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Published on: 01 Sep 2004 - Critical Reviews in Environmental Science and Technology (Taylor & Francis Group)

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New Approaches for Bioaugmentation as a Remediation Technology

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Bioaugmentation is commonly employed as a remediation technology. However, numerous studies indicate that introduced microorganisms often do not survive in the environment and thus do not increase contaminant remediation. This review details several new approaches that may increase the persistence and activity of exogenous microorganisms and/or genes following introduction into the environment. These techniques include: (1) bioaugmentation with cells encapsulated in a carrier such as alginate; (2) gene bioaugmentation where the goal is for the added inoculant to transfer remediation genes to indigenous microorganisms; (3) rhizosphere bioaugmentation where the microbial inoculant is added to the site along with a plant that serves as a niche for the inoculant's growth; and (4) phytoaugmentation where the remediation genes are engineered directly into a plant for use in remediation without a microbial inoculant. Additionally, the review discusses the generation of genetically engineered microorganisms for use in bioaugmentation along with methods for the control of the engineered microorganisms in the environment, and the potential effects of the release on indigenous organisms. Various methods for the detection of introduced microorganisms such as real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and reporter genes are also addressed. Ultimately, these new approaches may broaden the application of bioaugmentation as a remediation technology.

KEY WORDS: genetically engineered microorganism, immobilized cell, phytoaugmentation, phytoremediation, reporter gene, suicide gene

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. History of Bioaugmentation

Bioaugmentation has been utilized in agriculture for many years. The inoculation of legumes with symbiotic, nitrogen-fixing *Rhizobium* spp. dates back to the 1800s. Attempts have also been made to utilize bioaugmentation with free-living or plant-associated nitrogen-fixing bacteria such as *Azotobacter* or *Azospirillum* spp. to increase plant yields.^{147,175} Other agricultural applications of bioaugmentation include inoculation of plant seeds with plant-growth-promoting microorganisms or with plant-protecting microorganisms that are antagonistic to plant pathogens.^{15,88,157} Inoculation is also used to transform agricultural products into more useful forms such as the generation of silage from forages.²²⁷

More recently, bioaugmentation has been applied in attempts to remediate numerous environmental problems. Inoculants are commonly added to compost piles and septic tanks to expedite degradation.⁶⁸ Bioaugmentation with microorganisms has been shown to increase degradation of numerous compounds including chlorinated solvents, methyl *tert*-butyl ether, nitrophenols, oil, pentachlorophenol, polychlorinated biphenyls, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and several pesticides such as atrazine, dicamba, and carbofuran.^{3,129,191,200,214} However, numerous other studies have demonstrated that bioaugmentation often does not result in increased contaminant remediation.^{3,26,152}

B. Problems Associated with Bioaugmentation

Studies often observe that the number of exogenous microorganisms decreases shortly after addition to a site. There are several explanations for the death of introduced organisms, including both abiotic and biotic stresses.³ The abiotic stresses may include fluctuations or extremes in temperature, water content, pH, and nutrient availability, along with potentially toxic pollutant levels in contaminated soil.^{221,243} In addition, the added microorganisms almost always face competition from indigenous organisms for limited nutrients, along with antagonistic interactions including antibiotic production by competing organisms, and predation by protozoa and bacteriophages.

It can also be difficult to deliver the inoculant to the desired location.^{55,222} This is not problematic for surface soils where the inoculant can be mechanically incorporated into the contaminated material, but in subsurface environments direct incorporation ranges from difficult to impossible. Technologies such as use of ultramicrobacteria, bacteria with altered cell surface properties, and/or addition of surfactants may facilitate greater transport through the soil matrix.^{188,222} The ability to distribute the inoculant also depends on what organism is being used. Fungi, which are larger than bacteria, are

usually restricted to surface applications while bacteria are more adaptable to surface or subsurface applications.

Other researchers including Dejonghe et al.,⁴⁷ Pritchard,¹⁷² van Veen et al.,²⁴³ and Vogel²⁴⁵ have published reviews on bioaugmentation. Our goals for this review are to build on the foundation of the previous bioaugmentation reviews and to discuss new technologies, including: (1) novel methods to increase survival of microorganisms inoculated into contaminated sites; (2) the development of genetically engineered microorganisms with increased remediation capabilities; (3) use of reporter genes to monitor the activity and/or presence of introduced microorganisms; (4) use of suicide genes to control the spread of genetically engineered microorganisms; and (5) plant-based technologies for delivering remediation genes to a contaminated site.

II. CELL BIOAUGMENTATION

A. Carrier and Encapsulation Technologies for Inoculant Delivery

1. USE OF CARRIER MATERIALS FOR BIOAUGMENTATION

Several different techniques have recently been developed for bioaugmenting environmental sites (Figure 1 and Table 1), but microbial inoculants have historically been applied to the soil as live microorganisms in either a liquid culture or attached to a carrier material.¹⁶⁷ When applying the inoculant to a harsh environment such as soil, it may be desirable to use a carrier material since it can provide a protective niche and even temporary nutrition for the introduced microorganism.²⁴³ Numerous different carrier materials have been used including biosolids, charcoal-amended soil, clay, lignite, manure, and peat.^{11,13,104,113,164,243} Most of the research on the different carrier materials

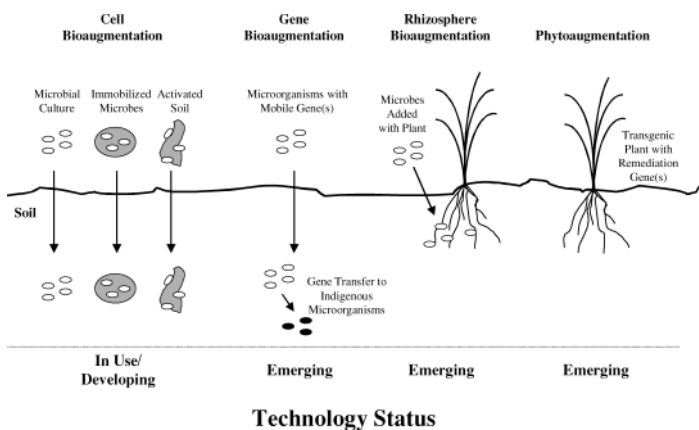


FIGURE 1. Overview of different technologies for delivering remediation genes to contaminated sites.

TABLE 1. Selected Research Articles Detailing the Different Approaches for Use of Bioaugmentation as a Remediation Technology

Bioaugmentation approach	Organism(s) used	Contaminant(s)	Reference
Cell			
Culture	<i>Comamonas testosteroni</i> BR60	3-Chlorobenzoate	77
	<i>Ralstonia eutropha</i> JMP134 and <i>Pseudomonas</i> strain H1	Cadmium and 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid	181
Immobilized	<i>Alcaligenes faecalis</i>	Phenol	10
	Mixed microbial culture	2,4-dichlorophenol	173
	<i>Pseudomonas</i> sp. UG14Lr	Phenanthrene	250
	<i>Flavobacterium</i> sp. and <i>Rhodococcus chlorophenolicus</i> PCP-1	Pentachlorophenol	28
Activated Soil	Indigenous microorganisms	Pentachlorophenol	9
	Indigenous microorganisms	Atrazine	189
	Indigenous microorganisms	2-, 3-, and 4-Chlorobenzoate	76
Gene	<i>Ralstonia eutropha</i> JMP134	2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid	53
	<i>Ralstonia eutropha</i> JMP134 and <i>E. coli</i> D11	2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid	155
	<i>Comamonas</i> sp. rN7(R503)	Phenol	249
	<i>Pseudomonas putida</i> UWC3	2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid	48
Rhizosphere	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i> and <i>Suillus variegatus</i>	2,4-Dichlorophenol	139
	<i>Triticum aestivum</i> and <i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i>	Trichloroethylene	261
	<i>Elymus dauricus</i> and <i>Pseudomonas</i> spp.	2-Chlorobenzoate	208
	<i>Bromus erectus</i> Huds. and <i>Pseudomonas</i> sp. Strain I4	2,4,6-Trinitrotoluene	212
Phytoaugmentation	<i>Oryza sativa</i>	3-Chlorocatechol	207
	<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	Methylmercury	18
	<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	Arsenic	51
	<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	Lead	78
	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	Copper	231
	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	Trinitrotoluene	72

has been for agricultural legume inoculants, with peat being the most commonly used.^{164,243,244}

Research has indicated that presterilization of the carrier can increase the inoculant's shelf life.²²⁸ The results of Van Dyke and Prosser²⁴² also demonstrate that preincubation of the inoculant in a sterile carrier can enhance its ultimate survival in environment. The researchers added a *Pseudomonas fluorescens* strain to soil either as a liquid culture, in a sterile soil carrier, or in a nonsterile soil carrier. The bacteria introduced via the sterile soil demonstrated enhanced survival as compared to the other treatments. After 28 d, $<10^3$ CFU/g of the 10^7 CFU/g of introduced bacteria remained in the

microcosms amended with the liquid inoculant and nonsterile soil inoculant, as compared to $>10^4$ CFU of introduced bacteria per gram in microcosms amended with the sterile soil inoculant. The authors also included treatments where *P. fluorescens* was inoculated in sterile soil, incubated for 7 or 14 d, and then used as the bioaugmentation inoculant. Interestingly, the longer *P. fluorescens* was incubated in the sterile soil, the better it survived when added to the target, nonsterile soil. The researchers theorized that growth of *P. fluorescens* in the sterile soil may have allowed the strain to adapt to the soil environment prior to encountering competition from indigenous microorganisms when added to the nonsterile soil.

The ideal characteristics for a carrier material as listed by van Veen et al.²⁴³ include: (1) providing an adequate environment for cell survival and growth resulting in a long shelf life and enhanced activity when added to the environment; (2) being nontoxic to the inoculant microorganisms and the environment; and (3) allowing targeted introduction of cells and also a means to contain the introduced microorganisms when control is necessary. All of the different materials listed earlier could potentially increase the inoculant's shelf life. However, biosolids and manure may introduce pathogens (unless sterilized) or other contaminants into the environment, and none of these materials would be effective at restricting the spread of the inoculant.

2. BIOAUGMENTATION WITH ENCAPSULATED MICROORGANISMS

Several other materials including acrylate copolymers, agarose, alginate, gelatin, gellan gum, kappa-carrageenan, polyurethane, and polyvinyl alcohol gel have been developed to encapsulate or immobilize cells for various purposes.^{75,85,141,149,165,173,203} Recently, researchers have investigated the use of these compounds to encapsulate microorganisms for introduction into soil or water.^{236,243} The different materials have varying characteristics and degrees of recalcitrance that may or may not be beneficial depending on the application²⁴ (Table 2). Alginate is the most commonly investigated carrier for bioremediation applications, and has been used with numerous contaminants including chromium, cresol, nitrate, pentachlorophenol, phenanthrene, phenol, phosphate, and 2,4,6-trichlorophenol.^{10,28,73,75,87,141,166,206,250} Alginate may also have potential for delivery of naked DNA directly into the environment for the purpose of gene bioaugmentation,¹ which is discussed in a later section.

As pointed out by van Veen et al.,²⁴³ the use of these materials allow the microorganisms to be contained in a relatively non-toxic matrix through which gases and liquids can diffuse. The capsule matrix can buffer the introduced microorganisms against pollutant toxicity in the environment.^{10,149} Additionally, substrates or C compounds can be added to the capsule to confer an advantage to the embedded inoculant;²³⁶ however, Duquenne et al.⁶² reported that diffusion of growth substrates from the capsule into the surrounding environment can diminish the positive effect. The capsule may

TABLE 2. Properties of Various Materials Used to Encapsulate Inoculants

Material	Description	Notable properties	Reference
Alginate	Linear polymer comprised of mannuronic and guluronic acid monomers. Produced by algae and several bacteria. Solidified by cross-linking with Ca ²⁺ ions.	Nontoxic, biodegradable. Commonly used encapsulating material.	10
Carrageenan	Comprised of galactose monomers that differ in degree of sulfonation. Produced by algae. Extrusion into K ⁺ ions strengthens gel.	Nontoxic, biodegradable. Cell exposure to >35°C during some encapsulation processes may harm microorganisms.	75
Polyacrylamide	Synthetic polymer formed by crosslinking acrylamide monomers using bisacrylamide.	More stable, not readily degradable, but acrylamide monomer is toxic.	236
Polyvinyl alcohol gel	Synthetic gel. Polyvinyl alcohol may be mixed with alginate and cross-linked with Ca ²⁺ ions.	Nontoxic, not readily degradable. Forms very elastic gel.	173

also protect the inoculant from indigenous microorganisms as evidenced by prevention of phage Φ R2f lysis of alginate-encapsulated *Pseudomonas fluorescens*.²¹⁶

Another potential benefit of the encapsulation technology is the ability to create microsites with a unique microbial community that works interactively to remediate a given compound. Hajji et al.⁸⁷ used an alginate-encapsulated methanogenic consortium to remediate *o*-cresol, *p*-cresol, and phenol contaminated sludges. Total removal of phenol occurred in less than 40 d following the addition of the encapsulated organisms, as compared to 171 d in the control without the consortium. Similar effects were seen for *o*- and *p*-cresol, although both compounds took longer to degrade than did the phenol. Additionally, Vassilev et al.²⁴⁴ demonstrated the utility of encapsulated, mixed microbial cultures for rhizosphere bioaugmentation. The researchers inoculated soil with the arbuscular mycorrhizae *Glomus deserticola* and the P-solubilizing yeast *Yarrowia lipolytica*. The microorganisms were applied to the soil either as free cultures, in alginate alone, or in alginate together. Treatments receiving the coencapsulated strains had increased plant dry weights, soluble P levels, and levels of mycorrhizal colonization. The authors concluded that the yeast had functioned as a “mycorrhizae helper microorganism.”

3. ACTIVATED SOIL BIOAUGMENTATION

Another approach to cell bioaugmentation is to use activated soil directly as both the inoculant and carrier without extracting the degraders from the

soil.^{9,47,76,189} Activated soil is defined as soil that has been exposed to the contaminant of interest and contains a developed degrader population that can eliminate the contaminant. The use of activated soil for bioaugmentation has the appearance of being less scientific than other methods but has the potential advantages of: (1) introduction of a naturally developed degrader population(s) that may be composed of several members or even consortia that would not be as effective if they were isolated and applied to the site as pure cultures; (2) the degraders are not cultured outside of the soil and thus do not lose their ability to compete in the environment as is often observed for lab-cultured strains; and (3) potential inclusion of unculturable degraders that would be missed in attempts to isolate and culture an organism from one site in order to introduce the organism to another site.⁷⁶ Activated soil also provides many of the benefits of materials such as peat and alginate as described in the previous sections.⁹

Barbeau et al.⁹ used activated soil to remediate pentachlorophenol (PCP)-contaminated soil. The researchers collected two different PCP-contaminated soils from a wood-mill site and a treated-pole storage site. Soil 2 degraded PCP and was used for the bioaugmentation inoculant, while Soil 1 did not degrade PCP and was bioaugmented. The activated soil inoculant was prepared by incubating Soil 2 in a soil slurry bioreactor for 31 d. Progressively increased levels of PCP (up to 300 mg/L) were added to the bioreactor during the incubation. The activated Soil 2 was then used to bioaugment Soil 1 resulting in addition of 10^5 CFU of PCP degraders/g bioaugmented soil. The PCP concentration in Soil 1 bioaugmented with activated Soil 2 decreased from 400 mg/kg to 5 mg/kg within 130 d, while PCP concentrations remained unchanged in the nonbioaugmented soil.

Despite the potential benefits, there can be disadvantages to the use of carriers, encapsulated cells, or activated soils for bioaugmentation. These technologies are more suited to surface applications due to the probability that microbial encapsulation in, or attachment to, larger particles may further impede their movement through soil or sediment.¹⁵⁰ Depending on the environmental conditions, microorganisms, and encapsulating material used, adverse conditions may develop within the capsule, such as the accumulation of toxic compounds or anoxic conditions, which may inhibit or kill the inoculant.^{149,251} It is therefore critical to match the appropriate carrier technology with the specific conditions of the contaminated site. More thorough discussions on environmental applications of carriers and encapsulated cells can be found in Cassidy et al.³⁶ and Trevors et al.²³⁶

B. Methods to Increase Microbial Transport Following Bioaugmentation

As discussed in the previous sections, it can be difficult to introduce and disperse microorganisms through the subsurface due to microbial

sorption and physical straining by soil solids.^{55,218,222} Techniques that researchers have investigated in order to increase microbial transport include the use of adhesion-deficient bacteria,^{55,222} ultramicrobacteria,^{33,122,188} and surfactants.^{29,131} Streger et al.²²² developed an adhesion-deficient strain of the methyl *tert*-butyl ether degrader *Hydrogenophaga flava* ENV735 by sequentially passing a culture through sterile sediment 27 times. While >99.5% of the cells were initially retained in the sediment, only 39% of the cells adhered to the sediment after 27 passes. In sand column studies, a maximum concentration of 10^7 adhesion-deficient cells/ml eluted, in contrast to 10^4 wild-type cells/ml that eluted. The results were even more dramatic for sediment columns, with 10^7 adhesion-deficient cells/ml eluting in contrast to no wild-type cells being detected even after 6 pore volumes of flow through. Further analysis indicated that the cell surface of the adhesion-deficient strain was much more hydrophilic than that of the wild-type strain, thus facilitating enhanced transport. The researchers also found that a 0.1% concentration of the surfactant Tween 20 reduced adhesion of the wild-type cells to a sand column and increased transport 28%. Other researchers have starved cells in order to reduce their cell size and potentially increase transport.^{33,122} Use of motile inoculants that can migrate toward contaminants may also enhance remediation.²⁵⁸

While these different techniques have great promise for enhancing the transport of inoculants, the selection of adhesion-deficient strains or generation of ultramicrobacteria may result in cultures with reduced contaminant-degrading capabilities, especially if the remediation genes are plasmid encoded, unless this selective pressure is maintained during the process.²²² Additionally, many surfactants may be toxic to the microorganisms.²²²

C. Use of Multiple Cultures for Bioaugmentation

Sites contaminated with several different chemicals present special problems for bioaugmentation.¹⁶⁷ In such cases, it may be necessary to use multiple microbial cultures or consortia for bioaugmentation.^{181,241} An example of this situation is soil cocontaminated with metals and organics. Roane et al.¹⁸¹ used a dual-bioaugmentation strategy to remediate soil contaminated with both Cd and 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D). The researchers inoculated the soil with the metal-resistant bacterium *Pseudomonas* strain H1 and/or the 2,4-D-degrading bacterium *Ralstonia eutropha* JMP134. Bioaugmentation with both *Pseudomonas* strain H1 and *R. eutropha* JMP134 increased 2,4-D degradation in the presence of Cd, as compared to microcosms not bioaugmented or bioaugmented with only one strain. Another interesting point from this paper is that the authors added the *Pseudomonas* strain H1 48 h before adding the *R. eutropha* JMP134. It was hypothesized that by staggering the bioaugmentation, the metal-resistant *Pseudomonas* strain H1 was

able to partially detoxify the Cd (reportedly by intracellular sequestration) prior to introduction of the Cd-sensitive *R. eutropha* JMP134.

III. GENE BIOAUGMENTATION

Since introduced microorganisms often do not survive following bioaugmentation, scientists have investigated the use of naturally occurring horizontal gene transfer processes for introduction of remediation genes into a contaminated site. Recent advances in genome sequencing are revealing the large role that horizontal gene transfer has played in microbial development and adaptation in the environment.¹⁵⁹ Horizontal gene transfer may occur via uptake of naked DNA (transformation), mediation by bacteriophage (transduction), or physical contact and exchange of genetic material such as plasmids or conjugative transposons between microorganisms (conjugation).

The potential advantages for use of gene bioaugmentation, where the remediation genes are in a mobile form such as a self-transmissible plasmid, over the traditional cell bioaugmentation approaches are: (1) introduction of remediation genes into indigenous microorganisms that are already adapted to survive and proliferate in the environment; and (2) no requirement for long-term survival of the introduced host strain. The transfer of plasmids, via conjugation, is the technology most studied with respect to bioaugmentation.^{39,48,53,93,155,156,233,234,235}

Newby et al.¹⁵⁵ compared bioaugmentation with two different bacterial donors for delivering the self-transmissible plasmid pJP4, containing 2,4-D degradative genes, to indigenous soil bacteria. The pJP4 plasmid was delivered to the soil either in its original host, *R. eutropha* JMP134, or in *E. coli* D11.¹⁵⁶ The *R. eutropha* JMP134 was capable of mineralizing 2,4-D, but *E. coli* D11 was not because it lacked the chromosomal genes that, along with the plasmid genes, allow for complete mineralization of 2,4-D. Accordingly, 2,4-D was degraded within 28 d in the soil receiving the *R. eutropha* JMP134, but took 49 d to degrade in the nonbioaugmented soil and soil receiving the *E. coli* D11 inoculant. Most of the 2,4-D degraders isolated from the soil receiving *R. eutropha* JMP134 were identified as the inoculant organisms, while numerous transconjugants were detected in the *E. coli* D11 amended soil. Following degradation of the initial 2,4-D amendment, the authors added additional 2,4-D to the soil. After the reamendment, 2,4-D was degraded more rapidly in the microcosms that received the *E. coli* D11 inoculant than the soil that received the *R. eutropha* JMP134 inoculant and non-bioaugmented soil. These results indicate the potential for indigenous microorganisms to degrade specific contaminants if furnished with the necessary genetic material via gene bioaugmentation. The data also illustrate the potential for bioaugmentation to alter the indigenous soil microbial gene pool.

Other researchers have also found similar results. Dejonghe et al.⁴⁸ investigated the dissemination of two different 2,4-D degradation plasmids in both

the A (upper) and B (lower) horizons of a soil. Addition of an auxotrophic *Pseudomonas putida* strain containing either of the two plasmids resulted in large populations of transconjugants ($>10^5$ /g) in both the A and B horizons. Donor populations decreased following addition to the soil, while the development of transconjugant populations correlated with the degradation of 2,4-D. However, bioaugmentation only resulted in enhanced 2,4-D degradation in the B horizon that did not have an indigenous degrader population and not the A horizon, which did contain an indigenous degrader population. Gene bioaugmentation may also have applications for metal contaminated sites.⁵⁶ A more thorough review of the use of mobile genes in bioaugmentation can be found in Top et al.²³⁴

Another point to consider when planning the use of gene bioaugmentation technology is that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may make a regulatory distinction between different hosts of the same plasmid even if neither is genetically engineered.²³⁹ The U.S. EPA considers microorganisms formed by combining genetic material from organisms in different genera to be “new” organisms, which are regulated under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). For organisms containing mobile genetic elements such as plasmids, the U.S. EPA considers the recipient microorganism to be “new” and thus regulated under TSCA if the mobile genetic element was first identified in a microorganism from a different genus. For example, of the two pJP4 hosts used by Newby et al.,¹⁵⁵ the *E. coli* D11 would be covered under these regulations even though the plasmid was transferred from *R. eutropha* JMP134 (the first identified host of pJP4) to *E. coli* D11 through a naturally occurring process. Not all countries make this distinction, and some exclude naturally occurring processes such as mating and/or natural recombination from processes that, in legal terms, produce genetically modified organisms.⁶⁷

In order to potentially avoid such regulations, it would be preferable to use the original host for bioaugmentation unless there is compelling need for another host. In fact, of the experiments described in this section, the donors other than *R. eutropha* JMP134 were chosen for their inability to degrade the contaminant and/or survive following bioaugmentation thus reducing their interference with the detection of transconjugants. While this may be desirable for certain laboratory studies, a donor microorganism that can both degrade the contaminant and transfer degradative genes is potentially more suited to field application.

IV. BIOAUGMENTATION WITH MICROBIAL-DERIVED MATERIALS

Another bioaugmentation approach is to add microbial products, such as biosurfactants or enzymes, directly as an amendment either alone or in combination with a microbial inoculant. Biosurfactants have been used for

bioremediation of metal and organic-contaminated material,^{74,97,134,137,193,204} and they may also have a utility in bioaugmentation applications either to protect a microbial inoculant from metal toxicity or to increase the amount of organic substrates available for degradation.^{174,193} Sandrin et al.¹⁹³ investigated the use of the metal-complexing biosurfactant rhamnolipid for decreasing metal toxicity in a model cocontaminated system. The system contained Cd and naphthalene and was inoculated with a naphthalene-degrading *Burkholderia* sp. The authors found that rhamnolipid eliminated Cd toxicity when added at a 10-fold higher concentration than the Cd. At lower concentrations, the rhamnolipid either only reduced or had no impact on Cd toxicity. The authors concluded that rhamnolipid decreased Cd toxicity through metal complexation and LPS release, and possibly increased naphthalene bioavailability.

Other researchers have used enzymes, either purified or encapsulated in dead microbial cells, for contaminant remediation.^{17,223,262,266} Strong et al.²²³ bioaugmented atrazine-contaminated soil with a genetically engineered *E. coli* strain that overproduced the atrazine chlorohydrolase enzyme responsible for dechlorinating atrazine. The researchers chemically killed the genetically engineered microorganisms (GEMs) prior to addition to a field site reducing regulatory concerns.²⁴⁶ After 8 wk, atrazine concentrations in the enzyme-treated plots had decreased 52% in contrast to insignificant degradation in the control plots. The use of these derived-materials may avoid some of the difficulties often associated with bioaugmentation, such as the need for survival of live microbial inoculants in harsh field environments. However, there still may be problems with biosurfactant toxicity¹⁹⁹ and effectiveness,⁴⁶ along with the potential hazards inherent in delivery of enzymes to the subsurface while attempting to minimize enzymatic sorption to soil solids and/or inactivation.

V. GENETICALLY ENGINEERED MICROORGANISMS (GEMs)

A. Enhancement of Contaminant Degradation Genes

In the previous sections, we have discussed different approaches for the addition of microorganisms to a contaminated site. As has been briefly mentioned in previous sections, it is also possible to increase the remediation potential of microorganisms through genetic engineering prior to their use for bioaugmentation. Recent advances in molecular biology have enabled numerous technologies for engineering or enhancing remediation genes. To date, the environmental release of GEMs has mostly been for agricultural purposes, but at least one bioremediation release has occurred.^{5,180} A thorough discussion of all the technologies to generate GEMs is beyond the scope of

this review, but we present a concise description of two major methods to engineer remediation genes: (1) gene introduction, and (2) gene alteration.⁸⁰

1. GENE INTRODUCTION

Specific remediation genes can be introduced into plasmids or the chromosome of the target microorganism.^{80,201} The most straightforward way to increase the genetic content of a microorganism is to add a plasmid containing the desired gene. This transfer can be accomplished with naturally occurring plasmids, if they are transmissible, by mating a donor microorganism with a target microorganism.^{156,217} This process does not involve any recombinant DNA techniques and commonly occurs in nature.¹⁵⁶ When an appropriate naturally occurring plasmid is not available, it may be necessary to clone the gene into a broad-host-range plasmid, which is then added to the donor microorganism either through conjugation or transformation.^{83,128}

It may be desirable to incorporate the gene into the host chromosome in order to reduce the potential for transfer of the gene to other microorganisms in the environment. The mini-Tn5 transposon system is commonly used to insert genes into gram-negative bacteria.^{44,92} A system based on Tn5 is even commercially available (Epicentre, Madison, WI). The original mini-Tn5 transposon system is constructed as a plasmid with a selectable marker (such as antibiotic resistance), a suicide function for counterselection, and a multiple cloning site for insertion of foreign DNA via recombinant DNA techniques.¹⁹² Once the recombinant plasmid is added to the target organism, the transposon containing the added gene incorporates into the chromosome of a portion of the target bacteria. These GEMs are then selected for based on the incorporated phenotypic trait. Wantanabe et al.²⁴⁹ used this approach to introduce a phenol-degradative gene into an environmental isolate for subsequent use in bioaugmentation. The researchers isolated the phenol-degrading bacterium *Comamonas* sp. rN7 from activated sludge. The *Comamonas* sp. rN7 was the dominant phenol-degrading population in the sludge, but was not as efficient at phenol degradation as were other strains such as *Comamonas testosteroni* R5. The authors initially attempted to bioaugment the sludge with *C. testosteroni* R5 but without success.²⁴⁸ They then isolated the phenol-degradative genes from *C. testosteroni* R5, and introduced the genes into the chromosome of *Comamonas* sp. rN7 via a mini-Tn5 construct to create *Comamonas* sp. rN7(R503).²⁴⁹ The authors then amended the activated sludge with *C. testosteroni* R5, *Comamonas* sp. rN7, or *Comamonas* sp. rN7(R503). The gene-augmented strain *Comamonas* sp. rN7(R503) survived in the sludge better than *C. testosteroni* R5 and resulted in improved resistance to phenol shock when compared to all other treatments.

The disadvantages of the mini-Tn5 system are that (1) it incorporates randomly into the host chromosome, possibly inactivating vital genes, and (2) it contains antibiotic resistance genes that may ultimately hinder the environmental release of constructed GEMs.²⁰¹ Different systems have been

developed that can potentially eliminate some of these problems. Koch et al.¹¹¹ developed a Tn7-based system that incorporates at a specific chromosomal site in gram-negative bacteria. Hoang et al.⁹⁵ constructed a system based on a phage attachment site that enables site-specific integration in *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (and possibly other *Pseudomonas* spp.) and also allows removal of antibiotic resistance genes in vivo.

2. GENE ALTERATION

It is also possible to alter selected genes for optimal activity under different environmental conditions.⁸⁰ While gene alteration has been applied more often for industrial or agricultural applications,^{14,124,126,224} it can also be useful for bioremediation processes.^{30,37,125,225} Traditionally, the gene of interest is first cloned into a vector for maintenance in a laboratory organism, such as *E. coli*, that is more amenable to laboratory growth and manipulation.¹⁹² The factors that can be altered in order to increase gene expression include: (1) transcriptional promoter and terminator sequences; (2) number of copies of the gene in the host organism; and 3) stability of the cloned gene protein.⁸⁰ The gene is then altered and ultimately reintroduced into the desired microorganisms as discussed in the previous section.

A classic example of gene alteration for enhanced contaminant degradation is the research of Ramos et al.¹⁷⁶ The *Pseudomonas putida* soil isolate containing plasmid pWWO was capable of degrading several compounds including toluene and xylene; however, it could not degrade 4-ethylbenzoate (4-EB) despite having all of the functional genes necessary for the metabolizing the chemical, because 4-EB was incapable of inducing the degradative pathway.¹²⁵ The researchers first cloned the *xylS* regulatory gene into *E. coli* and then generated a mutant gene that responded to the presence of 4-EB. Introduction of the mutant gene back into the *Pseudomonas* isolate enabled the strain to transform 4-EB, although it could not grow on the compound due to another enzymatic bottleneck lower in the pathway. The mutant *xylS* gene was also induced at higher levels in *E. coli* than in *P. putida* which the authors attributed to interference by the wild-type *xylS* gene in *P. putida*.

The approach above is very useful for alteration of genes that will ultimately be used in laboratory or industrial microbial strains; however, genes that are optimized in laboratory strains may not function at the same level in environmental isolates.^{31,35,257} Ohtsubo et al.¹⁶² used an in situ, homologous recombination approach, which avoided culture of degradative genes in laboratory strains, to increase the activity of biphenyl-degradative genes in *Pseudomonas* sp. KKS102. The researchers replaced the native biphenyl promoter in *Pseudomonas* sp. KKS102 with several different constitutive promoters in situ via homologous recombination. All of the constitutive promoters resulted in increased biphenyl degradation and decreased catabolite repression of the biphenyl pathway. This strategy could be applied to genes in

other bacterial strains, if they are amenable to homologous recombination, even without detailed knowledge of the gene's regulation.

B. Control of GEMs Released into the Environment

Even though GEMs with significant remediation capabilities can be constructed, it is difficult to obtain regulatory approval for their ultimate release into the environment. In the United States, there have only been 11 TSCA microbial environmental release applications filed with the U.S. EPA since 1998, with most of these being for *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* strains.²³⁸ In fact, to our knowledge, only one field release of a GEM for bioremediation has occurred in the United States.¹⁹⁷ The concern is regarding the potential for GEMs to persist at a site, post-bioremediation, and/or for engineered genes in GEMs to be transferred to indigenous organisms, resulting in unforeseeable consequences.^{7,70,144} The risk of gene transfer may be reduced by incorporating the engineered genes into the microbial chromosome instead of a plasmid, but it cannot be totally eliminated due to mobilization of chromosomal DNA by various naturally occurring processes.¹⁷⁸

The most commonly studied approach for control of GEM survival in the environment is the incorporation of an inducible suicide gene into the microorganism. The suicide gene is activated when the target contaminant is eliminated, and there is therefore no more need for the presence of the GEM. Several different suicide genes have been studied, including those encoding DNases and RNases^{2,52}; bacteriophage lysis genes^{109,183}; agents that block essential metabolic enzymes^{105,226}; and cell membrane-destabilizing genes.^{12,41,82,101,110,146,171,185}

One of the early conditional-suicide systems was developed by Contreras et al.⁴¹ This elegant system was based on two elements contained on separate plasmids: (1) a fusion between the *Pseudomonas putida* promoter P_m , from the TOL plasmid meta-cleavage pathway, and the gene for the Lac repressor (*lacI*) from *E. coli* along with the gene for positive regulation of P_m (*xylS*); and (2) a fusion between the P_{tac} promoter and the *gef* gene from *E. coli* that produces a porinlike protein that can kill the host by destabilizing the cell membrane (Figure 2). When XylS effectors, such as 3-methylbenzoate (3MB), are present, XylS is produced and positively regulates production of the Lac repressor resulting in negative regulation of the P_{tac} promoter and thus no Gef production. In contrast, when the effector (3MB) is not present as would be the case when bioremediation is complete, the Lac repressor is not produced, allowing transcription of the *gef* gene and activity of the killing function. The system killed the vast majority of the host microorganisms in the absence of the appropriate effector compound, but the survival frequency was in the range of 10^{-5} to 10^{-6} per cell in a generation. The system was later improved by incorporating the suicide gene cassette into the host chromosome via a mini-Tn5 transposon.¹⁰¹ The presence of two

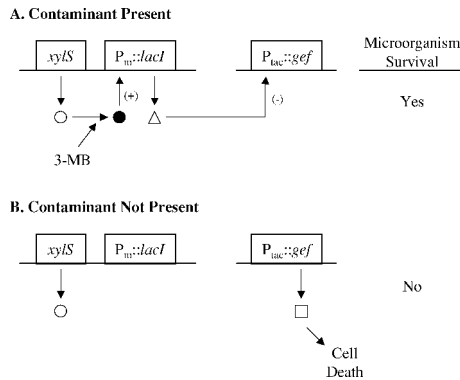


FIGURE 2. Conditional suicide system devised by Contreras et al.⁴¹ for control of genetically engineered microorganisms released into the environment. (A) In the presence of the inducer contaminant, 3-methylbenzoate (3-MB), production of the LacI repressor blocks Gef production. (B) When the contaminant is completely degraded, the Gef protein is produced resulting in cell death. Figure adapted from Contreras et al.⁴¹

copies of the suicide cassette on a bacterium's chromosome reduced the rate of kill-resistant mutants to as low as 10^{-8} per cell in a generation. A likely cause of mutations in this suicide system is the leaky repression of P_{tac} by the Lac repressor. This would result in small, constitutive levels of Gef production, which would serve as positive selection pressure for kill-resistant mutants. Szafranski et al.²²⁶ achieved approximately the same frequency of kill-resistant mutant formation (10^{-7} to 10^{-8} per cell in a generation) with a plasmid system based on the above model by including a dual control mechanism that reduced leaky expression of the suicide gene. It may be possible to further decrease the rate of kill-resistant mutant formation by using multiple suicide systems with independent regulation systems in a given organism.¹¹⁰ Ronchel and Ramos¹⁸⁴ improved killing by the *gef*-based system, initially devised by Contreras et al.,⁴¹ by using a Δasd mutant host strain that had the *asd* gene (which produces an intermediate in the biosynthesis of amino acids including lysine and methionine) inserted under the control of the P_m promoter. The engineered strain would only grow on complex media or in the presence of compounds such as 3-methylbenzoate that induce P_m transcription. By using this dual containment system, the researchers found that the number of bacteria that escaped killing after release into the environment was below the limit of detection ($<10^{-9}$ mutants/cell in a generation).

Additionally, bacteriophages may be useful for containment of GEMs. Smit et al.²¹⁶ added *P. fluorescens* R2f encapsulated in alginate to soil along with phage $\Phi R2f$. The phage did not impact bacterial numbers in the alginate, but it decreased the number of *P. fluorescens* R2f that developed outside of the alginate matrix by a factor of up to 10^3 . This level of control is not as high as that for the suicide genes, but it indicates the potential for combination of different methods to contain introduced GEMs.

This study was also interesting since it combined use of an alginate carrier, which may be an effective method for GEM introduction into a harsh environment as previously discussed, along with control of the introduced organism. Despite the potential of these containment systems, it would be practically impossible, due to the fluid nature of microbial genomes, to develop a suicide system where no GEMs survive at a site after bioremediation is complete, and where there is no potential for transfer of engineered genes to indigenous organisms. The decision to release a GEM into the environment is ultimately a regulatory decision based on the balance between the potential benefits of the release, and the risk that the GEM will persist in the environment or transfer its genes to the indigenous organisms.

VI. PHYTOREMEDIATION

A. Use of Plant-Associated Microorganisms for Contaminant Remediation

A developing approach for bioaugmentation is to add the microbial inoculant to the soil along with a plant that supports the inoculant's growth. The use of plants for remediation, or phytoremediation, is a relatively new technology. Phytoremediation has generated much interest because it is a low-cost technique that also has less of a negative impact on the site than other remediation methods such as excavation. The U.S. EPA broadly defines phytoremediation as "the direct use of living plants for in situ remediation of contaminated soil, sludges, sediments, and ground water through contaminant removal, degradation, or containment."²⁴⁰ Phytoremediation processes potentially include extraction; filtration; stabilization; degradation; and/or evapotranspiration of the contaminant. Additionally, these processes can be mediated by plants and/or plant-associated microorganisms. For example, (1) trichloroethylene (TCE) is taken up and metabolized or transpired by poplar trees; (2) some metals are changed into more bioavailable forms by microorganisms and then taken up by hyperaccumulating plants; and (3) many recalcitrant, organic pollutants are transformed or degraded by plant-associated microorganisms.^{81,106,116,127,254}

The rhizosphere, or zone of soil under the influence of plant roots, is well known as a site of elevated microbial numbers and activity.⁴² Additionally, different plant roots select for different rhizosphere populations.¹¹⁵ Researchers have recently begun to investigate the potential application of this selectivity for increasing the populations of specific, contaminant-remediating, microorganisms in the rhizosphere.^{6,86}

The selection of specific microorganisms in the rhizosphere has potential advantages for bioaugmentation.^{117,215} Specific rhizosphere-competent microorganisms that degrade a given contaminant can be added to soil along with a plant that supports the growth of these microorganisms. By using the plant-microorganism combination, the microorganism is added to soil along

with a niche (the plant root) supporting its growth thus increasing the likelihood for the microorganisms' survival.¹⁵⁸

Siciliano and Germida²¹⁰ have demonstrated the potential of plant-microbial associations for bioaugmentation of contaminated soil. The researchers inoculated the seed of Dahurian wild rye with *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* R75 and *Pseudomonas savastanoi* CB35, which had previously been shown to enhance phytoremediation.²⁰⁸ The researchers placed the inoculated seed into soil contaminated with 800 μg 3-chlorobenzoate (3-CB)/g. After 28 d of incubation, the plant-bacterial association in the inoculated planted soil had reduced the 3-CB level to 149 μg 3-CB/g, as compared to 583, 568, and 450 μg 3-CB/g remaining in the noninoculated control soil, inoculated control soil, and noninoculated planted soil, respectively. The researchers also tested different plant-bacterial combinations with some plants even inhibiting bacterial degradation of 3-CB, indicating the need for careful selection of the plant-bacterial combination to be used for remediation. Siciliano and Greer²¹² found similar results for 2,4,6-trinitrotoluene (TNT) degradation by meadow bromegrass inoculated with the TNT-degrader *Pseudomonas* sp. strain I4.

Likewise, Yee et al.²⁶¹ engineered a recombinant, root-colonizing *Pseudomonas fluorescens* strain that enhanced TCE remediation. The engineered strain constitutively expressed the enzyme toluene *ortho*-monooxygenase from *Burkholderia cepacia* PR1_{23c}. The researchers first isolated a recombinant *P. fluorescens* strain that colonized wheat as well as the wild-type strain, and then used it for subsequent studies. Wheat colonized with the recombinant *P. fluorescens* removed 63% of the TCE within 4 d compared to 4, 9, and 13% removal in sterile soil, noninoculated planted soil, and planted soil inoculated with wild-type *P. fluorescens*, respectively.

Other researchers have investigated the use of fungi for plant-associated bioaugmentation. Meharg and Cairney¹³⁸ reported that 33 out of 42 tested species of ectomycorrhizas (ECM) degraded one or more types of chemicals. Degraded compounds included PCBs and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.⁵⁷ Meharg et al.¹³⁹ demonstrated that the tree *Pinus sylvestris* mineralized over 3 times as much 2,4-dichlorophenol, within 13 d, when inoculated with the ectomycorrhizae *Suillus variegatus* as compared to uninoculated trees. Additionally, there is evidence that contaminants including 3-chlorobenzoate are taken-up by mycorrhizal plants and translocated to the plant shoots.⁵⁴ It is unclear if arbuscular mycorrhiza have the same phytoremediation potential as do the ectomycorrhiza.¹⁶³

B. Potential Application of Designer Rhizospheres to Bioaugmentation

Recent advances in the knowledge of how microorganisms communicate with each other and with plants may enable construction of plants that are

even more selective for certain microorganisms in the rhizosphere.^{161,169,194} Many different bacteria communicate via chemical signals, including amino acids or short peptides (gram-positive bacteria) and fatty acid derivatives (gram-negative bacteria).²⁵³ Communication by gram-negative bacteria via *N*-acyl-homoserine lactones (AHL) is one of the most characterized systems. A detailed description of this system is beyond the scope of this review, but briefly, AHL is produced by bacteria at low levels when cell densities are low. When cell numbers increase sufficiently, enough AHL is produced by the community to interact with a transcriptional regulator. The AHL-regulator complex can then bind to target promoter sequences thus initiating gene transcription.¹³² This communication system allows the microorganisms to orchestrate a concerted response to a stimulus. Many different microorganisms also interact either positively or negatively due to cross-communication from the various chemical signals including AHLs.^{219,253} Additionally, it has been shown that some plants produce chemicals that can mimic the bacterial signals.^{133,229}

Fray et al.⁷¹ demonstrated that plants could communicate with bacteria if engineered with AHL genes. The researchers introduced the genes for the AHL *N*-(3-oxohexanoyl)-L-homoserine lactone (OHHL), which enables *Erwinia carotovora* to infect plants and for the AHL *N*-hexanoylhomoserine lactone (HHL), which contributes to antifungal activity of the biocontrol agent *Pseudomonas aureofaciens* 30–84 into a tobacco plant. The transgenic plants produced both AHLs. Plant-generated AHLs restored the ability of an OHHL-deficient *E. carotovora* to infect tobacco and partially restored the ability of a HHL-deficient *P. aureofaciens* 30–84 to inhibit fungal growth. Similarly, Savka and Farrand¹⁹⁵ used an opine-based system to generate a biased rhizosphere. It has been documented for years that opines play a role in *Agrobacterium*–plant interactions.¹⁶ The researchers inoculated a transgenic plant producing an opine with *Pseudomonas* strains that either could or could not metabolize the opine. The opine-metabolizing strain was preferentially selected in the rhizosphere, achieving a population two to three times that of the non-opine-metabolizing strain. Most of this research on the construction of designer rhizospheres has focused on agricultural applications such as plant protection or plant growth promotion, but there is clearly great potential for the application of this technology to the remediation of contaminated soils with specific plant-microbial combinations.¹⁵³

VII. PHYTOAUGMENTATION

As mentioned in the phytoremediation section earlier, plants are often used to extract, filter, stabilize, degrade, and/or evapotranspire contaminants. However, the success of these processes often depends on microbial action to modify and/or degrade the contaminant. Since the appropriate

microorganisms may not be present at a given site and may also be difficult to establish via bioaugmentation, researchers have investigated the insertion of microbial genes for remediation processes directly into plants.^{18,51,72,78,79,98,207,231} Phytoaugmentation is a term used to describe the addition of remediation genes to a site via an engineered plant that contains the microbial genes. By incorporation of these genes into plants, it is also easier to control the persistence and spread of genes introduced into the environment than via an analogous GEM. In fact, several genetically engineered plants, including those engineered with herbicide- or insect-resistance genes, are commonly used in production agriculture.^{114,168,213}

The most common approaches for applying this technology to remediation are to incorporate genes for metal binding/transforming proteins, or for organic degradation into the plant. Dhankher et al.⁵¹ engineered *Arabidopsis thaliana* with the bacterial genes for arsenate reductase (*arsC*) and γ -glutamylcysteine synthetase (γ -ECS). Arsenate can potentially be taken up from soil by plants in conjunction with phosphate.¹⁴⁰ The theory behind the constructed system was that more arsenic could be accumulated by the plant if the arsenate taken up by the plant was reduced to arsenite, which could be sequestered by thiol groups such as γ -glutamylcysteine. In fact, *A. thaliana* containing the genes for both arsenate reductase and γ -glutamylcysteine synthetase accumulated two to three times more arsenic than did wild-type plants or the plants engineered with only arsenate reductase or γ -glutamylcysteine synthetase. Interestingly, the project also demonstrated the need to select the promoter carefully when adding microbial genes to plants. The researchers put the arsenate reductase gene under the control of the soybean rubisco promoter, which is induced by light. The arsenate reductase gene was therefore expressed in above-ground tissues, which allowed the arsenate to be translocated to above-ground portions before it was reduced to arsenite and sequestered. For phytoremediation applications, this would allow the arsenic to be removed from the site by harvesting the above-ground plant material. Similar results have been observed by other researchers for methylmercury detoxification and for copper and lead accumulation.^{18,19,78,231}

Plants have also been engineered with microbial genes for the metabolism of organic pollutants. Shimizu et al.²⁰⁷ introduced the chlorocatechol dioxygenase gene (*cbnA*) from *Ralstonia eutropha* NH9 into rice plants.¹⁶⁰ The gene was cloned under the control of an enhanced cauliflower mosaic virus promoter. Whole calluses of the transgenic rice transformed 3-chlorocatechol to 2-chloromuconate. The chlorocatechol dioxygenase was expressed well in above-ground portions of the plant, but expressed weakly in the roots. Accordingly, 3-chlorocatechol was converted by leaf tissues but not roots. The authors surmised that chlorocatechol dioxygenase activity could have been increased in the roots if they had used a root-specific promoter. Researchers have also engineered plants for the remediation of other organic pollutants including glycerol trinitrate and trinitrotoluene (TNT).⁷²

Even if the remediation genes are integrated into plants, there is still a risk that the genes may escape to other organisms following environmental release of the transgenic plants.⁵⁹ Kay et al.¹⁰⁷ demonstrated that transfer of antibiotic resistance genes in transgenic tobacco to *Acinetobacter* sp. strain BD413 could occur if the transgene contained sequences homologous to those in the *Acinetobacter* sp. No gene transfer was detected for a transgene without sequences homologous to *Acinetobacter* sp., but the results also indicated the potential for escape of engineered genes released into the environment.

VIII. METHODS FOR ASSESSMENT OF INTRODUCED MICROORGANISMS' SURVIVAL AND ACTIVITY

Numerous techniques have been developed to monitor the presence and/or activity of microorganisms in environmental samples (Table 3). We next discuss several of these procedures and have categorized them into sections

TABLE 3. Methods for Detecting Survival and Activity of Introduced Microorganisms

Method	Parameter measured	Advantages/disadvantages	Reference
16S rDNA PCR	Presence	Simple, less expensive than many other methods. Not quantitative. PCR product may be further analyzed by other methods, such as terminal restriction fragment length polymorphism analysis, to increase specificity.	129
Reverse transcription PCR	Activity	Determines gene expression. Can be combined with real-time PCR to be quantitative.	196
Real-time PCR	Presence/activity	Rapid, quantitative. Very sensitive, possible to detect $<10^4$ cells/g soil. Can be combined with reverse transcriptase PCR to measure gene expression.	182
Fluorescent in situ hybridization	Presence/activity	Can visualize, enumerate, and identify microorganisms directly without culturing. Quantitative. Can analyze complex communities using multiple probes.	8
Microarrays	Presence/activity	Simultaneous analysis of up to thousands of genes. Lower sensitivity than other methods—may require organism to comprise about 5% of community to be detected. Can be quantitative.	259
Reporter genes	Presence/activity	Possible to visualize microorganisms in situ. Quantitative. Luminescent reporters enable in situ measurement of gene expression. Multiple different reporters enable simultaneous study of several organisms. Requires genetic modification of host.	130

based on their underlying technology instead of their application, since many of the procedures are applicable to both the detection of organisms and monitoring of gene activity.

A. PCR-Based Strategies

1. 16S rRNA

One of the most commonly used methods for the detection of microorganisms in environmental samples is through PCR amplification of the bacterial small subunit ribosomal RNA gene¹²¹ (16S rRNA). The 16S rRNA gene is the foundation of bacterial phylogenetic analysis with sequences currently published for thousands of different bacteria.⁴⁰ For bioaugmentation studies, the 16S rRNA gene from the added microorganism(s) can be PCR amplified and detected by gel electrophoresis.⁹¹ However, if organisms similar to the inoculant are present at the target site, it may be necessary to analyze the 16S rRNA PCR product by additional techniques, such as terminal fragment length polymorphism (T-RFLP) analysis or to fully sequence the PCR product, in order to increase the detection specificity.^{84,91,129,252} For example, Lendvay et al.¹²⁹ used 16S rRNA PCR in conjunction with T-RFLP analysis to qualitatively assess the survival of a *Dehalococcoides*-containing inoculum capable of dechlorinating chloroethenes after introduction into a contaminated aquifer. The researchers used primers specific to *Dehalococcoides* spp. to determine the presence of the inoculant in all samples collected from the bioaugmented treatment within 5 wk of introduction indicating the spread of the inoculant. However, *Dehalococcoides* spp. were also detected in all of the control samples after 72 d. T-RFLP analysis of a PCR product generated from community DNA with less specific primers confirmed that the inoculant had not spread to the control site and that the detected *Dehalococcoides* spp. were indigenous populations that developed in response to the biostimulation treatment. Other researchers have used RFLP analysis of 16S rRNA to successfully discriminate between common environmental microorganisms, including *Pseudomonas* spp.¹⁷⁰

2. REVERSE TRANSCRIPTION PCR

Reverse-transcription PCR (RT-PCR) can be used to monitor microbial gene expression in environmental samples by first converting mRNA to cDNA for further PCR amplification.^{4,23,120,136,196} Bogan et al.²³ used RT-PCR to quantify (using competitive techniques) the expression of three *Phanerochaete chrysosporium* manganese peroxidase (MnP) genes during polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon degradation following bioaugmentation into presterilized soil. High levels of extractable MnP enzyme activity corresponded to high levels of MnP gene RT-PCR transcripts and maximal rates of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon degradation. RT-PCR can also be combined with other

procedures such as fluorescent in situ hybridization and microarray analyses as discussed in subsequent sections.^{8,49} In addition to RT-PCR, researchers have also used techniques such as differential display to assess mRNA levels.⁶⁹ While these studies demonstrate that RT-PCR of environmental microbial genes is possible, it still can be a significant challenge to extract and purify intact mRNA from complex samples,^{100,205} and it may be necessary to optimize the extraction protocol for different samples.^{100,196,205} The sensitivity of RT-PCR may also be an issue due to the labile nature of mRNA.

3. REAL-TIME PCR

Real-time quantitative PCR (RTm-PCR) technology has recently been used to rapidly quantify microorganisms following introduction into environmental samples.^{99,108,129,182,247,255,256} There are various procedures for quantitative and RTm-PCR;^{186,190} however, one of the more specific and widely used techniques is the TaqMan assay.⁹⁰ In the TaqMan procedure for RTm-PCR, the 5' exonuclease activity of the Taq DNA polymerase digests a fluorogenic TaqMan probe that anneals to an internal DNA site during primer extension. This results in the release of a fluorescent molecule. The cycle threshold (Ct) value is determined at the point where a significant increase in fluorescence emission occurs as compared to the background baseline. A larger initial concentration of DNA template results in a lower Ct value. Therefore, the DNA template level in a sample can be quantified by comparison with Ct values obtained from a standard curve of the DNA template. RTm-PCR eliminates the need for gel electrophoresis and allows a sample to be analyzed within hours.

Rodrigues et al.¹⁸² used RTm-PCR for both the 16S rRNA gene and a polychlorinated biphenyl degradative gene to quantify a *Rhodococcus* sp. after introduction into soil. This system detected 10^2 cells/ml in pure culture, but the sensitivity decreased to around 10^4 cells/g in soil. Kikuchi et al.¹⁰⁸ reported RTm-PCR detection based on the soluble methane monooxygenase gene of a trichloroethylene-degrading *Methylocystis* sp. to be linear over a range of at least 10^4 to 10^8 cells/ml in groundwater; however, it was possible to detect as few as 2×10^2 cells/ml when suspended in distilled water. Lendvay et al.¹²⁹ indicated that RTm-PCR detection limits for *Dehalococcoides* spp. and *Desulfuromonas* spp. in aquifer material were 10^2 and 10^3 cells/g, respectively. It may also be possible to combine RTm-PCR with RT-PCR in order to quantify microbial gene expression in environmental samples.^{50,198}

B. Hybridization-Based Strategies

1. FLUORESCENT IN SITU HYBRIDIZATION

Fluorescent in situ hybridization analysis (FISH) is a relatively new technique that can be used to visualize, quantify, and identify environmental microorganisms directly without culturing.^{8,151,166,179,252,260} Cells are hybridized

with a probe that is tagged with a fluorescent molecule thus enabling microscopic detection. Probes are commonly designed based on 16S RNA sequences²⁶⁰ but may also be designed for functional genes.⁸ Yang and Zeyer²⁶⁰ developed 16S rRNA-targeted FISH probes for *Dehalococcoides* spp. Two probes were designed to hybridize to 28 different published 16S rRNA sequences, primarily from uncultured organisms. One of the probes was demonstrated to hybridize with *D. ethenogenes* strain 195 and two dehalogenating enrichment cultures, but the other probe was not tested to the unavailability of known cultures that would potentially hybridize to the probe. FISH has also been used to visualize bacteria in biofilms.¹²³ Multiple different organisms can be detected using probes attached to various fluorescent molecules.²³² It is also possible to combine FISH with methods to detect active cells¹⁷⁷ or mRNA transcripts.⁸ FISH can enable the detection of uncultured microorganisms through hybridization with similar probes, but this can also complicate the monitoring of introduced strains if the probe also binds to indigenous organisms.

2. MICROARRAYS

Microarrays are a powerful tool to simultaneously assess the presence or activity of up to thousands of different genes.^{22,38,49,259,263,264} This could be useful when bioaugmenting with a culture containing multiple organisms or for detecting several genes such as in a degradation pathway. Microarrays can also be quantitative.³⁸ In environmental analysis, microarrays have typically been used to detect the presence of different 16S rRNA or functional genes from indigenous organisms,^{22,259,263} however, microarrays can also be used to monitor the survival and activity of an inoculant. Dennis et al.⁴⁹ used RT-PCR and microarray technology to monitor *Ralstonia eutropha* JMP134 gene expression during 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) degradation in a mixed culture. Induction of five different 2,4-D genes was measured by first converting the genes to cDNA, using RT-PCR for subsequent microarray analysis. Activity of four of the genes was detected from 10^6 cells/ml or fewer against a background of 10^8 cells/ml. Significant induction of the other gene was not detected due to high variability. Despite the potential advantage of analyzing multiple genes, microarrays can be difficult to use with environmental samples due to the technique's low detection sensitivity. Cho and Tiedje³⁸ estimated that an organism containing a target DNA sequence would need to comprise 5% of the total DNA in the sample in order to be detectable by microarray technology; however, this can be improved somewhat through alterations in the hybridization methodology such as increasing the amount of environmental DNA used for analysis.

3. USE OF REPORTER GENES

One major advance that was enabled by genetic engineering is the development of reporter genes. The use of reporter genes for environmental research

has increased greatly in recent years as evidenced by several recent reviews discussing the topic.^{112,130,145,187,196} For bioaugmentation specifically, reporter genes can allow for more sensitive monitoring of the presence and activity of introduced microorganisms. Several different reporter genes have been developed,^{112,220} but the bacterial luciferase (*lux*) and jellyfish green fluorescent protein (*gfp*) genes are currently the most widely used for environmental applications. Both the *lux* and *gfp* genes can emit signals without addition of an external substrate—in contrast to many early reporter genes that required addition of an exogenous substrate for detection. Expression of the *lux* genes results in light emission, while expression of the *gfp* gene produces a fluorescent protein (GFP). A major distinction between the potential applications for the two reporters is due to their persistence once expressed. Luminescence from the *lux* genes is short-lived, making it suitable for real-time detection of gene expression, while fluorescence from GFP persists longer, making it more applicable to the detection of cumulative gene expression or the presence of whole microorganisms.³²

Microorganisms containing *lux* and/or *gfp* have been added to contaminated soils for the purposes of remediation or assessment of contaminant bioavailability. In the first field release in the United States of a genetically engineered microorganism for bioremediation, Ripp et al.¹⁸⁰ added *Pseudomonas fluorescens* HK44, containing *lux* genes fused with the naphthalene degradative pathway, into soil contaminated with naphthalene, anthracene, and phenanthrene. The engineered microorganism successfully provided real-time data on naphthalene bioavailability and degradation based on luminescence as detected by fiber optic/photon multiplier tube techniques. Additionally, over 10² CFU of *P. fluorescens* HK44/g soil remained even after 660 d of incubation, indicating the potential for long-term survival of GEMs after release into the environment.

Historically, *gfp* has often been used to detect the survival of GEMs added to soil or water.^{10,43} The GFP-containing cells can be detected by epifluorescence microscopy or by visualization of cultured bacteria on plates with long-wave ultraviolet (UV) or black light.^{10,237} The *gfp*-tagged cells can also be used to detect gene expression.^{34,96} The *gfp* gene has found particular use in dual-labeling applications with other reporter genes. By using dual labels, it is possible to concurrently measure (1) survival and activity of an introduced organism, or (2) dynamics of multiple different introduced organisms. Unge et al.²³⁷ integrated *gfp* and *luxAB* genes under the control of a strong constitutive promoter into the chromosome of *Pseudomonas fluorescens* SBW25. Expression of luminescence varied with metabolic activity of the cells, since it required reducing equivalents to be activated, while production of GFP was independent of the cells' metabolic status. The authors were able to determine that tagged cells survived at high levels when added to soil, but the cells' metabolic activity decreased as nutrients became limiting. Elväng et al.⁶⁶ found similar results by incorporating the GFP (*gfp*) or firefly

luciferase (*luc*) genes into the chromosome of the 4-chlorophenol degrader *Arthrobacter chlorophenolicus* A6. A culture containing both *luc*-tagged *A. chlorophenolicus* A6 and *gfp*-tagged *A. chlorophenolicus* A6 was added to 4-chlorophenol contaminated soil. The authors were unable to get both *gfp* and *luc* to be expressed in *A. chlorophenolicus* A6 containing both of the genes, in contrast to the results for *P. fluorescens* SBW25.²³⁷ Bloemberg et al.²⁰ were able to visualize the dynamics of up to three different populations of *P. fluorescens* in the rhizosphere by using different reporter genes. The researchers added mixed cultures of *P. fluorescens*, each containing genes for one of four different fluorescent proteins, to the rhizosphere. The bacterial community dynamics were monitored with confocal laser scanning microscopy.

Reporter genes can be instrumental in bioaugmentation research and even in real-world applications as evidenced by research detailed above. However, care should be taken when conducting experiments using reporter genes and also during data interpretation. Reporter genes on mobile genetic elements such as plasmids may be transferred to indigenous organisms which could lead to erroneous results. Additionally, even small fluctuations in environmental conditions can exert a large impact on the activity of some reporter genes.¹⁵⁴ For example, Dorn et al.⁵⁸ found that variations as low as a 1°C change in temperature, 0.2 units change in pH, or 1 order of magnitude change in initial cell number could alter *lux* expression by *Pseudomonas putida* RB1353 during metabolism of salicylate and naphthalene. The authors concluded that their research confirmed the potential of *lux*-based systems for controlled laboratory experiments, but that interpretation of *lux* data from complex field environments would be difficult. Leveau and Lindow¹³⁰ had similar conclusions regarding interpretation of reporter gene data and stated, “in microbial ecology, this responsibility [determining what the data truly indicates] lies not with the bioreporter but with the microbial ecologist, whose greatest challenge is to translate bioreporter data into a meaningful account of the microbe’s biology and its perception of the world” (p. 263).

IX. BIOAUGMENTATION IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS MICROORGANISMS

Since the primary focus of bioaugmentation is to enhance contaminant remediation, the resulting impact of bioaugmentation on indigenous microbial populations is often overlooked. While the impact of bioaugmentation on microbial communities in contaminated sites is probably secondary to that imposed by the presence of the contaminant, it is worthwhile to consider these bioaugmentation effects especially when using genetically modified organisms.

Addition of intact microorganisms to soil can potentially result in establishment of new microbial populations, shifts in microbial populations, and/or transfer of genetic material to indigenous microorganisms. Jernberg and Jansson¹⁰² investigated the impact that 4-chlorophenol contamination and/or inoculation with the 4-chlorophenol-degrader *Arthrobacter chlorophenolicus* A6L had on the structure of the soil bacterial community. The authors used T-RFLP analysis to generate fingerprints of the bacterial communities. Some populations increased following addition of *A. chlorophenolicus* A6L or 4-chlorophenol, and some populations decreased. It is difficult to determine whether addition of the inoculant only, or the contaminant only, had the greater impact, since 25 and 27 T-RFLPs were significantly changed in the respective treatments relative to the control soil. When the inoculant and contaminant were added together, 41 T-RFLPs were significantly changed. Most of the populations reacted to the combined addition in a similar manner to that of the individual addition of the inoculant or contaminant, but some reacted differently, indicating a greater impact by either the inoculant or contaminant. Other researchers have found that addition of an inoculant can reduce the negative impact a contaminant has on indigenous microbial populations.^{25,77} Inoculation of plant roots can also impact rhizosphere community diversity, but the effect is probably less than that of the plant species and soil used.^{142,202,209}

Genes can be transferred from introduced organisms to indigenous microorganisms even when that is not the original goal. Thiem et al.²³⁰ added the 3-chlorobenzoate (3-CB) degrader *Pseudomonas* sp. B13 to an aquifer. Over 14 mo later, the researchers isolated a novel 3-CB-degrading bacterium from the site. It was later confirmed that the 3-CB-degrading genes in the novel bacterium were identical to those in the *Pseudomonas* sp. B13 inoculant, but the method by which the genes were transferred was not determined.²⁶⁵ A genetically modified *Sinorhizobium meliloti* was found to survive in soil at least 6 yr after a field release, and transfer of its plasmid to other bacteria was detected even though the plasmid was not self-transmissible.¹⁴⁸ These results indicate the risk for escape of engineered genes to indigenous microorganisms if appropriate cautions are not taken.

Even if engineered microbial genes are incorporated into plants in order to reduce the risk for their escape, addition of the genes to the site via phytoaugmentation can alter the soil microbial community. James Germida's lab has conducted extensive field tests on genetically engineered canola.^{61,143,211} The rhizosphere and root interior microbial communities were different for a cultivar engineered with glyphosate resistance genes compared to the cultivar from which it was derived, based on fatty acid methyl ester and community-level physiological profiles. The authors hypothesized that the differences may have been due to altered root exudation patterns in the engineered plant.

The research indicates that bioaugmentation with a microbial culture can affect the composition of the indigenous microbial community. However, it is uncertain if the effects are long-term or just short-lived. Additionally, whether the changes are positive or negative may depend on the individual microorganism affected. The greater risk is probably from escape of engineered genes to indigenous microorganisms, with unforeseeable results.

X. FIELD-SCALE BIOAUGMENTATION STUDIES

A. Soil Bioaugmentation

The majority of bioaugmentation research, including most of what we have discussed thus far in this review, has occurred as laboratory-scale experiments using small quantities of soil (often <1 kg). It is more difficult to conduct bioaugmentation research in the field due to spatial heterogeneity in the soil along with the variability of contaminant concentrations throughout the site. One method researchers have used to better simulate actual field conditions is to conduct “intermediate field scale” experiments^{94,118,119,155,181,223} (Table 4). For this method, researchers use large quantities (many kilograms) of soil and conduct the experiment under actual field conditions—fluctuating temperature, etc. The soil is typically excavated and/or mixed prior to the beginning of the experiment thus reducing the heterogeneity between different samples. For instance, Lamar et al.¹¹⁸ excavated 183 m³ of PCP- and creosote-contaminated soil from a pole-treatment facility. The soil was passed through an 8-cm screen and then split into 5-m³ piles. If necessary, the soil was mixed with clean soil to achieve a target PCP concentration of 700 mg/kg. Selected plots were then bioaugmented with the fungus *Phanerochaete sordida*. After 20 wk, significantly less of the original PCP was recovered in the bioaugmented soil (36%) as compared to the control soil (82%). The authors also found that bioaugmentation tended to increase the degradation of four-ring polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), but tended to inhibit the degradation of three-ring PAHs.

B. Aquifer Bioaugmentation

One area in which bioaugmentation has found both research and commercial success is the remediation of contaminated aquifers^{27,45,60,63–65,89,103,129,191,218,258} (Table 4). Specifically, sites contaminated with chlorinated ethenes, including trichloroethene (TCE) and tetrachloroethene (PCE), have received considerable attention due their widespread occurrence as groundwater contaminants.^{65,129,135,218} Indigenous microorganisms at these contaminated sites are often only capable of reducing TCE or PCE to dichloroethene (DCE) instead of completely

TABLE 4. Selected Studies Demonstrating Successful Field-Scale Application of Bioaugmentation

Organism(s) used	Contaminant(s)	Site material	Major results	Reference
<i>Dehalococcoides ethenogenes</i> -containing culture	Tetrachloroethene	Aquifer	<i>D. ethenogenes</i> spread throughout site and increased in number following bioaugmentation. A 0.02% inoculant volume was sufficient to remediate site.	135
<i>Burkholderia cepacia</i> ENV435	Trichloroethene, dichloroethene, and vinyl chloride	Aquifer	The strain with reduced adhesion properties traveled through aquifer at 0.37–0.54 m/d. Chlorinated ethenes reduced by up to 78% within 2 d.	218
Enrichment culture	Methyl <i>tert</i> -butyl ether	Aquifer	Significant removal of methyl <i>tert</i> -butyl ether detected with bioaugmentation and O ₂ addition within 30 d. O ₂ only plot required >230 d for same amount of removal as occurred in bioaugmented plot.	191
Enrichment culture	Trichloroethene and dichloroethene	Aquifer	Site inoculated with culture from another location. Aerobic aquifer conditions converted to anaerobic by the addition of lactate prior to addition of dechlorinating culture. A 90 d lag before detection of derivatives but full dechlorination within ~200 d.	65
<i>Pseudomonas stutzeri</i> KC	Carbon tetrachloride and nitrate	Aquifer	Denitrifying strain used to create biocurtain. System removed >98% of carbon tetrachloride for over 4 yr. High-acetate feeds removed nearly 100% of nitrate.	64
<i>Escherichia coli</i> (killed)	Atrazine	Soil	Used genetically engineered strain that overproduced atrazine chlorohydrolase. Killing cells allowed regulatory treatment as a catalytic particle.	223
<i>Phanerochaete sordida</i>	Pentachlorophenol and creosote	Soil	Fungal bioaugmentation decreased initial pentachlorophenol levels (~1000 mg/kg) 64%, compared to 26% reduction in the amended control. Effect less clear for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.	118

dechlorinating them to ethene.⁹¹ Only *Dehalococcoides ethenogenes* strain 195 and related organisms are known to be capable of completely dechlorinating TCE and PCE through use as a terminal electron acceptor,⁹¹ although other organisms are capable of transforming or degrading chlorinated ethenes via different pathways.²¹⁸ Several studies have investigated the bioaugmentation of contaminated sites with enrichment cultures containing *D. ethenogenes* or similar organisms,^{65,129,135} and some of these cultures are commercially available (Bioremediation Consulting, Inc., Watertown, MA; Site Recovery & Management, Guelph, Ontario, Canada). Lendvay et al.¹²⁹ compared the ability of biostimulation and bioaugmentation with a *Dehalococcoides*-containing dechlorinating inoculum to remediate an aquifer contaminated with chloroethenes. Lactate was added as the electron donor. Within 43 d of bioaugmentation, 92% of the aqueous chlorinated ethenes were converted to ethene, in contrast to only 76% being converted to ethene after 121 d in biostimulation plots. The total aqueous concentration of chlorinated ethenes in the control plot was largely unchanged during the experiment. The researchers used *Dehalococcoides*-specific PCR to monitor spread of the inoculant throughout the site and RTm-PCR to quantify a three to four orders of magnitude increase in population. There was also an increase in *Dehalococcoides* spp. numbers in the biostimulation plot, although more gradual than in the bioaugmentation plot, immediately prior to rapid dechlorination activity, but T-RFLP analysis was used to confirm that these were indigenous organisms and that they had not spread from the bioaugmented site.

The research on aquifers contaminated with chlorinated ethenes illustrates that traditional techniques such as cell bioaugmentation can be effectively used to remediate a site if the inoculant can fill a niche in the environmental ecosystem²¹—in this case, the use of the chlorinated ethenes as a terminal electron acceptor. However, the vast majority of the field-scale bioaugmentation experiments have only investigated the cell bioaugmentation approach. Since traditional bioaugmentation techniques may not work at all sites, additional research is needed at the field-scale level on alternative bioaugmentation methods such as gene bioaugmentation or the use of GEMs.^{155,223,246}

XI. CONCLUSIONS

There have been many advances in bioaugmentation research over the last few years that may ultimately translate into the enhanced remediation of pollutants at contaminated field sites. Cell bioaugmentation remains the most commonly used technique for adding a microbial inoculant to a contaminated site, but alternative methods such as the use of immobilized microorganisms or activated soil may increase the success rate of this approach. Additionally,

several other bioaugmentation approaches, including gene bioaugmentation, rhizosphere bioaugmentation, and phytoaugmentation, are currently in the developmental stages, and may greatly broaden the range of applications for the bioaugmentation-based remediation of contaminated sites. Microorganisms or plants that have been genetically altered to increase their remediation potential may also be applicable to bioaugmentation. Overall, these new bioaugmentation approaches appear to have great potential for contaminant remediation, but continued research is needed, especially at the field-scale level, in order to test and refine the developing technologies before widespread application on a commercial basis. Furthermore, given the unknown risks resulting from the inevitable transfer of genes from introduced genetically engineered microorganisms to environmental organisms, it is advisable to use a proven bioaugmentation method with a nonengineered strain, provided it is suitable to the specific target site.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Liza F. Gentry for assistance with the preparation of this manuscript. This work was supported by NIEHS Basic Superfund grant 5 P42 ESO4940-09.

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