

**GERSTEL**

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## Accelerating Single or Dual Column Environmental Methods using Low Thermal Mass Column Technology and Software-Controlled Independent Module Heating

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### **KEYWORDS**

Fast GC, Environmental, GC-MS

### **ABSTRACT**

Routine analytical methods employing mass spectral analysis on a gas chromatograph are often plagued with long run times in order to achieve acceptable separations. The Modular Accelerated Column Heater (MACH) System from GERSTEL is easily retrofitted to the Agilent 6890 GC with Mass Selective Detection. MACH is based on Low Thermal Mass (LTM) technology, that enables very fast temperature ramping and cooling, resulting in short cycle times and high sample throughput. Excellent linearity and precision in the analytical data is maintained, all performance gains are accomplished using conventional capillary columns, existing methods can be directly transferred and accelerated.

The MACH system is designed to allow two GC columns to be heated independently on the same GC, thus enabling independent optimization of temperature ramps for standard dual column confirmation applications. Furthermore, the system provides the flexibility needed to separate complex samples using inexpensive and efficient 2D heart cutting with different column phases on the one GC, as well as running two relative short columns, with different phases, independently heated in series to possibly allow very complicated chromatography to be run much faster.

Specific data will be reviewed illustrating performance when accelerating various environmental methods, with a focus on methods utilizing the Agilent 5975 MSD.

## INTRODUCTION

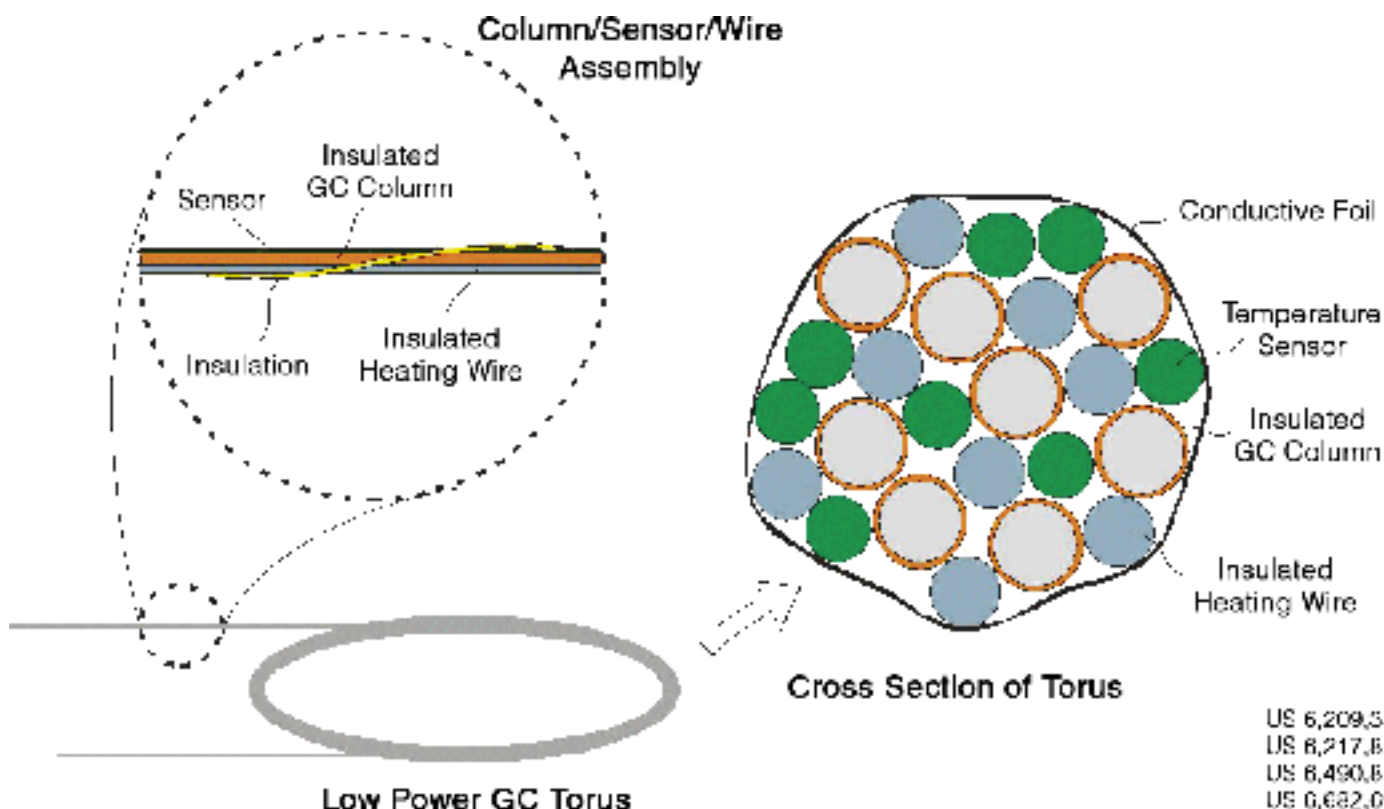
Environmental contract laboratories are constantly faced with shrinking margins and the pressure to increase throughput without sacrificing data quality. Many techniques have been used in the past to reduce GC runtimes. Such techniques have employed high-voltage GC ovens, narrow bore columns, high pressure injections, supplemental oven heaters, and directly heated columns. While directly heating a narrow bore column has yielded excellent Fast GC results [1, 2], this technique has long been plagued with issues involving leaks, inability to use a pre-column, and reduced column lifetime. These issues are resolved in the GERSTEL MACH, providing separations normally associated with directly heated columns in a leak-free, user friendly package.

Figure 1 is a photograph of a two column MACH system installed on an Agilent 6890 with 5973 MSD. With this equipment, the columns reside in modules outside of the actual GC oven. Almost any brand or size of capillary GC column may be used. The columns are wound into a torus with a length of heater wire and sensor wire (Figure 2). The assembled torus can

therefore be heated and cooled rapidly with very little electrical energy. Temperature heating rates in excess of 1000°C/min are possible, with cool down times of 30 seconds to three minutes, depending on the column length, are a vast improvement over standard GC ovens.



**Figure 1.** Dual column MACH connected to 6890 GC system.



**Figure 2.** Low thermal mass column module diagram.

US 6,209,535  
 US 6,217,629  
 US 6,490,652  
 US 6,682,099

Column connections are made by attaching two lengths of fused silica capillary to the two column ends, and connecting these to the injector and detector respectively using standard Valco and Agilent fittings.

Fast separations of two types of common environmental samples are illustrated below, Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocarbons (EPA Method 610), and Semivolatile Organics (EPA Method 8270).

## EXPERIMENTAL

**Instrumentation.** The Semivolatiles (8270) and PAH (610) separations were performed using the GERSTEL MACH system installed on an Agilent 6890N with 5975 Mass Selective Detector, a split/splitless inlet, and a GERSTEL MPS 2 autosampler.

### Analysis conditions.

Injection: 1  $\mu$ L, MPS 2  
GC Inlet: split 50:1; 280°C  
GC Oven: 280°C, held for duration  
MACH Module: 20 m Rtx<sup>®</sup>-5Sil-MS (Restek),  
MACH format  
 $d_i = 0.18$  mm  $d_f = 0.18$   $\mu$ m  
He,  $P_1 = 14.6$  psi  
35°C (0.5 min); 600°C/min;  
120°C; 25°/min; 320°C  
(1.5 min)

MSD: scan, 50-350 amu,  
19.7 scans/s

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 3 is a chromatogram obtained using conventional GC conditions for the EPA Method 610 (courtesy of Restek Corp., Bellefonte, PA). Method parameters are listed in the figure. The method involves a fairly rapid ramp for a conventional oven, 25°C/min, with a slower 5°C/min ramp around the region of benzo[b]fluoranthene and benzo[k]fluoranthene elution. In addition, hydrogen was used as carrier gas to provide faster separation. The benzo[b]- and [k]fluoranthene pair represents one of the most difficult separations in this analysis. Peak separations of 50% or better are normally considered acceptable.

The MACH separation shown in Figure 4 compares favorably with the conventional separation in Figure 3. This analysis using the MACH system was begun at 35°C in order to achieve good solvent focusing and then ramped rapidly to 120°C to begin the separation. Using the enhanced ramp rates and flexibility of the MACH system, we were able to achieve comparable separation in less than 2/3 of the time, the fast cool-down of the system cut the total cycle time to about 50% of the standard cycle time.

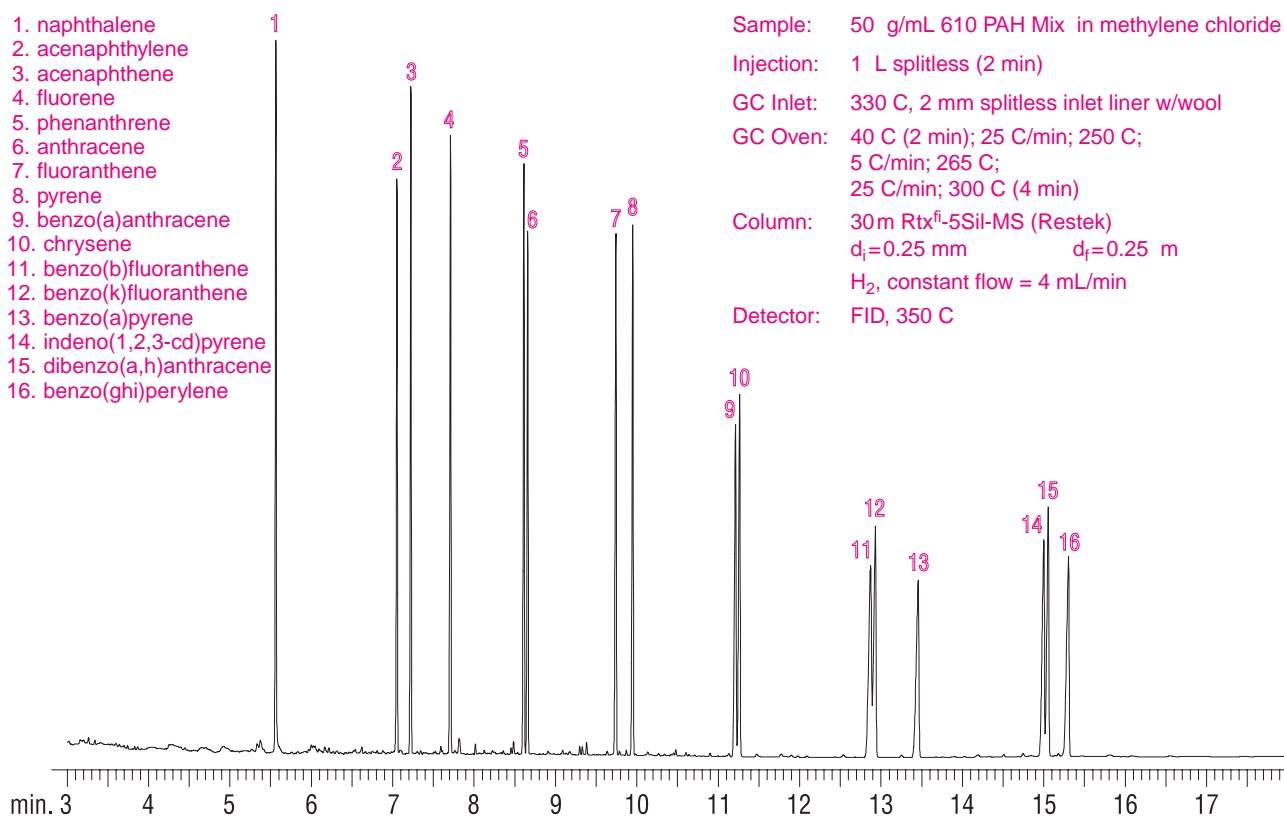
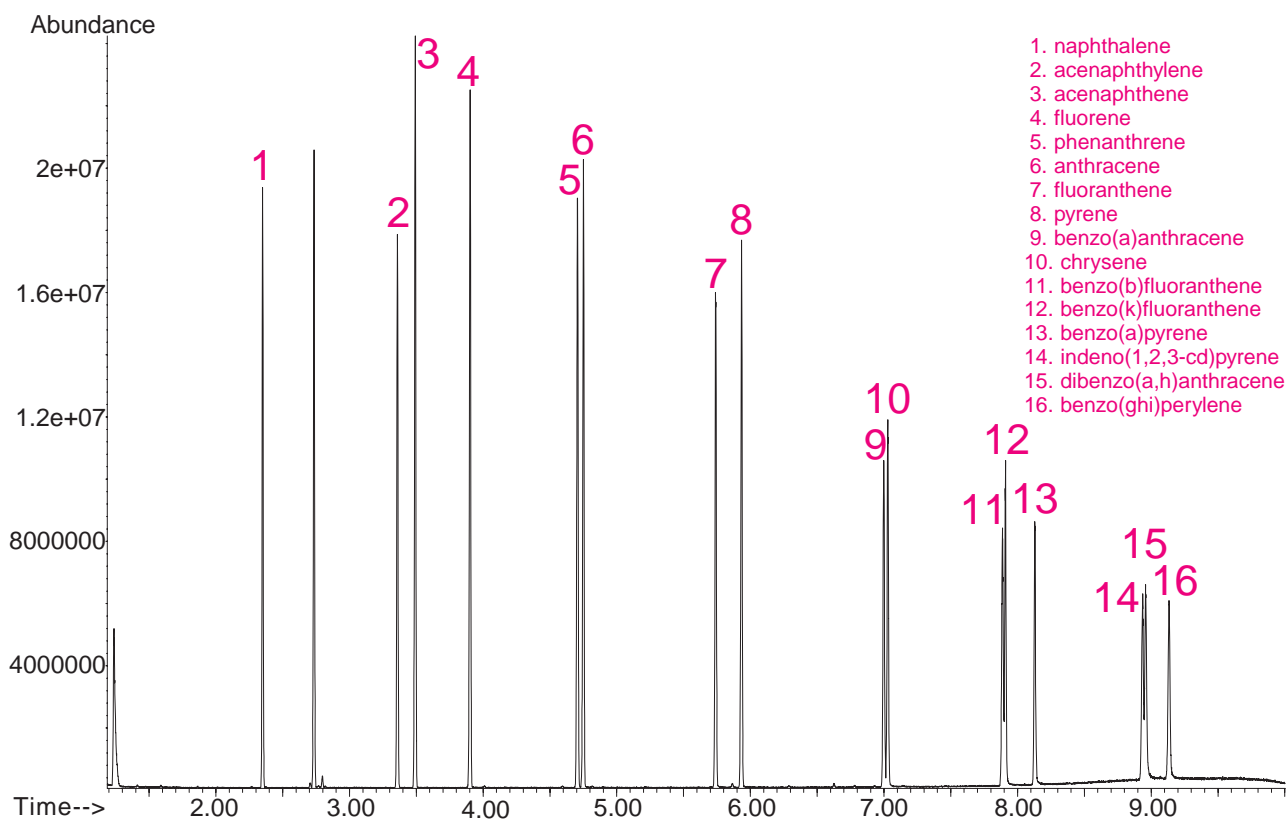


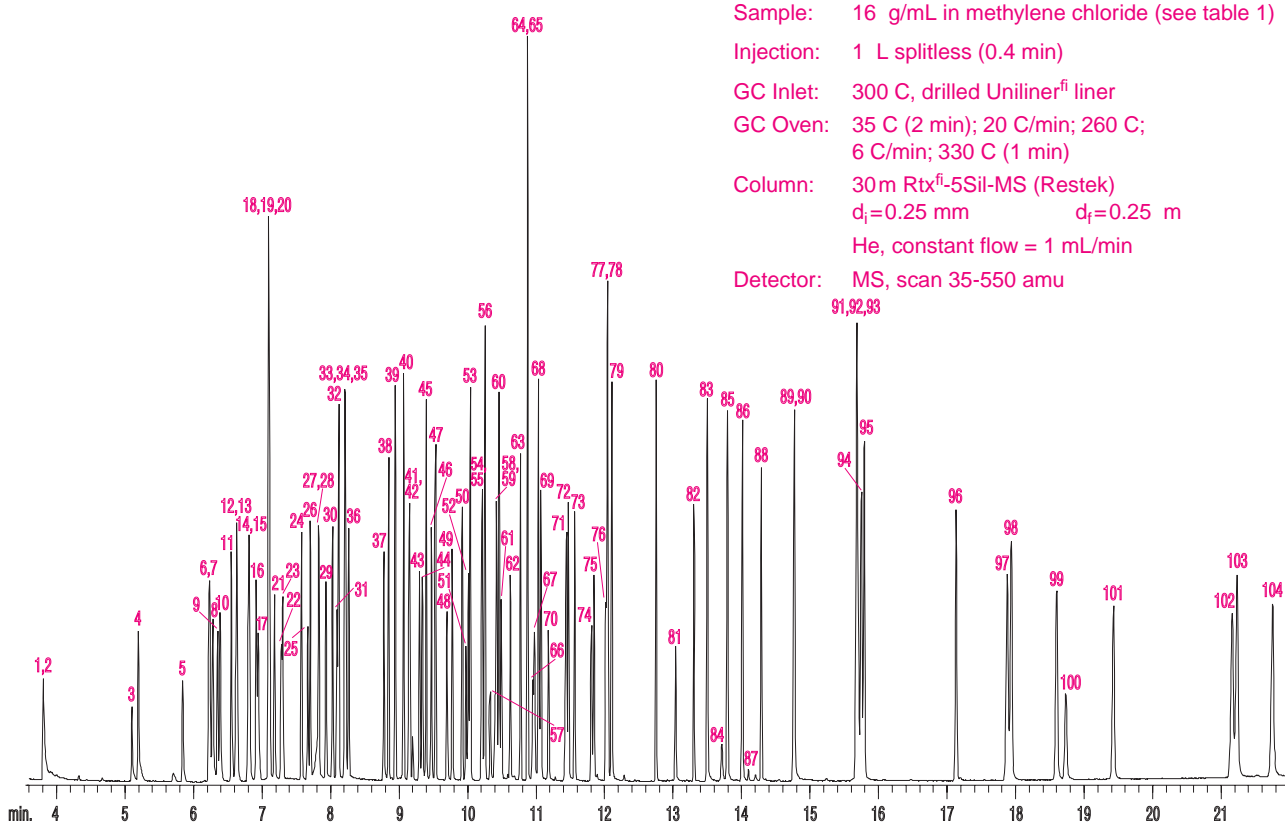
Figure 3. Conventional chromatogram for EPA method 610.



**Figure 4.** MACH chromatogram for EPA method 610.

Figure 5 is a chromatogram obtained using conventional GC conditions for EPA Method 8270 (Courtesy of Restek Corp., Bellefonte, PA). Method parameters are listed in the figure. This method also

involves a fairly rapid ramp for a conventional oven, 20°C/min, with a slower 6°C/min around the region of benzo[b]fluoranthene and benzo[k]fluoranthene elution.



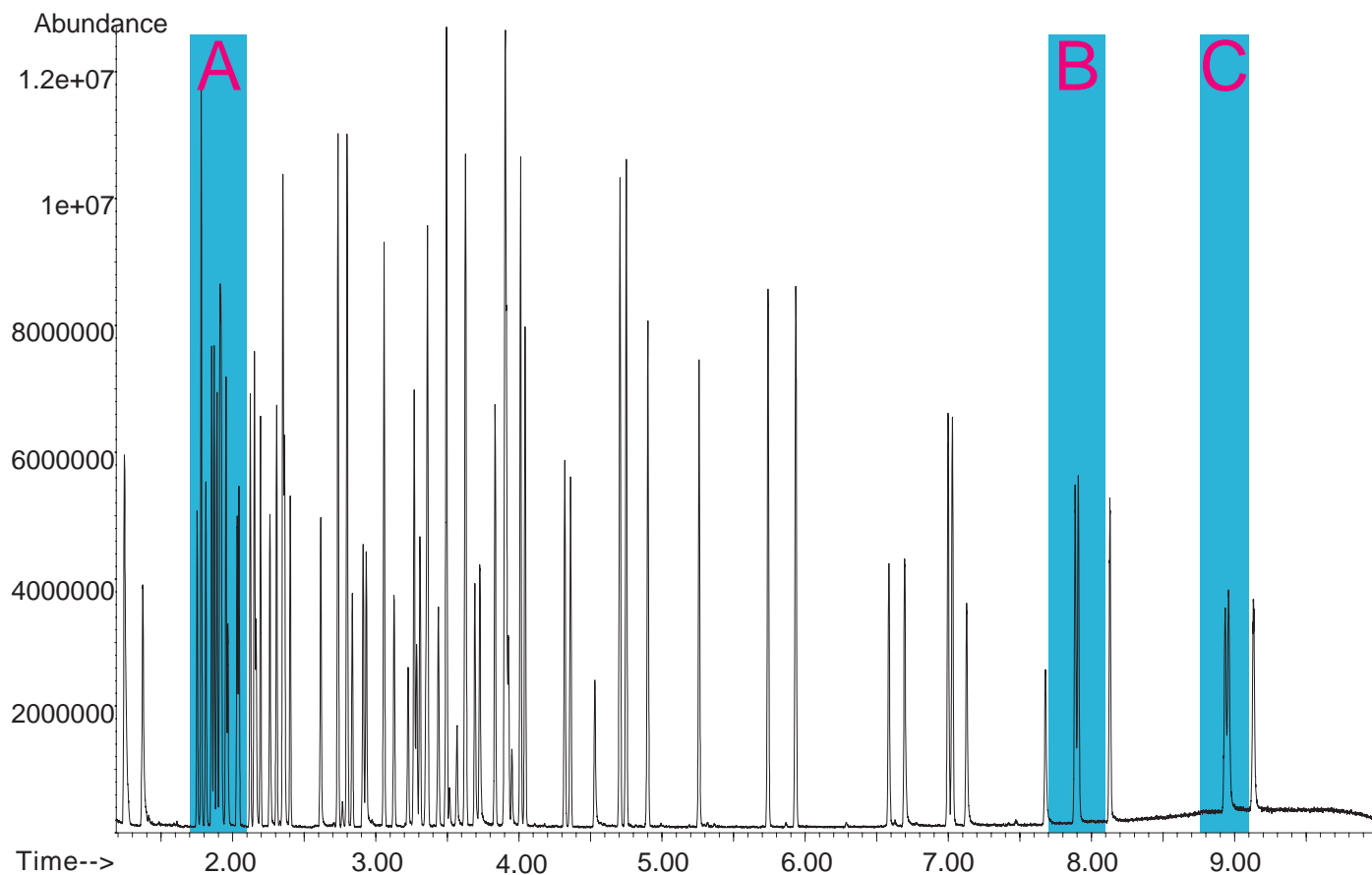
**Figure 5.** Conventional chromatogram for EPA method 8270.

1. N-nitrosodimethylamine	27. bis(2-chloroethoxy)methane	54. acenaphthene-d10	81. 4-nitroquinoline-1-oxide
2. pyridine	28. benzoic acid	55. 3-nitroaniline	82. isodrin
3. methyl methanesulfonate	29. 2,4-dichlorophenol	56. acenaphthene	83. fluoranthene
4. 2-fluorophenol	30. 1,2,4-trichlorobenzene	57. 2,4-dinitrophenol	84. benzidine
5. ethyl methanesulfonate	31. naphthalene-d8	58. pentachlorobenzene	85. pyrene
6. phenol-d6	32. naphthalene	59. 4-nitrophenol	86. <i>p</i> -terphenyl-d14
7. phenol	33. 2,6-dichlorophenol	60. dibenzofuran	87. Aramite
8. aniline	34. 4-chloroaniline	61. 2,4-dinitrotoluene	88. chlorbenzilate
9. bis(2-chloroethyl)ether	35. hexachloropropene	62. 2,3,4,6-tetrachlorophenol	89. Kepone
10. 2-chlorophenol	36. hexachlorobutadiene	63. diethyl phthalate	90. butyl benzyl phthalate
11. 1,3-dichlorobenzene	37. 4-chloro-3-methylphenol	64. fluorene	91. benzo(a)anthracene
12. 1,4-dichlorobenzene-d4	38. isosafrole	65. 4-chlorophenyl phenyl ether	92. 3,3'-dichlorobenzidine
13. 1,4-dichlorobenzene	39. 2-methylnaphthalene	66. 4-nitroaniline	93. chrysene-d12
14. 1,2-dichlorobenzene	40. 1-methylnaphthalene	67. 4,6-dinitro-2-methylphenol	94. chrysene
15. benzyl alcohol	41. hexachlorocyclopentadiene	68. diphenylamine	95. bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate
16. 2-methylphenol	42. 1,2,4,5-tetrachlorobenzene	69. azobenzene	96. di- <i>n</i> -octyl phthalate
17. bis(2-chloroisopropyl)ether	43. 2,4,6-trichlorophenol	70. 2,4,6-tribromophenol	97. benzo(b)fluoranthene
18. acetophenone	44. 2,4,5-trichlorophenol	71. phenacetin	98. benzo(k)fluoranthene
19a. 4-methylphenol	45. 2-fluorobiphenyl	72. 4-bromophenyl phenyl ether	99. benzo(a)pyrene
19b. 3-methylphenol	46. safrole	73. hexachlorobenzene	100. perylene-d12
20. N-nitroso-di- <i>n</i> -propylamine	47. 2-chloronaphthalene	74. pentachlorophenol	101. 3-methylcholanthrene
21. hexachloroethane	48. 2-nitroaniline	75. pentachloronitrobenzene	102. indeno(1,2,3- <i>cd</i> )pyrene
22. nitrobenzene-d5	49. 1,4-naphthoquinone	76. phenanthrene-d10	103. dibenzo(a,h)anthracene
23. nitrobenzene	50. dimethyl phthalate	77. dinoseb	104. benzo(ghi)perylene
24. isophorone	51. 1,3-dinitrobenzene	78. phenanthrene	
25. 2-nitrophenol	52. 2,6-dinitrotoluene	79. anthracene	
26. 2,4-dimethylphenol	53. acenaphthylene	80. di- <i>n</i> -butylphthalate	

**Table 1.** Peak Identifications for Figure 5.

Comparing the conventional separation with the MACH separation for a 76-component subset of the key compounds shown in Figure 6, using the same temperature program developed for the PAH

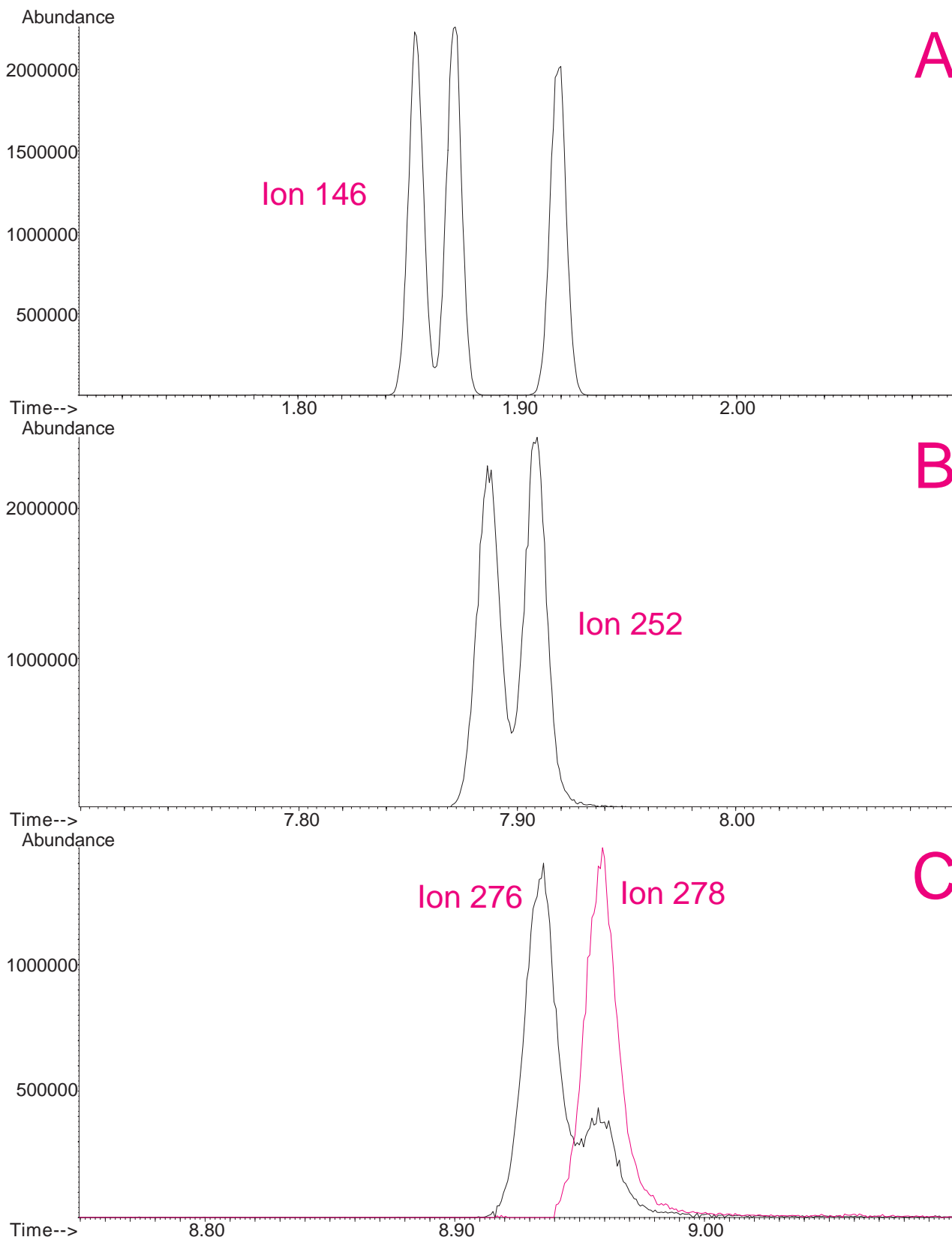
separation, enabled us to achieve a similar separation in less than half the time of the conventional analysis. Benzo[b]fluoranthene and benzo[k]fluoranthene are separated by at least 60%. (Figure 7B).



**Figure 6.** MACH chromatogram for EPA method 8270.

Additionally, as shown in Figure 7, other difficult regions in this separation, such as 1,3-dichlorobenzene, 1,4-dichlorobenzene, and 1,2-dichlorobenzene (7A) and indeno[1,2,3-cd]pyrene and dibenzo[a,h]anthracene

(7C), are satisfactorily resolved. Resolving the aniline/bis(2-chloroethyl)ether pair will require some additional temperature program optimization.



**Figure 7.** Highlighted regions from MACH 8270 chromatogram.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The enhanced capabilities of the MACH open a new door of opportunity in GC analysis. The ability to start at a low temperature, and then rapidly heat the column to a more suitable start temperature for rapid separation provides the analyst with the best of both worlds. Furthermore, precise control of temperature holds and negative ramps are available to help optimize fast separations.

We showed that by using the fast heating and cooling capabilities of the MACH we could accelerate conventional EPA methods 610 and 8270, cutting cycle time in half which can potentially double throughput on a single instrument.

Finally, the ability to use Fast GC techniques without worries of leakage, and the ability to use precolumns, makes this a simple and robust system to implement. By taking advantage of these abilities, commercial environmental labs can improve throughput without sacrificing data quality.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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