

# Comparison of the acute toxicity of tributyltin and copper to veliger larvae of *Nassarius reticulatus* (L.)

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The ban on the use of tributyltin (TBT) is promoting an increasing use of copper as an active biocide in antifouling paints, with consequent rising levels of this metal in the environment. This study assesses the acute toxicity of copper and tributyltin to the larvae of the mollusc gastropod *Nassarius reticulatus*. Recently hatched veligers were exposed to nominal TBT-Sn concentrations of 0.9, 1.4, 1.9, 2.8, 3.8, 4.7 and 5.6  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and nominal copper concentrations of 9.4, 23.4, 46.9, 70.3, 93.8, 117.2, 140.6 and 164.1  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  for up to 96 h, under static conditions ( $17 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$  and  $33 \pm 1$  psu). The percentage of larval mortality was determined for each organometal/metal concentration and exposure time (1, 24, 48, 72 and 96 h). Both TBT and copper had a highly significant effect on larvae survival ( $p < 0.001$ ) for all times of exposure, except for the first hour in the particular case of TBT. The lowest observed effect concentration for TBT-Sn decreased over time from 3.8  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 24 h to 1.9  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 96 h, whereas for copper it remained constant over time (46.9  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ). The median lethal concentration ( $\text{LC}_{50}$ ) for TBT-Sn decreased from 4.87  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 24 h to 1.78  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 96 h, and the  $\text{LC}_{50}$  for copper decreased from 83.08  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 24 h to 58.84  $\mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 96 h. TBT is far more toxic to *N. reticulatus* larvae than copper. However, owing to the higher copper environmental concentrations, the risk factors of the two biocides may approach each other. This stresses the need to find adequate substitutes for organotin biocides in future antifouling paints. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

**KEYWORDS:** gastropod; *Nassarius reticulatus*; larvae; antifouling paints; TBT; copper; acute toxicity; risk factor (RF)

## INTRODUCTION

Tributyltin (TBT) compounds have been extensively used in the last four decades as biocides in antifouling paints, which caused a new pollution problem around the world. Owing to its high toxicity towards non-target organisms,<sup>1</sup> TBT applications have been regulated over recent years. This has promoted an increased usage of copper as the active biocide in antifouling paints, with a consequent increase in the level of this metal in the environment.<sup>2</sup> The masculinization of gastropod prosobranch females due to TBT, a phenomenon coined as imposex by Smith,<sup>3</sup> is probably the best known example of endocrine disruption caused by a pollutant.

Imposex is already described for 180 different species around the world, and it may lead to female sterility at highly polluted sites.<sup>4,5</sup> A severe ecological impact may be expected in species that lack a planktonic stage in their life cycle, since if no recruitment of young specimens occurs from other places then the population will become extinct. This has happened, for instance, with the dog-whelk *Nucella lapillus* (L.) at many sites on Atlantic coasts.<sup>5–7</sup> It is generally assumed that populations of species with planktonic stages in their life cycle will not be severely affected by female sterilization, as the supply of new individuals is always assured from less-polluted places. However, larval stages are, in general, more sensitive than the adults,<sup>8</sup> and thus more research should be addressed regarding the effects of pollutants on the recruitment of prosobranch species at highly polluted sites. Most of the studies regarding the toxicity of metals towards mollusc larvae have been performed on bivalves, such as *Scrobicularia plana*,<sup>9–11</sup> *Crassostrea gigas*,<sup>12–16</sup> *Mytilus*

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*edulis*<sup>17,18</sup> and *Mytilus galloprovincialis*.<sup>12,14</sup> Curiously, very few ecotoxicological studies are available regarding gastropod larvae.<sup>19</sup>

The netted whelk *Nassarius* (= *Hinia*) *reticulatus* (L.) is a common European prosobranch gastropod that is distributed from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, north to Norway and into the western Baltic.<sup>20</sup> *N. reticulatus* has an indirect development: females lay capsules between spring and summer and after 2–4 weeks veligers hatch from the capsule to start a planktonic phase of 1–2 months before settling.<sup>21–23</sup> This species is affected by imposex throughout Europe,<sup>24–28</sup> and female sterility has been reported for highly polluted sites. The aim of the present study is to assess and compare the acute toxicity of TBT and copper on the survival of veliger larvae of *N. reticulatus* and to evaluate whether the recruitment of this species might be affected at places where pollution by these (organo) metals is high.

## METHODS

### Bioassay procedure

*N. reticulatus* capsules were collected at Ria de Aveiro (northwest Portugal) in September 2003. The capsules were mainly attached to the algae *Laurencia pinnatifida*, so those algae were brought to the laboratory and maintained at  $17 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$  in 250 ml beakers containing permanently aerated natural seawater (33 psu (practical salinity unit), equivalent to permill). Each capsule was monitored daily under a stereo microscope and those 'close to hatch', i.e. containing veliger larvae with developed eyes, pigmentation, statocysts and beating velum, were ripped and larvae were collected with a micropipette. The test was started by adding approximately 8–10 recent hatched larvae to each 2 ml well containing 1.5 ml of test solution. Each treatment, including the control, was replicated 12 times, yielding a total of ca 100 larvae. No food was supplied. All the material was subjected to a previous acid bath in order to prevent adsorption of toxic substances. Temperature ( $17 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ ) and salinity (33 psu) were maintained constant and no renewal of test solutions was performed during the experiment.

Numbers of live and dead larvae were counted every 24 h under a stereo microscope between the first hour and the fourth day of the experiment. Live larva were those actively swimming in the water or lying on the bottom but with beating of the velum.

### Test solutions

TBT chloride ( $\text{C}_{12}\text{H}_{27}\text{ClSn}$ , Fluka) solutions were prepared with filtered natural seawater (TBT-Sn  $< 0.03 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ) at nominal TBT-Sn concentrations of 0.9, 1.4, 1.9, 2.8, 3.8, 4.7 and  $5.6 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ . To improve the solubility of TBT in seawater, the organic solvent dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) was used to add TBT into the test solutions. Therefore, two controls were used, one with seawater and the other with seawater plus

DMSO. The DMSO control received the same quantity of solvent as the treatments ( $150 \mu\text{l l}^{-1}$ ).

Copper ( $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ; JMV Pereira, Lda.) solutions were prepared at nominal copper concentrations of 9.4, 23.4, 46.9, 70.3, 93.8, 117.2, 140.6 and  $164.1 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  with filtered natural seawater (copper  $< 0.8 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ) to which 0.001%  $\text{HNO}_3$  had been added to increase metal solubility and reduce surface plating on vessel walls. Filtered natural seawater was used as a control.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The mean percentage of dead larvae and standard deviation were calculated for each treatment at 1, 24, 48, 72 and 96 h and compared with the controls (DMSO for TBT and seawater for copper exposures). One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by a *post hoc* Student Newman Keuls (SNK) test ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) was performed in order to test the null hypothesis that contaminants had no effect upon larval survival. The transformation  $\arcsin \sqrt{x}$  was applied to the data prior to the analysis, and variances of data were checked by means of Cochran's homogeneity test before running the ANOVA.<sup>29</sup>

The 'no observed effect concentration' (NOEC) and the 'lowest observed effect concentration' (LOEC) values were determined from the larval mortality data after using ANOVA and the *post hoc* SNK test. NOEC was defined as the highest concentration causing no significant mortality on larvae, and LOEC was defined as the lowest concentration causing significant mortality of larvae.<sup>30,31</sup> The median lethal concentration  $\text{LC}_{50}$  values, i.e. concentrations causing 50% of mortality, and their confidence limits were calculated using probit analysis.<sup>32</sup> The risk factor (RF) was calculated as  $C_{\text{est}}/\text{LOEC}$ , where  $C_{\text{est}}$  is the mean TBT-Sn or copper concentration in estuaries.

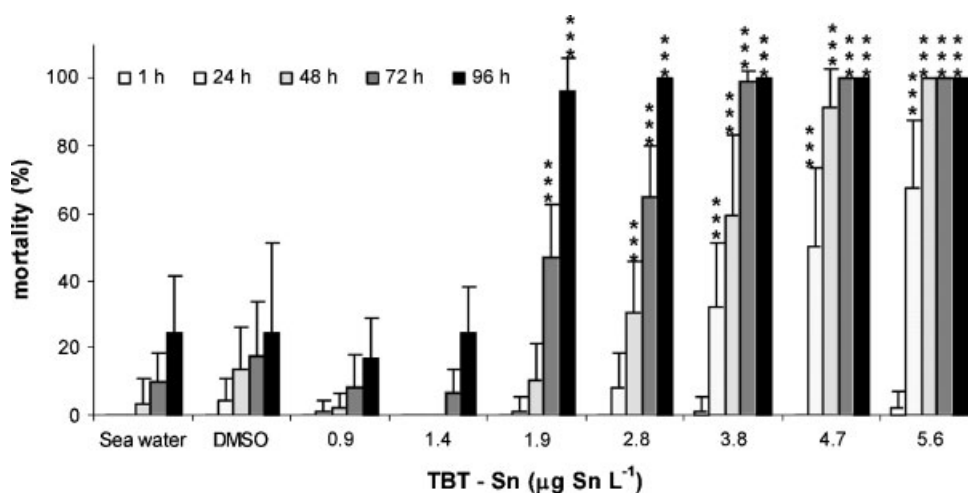
## RESULTS

There was no significant difference in mortality observed in the seawater or the DMSO controls up to 96 h (SNK test,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The average mortality in the control was always lower than 20%, except for 96 h where mortality reached 24.7% for TBT-Sn and 27.2% for copper. Mortality values below 30% in the control group are acceptable for a valid oyster embryo larval test according to ASTM protocols.<sup>33</sup>

TBT had a highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) effect on the survival of *N. reticulatus* larvae for all times of exposure, except for the first hour (Table 1). A highly significant increase in mortality occurred at a TBT-Sn concentration as low as  $1.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  for 72 h onwards, compared with the control. Higher TBT-Sn concentrations caused significant effects for lower exposure times, e.g.  $\geq 3.8 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  induced mortality from 24 h onwards (Fig. 1). The estimated values for NOEC, LOEC and  $\text{LC}_{50}$  are shown in Table 1. The NOEC and the LOEC

**Table 1.** Parameters of one-way ANOVA testing the effects of TBT and copper on the percentage of dead larvae of *N. reticulatus* at different times of exposure and the respective NOEC, LOEC, LC<sub>50</sub> and LC<sub>50</sub> 95% confidence intervals. \*\*\**p* < 0.001; ns: *p* > 0.05

Time (h)	TBT-Sn ( $\mu\text{g Sn l}^{-1}$ )					Copper ( $\mu\text{g Cu l}^{-1}$ )				
	<i>F</i>	NOEC	LOEC	LC <sub>50</sub>	95% CI	<i>F</i>	NOEC	LOEC	LC <sub>50</sub>	95% CI
1	1.55 ns	—	—	—	—	40.46***	23.4	46.9	102.70	73.15–132.07
24	53.57***	2.80	3.80	4.87	3.67–6.07	46.53***	23.4	46.9	83.08	28.24–137.41
48	110.05***	1.90	2.80	3.59	3.14–4.03	85.93***	23.4	46.9	80.83	53.64–108.40
72	146.73***	1.40	1.90	2.50	1.29–3.72	91.62***	23.4	46.9	66.50	59.38–74.00
96	105.02***	1.40	1.90	1.78	1.44–2.12	91.62***	23.4	46.9	58.84	35.45–82.29

**Figure 1.** Percentages of dead *N. reticulatus* larvae in relation to different concentrations of TBT throughout the experimental period. Error bars represent the standard deviation for each concentration (*n* = 12). Concentrations where significant increasing mortality in relation to the DMSO control occurred are marked: \*\*\**p* < 0.001.

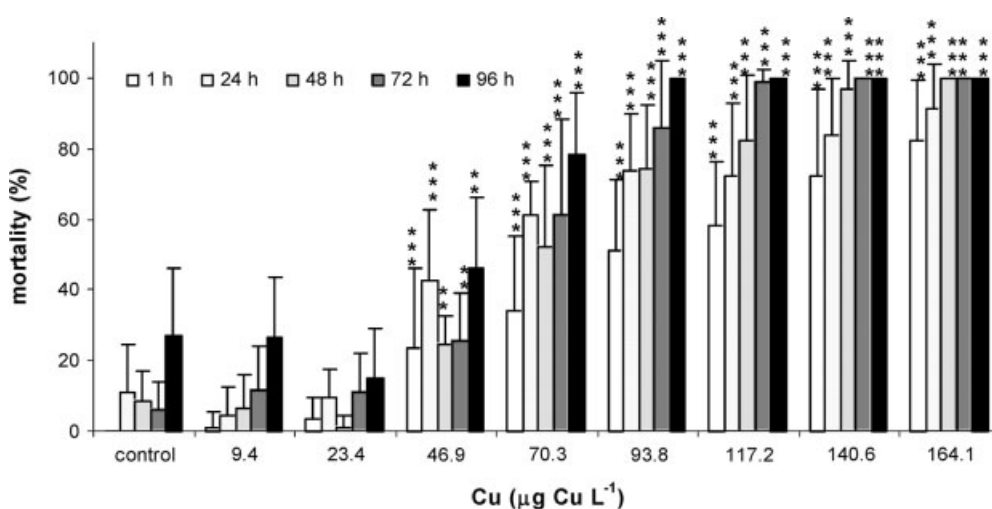
decreased over the time of exposure: for TBT-Sn at 24 h they were  $2.8 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $3.8 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively, whereas for 96 h they were  $1.4 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $1.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively. The LC<sub>50</sub> values also decreased with the time of exposure, from a TBT-Sn  $4.87 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  (at 24 h) to  $1.78 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  (at 96 h). Copper had a highly significant (*p* < 0.01) effect on the survival of *N. reticulatus* larvae for all times of exposure (Table 1). Copper toxicity remained insignificant up to  $23.4 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  throughout the exposure time, but copper concentrations  $\geq 46.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  had a highly significant (*p* < 0.01) effect on larvae mortality and 100% mortality was achieved for the highest concentration after 48 h of exposure (Fig. 2). NOEC and LOEC values for copper remained constant over time:  $23.4 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $46.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively. The LC<sub>50</sub> values for copper varied from  $102.70$  (at 1 h) to  $58.84 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  (at 96 h) (Table 1).

## DISCUSSION

Few studies have measured the effects of the antifouling compounds TBT and copper on gastropod larval survival. This is the first one to report those effects on *N. reticulatus* veliger larvae.

TBT has a highly significant (*p* < 0.001) effect on the survival of recently hatched veliger of *N. reticulatus*. Our results show LC<sub>50</sub> for TBT-Sn varying from  $4.87 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 24 h to  $1.78 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  at 96 h. The TBT-Sn LC<sub>50</sub> (48 h) of  $3.59 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  obtained in the current study compare with those reported for acute toxicity tests with gastropod and bivalve larvae. For gastropod larvae of *Thais clavigera*, *Haliotis discus discus* and *Haliotis madaka* the reported TBT-Sn LC<sub>50</sub> values (48 h) are  $2.29 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ,  $2.21 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $0.49 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively.<sup>19</sup> For the bivalve larvae of *Mytilus edulis*, *Crassostrea virginica* and *Mercenaria mercenaria* the TBT-Sn LC<sub>50</sub> values (48 h) are  $0.90 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ,  $1.62 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $0.68 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively.<sup>8,34</sup> These values are very high, however; if one were to extend the time of exposure of the tests, then lower effective concentrations would probably be found. For instance, the TBT-Sn LC<sub>50</sub> in *M. edulis* larvae varies drastically from  $0.90 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  for 24 h to  $0.04 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  for 15 days.<sup>8–18</sup>

The LC<sub>50</sub> and LOEC obtained in the current study are much higher than the environmental quality standards (EQSs) for TBT-Sn in the UK and the USA of  $8.2 \times 10^{-4} \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $4.1 \times 10^{-4} \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively,<sup>35,36</sup> and above TBT-Sn concentrations in water generally found in the open waters of estuaries



**Figure 2.** Percentages of dead *N. reticulatus* larvae in relation to different concentrations of copper throughout the experimental period. Error bars represent the standard deviation for each concentration ( $n = 12$ ). Concentrations where significant increasing mortality in relation to the seawater control occurred are marked: \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

of between  $4.0 \times 10^{-3}$  and  $4.0 \times 10^{-2} \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ,<sup>37</sup> they are also higher than the TBT-Sn concentrations reported for dockyards and ports, which are commonly  $0.10$  to  $0.20 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ,<sup>38</sup> and they can occasionally reach  $0.96$  and  $1.15 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ .<sup>39</sup> Thus, the present TBT-Sn concentrations observed in the environment do not affect the survival of *N. reticulatus* larvae within the first 96 h after hatching, since the RF is very low; e.g., considering a mean TBT-Sn concentration in estuaries of  $4.0 \times 10^{-2} \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and the 96 h LOEC ( $1.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ) gives an RF  $\approx 0.021$ .

Regarding copper toxicity, our results show copper LC<sub>50</sub> values varying from  $102.70 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  (at 1 h) to  $58.84 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  (at 96 h). The copper LC<sub>50</sub> for 48 h obtained in this study ( $80.83 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ) is in the same range as values reported for gastropod, coral and bivalve larvae, such as *M. edulis* larvae, with a copper LC<sub>50</sub> (at 48 h) of  $84 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ .<sup>30,31,40–44</sup> Reported mean concentrations for total dissolved copper in harbours, estuaries and open sea regions from Europe are, according to Hall and Anderson,<sup>45</sup>  $1.53 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ ,  $1.49 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $0.68 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively. Copper levels between 2 and  $6 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  have been reported<sup>46</sup> along the Portuguese coast, and exceptionally very high levels were observed in northwest Spain, e.g. in Ria Pontevedra (Galicia) with copper concentrations as high as  $190 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$ .<sup>31,47</sup> EQSs for copper in seawater are  $5 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  in the UK and  $2.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  in the USA and Denmark. In Europe, the Oslo and Paris Commission (OSPAR) set copper concentrations of  $0.1$ – $1.0 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  to be used as a guide to identify areas for further monitoring.<sup>48</sup> The lowest LC<sub>50</sub> and LOEC values obtained for copper in the current study ( $58.84 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  and  $46.9 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  respectively) are much higher than the EQS and the mean copper concentrations reported prior to the TBT ban. Considering a mean copper concentration of about  $1.5 \mu\text{g l}^{-1}$  in estuaries, the RF for the larvae of this species is as low as 0.031. Nevertheless, if copper concentrations reported for Galician waters<sup>47</sup> are

considered, then the risk factor approaches unity at several locations. In fact, copper environmental concentrations are expected to increase due to the growing use of copper-based antifouling paints, as has already been noticed in Arcachon Bay, where an increase in copper content in oysters harvested in a zone located in the vicinity of marine and mooring areas was registered between 1979 and 1991.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the higher leaching rate of copper from self-polishing paints ( $25.0$ – $40.0 \mu\text{g cm}^{-2}\text{day}^{-1}$ ) relative to TBT ( $1.5$ – $4.0 \mu\text{g cm}^{-2}\text{day}^{-1}$ )<sup>49</sup> contributes to the rise in copper environmental levels.

The present study reveals that TBT is far more toxic to *N. reticulatus* larvae than copper, a tendency also reported by several workers<sup>41,50,51</sup> for different larval species and different endpoints. The RF obtained for TBT and copper assuming pre-TBT-ban concentrations of both contaminants and acute exposure of up to 96 h are similarly very low for recently hatched larvae of *N. reticulatus*. Nevertheless, it is important to note the increasing tendency in copper levels as a result of its usage as a substitute for TBT in antifouling paints.<sup>2,48,49</sup> Moreover, for some locations there is already an important ecological risk associated with this contaminant, as noted by Beiras and Albentosa<sup>44</sup> for commercial bivalve populations in certain areas of the Galician coast.

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