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AN ACTIVATED SLUDGE BASED SYSTEM
FOR THE TREATMENT OF A
LEACHATE CONTAINING CHLOROPHENOLS
AND PHENOXYACETATE HERBICIDES.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Biotechnology at Massey University.

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1990

ABSTRACT

A study was made on the biological treatment of a landfill leachate containing high concentrations of the phenoxy herbicides 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D), 2-methyl-4-chlorophenoxyacetic acid (MCPA) and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T), along with significant quantities of *para*-chloro-*ortho*-cresol (PCOC), methanol, butan-1-ol and butan-2-ol.

A mixed, natural microbial population (consisting of *Pseudomonas* species) was developed from a soil inoculum. The culture was found to be capable of mineralising 2,4-D and reducing the toxicity of the leachate by 92 %. The culture was found to be stable in continuous culture (residence time = 14.5 h) for 872 days.

The optimum concentrations for degradation were found to be 5-10% leachate (217-435 mg/l phenoxies, 33-66 mg/l PCOC, 40-80 mg/l alcohols and 0.6-1.2 g/l ash) for batch work and 10-15 % leachate (435-708 mg/l phenoxies, 66-107 mg/l PCOC, 80-120 mg/l alcohols and 1.2-1.9 g/l ash) for CSTR work. Batch studies showed sequential utilisation of the substrates: alcohols, followed by PCOC followed by phenoxies.

Studies were carried out to determine the kinetics of degradation for each group of substrates. The results showed that alcohols were the most rapidly degraded ($\mu_{MAX} = 0.3 \text{ h}^{-1}$), although growth was inhibited by PCOC and phenoxies.

PCOC was inhibitory to its own degradation, with inhibition directly proportional to PCOC concentration up to 290 mg/l, above which no degradation occurred. Both alcohol and PCOC degradation were described well by a linear inhibition model.

A comparison was made between the batch determination of PCOC degradation kinetics and a relatively new method, the Modified Infinite Dilution Test (MIDT). The MIDT results showed rates 50 % higher than the batch methods, indicating there was a change in the nature of the biomass in batch studies.

The kinetics of phenoxy degradation indicated that there was no inhibition in the concentration range of interest for MCPA and 2,4-D. However, 2,4,5-T was apparently degraded by cometabolism, with PCOC the best stimulator of degradation.

An interactive three substrate model was used to describe degradation and was found to fit measured data for CSTR systems. The model was robust and could predict the single substrate (ie pure compound kinetics) on simplification, indicating the wide range of application of the model.

The model showed that the presence of the alcohols in leachate considerably accelerated the degradation of PCOC and phenoxies. Critical points for washout were significantly shifted and reversed

from those of pure compounds, indicating interactions between the substrates could not be ignored. The model provides a method for quantifying the effect of a secondary substrate on the target compounds.

Results from laboratory activated sludge experiments showed that this process was capable of degrading the alcohols, PCOC and phenoxies present in both 10 and 15 % leachate. Loading rates (1.9-3.0 kgsubstrate/m³.d) were high in comparison to the typical loadings quoted in the literature. The three substrate model, in association with the critical point method predicted three regions of plant operation, total substrate removal, stable operation with residual substrate and no degradation, compared with the two regions of the critical point method.

The results also showed that the system could be treated as non-inhibitory for design purposes, as the Monod model gave a closer prediction of behaviour than the critical point method. However, as the composition of the leachate is expected to change, the three substrate model is required to predict the effect of these changes on an AS plant.

The sludge produced by the AS plant had low concentrations of residual organic and inorganic ions, indicating it could be treated as a non-hazardous byproduct. While AS reduced the toxicity by 71 %, the effluent toxicity could be reduced further by the use of activated carbon treatment. This produced a final effluent with an EC₃₀ (48h) of 46 %.

Preliminary economic analysis showed that AS followed by activated carbon treatment was capable of treating the leachate for 42c/l, lower than the alternatives of activated carbon alone and incineration. The cost was most sensitive to leaching rate, with lower rates resulting in smaller and cheaper processes.

To conclude, it was shown that a biologically based process is capable of producing non-hazardous byproducts and is economically viable as compared to alternative treatment processes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are extended to Dr. C. Hickey, Water Quality Centre, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Hamilton for performing the toxicity tests and Dr. J. Lee, Biotechnology Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Palmerston North for the ICP-AES analysis of leachate and sludge.

The author wishes to thank John Alger, Bruce Collins and Wayne Mallet, the workshop staff in the Biotechnology Department. Without their abilities and efforts to maintain ageing equipment and turn ideas and sketches into working equipment, this study would have taken much longer.

Thanks are also extended to Bob Chong, Graham Manderson and Rao Bhamidimarri for their supervision of the project. This required a mixture of their skills in chemistry, microbiology and chemical engineering.

The assistance of Dr G.V. Bhaskar in the development of the computer program for solving the three substrate model and of Dr A.H.J. Patterson for advice on the economic analysis was also appreciated.

The efforts of DowElanco staff Chris Collins, Dave Catt and Colin Mercer were greatly appreciated, especially the use of an HPLC for the duration of the project and the prompt replies to requests for information and chemicals. The financial support of DowElanco was also appreciated.

The financial support of the University Grant Committee was also warmly welcomed.

The support of the Department of Soil Science, who allowed the use of equipment for TOC analysis (performed by J.Sykes) and the scintillation counting equipment is also acknowledged.

The assistance of the laboratory staff and administrators, Mike, Ann-Marie, Janice, John and Judy in obtaining obscure chemicals and equipment was also greatly appreciated.

The sense of humour of long term office-mates, Carlo Bogoni (Switzerland) and Xabi Chiura (Japan) was greatly appreciated, as both were capable of succinctly putting mishaps and bad days into their proper perspective.

Finally, my greatest appreciation is extended to my wife, Rosalie. I am deeply indebted to her, for putting up with the frequent trips to Massey, the constant bind of a bioreactor and the problem of having a husband present in body but not mind. It has all been worth it and this thesis is dedicated to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.	i
ABSTRACT.	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.	v
LIST OF FIGURES.	ix
LIST OF TABLES.	xii
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION.	1
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Biodegradation	5
2.2.1 Biodegradation of Chlorophenols and Phenoxies	5
2.2.1.1 Pathways of Degradation	7
2.2.1.2 Side Reactions to the Phenoxy Degradation Pathways.	14
2.2.1.3 Microbiology and Genetics of Degradation.	17
2.2.1.4 Regulation of the Pathways.	19
2.2.1.5 Kinetics of Biodegradation.	20
2.2.2 Aerobic Degradation of Alcohols.	21
2.2.2.1 Degradation of Methanol.	22
2.2.2.2 Degradation of Butan-1-ol and Butan-2-ol.	22
2.2.3 Summary.	23
2.3 Activated Sludge.	23
2.3.1 Process Description.	23
2.3.1.1 Process Variations.	24
2.3.2 The Microbiology of Activated Sludge.	27
2.3.2.1 Bacteria.	30
2.3.2.2 Fungi.	30
2.3.2.3 Protozoa and Rotifers.	31
2.3.3 Process Considerations.	31
2.3.3.1 Toxic Compounds.	31
2.3.3.2 Control of Mean Cell Residence Time.	33
2.3.3.3 Sludge Disposal.	35
2.3.3.4 Tertiary Treatment of the Effluent.	36
2.4 Mathematical Description of a CSTR Activated Sludge System.	38
2.4.1 The Microbial System.	38
2.4.2 The Physical System.	40
2.4.3 Determination of Uninhibited Kinetic Parameters of an AS Plant.	42
2.4.4 Mathematical Description of Inhibited Microbial Growth.	43
2.4.4.1 Models Described in the Literature.	43
2.4.4.2 Determination of Inhibition Constants.	44
2.4.4.3 Effect of a Biodegradable Inhibitor on an AS Plant.	46
2.4.5 Multisubstrate Models.	48
2.5 Summary and Conclusions.	51
CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODS.	52
3.1 Introduction	52
3.2 The Determination of Chlorophenol and Phenoxy Concentrations.	52
3.3 Determination of Alcohol Concentrations.	55
3.4 Determination of Biomass Concentration.	55
3.5 The Determination of Ash and Total Dissolved Solids.	57

3.6 Determination of Dissolved Oxygen Concentration.	58
3.7 Determination of Total Organic Carbon.	58
3.8 Small Scale Bioreactors.	58
3.9 Miscellaneous Materials and Methods.	59

CHAPTER 4: THE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF A BACTERIAL CULTURE CAPABLE OF DEGRADING LEACHATE. 61

4.1 Introduction.	61
4.2 Initial Development.	61
4.2.1 Development of an Enriched Culture.	61
4.2.2 Simplification of the Medium.	63
4.3 Establishment of the Parent Bioreactor	66
4.4 Proof of Total Degradation.	70
4.4.1 Toxicity Testing.	70
4.4.2 Radioactive Tracer Study.	72
4.4.2.1 Experimental Procedure.	72
4.4.2.2 Results.	74
4.4.3 Discussion.	74
4.5 Determination of Suitable Operating Conditions.	75
4.5.1 The Effect of Leachate Concentration.	75
4.5.1.1. Batch Conditions.	75
4.5.1.2 CSTR Conditions.	77
4.5.1.3 Choice of Leachate Concentration for Experimentation.	79
4.5.2 Effect of pH on Leachate Degradation.	79
4.5.2.1 Experimental Procedure.	83
4.5.2.2 Results and Discussion.	83
4.5.3 Effect of Recycled Effluent on Degradation.	83
4.5.3.1 Experimental Procedure.	83
4.5.3.2 Results and Discussion.	85
4.5.4 Summary.	87
4.6 Microbiology.	87
4.6.1 Proof of Microbial Degradation.	87
4.6.1.1 Experimental Procedure.	87
4.6.1.2 Results and Discussion.	88
4.6.2 Isolation and Identification of Microorganisms in the Mixed Culture.	88
4.7 Culture Maintenance.	90
4.8 General Discussion.	91
4.9 Conclusions.	93

CHAPTER 5: KINETICS OF DEGRADATION OF PURE COMPOUNDS. 94

5.1 Introduction.	94
5.2 Initial Batches.	94
5.2.1 Experimental Procedure.	94
5.2.2 Results.	95
5.2.3 Discussion.	95
5.3 Alcohol Degradation.	95
5.3.1 The Kinetics of Alcohol Degradation.	95
5.3.1.1 Experimental Procedure.	95
5.3.1.2 Results.	97
5.3.1.3 Discussion.	99
5.3.2 Determination of the Effect of PCOC on Alcohol Degradation.	100
5.3.2.1 Experimental Procedure.	100
5.3.2.2 Results.	101
5.3.2.3 Discussion.	103
5.3.3 Determination of the Effect of Phenoxies on Alcohol Degradation.	104
5.3.3.1 Experimental Procedure.	104
5.3.3.2 Results.	105
5.3.3.3 Discussion.	107
5.3.4 Modelling of Alcohol Degradation.	107

5.3.4.1	Development of A Mathematical Model.	107
5.3.4.2	Verification of the Model.	109
5.3.4.3	Discussion.	110
5.3.5	Overview of Alcohol Degradation.	110
5.4	PCOC Degradation.	112
5.4.1	Batch Determination of Degradation Kinetics.	112
5.4.1.1	Experimental Procedure.	112
5.4.1.2	Results.	113
5.4.1.3	Discussion.	113
5.4.2	Effect of PCOC on Cell Viability.	113
5.4.2.1	Experimental Procedure.	115
5.4.2.2	Results.	115
5.4.2.3	Discussion.	115
5.4.3	MIDT Determination of PCOC Degradation Kinetics.	115
5.4.3.1	Experimental Procedure.	117
5.4.3.2	Results.	119
5.4.3.3	Discussion.	121
5.4.4	CSTR Work with PCOC as the Sole Source of Carbon and Energy.	124
5.4.4.1	Experimental Procedure.	124
5.4.4.2	Results.	124
5.4.4.3	Discussion.	125
5.4.5	Overview.	126
5.5	Phenoxy Degradation.	128
5.5.1	MIDT Experiments.	128
5.5.1.1	Experimental Procedure.	128
5.5.1.2	Results.	129
5.5.1.3	Discussion.	129
5.5.2	Batch Experiments Using 2,4-D and MCPA.	131
5.5.2.1	Experimental Procedure.	131
5.5.2.2	Results.	131
5.5.2.3	Discussion.	131
5.5.3	CSTR Experiments.	132
5.5.3.1	Experimental Procedure.	132
5.5.3.2	Results.	132
5.5.3.3	Discussion.	134
5.5.4	Degradation of Mixtures of Phenoxies.	136
5.5.4.1	Experimental Procedure.	136
5.5.4.2	Results.	136
5.5.4.3	Discussion.	138
5.6	Conclusions.	138
 CHAPTER 6: THE REMOVAL KINETICS OF MIXED SUBSTRATES IN LEACHATE.		142
6.1	Introduction.	142
6.2	Experimental Procedure.	142
6.3	Results.	142
6.3.1	Overview.	142
6.3.2	Determination of Activated Sludge Parameters.	151
6.3.4	Development of a Three-Substrate Model to Describe Leachate Degradation.	155
6.4	Discussion.	158
6.4.1	Substrate Removal.	158
6.4.2	The Three Substrate Model.	161
6.5	Conclusions.	166
 CHAPTER 7: DEGRADATION OF LEACHATE BY ACTIVATED SLUDGE: PROCESS KINETICS AND EFFLUENT QUALITY.		167
7.1	Introduction.	167
7.2	Laboratory Activated Sludge Experiments.	167
7.2.1	Development of a Cell Recycle System.	167
7.2.2	Experimental Procedure.	172

7.2.3 Results.	179
7.2.4 Discussion.	189
7.3 The Three Substrate Model in the Critical Point Method.	195
7.3.1 Development of a Computer Program.	195
7.3.2 Discussion.	196
7.4 Overview.	200
7.5 Conclusions.	202
CHAPTER 8: DESIGN AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS FOR TREATING LEACHATE.	203
8.1 Introduction.	203
8.2 Design of AS and AC plants.	203
8.2.1 Flow Sheet Development.	203
8.2.2 Mass Balance over Processes.	205
8.2.3 Plant Design at the Selected Conditions.	206
8.3 Cost Estimation for Leachate Treatment.	209
8.3.1 Capital Costs of Alternatives.	209
8.3.2 Operating Costs of Alternatives.	209
8.3.3 Discounted Cash Flow Analysis of the Three Options.	211
8.3.3.1 Estimation of Total Costs.	211
8.3.3.2 Effect of Variation From Nominated Conditions on Economics.	212
8.4 Comparison With Other Costs.	214
8.5 Conclusions.	216
CHAPTER 9: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.	217
ABBREVIATIONS AND NOMENCLATURE.	221
REFERENCES.	223
APPENDICES.	
Appendix:	
1 APPEND1.WKS: Raw Results of Variation of Leachate Concentration (Disk 1).	
2 Raw Data for the Effect of pH on Leachate Degradation.	
3 Isolation and Identification of Organisms Present in the Mixed Culture Degrading Leachate.	
4 Biomass Determination Using the COD and Biuret Methods.	
5 Development of a Basal Ash Medium.	
6 ISIS Program for the Simulation of Alcohol Degradation.	
7 APPEND7.WKS: Raw Results for the PCOC Degradation Experiments (Disk 1).	
8 BMDP85 Programs for MIDT Analysis.	
9 APPEND9.WKS: CSTR Results using MCPA and 2,4-D (Disk 1).	
10 Model of Phenoxy Degradation Based on Hutchinson and Robinson (1988).	
11 APPEND11.WKS: Raw Results of Varying SRT on Leachate Degradation (Disk 1).	
12 Program CURVE: in FORTRAN 77L.	
13 ISIS Program for the Prediction of Batch Degradation of Leachate Based on the 3 Substrate Model.	
14 Program PURE: in FORTRAN 77L.	
15 APPEND15.WKS: Raw Results for AS Plant Experiments (Disk 2).	
16 Identification of Organisms Present in the AS Plant.	
17 Program CRIT: in FORTRAN 77L (See Addendum 1).	
18 APPEND18.WKS: Economic Analysis of Treatment Options (Disk 2).	
19 Block Diagram of Spreadsheet APPEND18.WKS.	

Disks containing Appendices 1,7,9,11,15 and 18 can be found inside the back of this thesis. The data were stored on a write protected 5 1/4 inch, 360 K disk using the spreadsheet VP-PLANNER. The data can be read into the public domain spreadsheet ASEASYAS, along with VP-PLANNER, LOTUS 1-2-3 and QUATTRO. The remaining Appendices can be found (on microfiche) in the same envelope.

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.1	Schematic Diagram of the Waireka Secure Landfill.	2
2.1	Pathway for <i>ortho</i> cleavage of phenol (Dagley,1971)	8
2.2	Pathway for <i>meta</i> cleavage of phenol (Dagley,1971)	9
2.3	Degradation Pathway of 2,4-D by <u>Arthrobacter</u> .	10
2.4	Degradation Pathway of MCPA by <u>Pseudomonas</u> (Loos, 1975).	12
2.5	Degradation Pathway of 2,4,5-T (Rosenberg and Alexander,1980a).	13
2.6	Side Reactions: Products.	16
2.7	Schematic Diagram of a Conventional Activated Sludge Plant: Two Techniques Used (Grady and Lim,1980).	26
2.8	Schematic Diagram of a Step Aeration Activated Sludge Plant (Grady and Lim,1980).	26
2.9	Schematic Diagram of a Completely Mixed Activated Sludge Plant (Grady and Lim,1980).	28
2.10	Schematic Diagram of a Pure Oxygen Activated Sludge Plant (Grady and Lim, 1980).	28
2.11	Schematic Diagram of a Contact Stabilisation Activated Sludge Plant (Grady and Lim, 1980).	29
2.12	Schematic Diagram of an Extended Aeration Activated Sludge Plant as Proposed by Rozich and Gaudy (1985).	29
2.13	Typical Clarifier used in Activated Sludge Systems (from Eckenfelder,1980).	34
2.14	Typical Activated Carbon Adsorption Column (from Tchobanoglous,1979).	37
2.15	Typical Breakthrough Curve for Activated Carbon Column (from Tchobanoglous,1979).	37
2.16	Typical CSTR Activated Sludge Flow Diagram.	41
2.17	Theoretical Fed-Batch Reactor Response (from Watkin and Eckenfelder,1989).	45
2.18	Dilute out Curves Calculated for Monod and Haldane Models for Phenol (from Gaudy <u>et al</u> ,1988).	47
3.1	Chromatogram of Chlorophenols and Phenoxies Generated by HPLC System used for this Study.	54
3.2	Typical Chromatogram for the Determination of Alcohol Concentrations.	56
3.3	Schematic Diagram of the Perspex Bioreactor Built by the Biotechnology Department, Massey University, Palmerston North.	60
4.1	Plot of PCOC/Phenoxies versus Time for Initial Batch Using Soil Inoculum.	62
4.2	Plot of PCOC/Phenoxies versus Time for Batch Prior to the First Chemostat Run.	62
4.3	Plot of PCOC/Phenoxy Concentrations vs Time for First Chemostat Run.	64
4.4	Schematic Diagram of the Parent Bioreactor.	68
4.5	Photograph of the Parent Bioreactor Experimental Equipment.	69
4.6	Plot of Residual PCOC versus Time for Parent Bioreactor.	71
4.7	Plot of Residual Phenoxy Concentration versus Time for Parent Bioreactor.	71
4.8	Schematic Diagram of Experimental Apparatus for Radioactive Tracer Study.	73
4.9	Plot of Substrate vs Time for the Degradation of 10 % Leachate.	76
4.10	Plot of Residual PCOC and Phenoxy versus Time for Chemostat Run on 5 % Leachate.	80
4.11	Plot of Residual PCOC and Phenoxy versus Time for Chemostat Run on 10% Leachate	80
4.12	Plot of Residual PCOC and Phenoxy versus Time for Chemostat Run on 15% Leachate	81
4.13	Plot of Residual PCOC and Phenoxy versus Time for Chemostat Run on 20% Leachate	81
4.14	Chromatograms Generated Using CN-HPLC System.	82
4.15	Plot of Relative Degradation Rate versus Leachate pH.	84
4.16	Plot of Specific Growth Rate of a Pseudomonad versus Growth pH using 2,4-D and 2,4-DCP (Reproduced from Tyler and Finn,1974).	84
4.17	Plot of Relative Degradation Rates versus NaCl Concentration in the Growth Medium.	86
4.18	Plots of Substrate vs Time for (a) viable and (b) autoclaved inocula in 10 % Leachate.	89
5.1	Plot of Substrate and Biomass versus Time for the Degradation of 10 % Leachate:Batch I.	96
5.2	Plot of Substrate and Biomass versus Time for the Degradation of 10 % Leachate:Batch II.	96
5.3	Plot of $1/\mu$ versus $1/S$ to determine Whether Alcohols are Inhibitory.	98
5.4	Plot of Alcohol and Biomass Concentrations versus Time for the Batch Degradation of Alcohols in BAM.	98
5.5	Plot of Specific Growth Rate on Alcohols versus PCOC (inhibitor) Concentration for the Culture Grown in Amended Leachate.	102
5.6	Plot of Specific Growth Rate on Alcohols versus PCOC (inhibitor) Concentration for Culture Grown in BAM.	102

5.7	Plot of Specific Growth Rate on Alcohols versus Inhibitor (Phenoxy) Concentration (Mixture of Phenoxyes).	106
5.8	Plot of Measured and Predicted (Appendix 6) Alcohol and Biomass Concentrations versus Time for the Degradation of Alcohols in 15 % Leachate.	111
5.9	Example of Batch Data for the Determination of PCOC Degradation Kinetics.	114
5.10	Summary of Results for the Batch Determination of PCOC Degradation Kinetics.	114
5.11	Plot of Viable Cell Count versus Time of Exposure to PCOC Showing the Death of Cells Due to PCOC.	116
5.12	Experimental Apparatus Used for the Modified Infinite Dilution Test.	118
5.13	Time Course Data for a Typical MIDT Experiment.	118
5.14	Comparison of the Linear Model Developed and the Model of Watkin and Eckenfelder (1989).	122
5.15	Plot of Specific Growth Rate on PCOC versus PCOC Concentration Predicted by the Linear Model.	127
5.16	Typical Plot of Substrate Concentration versus Time for MIDT using 2,4-D.	130
5.17	Plot of MIDT Results using 2,4,5-T as the Substrate.	130
5.18	Typical Batch Data for the Degradation of MCPA(Duplicate Experiments).	133
5.19	Plot of $1/Q$ versus S to Determine the Kinetic Constants for Haldane Model on 2,4-D.	133
5.20	Plot of Specific Growth Rate on 2,4-D versus 2,4-D Concentration Predicted By the Haldane Model, Along with Measured Points.	135
5.21	Plot of Specific Growth Rate on MCPA versus MCPA Concentration Predicted By the Monod Model, Along with Measured Points.	135
5.22	Comparison of Predicted and Measured 2,4-D Concentrations for a 1:1 Mixture of MCPA and 2,4-D.	137
5.23	Comparison of Predicted and Measured MCPA Concentrations for a 1:1 Mixture of MCPA and 2,4-D.	137
5.24	Comparison of Predicted and Measured 2,4-D Concentrations for a 1.6:1 Mixture of MCPA and 2,4-D.	139
5.25	Comparison of Predicted and Measured MCPA Concentrations for a 1.6:1 Mixture of MCPA and 2,4-D.	139
5.26	The effect of Phenoxyes and PCOC on the Degradation of 2,4,5-T.	140
6.1	Plots of Residual PCOC and Phenoxy Concentrations versus Time for Various SRT's (a)- (m)	144 150
6.2	Plot of Residual PCOC, Alcohol and Phenoxy Concentrations versus Dilution Rate.	150
6.3	Plot of $1/\theta_c$ versus Q for the Determination of k_d and Y .	153
6.4	Plot of $1/Q$ versus $1/S'$ for the Determination of Q_{MAX} and k_s .	153
6.5	Plot of SVI versus SRT Indicating the Loss of Flocculating Ability at SRT's less than 10 h	154
6.6	Plot of pH Fall During Degradation versus SRT.	154
6.7	Plot of Residual TOC versus SRT.	154
6.8	Plot of Residual Sum of Squares for the Phenoxy Concentration versus k_3 , Indicating a Minimum at $k_3 = 5.5$.	159
6.9	Plot of Measured and Predicted Substrate Concentrations versus Dilution Rate for the Three Substrate Model.	159
6.10	Batch Substrate Removal Profile Based on the Three Substrate Model.	160
6.11	Plot of MLSS Concentrations (Measured and Predicted by the Three Substrate Model) versus Time.	160
6.12	The Effect of Alcohols on the Dilute Out Curve for Phenoxyes.	164
7.1	Schematic Diagram of the Novel Cell Recycle System.	168
7.2	Block Diagram of the Cell Recycle Controller.	169
7.3	Schematic Diagram of the Scraper System for the Clarifier.	170
7.4	Photograph of the Cell Recycle System.	171
7.5	Standard Curve for the Determination of MLSS from A_{600} .	174
7.6	Schematic Diagram of the Laboratory Activated Sludge Plant.	176
7.7	Photograph of the Laboratory Activated Sludge Plant.	177
7.8	Plots of Residual PCOC and Phenoxyes vs Time for the Three Activated Sludge Runs.	180
7.9	Plots of θ_c vs Time for the Three Activated Sludge Runs.	181
7.10	Plot of $1/\theta_c$ vs Q using both AS Runs and Data from Chapter 6.	182
7.11	Plot of Recycle Concentration vs Time for the Three Activated Sludge Runs.	183
7.12	Plot to Determine the Langmuir Isotherm Parameters for the Treatment of Leachate with Activated Carbon.	186

7.13	Plot to Determine the Langmuir Isotherm Parameters for the Treatment of Effluent with Activated Carbon.	186
7.14	Plot of EC_0 vs EC_{50} for the Data of Kuhn (1989a).	193
7.15	Plot of Critical Points vs S_0 for Run 1 Based on the Three Substrate Model.	197
7.16	Plot of Critical Points vs S_0 based on Rozich and Gaudy(1984) and Breakthrough (3 Substrate Model) for Run 1.	197
7.17	Plots of Total Residual Substrate vs SRT for Monod Kinetics, the Method of Rozich and Gaudy (1984) and the Three Substrate Model.	199
7.18	Operating Curves for an AS Plant Based on Θ and X .	201
7.19	Operating Curves for an AS Plant Based on ∞ and X_R .	201
8.1	Process Flow Diagram for the Proposed Treatment of Leachate.	204
8.2	Construction for the Graphical Design of a Clarifier from Batch Settling Data(Run3).	208
8.3	Plot of Present Worth versus Leachate Concentration for AS+AC Treatment.	213
8.4	Plot of Present Worth versus Feed Concentration for AS+AC Treatment.	213
8.5	Plot of Present Worth versus Leaching Rate for AS+AC Treatment.	215
8.6	Plot of Present Worth versus Cleanup Time for AS+AC Treatment.	215

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
2.1	Composition of Leachate.	5
2.2	Summary of Organisms Degrading Phenoxy Herbicides.	6
2.3	Chlorophenols Reported to be Biodegradable.	14
2.4	Summary of Kinetic Parameters from the Literature.	20
2.5	Alternative Activated Sludge Process Configurations (from Tchobanoglous,1979).	24
3.1	Peak Identities and Retention Times from Figure 3.1.	53
3.2	Peak Identity and Run Times for Alcohol Quantification.	55
3.3	Suppliers of Miscellaneous Chemicals and Equipment.	59
4.1	Initial Medium Used for Leachate Degradation.	63
4.2	Metal Concentrations in 10% Leachate and Complex Medium.	65
4.3	Non Metal Ion Concentrations in 10% Leachate and Complex Medium.	65
4.4	Substrate Removal Under Batch and Chemostat Conditions in Simple and Complex Media.	66
4.5	Simple Buffered Medium Using 10 % Leachate.	67
4.6	Composition of the Leachate Batches obtained from DowElanco.	67
4.7	Toxicity of Feed to and Effluent from the Parent Bioreactor.	70
4.8	Scintillation Counts from Radioactive Tracer Study.	74
4.9	Summary of Batch Degradation of Leachate.	75
4.10	Summary of the Effect of Initial Concentration on CSTR Performance.	78
4.11	The Effect of Dissolved Solids and NaCl on Leachate Degradation Rates.	85
5.1	Initial Estimates of μ_{MAX} and Yield Coefficients of Alcohols and Phenoxyes in Leachate.	95
5.2	Specific Growth Rates at Five Different Alcohol Concentrations.	97
5.3	Literature Values of k_s on Butan-1-ol and Methanol for Some Bacteria.	100
5.4	Measured Specific Growth Rates Using Alcohol in the Presence of Individual Phenoxyes.	105
5.5	Parameters Used to Generate Figure 5.8	110
5.6	Data Generated By MIDT.	119
5.7	Curve Fitting Data for Selected Models.	121
5.8	MIDT Results using PCOC as the Substrate.	121
5.9	Measured CSTR Parameters with PCOC as the Substrate.	125
5.10	Literature Values of k_s for Some Chlorinated Compounds.	126
5.11	Literature Values of μ_{MAX} for Some Chlorinated Compounds.	128
5.12	MIDT Results with 2,4-D and MCPA as Substrates.	129
5.13	Measured Q for 2,4-D and MCPA using Batch Methods.	132
5.14	Summary of Parameters Describing Pure Compound Degradation.	141
6.1	Summary of Results: Varying Dilution Rates on Leachate Degradation.	143
6.2	Determination of the 95% Confidence Interval on Parent Bioreactor Biomass.	151
6.3	Data for the Determination of Activated Sludge Parameters.	152
6.4	Measured Activated Sludge Design Parameters.	155
6.5	Data for the Determination of Interaction Parameters.	156
6.6	Summary of Analysis of Variance on Three Substrate Model.	158

6.7	Determination of Sensitivity of Predictions to Variations in Interaction Coefficients.	158
6.8	Predicted and Measured Critical Points for 10 % Leachate.	166
7.1	Comparison of Specific Oxygen Uptake Rates of MLSS and Clarifier Underflow.	173
7.2	Summary of Principal Results from Activated Sludge Experiments.	184
7.3	Toxicity Test Data for Activated Sludge Plant Effluents.	185
7.4	Summary of the Results of Sludge Analysis.	187
7.5	Langmuir Isotherm Parameters for AC Treatment of Leachate and AS Effluent.	188
7.6	Summary of Toxicity Test Results.	188
7.7	Literature Values of k_d for Waste Treatment Systems on a Variety of Substrates.	190
7.8	Literature Values of SRT for the Degradation of Similar Compounds.	190
7.9	Mass Balance Around the Clarifier for the Activated Sludge Runs.	191
7.10	Predictions of EC_{50} and NOEC based on Measured Data for AC Treated Effluents.	192
7.11	Mass Balance on Nutrients around Run Three.	194
7.12	Comparison of Critical Points Predicted using PURE and CRIT.	196
8.1	Mass Balance Summary for Three Options for Leachate Treatment.	206
8.2	Equipment Design and Cost.	210
8.3	Summary of Estimated Costs at Nominal Flows.	211
8.4	Summary of Discounted Cash Flow at Nominal Conditions.	212

THESIS PRESENTATION

The reader will note that many of the chapters are broken into discrete Results and Discussion sections. This was done to emphasise the logical progression of the work, rather than adhere to the conventional thesis structure.