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Atmospheric Optics IV: Turbulence and Propagation

**Alexander M. J. van Eijk
Stephen M. Hammel**
Editors

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Contents

v	Conference Committee
vii	Introduction

SESSION 1 FUNDAMENTALS OF BEAM PROPAGATION

- 8161 02 **Atmospheric scintillations and laser safety** [8161-01]
A. Zilberman, E. Golbraikh, N. S. Kopeika, Ben-Gurion Univ. of the Negev (Israel)
- 8161 03 **Arago spot and turbulent distortions** [8161-03]
M. Charnotskii, Zel Technologies, LLC (United States) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (United States)

SESSION 2 IMAGING AND IMAGE QUALITY

- 8161 04 **Adaptive optics solutions for turbulence mitigation in different scenarios** [8161-04]
G. Marchi, C. Scheifling, Fraunhofer-Institut für Optronik, Systemtechnik und Bildauswertung (Germany)
- 8161 05 **The effect of free parameter estimates on the reconstruction of turbulence corrupted images using the bispectrum** [8161-05]
J. P. Bos, M. C. Roggeman, Michigan Technological Univ. (United States)
- 8161 06 **Simulation of extended scenes imaged through turbulence over horizontal paths** [8161-06]
J. P. Bos, M. C. Roggeman, Michigan Technological Univ. (United States)
- 8161 07 **Anisoplanatic wavefront error estimation using coherent imaging** [8161-07]
R. L. Kendrick, Lockheed Martin Advanced Technology Ctr. (United States); J. C. Marron, Lockheed Martin Coherent Technologies (United States); R. Benson, Lockheed Martin Advanced Technology Ctr. (United States)

SESSION 3 AEROSOL AND PROPAGATION

- 8161 08 **The Advanced Navy Aerosol Model (ANAM): validation of small-particle modes** [8161-08]
A. M. J. van Eijk, TNO Defence, Security and Safety (Netherlands) and Lab. de Mécanique de Fluides, CNRS, Ecole Centrale de Nantes (France); J. T. Kusmierczyk-Michulec, Institute of Oceanology (Poland); J. J. Piazzola, Univ. du Sud Toulon-Var (France)
- 8161 09 **Generating accurate vertical aerosol and turbulence profiles** [8161-09]
B. A. Bachmann, S. Hammel, Space and Naval Warfare Systems Ctr. Pacific (United States)

8161 0A   **Application of year-round atmospheric transmission data, collected with the MSRT multiband transmissometer during the FATMOSE trial in the False Bay area** [8161-10]
A. N. de Jong, A. M. J. van Eijk, L. H. Cohen, P. J. Fritz, TNO Defence, Security and Safety (Netherlands); W. H. Gunter, G. Vrahimis, F. J. October, Institute for Maritime Technology (South Africa)

8161 0B   **Scintillation measurements over False Bay, South Africa** [8161-11]
M. van Iersel, TNO Defence, Security and Safety (Netherlands); A. M. J. van Eijk, TNO Defence, Security and Safety (Netherlands) and Lab. de Mécanique de Fluides, CNRS, Ecole Centrale de Nantes (France)

SESSION 4   BEAM PROPAGATION AND TURBULENCE

8161 0C   **Long-range beam propagation for single-photon communications** [8161-12]
I. Capraro, A. Tomaello, A. Dall'Arche, P. Villorosi, Univ. degli Studi di Padova (Italy)

8161 0E   **Design of a differential image motion monitor for measurement of optical turbulence in support of dynamic range tests** [8161-14]
K. R. Johnson, R. Dewees, Naval Air Warfare Ctr. Weapons Division (United States)

8161 0F   **Measurement and modeling of beam wander** [8161-15]
S. Hammel, K. McBryde, C. Reinhardt, Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (United States)

SESSION 5   JOINT SESSION WITH CONFERENCE 8162

8161 0H   **Experimental generation of non-Kolmogorov turbulence using a liquid crystal spatial light modulator** [8161-21]
I. Toselli, B. N. Agrawal, Naval Postgraduate School (United States); C. C. Wilcox, S. Restaino, U.S. Naval Research Lab. (United States)

8161 0I   **Atmospheric channel transfer function estimation from experimental free-space optical communications data** [8161-18]
C. N. Reinhardt, Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (United States); Y. Kuga, J. A. Ritcey, A. Ishimaru, Univ. of Washington (United States); S. Hammel, D. Tsintikidis, Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (United States)

POSTER SESSION

8161 0K   **An investigation into the Paulding Mystery Lights** [8161-20]
J. P. Bos, W. Norkus, Jr., M. Maurer, D. Sims, C. Middlebrook, M. C. Roggeman, Michigan Technological Univ. (United States)

Author Index

Conference Committee

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Thomas Weyrauch, University of Dayton (United States)

Session Chairs

- 1 Fundamentals of Beam Propagation

Alexander M. J. van Eijk, TNO Defence, Security and Safety
(Netherlands)

- 2 Imaging and Image Quality

Mikhail I. Charnotskii, Zel Technologies, LLC (United States)

- 3 Aerosol and Propagation

Matthew M. Bold, Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company (United States)

- 4 Beam Propagation and Turbulence
Stephen M. Hammel, Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command
(United States)
- 5 Joint Session with Conference 8162
Alexander M. J. van Eijk, TNO Defence, Security and Safety
(Netherlands)
Christopher C. Davis, University of Maryland, College Park (United
States)

Introduction

The effects of the atmosphere on optical propagation can often be the limiting performance factor in many optical system applications. The primary factors in beam degradation are: absorption and scattering by molecules, aerosols and clouds; large-scale refractive effects; and optical turbulence. For many applications, it is necessary to understand how these factors can be predicted and modeled, and hence to describe the interactions and correlations between the factors. Specific environments remain difficult for beam propagation models: long horizontal propagation paths near the ocean surface or near the land surface can encounter large vertical gradients in turbulence intensity and in extinction. Inhomogeneous regions such as coastal areas, mountains, or urban islands are difficult to simulate.

For laser projection systems, atmospheric extinction induces irradiance reduction, while turbulence-induced temporal variation in irradiance can be manifest as either a fade or a surge. Temporary signal fades are detrimental to communication systems efficiency and reliability, but surges are also somewhat problematic since they may involve depositing more than the designed irradiance at a target or a receiver. Validated models and well-controlled field experiments are important to progress in system designs which can mitigate these effects.

For imaging systems, atmospheric effects may lead to serious degradation of image quality through contrast reduction, blurring and scintillation. Due to its chaotic nature and its high spatial and temporal frequencies, atmospheric turbulence is presently one of the most important factors determining image quality. For a reliable assessment of system performance, a description of turbulence intensity and its impact on imaging systems is crucial. There is thus a need for a description of turbulence in terms of environmental parameters, in terms of its impact on image quality, and in terms of image processing techniques to improve image quality by removing turbulence effects.

The "Atmospheric Optics: Turbulence and Propagation" conference is the 2011 contribution to a series of SPIE conferences addressing optical propagation through the atmosphere, which has been hosted over the years in the "Optical Engineering and Applications" symposium. Similar to its predecessors, the conference aims at stimulating interdisciplinary discussions of atmospheric turbulence and propagation phenomena and their impact on optical, radar and communication systems, by providing a venue to present papers on:

- measurement and modeling of the effects of turbulence on propagation and system performance

- measurement and modeling of the effects of aerosol (including dust), rain, and clouds on propagation and system performance
- nowcasting and forecasting of propagation effects
- critical analyses of the current state-of-the-art propagation and radiance codes
- inversion techniques, applying the sensor as a probe of the atmospheric state
- techniques for mitigation of atmospheric effects, and sensor fusion
- sensor signal (image) improvement techniques by removing atmospheric effects
- impact of atmospheric effects on sensor task performance (tracking, beam pointing, wavefront control).

The major focus of the conference is closely related to the "Free Space and Atmospheric Laser Communications" conference that is also part of the "Optical Engineering and Applications" symposium. This year, as well in previous years, this proximity has been underlined by a joint session in which papers from both conferences are presented. This approach has resulted in an improved intermingling of attendees of both conferences, and it is the intention of the chairmen of both conferences to continue and to improve the contacts between the two communities.

Continuing a trend that has been visible for a few years, this year's conference saw a further decline of papers dealing with transmission losses by aerosols and molecules and/or large-scale refractive effects. Instead, many papers addressed turbulence phenomena, from either a theoretical or experimental point of view. It is this mix between fundamental wave propagation theory, elegant laboratory-scale experiments to reveal elemental parameters governing turbulence phenomena, and field trials that identify the operational effects of turbulence on sensor systems that create the platform for a fruitful discussion and allow participants to refresh their point of view on this elusive topic.