

Background Studies for the MINER Coherent Neutrino Scattering Reactor Experiment

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Abstract

The proposed Mitchell Institute Neutrino Experiment at Reactor (MINER) experiment at the Nuclear Science Center at Texas A&M University will search for coherent elastic neutrino-nucleus scattering within close proximity (about 2 meters) of a 1 MW TRIGA nuclear reactor core using low threshold, cryogenic germanium and silicon detectors. Given the Standard Model cross section of the scattering process and the proposed experimental proximity to the reactor, as many as 5 to 20 events/kg/day are expected. We discuss the status of preliminary measurements to characterize the main backgrounds for the proposed experiment. Both *in situ* measurements at the experimental site and simulations using the MCNP and GEANT4 codes are described. A strategy for monitoring backgrounds during data taking is briefly discussed.

1. Introduction

The cross section for the coherent elastic scattering of neutrinos off of nuclei (CE ν NS) [1] is a long-standing prediction of the Standard Model, but has yet to be measured experimentally in part due to the extremely low energy threshold needed for detection with typical high flux neutrino sources such as nuclear reactors. Improvements in semiconductor detector technologies [2] which utilize the Neganov-Luke phonon amplification method [3] have brought CE ν NS detection within reach. The Mitchell Institute Neutrino Experiment at Reactor (MINER) experiment, currently under development at the Nuclear Science Center (NSC) at Texas A&M University, will leverage this detector technology to detect CE ν NS and measure its cross section. If successful, the CE ν NS interactions can be used to probe new physics scenarios including a search for sterile neutrino oscillations, the neutrino magnetic moment, and other processes beyond the Standard Model [4–7]. The experiment will utilize a megawatt-class TRIGA (Training, Research, Isotopes, General Atomics) pool reactor stocked with low-enriched (about 20%) ²³⁵U. This facility has the unique

13 advantage of possessing a movable core and provides access to deploy detectors as close as about 1 m from
14 the reactor, allowing for a varying distance from the neutrino source to the detector. At these short baselines,
15 we expect to detect as many as 20 events/kg/day in the range of recoil energy between 10 and 1000 eV_{nr}.
16 This estimate is obtained by integrating the Standard Model differential cross-section over the neutrino
17 energy spectrum of a megawatt ²³⁵U reactor and integrating the nuclear recoil energy from the specified
18 sensitivity threshold up to the kinematic cutoff, as described in [4, 7]. The rate is cut to approximately a
19 third if the detection threshold is instead 100 eV_{nr}, and diminishes as r^{-2} with increasing distance, e.g. to
20 as many as 5 events/kg/day at 2 m.

21 An important aspect of the proposed experiment are the backgrounds induced by both the core and
22 environmental sources. These backgrounds include gammas and neutrons from the reactor, muons and
23 muon-induced neutrons from cosmic rays, and ambient gammas. The rate of such backgrounds must be
24 comparable to or below the expected rate of the neutrino recoil signal. We take a rate of 100 events/kg/day
25 in the range of recoil energy between 10 and 1000 eV_{nr} as the target level of acceptable background rate,
26 corresponding to a signal to background ratio of about 0.05 to 0.2. It has been demonstrated in [8] that
27 a signal rate of 10 over a background rate of 100 events/kg/day is discoverable at the 5σ level after a few
28 months of integrated run time using a binned profile likelihood test statistic with marginalization over the
29 background and flux normalization and assuming 2% systematic uncertainty. Events outside of this 10 to
30 1000 eV_{nr} energy window are acceptable to a level of about 100 Hz total event rate, dictated by the sampling
31 rate of the data acquisition system. These higher energy events can serve to normalize backgrounds in the
32 lower energy signal region.

33 The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, a brief description of the experimental location is given.
34 Section 3 describes the modeling of the reactor core and experiment in the MCNP and GEANT4 framework.
35 Sections 4, 5, and 6 describe the *in situ* measurements of the gamma, neutron, and cosmic muon backgrounds
36 respectively, including comparison to the simulation for the gamma and neutron backgrounds. Section 7
37 combines the simulation with the *in situ* measurements to estimate a background rate in the detectors given
38 a preliminary shielding design. Finally, status and prospects are described in Section 8.

39 2. Description of Experimental Site

40 The NSC reactor facility pool is surrounded by roughly 2 meters of high density concrete (about 3.5 g/cm³
41 density) which acts as a shield to the high flux of neutron and gamma byproducts in the reactor. A cavity in
42 this wall, dubbed the “Thermal Column”, was used in the past to facilitate close proximity to the reactor for
43 material neutron irradiation. The cavity is located in the lower research area of the NSC and is in the same
44 horizontal plane as the reactor core (see Figure 1). The cavity has many advantages as an experimental
45 location, including the ability to access an area in very close proximity to the core, a natural overburden
46 provided by the concrete wall to reduce the rate of cosmic muons, and an open area to allow placement of
47 optimized shielding between the core and the detectors. A schematic diagram of the Thermal Column can
48 be seen in Figure 1 and a photograph from the outside of the cavity is shown in Figure 2.

49 3. Background Simulation

50 3.1. Reactor Core Model

51 Fission processes in the reactor produce large fluxes of both gammas and neutrons near the core. The
52 energy spectrum and production rate of these backgrounds are predicted using a core model developed at the
53 NSC, shown in Figure 3, and applied in the MCNP [9] framework. The TRIGA reactor of the NSC features
54 a 90 fuel element, low-enriched uranium core operating at a nominal power of 1 MW. The fuel burn-up of
55 the relatively new core (installed in 2006) is modeled in a 15 axial layer configuration for each fuel element
56 and includes a wide range of fission products in the fuel material resulting in a high detail model of the
57 reactor.

58 Using the MCNP reactor core model, we calculated the neutron energy spectrum produced by the reactor
59 shown on the left in Figure 4, with fluxes of $5.8 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ fast component ($> 100 \text{ keV}$ kinetic energy)

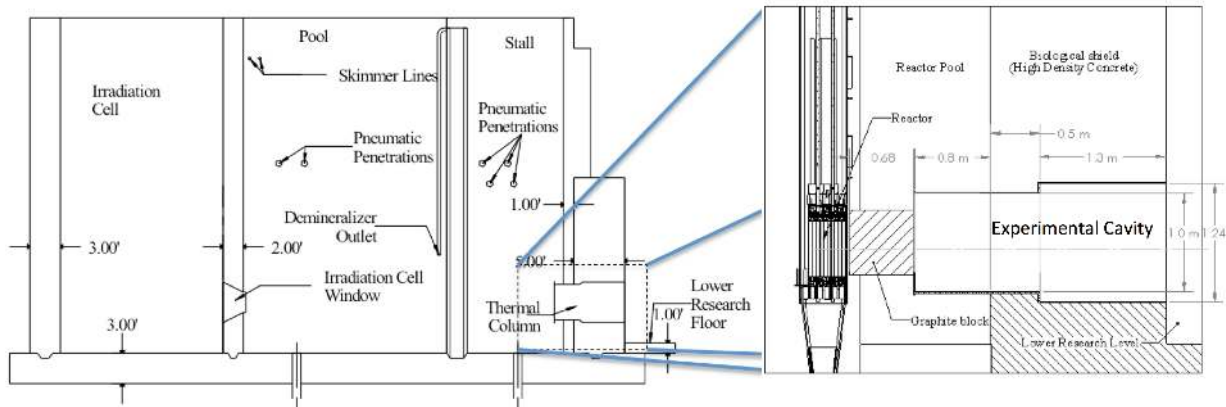


Figure 1: Schematic side view of the reactor pool and experimental cavity where the proposed detector and shielding will be constructed.



Figure 2: Photograph from the outside of the empty experimental cavity.

60 and $7.7 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ thermal component ($< 0.625 \text{ eV}$ kinetic energy). A moderator can be used to
 61 convert the fast neutron flux to a thermal flux which can be shielded using a thermal neutron absorber such
 62 as boron, cadmium or gadolinium.

63 The simulated gamma spectrum is shown on the right in Figure 4, with a total flux of $9.0 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$.
 64 This gamma energy spectrum can be attenuated by conventional high density materials such as lead.

65 3.2. GEANT4 Geometry Model

66 A model geometry of the experimental hall was constructed in the GEANT4 [10] (v10.2.1) framework.
 67 Correct description of the atomic composition of the surrounding materials is critical since backgrounds
 68 strongly depend on the materials used and secondary production of backgrounds in these materials must be
 69 included. Detailed material descriptions with isotope composition to the level of ppm are provided by the
 70 NSC and are included in the GEANT4 model.

71 Reactor gammas and neutrons were generated with an energy spectrum as produced by the MCNP core
 72 model described above. The flux is modeled to originate from a $30 \times 30 \text{ cm}^2$ square plane representing the
 73 active face of the reactor closest to the experimental cavity. To model different core positions, this source
 74 surface was moved to the corresponding core face position. To significantly save computational time, particles
 75 were simulated with only momenta along a direction from the reactor core to the experimental cavity,
 76 perpendicular to the source plane. The "Shielding" [11] physics list was used in all GEANT4 simulations
 77 described in this paper.

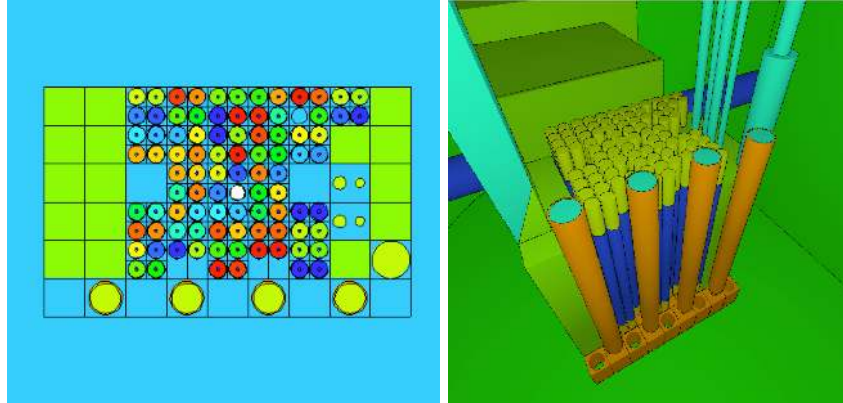


Figure 3: Visualization of the TRIGA reactor core as modeled in MCNP. The small circles in the picture represent the various fuel and control rods while the green rectangles are graphite reflectors. The fuel rods are about 3.58 cm in diameter and 38.1 cm in length.

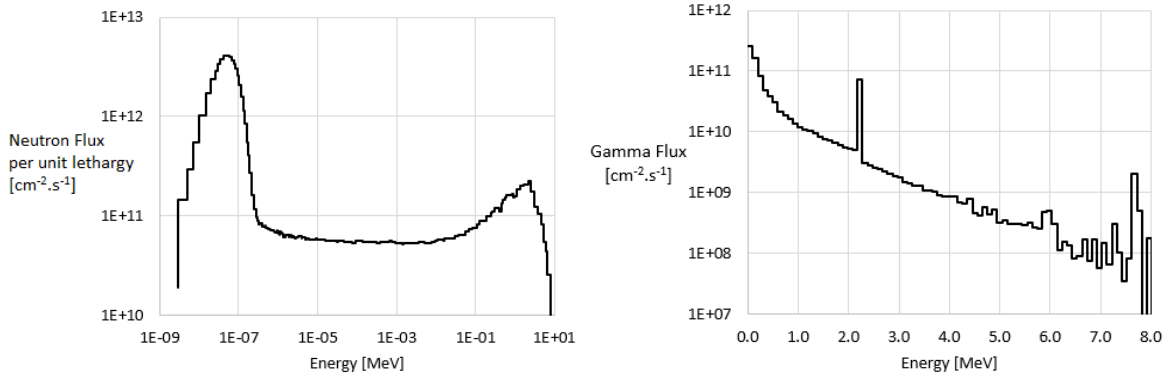


Figure 4: Calculated neutron (left) and gamma (right) spectra just outside the core volume (before shielding), obtained using the MCNP core model as described in the text. The neutron spectrum is bin-by-bin normalized to unit lethargy, with normalization factor given as $E_{Ave}/(E_2 - E_1)$ where E_1 and E_2 are the energy values at the respective bin edges and E_{Ave} is the average of these bin edge values. The 2.2 MeV line in the gamma spectrum is the result of neutron capture on Hydrogen in the surrounding water, while excesses in bins near 6 and 8 MeV are due to statistical fluctuations. The total fluxes from these calculations are $5.8 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ fast neutrons component ($> 100 \text{ keV}$ kinetic energy), $7.7 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ thermal neutrons ($< 0.625 \text{ eV}$ kinetic energy), and $9.0 \times 10^{11} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ gammas.

78 Since the initial flux from the reactor is large and the desired target rate at the detectors must be
79 low, we implemented a variance reduction scheme to obtain good statistical significance of the background
80 characteristics at the detector site. GEANT4 has multiple built-in variance reduction schemes available to
81 users, and we chose the ‘importance sampling’ scheme for this application. In the importance sampling
82 scheme, the geometry is divided up into different regions, each with an importance score assigned. As a
83 particle is propagated across the boundary of two such regions, the ratio of the importance score in the new
84 region over that of the previous region is taken. If this ratio is larger than one, the particle is duplicated a
85 number of times equal to this ratio decreased by one. If less than one, a “Russian Roulette” algorithm is
86 used to determine whether to terminate the particle with a probability equal to the ratio. Particles are then
87 weighted by the inverse of the importance ratio. By increasing the importance value assigned to regions
88 deeper within the shielding, the number of particles making it through to the detector is greatly enhanced.
89 We used 16 to 22 importance regions (depending on distance of the source to the detectors) of equal thickness
90 with importance score increasing by factors of 2. Large statistics GEANT4 simulations (typically around
91 10^9 primary particles generated) were run on both the Brazos Computing Cluster at Texas A&M University

92 as well as the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC) cluster at the University of Texas at Austin.

93 A preliminary shielding design was then added to the GEANT4 geometry model to assess the background
 94 expected in the full experimental setup. Materials included 1.38 m of high density borated (5%) polyethylene
 95 as neutron shielding and 30.5 cm of lead as gamma shielding. Additional lead and polyethylene were included
 96 after the initial shielding to reduce backgrounds from secondary particles which include neutrons from (γ,n)
 97 reactions and gammas released from neutron captures in the shielding materials. This shielding design is
 98 shown in Figure 5. The thickness of shielding materials in this design was chosen based on initial estimates
 99 made with simple GEANT4 geometry models but has not yet been optimized.

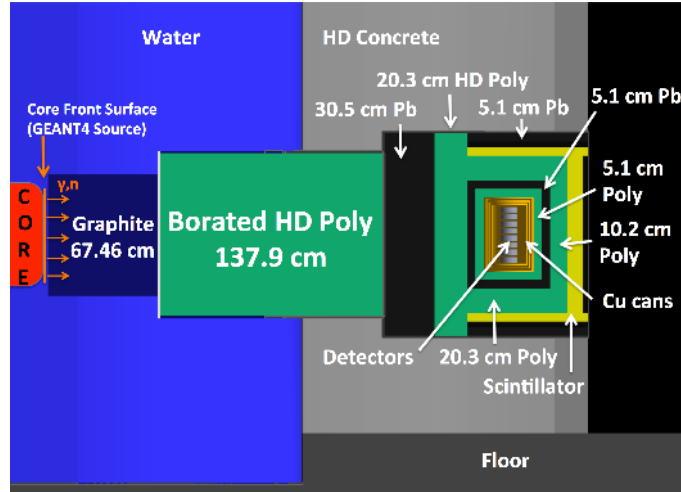


Figure 5: Cross section of the GEANT4 geometry model of the experimental cavity with a preliminary shield design. In this figure, different materials are represented by different colors. Blue: water, Dark Blue: graphite, Green: 5% Borated polyethylene, Light Gray: HD concrete, Dark Gray: Lead, Gold: Copper, Yellow: Plastic Scintillator. The small disks within the copper are germanium and silicon detectors.

100 4. Gamma Background Measurements

101 Background measurements have been conducted in the experimental cavity using a commercial High
 102 Purity Germanium (HPGe) detector shown in Figure 6 (Canberra GC2020, approx. 0.5 kg). Due to the
 103 large volume of water between the detector and the reactor core, these measurements were dominated by
 104 gamma interactions. A commercially available shield was used to limit the rate registered by the detector,
 105 while maintaining a simple geometry for matching with simulations. The shield is cylindrical, comprised of a
 106 4" layer of low activity lead enclosed externally by a 1/2" thick layer of steel. Inside the shield cavity, the lead
 107 is lined with layers of high purity tin and OFHC copper, approximately 0.04" and 0.06" thick, respectively,
 108 to block lead X-rays. Measurements were made at reactor powers of 0 kW (core off), 1 kW, 98 kW, and
 109 500 kW at distances (measured from the face of the core to the face of the experimental cavity) of 3.83 m,
 110 3.33 m, and 2.83 m (see Figure 7). All measurements consist of 300 seconds of live time. The HPGe detector
 111 was calibrated before measurements using a ^{22}Na source, which provides gammas with energy 511 keV and
 112 1274 keV.

113 Measured energy spectra are due to gammas produced in the reactor core and gammas from other
 114 sources (e.g., activated materials in the area). To properly compare simulations of the reactor core flux with
 115 measurements, the flux that is not coming directly from the reactor core must be subtracted. To perform
 116 this subtraction, we use the energy spectra measured at a given core position, while the reactor is turned
 117 off. An example of this subtraction is shown in Figure 8. It can be seen that after this subtraction, the only
 118 remaining spectral line is the 511 keV electron-positron annihilation line. Other lines present in the initial

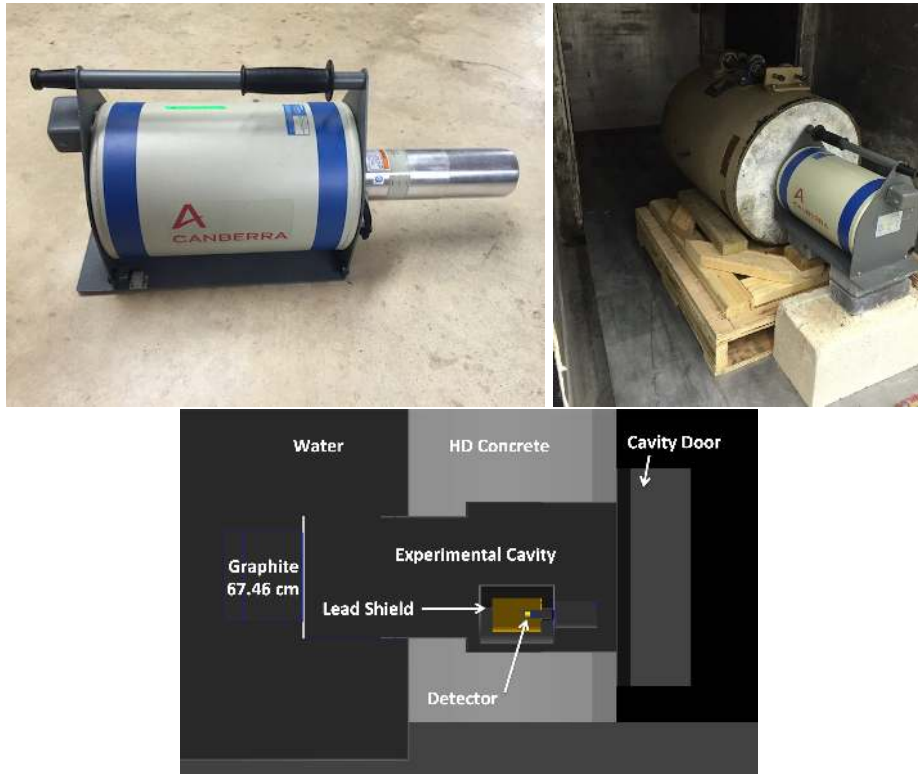


Figure 6: Top Left: Photo of Canberra HPGGe detector used in the gamma measurement. Top Right: Placement of HPGGe detector and shielding in the experimental cavity for the gamma measurement. The active detector is shielded by approximately 4 inches of lead provided by the commercial shield described in the text. Bottom: Cross section of GEANT4 geometry (side view) used in simulation of this setup. The active detector is shown in yellow. The only shielding present in this configuration is the commercial gamma shielding described in the text (the experimental cavity was otherwise empty).

119 reactor core gamma energy spectrum are washed out due to gammas interacting in the water, graphite, and
 120 lead shielding between the core and detector.

121 The different core positions were simulated in GEANT4, including a model of the lead shielding and the
 122 HPGGe detector used to make the measurement (shown schematically in Figure 6). Each core position in
 123 simulation was systematically 2 cm further from the detector than the corresponding position in the data,
 124 due to a correction made to the measured position after the simulation had been run. For each core position,
 125 approximately 3×10^9 single gamma initial events were generated using the energy spectrum obtained from
 126 the MCNP core model described previously. The deposited energy of gammas reaching the detector were
 127 compared to the background-subtracted data, as shown in Figure 9. In this plot, the GEANT4 prediction
 128 was scaled to match the integrated event count of the data in the region of deposited energy greater than
 129 100 keV. The energy resolution in the higher rate environment of the experimental cavity was dominated
 130 by pile-up effects resulting in a degradation of resolution with rate. A resolution smearing was applied
 131 to the simulated results to account for this effect, determined using a comparison of width of the 511 keV
 132 line between the simulation and the data. A simple Gaussian fit was used to determine these line widths
 133 (ranging from about 4 keV to 8 keV), and the difference of the squares of these widths was used to define
 134 a new Gaussian which was then applied as an event-by-event smearing to the simulated energy deposits. The
 135 simulation and data matched quite well in shape, with about a 25% deviation for the region above 3 MeV.
 136 The large deviation in the region below 20 keV is due to detector threshold effects not accounted for in the
 137 simulation.

138 We determined the scaling of event rate as a function of core position in both the measured and the
 139 simulated spectra by taking the ratio of background-subtracted spectra at each position. This ratio is shown

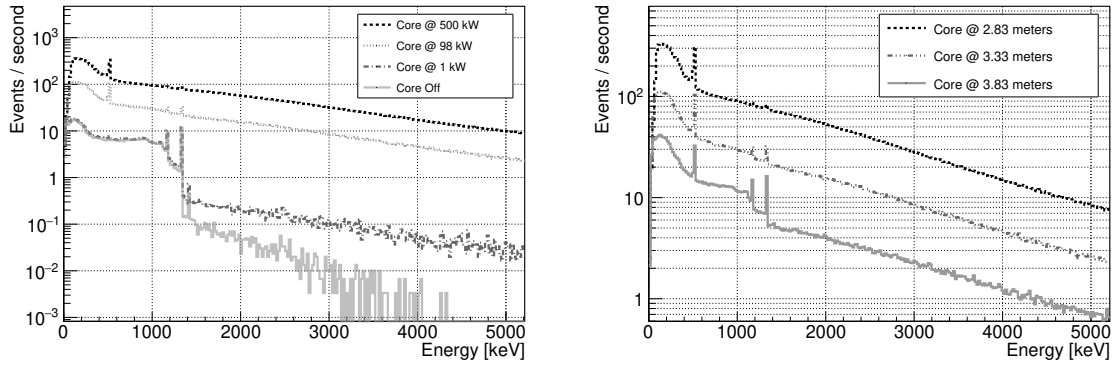


Figure 7: Measured gamma spectrum in the commercial HPGe detector (Canberra GC2020, approx. 0.5kg) for different reactor powers with the core held at 3.33 meters (left) and different reactor positions with the core at 98 kW power (right). All runs consist of 300 seconds of live time.

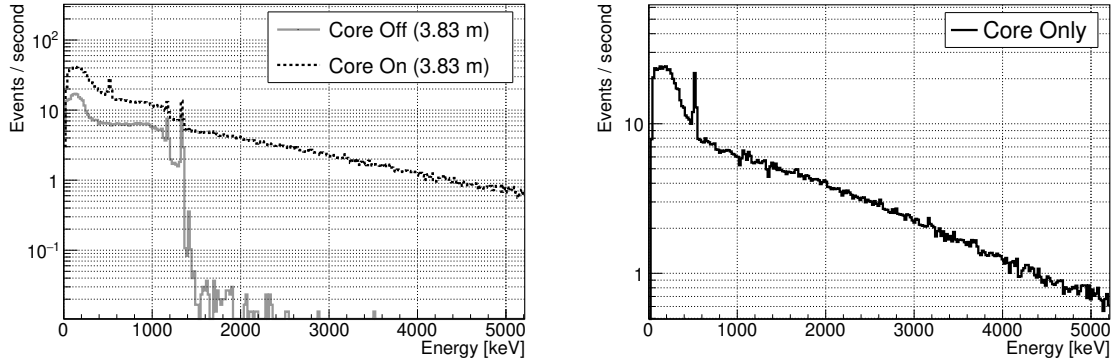


Figure 8: Full measured gamma spectrum in HPGe detector with the core (at distance 3.83 m) on and with the core off (left). The core-off spectrum is subtracted from the core-on spectrum to get the “core-only” spectrum (right) which can be compared directly to the simulation. The main features of the core-off spectrum are the two Cobalt 60 gamma lines at 1173.2 and 1332.5 keV which come from activated stainless steel lining near the back of the experimental cavity.

140 in Figure 10. The rate is reduced by roughly a factor of 3.5 per 0.5 m of increased distance from the core in
 141 both the data and the simulation. Because this scaling of rate with distance is reproduced to within about
 142 10-15% in the simulation, the scaling factor needed to translate the simulated result to a rate is taken to
 143 be constant regardless of the distance of the core to the detector. We take as this scaling factor the ratio
 144 of the integrated event count of the data (in the region of deposited energy greater than 100 keV) to the
 145 integrated weighted event count in the same region in the simulated result. This scaling factor was applied
 146 to all further simulated results to obtain rate estimations.

147 5. Neutron Background Measurements

148 Due to administrative and safety constraints preventing deployment of traditional detectors, the back-
 149 ground neutron measurement was thus far restricted to measurements needed for validation of the compu-
 150 tational models. The validation measurement was performed using a 6×6 inch copper foil (see Figure 11)
 151 that was activated by neutrons in the experimental cavity. The copper acts as an absorber of thermal
 152 neutrons and can be used to verify the integrated thermal neutron flux by measuring the activation of the
 153 foil after neutron exposure. This measurement was performed with the core and experimental cavity in the
 154 configuration shown in Figure 1 (left) (i.e., without any additional shielding).

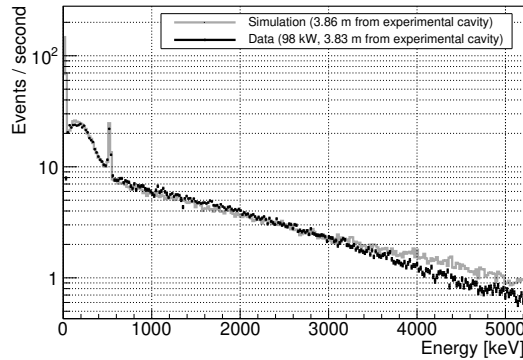


Figure 9: Comparison of reactor core gamma spectrum measured by the Canberra HPGe detector and the prediction from the GEANT4 simulation. The GEANT4 prediction is scaled to match the integrated event count of the data for the region of deposited energy greater than 100 keV in order to compare shape. The large deviation in the region below 20 keV is due to detector threshold effects not accounted for in the simulation.

155 Using the MCNP simulation, the neutron spectrum at the surface of the graphite box facing the exper-
 156 imental cavity was determined using the 172 energy bin XMAS structure [12]. The calculated spectrum is
 157 shown in Figure 11 (right), with fluxes of $5.6(3) \times 10^6 \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ fast and $4.0(2) \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ thermal
 158 neutrons, and was used in a subsequent activation analysis to obtain the capture cross-section of ^{63}Cu .
 159 This cross-section was then used in the Bateman equations [13] to obtain the total thermal flux from the
 160 ^{64}Cu measured activity. The activated ^{64}Cu decays with a half life of 12.7 hours via electron capture, beta
 161 and positron emission (0.5787 MeV and 0.6531 MeV respectively), and gamma emission (1.355 MeV). The
 162 activity of the foil was measured by a HPGe detector at the NSC, resulting in a measured total thermal
 163 neutron flux of $5.8(3) \times 10^7 \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$. The uncertainty on these fluxes include both statistical uncertainty
 164 from the model calculation and HPGe activation measurement as well as uncertainty on the core power
 165 calibration.

166 The measured thermal neutron flux together with a calculated thermal neutron flux profile is shown in
 167 Figure 12. The data point was consistent with the expected result from the simulation within 5%, indicating
 168 that the neutron flux is predicted by the MCNP core model.

169 6. Muon Background Measurements

170 Bolometric detectors with low thresholds are particularly vulnerable to large energy depositions from
 171 atmospheric muons. A typical solution for low rate experiments to this problem is to install such detectors
 172 deep underground, maximizing the overburden, and thus shielding of the detector. For detecting higher
 173 rate processes, such as neutrino interactions near a nuclear reactor, a higher muon rate can be tolerated.
 174 The experimental cavity proposed for this experiment provides some overburden in the form of the high
 175 density concrete wall surrounding the reactor pool, as the cavity is located within this wall (see Figure 1).
 176 This overburden has been characterized with regards to its muon shielding effectiveness by measurements
 177 described below.

178 Two polyvinyl-toluene scintillators (one smaller $1.75 \times 0.5 \times 0.375 \text{ in}^3$ panel on top and a larger $13.0 \times 3.0 \times$
 179 0.375 in^3 panel on bottom, separated by a 2 in lead brick) were installed to trigger on muons. These counters
 180 were coupled to photomultiplier tubes via waveguides and were connected to front-end NIM electronics
 181 to produce a coincidence signal when both scintillators triggered above threshold within a 3 ns window
 182 of each other. Due to the high rate (and high energy) gamma environment, accidental triggers due to
 183 random coincidence were an experimental concern. To characterize the rate of such events, the signal of
 184 one scintillator was delayed arbitrarily to about 150 ns, maintaining all other aspects of the experimental
 185 conditions. This setup was first exposed in the most radioactive location surveyed to get an upper limit on
 186 the rate of random coincidence events. A 13 hr run under these conditions showed no events passing the

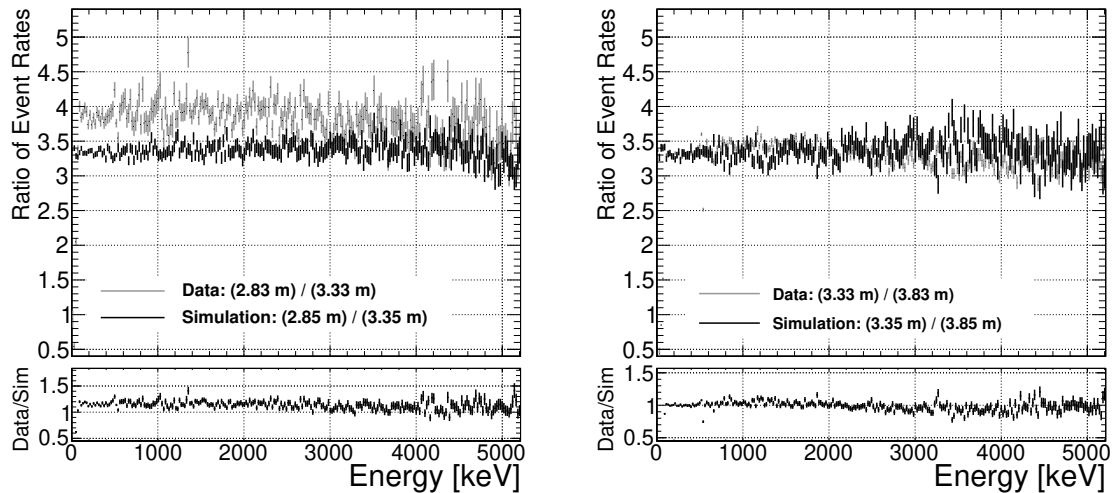


Figure 10: Event rate scaling as a function of deposited energy in the HPGe detector for different reactor core positions in the measured data and simulation. Error bars are statistical uncertainties only.

187 coincidence requirement, demonstrating that a subtraction correction for random coincidence would not be
 188 necessary.

189 Muon measurements were made with this setup at 5 locations. The first was made in a building adjacent
 190 to the reactor confinement building as a baseline measurement. This location has no effective overburden
 191 and was used as an open-sky muon baseline reference. With this setup, a rate of about $1 \mu/\text{min}/\text{cm}^2$ was
 192 measured at that location. The equipment was then moved to the lower research level of the reactor
 193 confinement building. The other measurements were made in the confinement building and all share the
 194 overburden of the 1 m thick high density concrete roof. The next measurement, performed outside of the
 195 reactor pool wall, showed a 17% reduction in muon rate compared to the baseline. The setup was then
 196 installed in the experimental cavity, inserted into 3 different positions in the cavity as shown in Figure 13.
 197 The measured reduction in muon rate with respect to the open-sky baseline is given in Table 1.

Position #	Distance Into Cavity	Muon Rate Reduction
1	-	$17 \pm 6\%$
2	1.0 m	$50 \pm 3\%$
3	1.5 m	$57 \pm 6\%$
4	2.5 m	$47 \pm 4\%$

Table 1: The muon rate reduction with respect to the open-sky measurement. Position number refers to the positions marked on the diagram in Figure 13. The open-sky measurement was taken in a separate building at the NSC facility located at ground level.

198 These measurements show a 50% reduction of muons incident upon the MINER detectors in the proposed
 199 experimental cavity. They also guide calculations of energy depositions that will be carefully considered in
 200 finalizing the geometry of the detectors. For a given volume/mass, one must make a trade-off between
 201 muon rate (determined effectively by a detector's horizontal cross-section) and energy deposition per muon
 202 (determined by detector's vertical dimension).

203 7. Rate Estimate With Shielding

204 We then used the GEANT4 setup to estimate the backgrounds with a full preliminary shielding design,
 205 as shown in Figure 5. We generated approximately 3×10^9 gamma and 4×10^9 neutron events with the

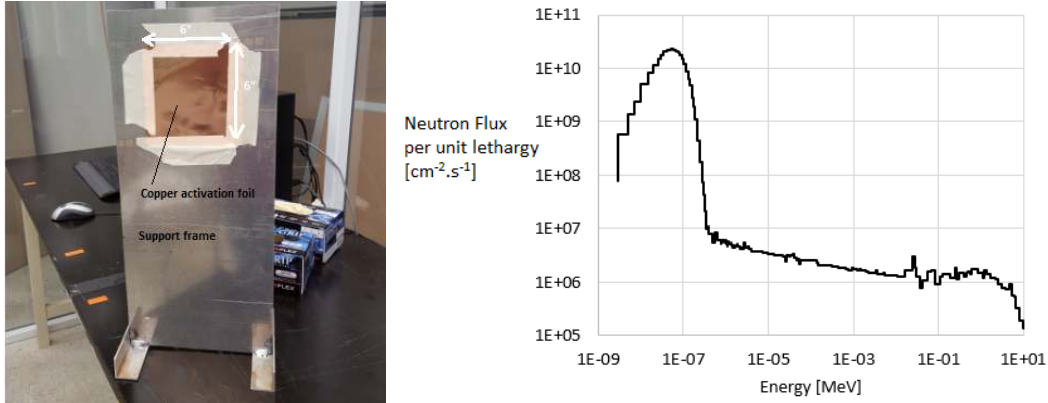


Figure 11: Photo of the 6×6 in copper foil setup which was placed in the experimental cavity to be irradiated by neutrons(left). Neutron spectrum inside the experimental cavity at the surface of the graphite block facing the experimental cavity, as calculated by MCNP (right). The neutron spectrum is bin-by-bin normalized to unit lethargy, with normalization factor given as $E_{Ave}/(E_2 - E_1)$ where E_1 and E_2 are the energy values at the respective bin edges and E_{Ave} is the average of these bin edge values.

206 core at the closest possible proximity to the experimental cavity (at the face of the graphite block shown
 207 in Figure 1). The simulation included 4 germanium detectors and 4 silicon detectors, each represented as
 208 100 mm diameter, 33 mm thickness cylinders, and backgrounds were assessed by determining the energy
 209 deposited in these volumes. Rates were determined using the scaling obtained in the previous gamma and
 210 neutron measurements. The resulting spectrum of energy deposited is shown in Figure 14.

211 These rates are compatible with the target background rate of 100 events/kg/day in the range of recoil
 212 energy between 10 and 1000 eV_{nr} and optimization of the shielding configuration will further reduce the
 213 estimated rate. The event rate outside of this window was approximately 30 Hz, found by converting
 214 events/day to events/sec and multiplying by the mass of the 4 Ge and 4 Si detectors used in this simulation.
 215 This total event rate is below the acceptable upper limit of about 100 Hz set by our data acquisition hardware.
 216 It should be noted that moving the core further away would drastically reduce the expected background,
 217 due to the addition of more water shielding between core and experiment, as well as the r^{-2} reduction
 218 with distance. This estimate gives us confidence that we are within reach of our background goal with a
 219 reasonable shielding configuration and within a core to experiment distance compatible with making our
 220 signal measurement.

221 8. Summary and Future Prospects

222 We have performed *in situ* measurements and detailed simulations of expected backgrounds for the
 223 proposed MINER experiment with the goal of detecting CE ν NS. Simulations reproduce the measurements
 224 of thermal neutrons and gammas and were used to estimate the expected backgrounds with a full shielding
 225 designed to bring the backgrounds down to a level compatible with a measurement of the CE ν NS signal
 226 in the MINER experiment. This simulation has shown that it is indeed possible to reduce both neutron
 227 and gamma backgrounds to a level of about 100 events/kg/day in the range of recoil energy between 10
 228 and 1000 eV_{nr} with the reactor core as close as about 2.3 m.

229 Gamma measurements will be performed with increased lead shielding and a core at the closest position
 230 to the experiment. Neutron measurements will be performed with other foil samples to provide multiple
 231 checks against the simulation, as well as with other detector technologies. In parallel, optimization of the
 232 shielding configuration is being performed in both the GEANT4 and MCNP simulations to further reduce
 233 the neutron and gamma background. Simulation of muon-induced neutron backgrounds are now underway,
 234 but these are expected to be small in the experimental region of interest.

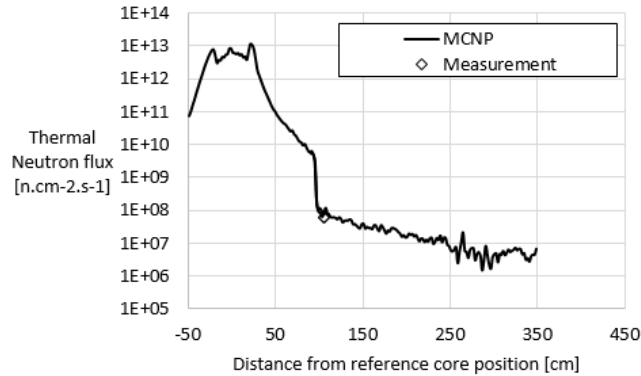


Figure 12: Thermal neutron flux as a function of distance from the reactor core center with only the graphite block between core and foil position. The data point represents the flux calculated using the measured activation of the copper foil at that position. The solid line indicates the flux calculated directly from the MCNP core model.

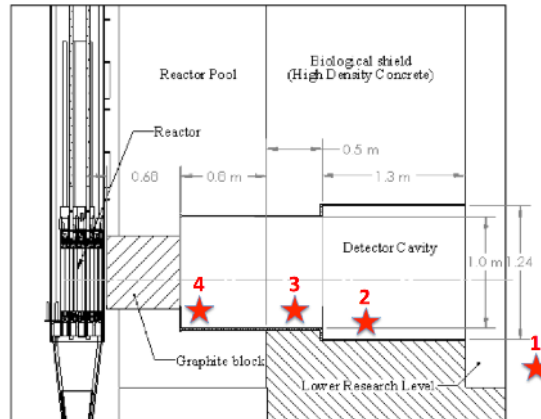


Figure 13: Approximate position of the muon scintillation detector in the experimental cavity for the four measurements made in or near the experimental cavity. A baseline measurement not shown in this figure was made in an adjacent building with minimal overburden.

235 Based on measurements reported here and planned in the future, we are developing plans for *in situ*
 236 monitoring of backgrounds for the MINER experiment. Several technologies are being considered including
 237 segmented, active liquid-scintillator shield, and a dedicated iZIP-type detector used by SuperCDMS [14] that
 238 provides excellent nuclear recoil discrimination down to 1 keV recoil energy. Also, to further monitor and
 239 characterize neutron backgrounds, a ^6Li doped scintillator detector for thermal neutrons, and a PTP-doped
 240 scintillator with neutron/gamma pulse shape discrimination for fast neutrons are being constructed at the
 241 Texas A&M University Cyclotron Institute.

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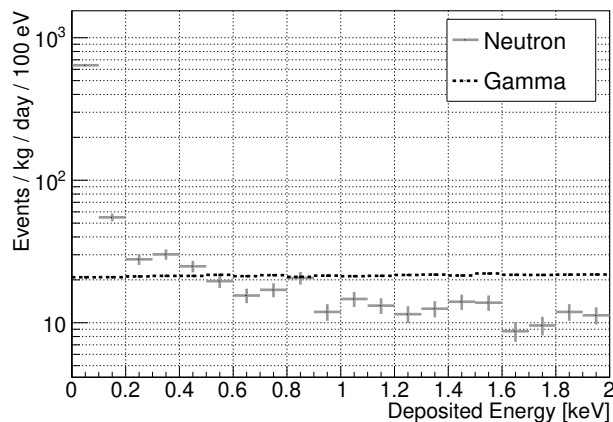


Figure 14: Energy deposited in the germanium detectors due to neutron and gamma backgrounds as estimated using the GEANT4 simulation and shielding design shown in Figure 5. The core source was located at the closest possible proximity to the experimental cavity. Uncertainties shown on this plot are statistical only.

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