Date: July 8, 2013

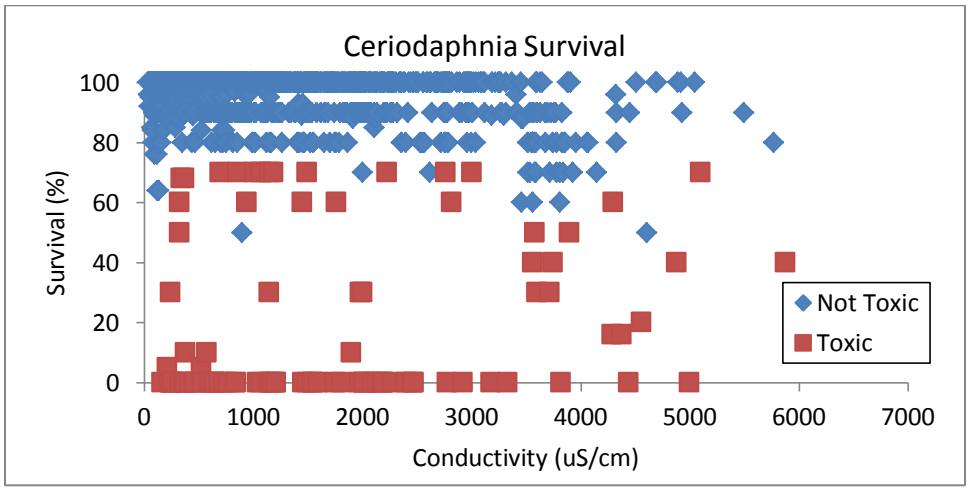
To: Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) Round Table

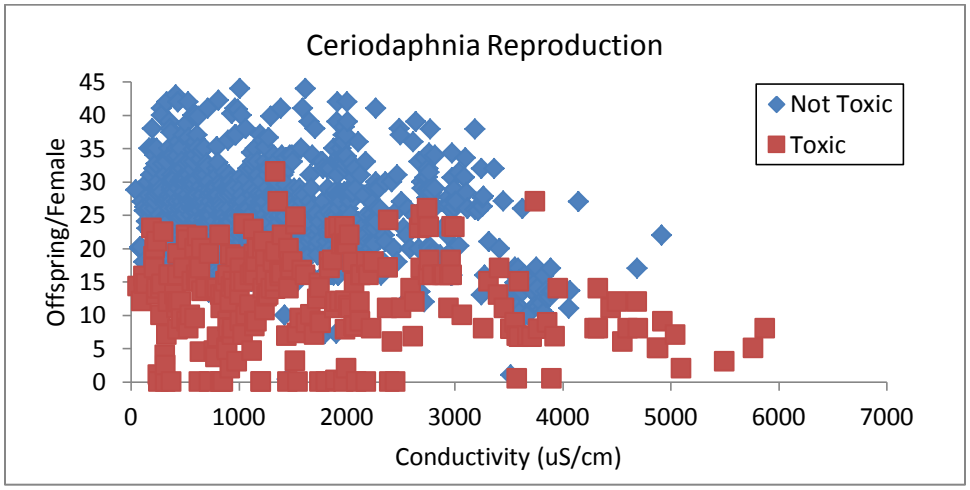
From: SWAMP Toxicity Work Group

Subject: Salinity/Conductivity Control Issues

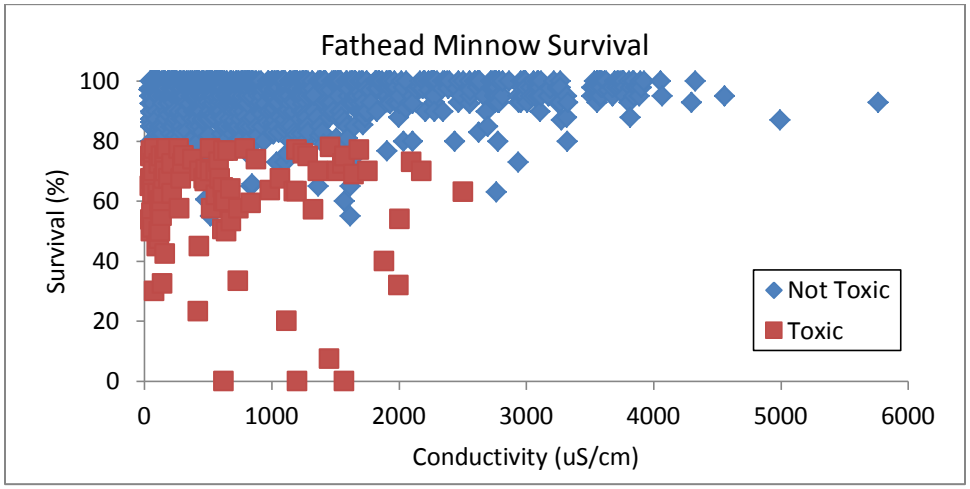
Issue 1 - Provide specific guidance for organism selection based on conductivity

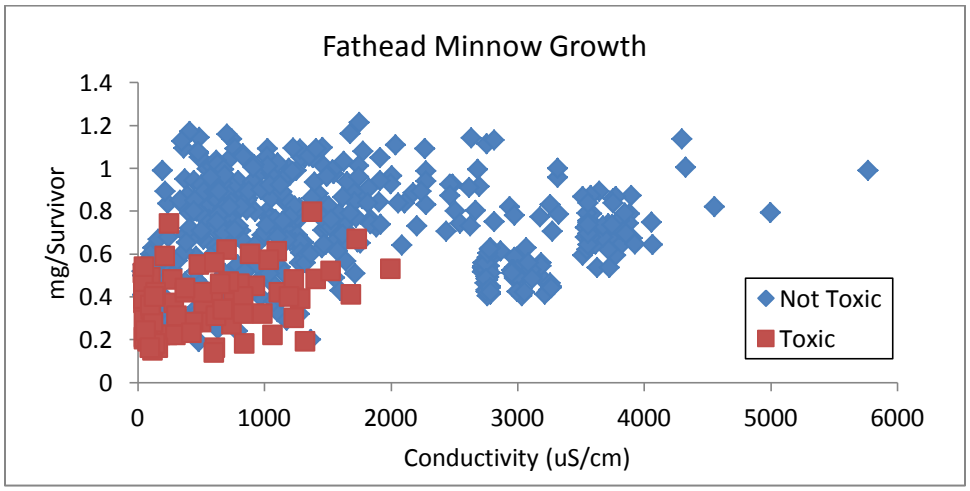
We are re-examining the conductivity tolerance of freshwater toxicity test species as part of the new SWAMP QAPrP. The SWAMP database was queried for paired toxicity test results and conductivity concentrations. The following tables represent the results of these queries.



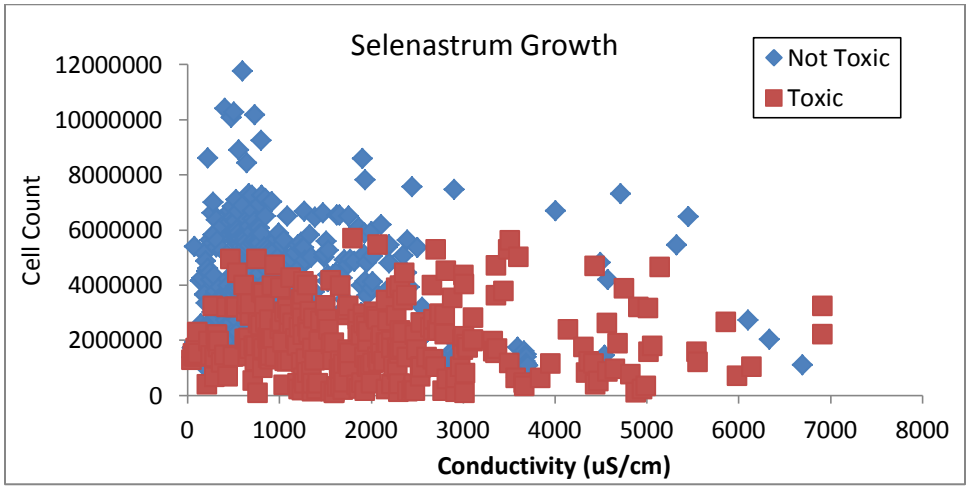


Ceriodaphnia survival is not adversely affected until conductivity exceeds 5000 µS/cm, but reproduction is likely affected at conductivities greater than 4000 µS/cm.





Fathead minnow survival and growth do not appear to be affected by elevated conductivity. All of the samples with conductivities greater than 3000 µS/cm were not toxic.



Selenastrum appears to be sensitive at higher conductivities, but because the results can be variable, lower growth responses can be considered not toxic.

Recommendations

SWAMP provides some guidance for organism selection based on the conductivity or salinity of the sample. The following are excerpts from the Toxicity MQO Tables with additional recommended text in **bold**:

Ceriodaphnia dubia – Include appropriate controls when sample conductivities are 0 – 100, or >1900 µS/cm. Substitute with *Hyalella azteca* if conductivity is >2500 µS/cm.

Pimephales promelas – Include appropriate controls when sample conductivities are 0 – 100, or above 1900 µS/cm. **Consider an alternate species at conductivities greater than 6000 µS/cm (e.g., *Atherinops affinis*).**

Selenastrum capricornutum – Include appropriate controls when sample conductivities exceed 1500 uS/cm. **If conductivity exceeds 3000 uS/cm, use alternate species or forego testing.**

Issue 2 – Incorporate statistical procedures for dual controls in the SWAMP database

The SWAMP database currently compares all sample responses to the corresponding response in the dilution control. As described above, SWAMP recommends the use of salinity/conductivity controls when the salinity or conductivity of the sample is near the organism's threshold of tolerance. There is currently no provision for using the additional control in the statistical comparison.

U.S. EPA provides guidance for using dual controls (U.S. EPA, 2000). In the excerpt below, guidance is provided for the use of dilution controls versus culture controls. Similar procedures could be used for salinity/conductivity controls. There are precedents for these procedures in the Marine Bioassay Project reports, and also the commonly used statistical software CETIS.

The following is from U.S. EPA (2000)

When and how do I use dual controls?

When the dilution water used in a test differs from the water used to culture, hold, and maintain the test organisms, an additional set of dilution water controls should be evaluated in the WET test. This is generally the case when natural receiving water or adjusted synthetic water is used for dilution, but additional controls also may be necessary for standard synthetic dilution waters if organisms are cultured in alternative water. A culture water control should consist of 100% culture water, and a dilution water control should consist of 100% of the dilution water used in the test. These two controls

should be run concurrently in the test and undergo the same test conditions. Prior to the analysis of test treatment data, the two controls (dilution water control and culture water control) should be compared to determine if statistically significant differences exist. This comparison should be made using a t-test as described in Appendix H of the freshwater method manual (USEPA, 1994a) and Appendix G of the marine method manual (USEPA, 1994b). If there is no statistically significant difference between the two controls, the dilution water control should be used for further analysis and comparisons with the treatment groups. If a receiving water control is significantly different from the culture control, this may indicate ambient toxicity in the receiving water. In this case, the use of synthetic dilution water adjusted to approximate the receiving water may be more appropriate. If adjusted synthetic dilution water shows a significant difference from the culture control, this generally indicates that either the chemical adjustments of the dilution water were outside of the tolerance range of the test organism or acclimation of the test organisms to the dilution water is necessary. In this situation, the analyst should consider using organisms cultured in water more similar to the dilution water or consider acclimatizing the test organisms to the adjusted dilution water prior to the test. These options, however, may increase test cost and may be impractical for laboratories that test effluents from numerous dischargers, each with specific dilution water requirements. For this reason, local regulatory authorities may wish to reevaluate test objectives for this effluent and consider the use of standardized synthetic water (U.S. EPA, 2000).

Recommendation

Follow the guidance for use of dual controls provided in the MQO Tables. Both controls must meet test acceptability criteria, but if the secondary control is significantly different from the primary control, then the secondary control should be used for further statistical analysis in the determination of sample toxicity.

Reference

U.S. EPA, 2000. Method guidance and recommendations for whole effluent toxicity (WET) testing (40 CFR Part 136). EPA/821/B-00/004. Office of Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C. 20460.