



Application Note AN-O-043

# Carbonate impurities in caustic soda

## Robust IC analysis of carbonate in sodium hydroxide

Sodium hydroxide (NaOH, also known as caustic soda or soda lye) is a strong, harmful base made of solid white crystals. It is used in many industries (e.g., paper manufacturing, petrochemistry, soap manufacturing [1]) with an annual production of about 60 million tons worldwide [2]. Caustic soda is very hygroscopic and also absorbs carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere. This increases the carbonate content while reducing the hydroxide concentration of the product. Therefore, it should be stored under both water-free and CO<sub>2</sub>-free conditions, with minimal atmospheric contact. Depending on the application and its purity requirements, caustic soda as a raw product must fulfill the respective quality

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criteria.

Quality control analysis comprises the determination of contaminants such as alkalinity, trace metals, anionic impurities (e.g., nitrate and sulfate), as well as carbonate. The analysis of carbonate by ion chromatography (IC) is quite tricky. Suppressed anion IC with hydroxide eluents does not work as suppression converts carbonate back to carbonic acid (H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>) with almost no sensitivity. In this Application Note carbonate determination in NaOH is demonstrated by applying ion-exclusion chromatography with conductivity detection after inverse suppression – a way for automated, reliable, and secure quantification.

## SAMPLE AND SAMPLE PREPARATION

Two 50% sodium hydroxide solutions are analyzed for their carbonate content (**Figure 1**). As 50% NaOH is too highly concentrated to be directly injected into the IC, a 1:20 dilution with degassed ultrapure water is applied. To avoid

extra CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption, the final sample is kept in a closed bottle. Depending on the quality of the original sample, Metrohm Inline Ultrafiltration is a suitable choice for automated sample preparation.

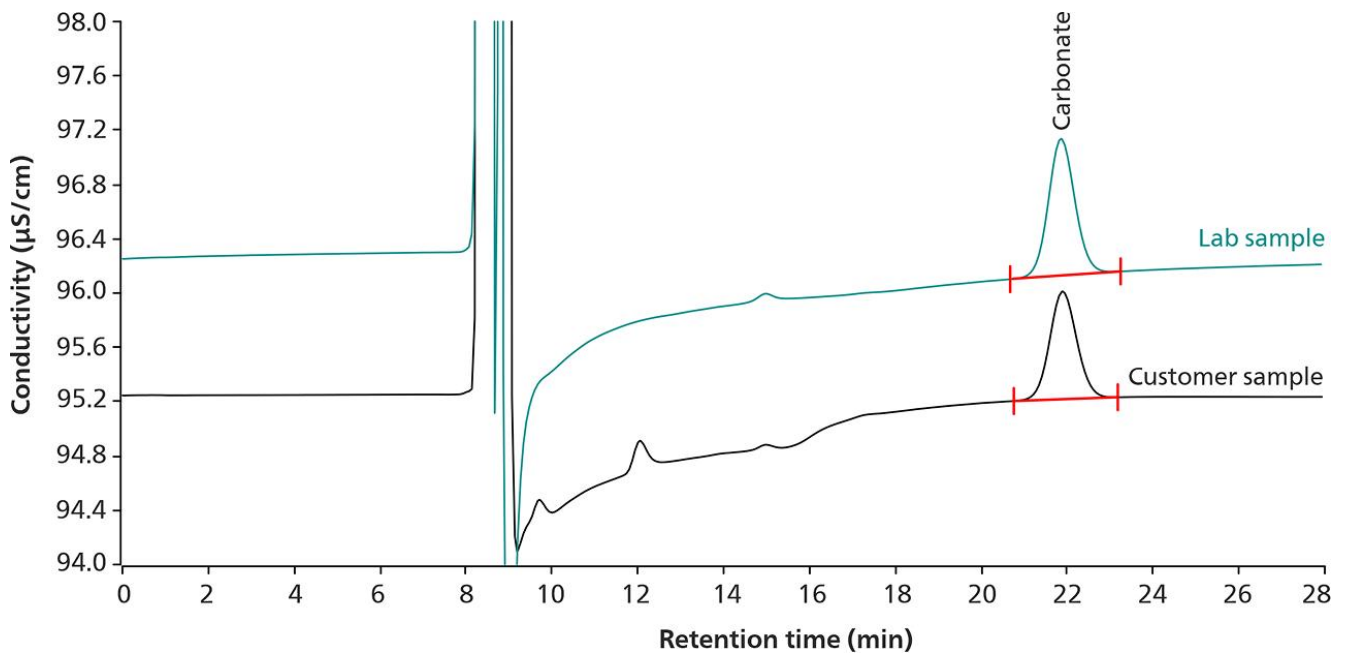
## EXPERIMENTAL

The analysis is performed on a Compact IC Flex system, fully automated with a 858 Professional Sample Processor and the Metrohm intelligent Partial Loop Injection Technique (MiPT) (**Figure 2**). Carbonate (as carbonic acid) is separated from other analytes in the sample on the Metrosep Organic Acids - 250/7.8 analytical column with a sulfuric acid eluent (**Figure 1**). The column is operated at 30 ° C, providing thermal stability for reproducible results.

With direct conductivity detection, carbonate (as

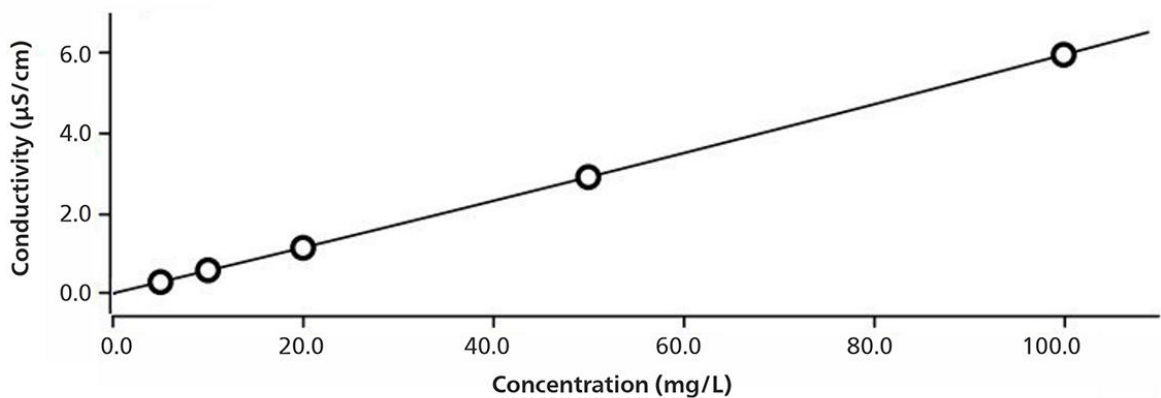
carbonic acid) cannot be quantified. Thus, after separation, inverse suppression is applied prior to conductivity detection. In contrast to classical anion suppression, inverse suppression replaces the H<sup>+</sup> ion with Li<sup>+</sup>. This step neutralizes the sulfuric acid eluent and converts weak acids into their salts. In this way, the eluent background conductivity is reduced, and the weak acids are dissociated. This improves the conductivity response of e.g., organic acids or carbonic acid.

A



**Figure 1. (A)** Chromatogram overlay of carbonate in two 50% NaOH samples (lab sample: 1018 mg/kg carbonate, customer sample: 816 mg/kg carbonate) analyzed by a Compact IC 930 Compact IC Flex. A 20 µL volume of the diluted samples is injected applying the Metrohm intelligent Partial Loop Injection Technique (MiPT).

**B**



Function: . . . . .  $A = 8.26525E-3 + 7.05700E-4 \times Q + 4.91848E-9 \times Q^2$   
 Relative standard deviation . . . . . 0.352004 %  
 Correlation coefficient . . . . . 0.999997

**Figure 1. (B)** The calibration (5–100 mg/L) is performed from a single standard using MiPT.



**Figure 2.** Compact instrumentation to quantify carbonate in sodium hydroxide: Compact IC Flex with a Dosino for MiPT and a 858 Professional Sample Processor.

## RESULTS

The calibration ranged from 5 to 100 mg/L for carbonate (Figure 1). The calibration curve is built by injecting different volumes of a single standard solution as a fully automated process with MiPT (Figure 1).

Two sample bottles of 50% NaOH were tested in

this application example. The first was supplied externally, and the second bottle was sourced from the testing laboratory. Table 1 shows the concentration of carbonate in sodium hydroxide from these two samples.

**Table 1.** Concentration of carbonate in two samples of 50% sodium hydroxide as measured by ion-exclusion chromatography.

	Carbonate (mg/kg)
Customer sample	816
Lab sample	1018

## 概要

The quality control of sodium hydroxide for carbonate content is possible with ion-exclusion chromatography. To use the universal maintenance-free detection technique of conductivity, inverse suppression with  $\text{Li}^+$  is a crucial step. This is easily performed with the Metrohm Suppressor Module (MSM). The freedom of usable regeneration solutions and

100% pH stability allows full flexibility of the MSM for a variety of challenging applications. Automated IC delivers fast and reliable results. The Metrohm intelligent Partial Loop Injection Technique and optional Inline Ultrafiltration save additional time, reduce labor costs, and make this an efficient and accurate choice for quality control measurements.

## REFERENCES

1. NIOSH. *Sodium Hydroxide, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)*.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/sodium-hydroxide/> (accessed 2022-05-13).

2. Vargel, C. Chapter E.4 - Inorganic Bases. In *Corrosion of Aluminium*; Vargel, C., Ed.; Elsevier: Amsterdam, 2004; pp 385–393.

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## CONFIGURATION



### Metrosep Organic Acids - 250/7.8

Metrosep Organic Acids - 250/7.8は、ホリマーヘー  
ースの陽イオン交換カラムです。これは、有機酸の  
測定や、困難かつ複雑な分離課題の解決のための高  
性能カラムです。更に、有機酸の他に、炭酸塩（逆  
相サフレーションによって）、フッ化物（フッ酸）、  
リン酸塩（リン酸）も測定することかてきます。  
Hamilton PRP-X300 - 250/4.0に比へて、  
Metrosep Organic Acids - 250/7.8の容量はより大  
きく、選択性も向上しています。



### 930 Compact IC Flex Oven/ChS/PP/Deg

930 コンパクト IC Flex Oven/ChS/PP/Deg はカ  
ラムオーブン、ケミカルサフレーション、サフレッサ  
ー再生のためのヘリスタリックホンフ、内蔵式脱気  
装置を備えたインテリシエントコンパクトIC装置で  
す。この装置は任意の分離メソッドおよび検出メソ  
ッドによって使用することかてきます。

典型的な使用領域:

- ケミカルサフレーションと電気伝導度検出器によ  
る陰イオンの測定
- イオン排除クロマトグラフィーおよび逆のサフ  
レーションを用いた有機酸



### 858 Professional Sample Processor - Pump

858 フロフェッショナルサンプルプロセッサ - ホン  
フは、500  $\mu$ Lから500 mLまでのサンプルを処理し  
ます。サンプルは内蔵式双方向性の2チャンネルの  
ヘリスタリックホンフまたは800 トシーノ電動ヒュ  
レットによって転送されます。



### IC: MiPT

ハーシャルルーフィンセクションのトシーノ設置のための付属品セット。



### 800 Dosino

高性能電動ヒュレットのトーシンクユニット用書き込み・読み取り用ハードウェア付き駆動部。固定されたケーブル付き (長さ150 cm)。