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Inhibition effect of natural organic matter on adsorption of radiocesium onto particulate matters in Pripyat River

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Radiocesium have been emitted to environment originated from nuclear weapon tests and nuclear accidents such as in Chernobyl and Fukushima. Among various sources, the nuclear accidents in Chernobyl and Fukushima have caused serious contaminations in land-surface around these areas due to the deposition of the radionuclides dispersed via. atmosphere as aerosols. Subsequently, radiocesium can be transported via rivers into oceans. In the soil- river-sediment system, radiocesium has high affinity for particulate matters, in particular for clay minerals. The high affinity has been shown to be the results of specific adsorption to frayed edge site (FES) and interlayer site in 2:1 phyllosilicate as inner-sphere (IS) complexes. However, it has been indicated that cesium adsorption to clay minerals can be blocked by natural organic matters (NOM) that adsorb on the mineral surface. NOM are ubiquitous and play various important roles on the adsorption of metal ions on particulate matters such as (i) promotion of adsorption of metal ions by the complexation with NOM and (ii) inhibition of adsorption by covering the particulate matters. High availability of Cs in soils with relatively high organic matter content was explained in terms of the blocking of access of cesium to specific adsorption sites (such as FES and interlayer site) of the clay mineral.

In river waters in Fukushima, it has been indicated that more than 70% of radiocesium is adsorbed on particulate matters. In contrast, Sansone et al. (1996) showed that more than 70% of radiocesium was in the dissolved fraction in Chernobyl. One critically important difference between the two sites is that peat, which contains large amount of NOM, is the main surface layer in the Chernobyl area. These NOM can be introduced into the Pripyat River that can coat on the particulate matters in river waters. Thus, it is possible that high content of NOM in rivers (e.g., Pripyat River) in Chernobyl can be responsible for the larger fraction of dissolved radiocesium compared with that in Fukushima due to the blocking effect by the NOM. In this study, therefore, adsorption of cesium on particulate matters collected in the Pripyat River with the characterization of the particulate matters have been conducted to study whether the blocking effect is affecting the adsorption behavior of cesium.

Here, we examined Cs LIII-edge extended x-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) to study the cesium species adsorbed on the particulate matters collected from Pripyat River and also on the particulate mattes after the removal of NOM by the treatment with hydrogen peroxide. To characterize the particulate matter, distribution image of organic substances on the particulate matter was analyzed by compact Scanning Transmission X-ray Microscope (cSTXM) newly developed in Photon Factory, KEK in Tsukuba, Japan. After the cSTXM imaging, characterization of NOM was conducted by near edge X-ray absorption fine structure (NEXAFS) at the C K-edge measured for the NOM by cSTXM.

From this study, blocking effect of cesium adsorption to clay minerals by humic acid was confirmed in natural particulate matter in Pripyat River, which might be related to the larger dissolved fraction of radiocesium around Chernobyl area, compared with that in rivers in Fukushima area.

Keywords: chernobyl, natural organic carbon, STXM