MEA)_1(SA)_1$ is the
343 rate-determining step for the cluster growth since the $(MEA)_1(SA)_1$ cluster is much
344 more unstable than other clusters in the cluster growth pathway and readily evaporates
345 back into MEA and SA monomers.



346 Figure 6. Main clustering pathways (left panel) and actual Gibbs free energy surface
347 for the formation of clusters $MEA_m(H_2SO_4)_n$(m=0-4 and n=0-4) (right panel) at 278.15
348 K, $[H_2SO_4]$ = 10^6 cm^{-3} and [MEA] = 10 ppt. For figure clarity, the pathways
349 contributing less than 5% to the flux of the cluster are not shown.

350 We also compared the growth pathways for MEA-H_2SO_4 with MA-H_2SO_4 and
351 DMA-H_2SO_4 system at the same simulation condition. The formation pathways for
352 MA-H_2SO_4 and DMA-H_2SO_4 are presented in Figure S6. A common feature is that the
353 initially formed cluster mainly consists of one H_2SO_4 and one base molecule for all
354 three amines. However, as a whole, the growth pathway for the MEA-H_2SO_4 system is
355 significantly different from that of the MA-H_2SO_4 and DMA-H_2SO_4 systems. In
356 accordance with a previous study,[47] collisions involving the $(DMA)_1(SA)_1$ cluster
357 contribute significantly to the growth for DMA-SA system, which makes the growth
358 occur mainly along the diagonal on the acid-base grid. In contrast to MEA and DMA,
359 the cluster growth for the MA system does not follow the diagonal direction and the
360 formation of larger clusters $(MA)_1(SA)_2$ and $(MA)_2(SA)_3$ has two pathways either via

addition of H_2SO_4 or MA. The sulfuric acid dimer has a significant population in the initial clusters, which results from the low stability of the $(MA)_1(SA)_2$ cluster.

Effect of Hydration. As water is many orders of magnitude more abundant than sulfuric acid and bases in the atmosphere, hydration might change the cluster formation free energies and therefore cluster formation kinetics[61,65,66] Previous studies have found that clusters consisting of H_2SO_4 and DMA or ammonia are mainly hydrated by less than three H_2O molecules.[30,61] We expected that MEA-H_2SO_4 clusters could still be hydrated by less than three H_2O molecules although the structure of MEA is different from DMA and ammonia. Here, 1-3 H_2O molecules were considered to study the effect of hydration on the formation kinetics of MEA-H_2SO_4 clusters. In addition, to save computational resources, we only selected the smallest clusters $(MEA)_m(SA)_n$ (m = 0-2, n = 0-2) as test system to investigate the hydration. Based on the calculated equilibrium hydrate distribution of the clusters at relative humidities (RH) 20%, 50% and 100%, at 278.15 K, converted from calculated Gibbs free energies of stepwise hydration at 278.15 K and 1 atm, we can conclude that sulfuric acid-MEA clusters are only mildly hydrated (0-2 H_2O molecules depending on RH). Details for the discussion on calculated Gibbs free energies of stepwise hydration, optimized structures and the hydrate distribution of the clusters are presented in SI. Here, we mainly focus on the effect of hydration on the cluster formation kinetics.

In principle, hydration can affect the cluster formation rate both through the collision and evaporation rates. However, hydration was found to have little effect on

382 the collision rate since the collision diameter, an important factor in collision rate
383 coefficients in kinetic collision theory employed in ACDC, changes very little with
384 hydration.[61] Hence, only the effect of hydration on the evaporation rates and formation
385 rates will be discussed in detail. Figure 7 presents the evaporation rates (left) and
386 formation rates (right) as a function of RH at 278.15 K compared to dry conditions.
387 Clearly, the presence of water has various effects on the evaporation rate depending on
388 the given cluster. Water has a little effect on the evaporation rate of the $(SA)_2$ and
389 $(MEA)_2(SA)_2$ and almost no effect on that of the $(MEA)_2$ cluster. However, the
390 evaporation rate of $(MEA)(SA)_2$ can be increased up to 3 times by hydration, and that
391 of $(MEA)_2(SA)$ can be decreased by 13 times compared to the dry case. More
392 importantly, the presence of water decreases the evaporation rate of initially formed
393 (MEA)(SA) clusters, i.e. the rate-determining step for cluster growth in the system, and
394 this trend gradually increases with RH, which explains the increased cluster formation
395 rate with increasing RH (right panel in Figure 7).The formation rate can be increased
396 about 5 fold at RH = 100 % compared to the dry case. It should be mentioned that
397 although the absolute formation rate obtained from a small simulation box (2×2) is not
398 reliable, the relative formation rate presented here should cancel out any significant bias
399 introduced by the small simulation box. Generally, from these small cluster hydration
400 simulations, we can conclude that hydration can slightly influence the evaporation rate,
401 but the effect is in all cases relatively low and does not severely influence the results.
402 Although it is not expected that qualitative conclusion from current study could be

changed when larger clusters and more water molecules are used, future study with larger clusters and more water molecules is still deserved, to reach a more definitive conclusion about the RH effect on MEA-H_2SO_4 cluster formation kinetics.

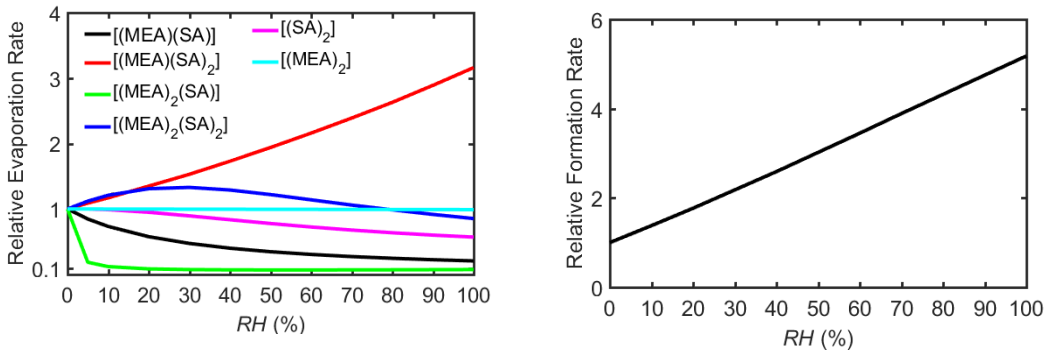


Figure 7. Relative evaporation rate (left panel) and cluster formation rate ($[H_2SO_4]$ = 10^6 cm^{-3} and [MEA] = 10 ppt) (right panel) as a function of relative humidity at 278.15 K.

Atmospheric Implications. We found that MEA at ppt-level can enhance the H_2SO_4-based NPF. The enhancing potential of MEA for NPF is lower than that of DMA, which is one of the strongest agents for enhancing H_2SO_4-based NPF,[25,43] and much higher than that of MA. In addition, we have shown that the -OH group of MEA plays an important role in enhancing H_2SO_4-based NPF due to the formation of additional H-bonds with H_2SO_4. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to point out the significant effect of one additional functional group in amines and show that the basicity of bases is not necessarily the only determining factor influencing H_2SO_4 driven NPF. Besides anthropogenic emission,[67] the oxidation of aliphatic amines could introduce -OH or keto-, peroxy- and carboxylic acid groups in the atmosphere.[31,68,69] Amines including these additional H-bond donor/acceptor functional groups can enhance the

NPF via a synergetic role of the basicity and the formation of additional H-bonds, especially for strongly basic amines. As the enhancing effect is very dependent on the exact structure of the molecule, the effect of these amines on NPF deserves further investigation.

Obviously, the participation of MEA in H_2SO_4-based NPF is a sink of the emitted MEA. It is known that the reaction with ·OH is an important sink for MEA due to a high reaction rate constant (k_{OH} 8.1 × 10^{-11} $cm^{-3}molecule^{-1}s^{-1}$ at 278.15 K) and concentration of ·OH (9.7 × 10^5 cm^{-3}).[18] At daytime, H_2SO_4 and ·OH can coexist in the atmosphere and atmospheric concentration of H_2SO_4 (1×10^6 -1.9×10^7 cm^{-3} depending on the location)[70-72] is usually 1-19 times that of ·OH. We estimated the relative contribution of H_2SO_4 to ·OH for the removal of MEA by $k_{H2SO4}[H_2SO_4]/k_{OH}[\cdot OH]$ at 278.15 K, where k_{H2SO4} is removal rate constants of MEA for the participation in NPF involving H_2SO_4 and its value is estimated to be 2.16×10^{-11} and 5.6×10^{-11} cm^3 $molecule^{-1}$ s^{-1} at dry or 50% RH condition, respectively (computational details in SI), $[H_2SO_4]$ and [·OH] are the concentration of H_2SO_4 and ·OH, respectively. The contribution of H_2SO_4 to the removal of MEA is calculated to be about 0.27-5.2 and 0.7-13.1 times that of ·OH at dry and 50% RH condition, respectively. This means that reactions with H_2SO_4 will compete with oxidation by ·OH in the atmosphere for the removal of MEA at tropospheric condition. Especially in regions where the concentration of H_2SO_4 is high, NPF might be the dominant removal process of gas-phase MEA. Therefore, the participation of MEA in H_2SO_4-based NPF should be considered when assessing the

environmental risk of MEA emissions related to, for example, postcombustion CO_2 capture technology.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information. Details for boundary conditions, discussion on the stability of cluster, hydration free energies, removal rate constants of MEA in NPF of H_2SO_4, thermochemical information for the formation of molecular clusters, evaporation coefficients for all evaporation pathways of different clusters, lower energy structures for NH_3-H_2SO_4 and dimethylamine (DMA)-H_2SO_4, low energy structure involving the hydrogen bonds between -OH of all MEA and H_2SO_4, Formation free energies for the clusters for MA/NH_3-H_2SO_4, evaporation rates for MA/DMA-H_2SO_4 clusters, the cluster formation rates and steady-state H_2SO_4 dimer concentrations as a function of temperature, the main clustering pathways for MA/DMA-H_2SO_4 clusters, hydrate distribution of clusters and coordinates of all optimized clusters. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

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