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# Impact of Carbonaceous and Inorganic Nanomaterial Chemistry on Polymer Additive Release from Weathered Epoxy Composites

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## **Impact of Carbonaceous and Inorganic Nanomaterial Chemistry on Polymer Additive Release from Weathered Epoxy Composites**

By

Haley Sefi-Cyr

Accepted in Partial Completion of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Science

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## **Master's Thesis**

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Haley Sefi-Cyr

Date: 2/15/2023

## **Impact of Carbonaceous and Inorganic Nanomaterial Chemistry on Polymer Additive Release from Weathered Epoxy Composites**

## A Thesis Presented to The Faculty of Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Science

> by Haley Sefi-Cyr February 2023

### <span id="page-4-0"></span>**Abstract**

Nanomaterials (NMs) are small  $(< 100$  nm), reactive, chemical species that can often be used as polymer fillers to improve mechanical strength and slow the degradation of polymer nanocomposites (PNCs). Polymers can undergo physical and chemical weathering which can result in increased release of polymer additives and non-polymerized monomers from the polymer matrix. This project aimed to study how NM chemistry and environmental weathering impacts the release and transformation of relevant PNC systems. Bisphenol A diglycidyl ether (BADGE) PNCs were synthesized containing titanium dioxide  $(TiO<sub>2</sub>)$ , multi-walled carbon nanotubes (MWCNT), or graphene oxide (GO) NMs. These composites were subjected to either simulated or natural weathering conditions to quantify and characterize their capacity to leach endocrinedisrupting chemicals. Environmental variables, including temperature and ultra-violet (UV) light, were investigated for their impact on additive release. Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy and Raman microscopy were used to characterize the PNCs which were leached in water for one to five days at 25, 45, or 65 °C. The degree of weathering also varied from no weathering, outdoor weathering, or simulated weathering using UV light. Leachates were analyzed using highperformance liquid chromatography quadrupole time-of-flight mass spectrometry to quantify release of bisphenol A (BPA), tert-butylphenol (TBP), and nonylphenol (NP). There were significant differences between NM types for PNCs weathered outdoors and leached at 25 °C for 24 h, however only TBP was detected in the leachate. When compared to the blank epoxy, GO PNCs leached significantly less in the UV and in May outdoor weathered experiments, MWCNT PNCs leached significantly less when weathered outdoors in May and June, and TiO<sub>2</sub> PNCs leached significantly less when UV weathered. Each of the NMs has potential to decrease TBP release through sorption or photodegradation. The carbonaceous NMs (GO and MWCNT) may sorb TBP, inhibiting its release, while  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  may photodegrade TBP. The unweathered PNCs leached the most TBP, followed by UV weathered, and then outdoor weathered. A possible explanation for this is photodegradation of TBP by UV light in the UV- and outdoor-weathered experiments leading to removal of TBP prior to leaching. Future experiments should include additional sorption trials and long-term natural weathering with microplastic generation to further explore the release and degradation mechanisms.

### <span id="page-5-0"></span>**Acknowledgements**

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### <span id="page-10-0"></span>**Chapter 1: Introduction**

### <span id="page-10-1"></span>*1.1 Nanomaterials*

While the term "nanotechnology" is relatively new, $<sup>1</sup>$  it has been part of humankind for at</sup> least 4,000 years. Ancient Egyptians used nanomaterials (NMs) to synthesize pigments such as Egyptian blue, which was created for dying hair and fabrics using nano glass and quartz.<sup>2,3</sup> Later, Egyptians and Mesopotamians started using copper, silver, and gold NMs to create colored glass and ceramic glazes.4,5 Despite these known historical uses of nanotechnology, it did not enter the research realm until the 1950s when it was first hypothesized by Richard Feynman in his American Physical Society lecture on atomic level manipulation.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after, in the 1980s, researchers gained the ability to see at the nanoscale with the inventions of scanning tunneling microscopy and atomic force microscopy.7,8

NMs are operationally defined as materials with less than 100 nanometers in at least one size dimension, which results in unique properties that are often drastically different from their bulk counterparts.<sup>9</sup> The past two decades have seen a technological revolution with increasing NM use in consumer and industrial applications. Examplesinclude silver nanoparticles as antimicrobial agents in clothing, cerium oxide catalysts in fuel, and quantum dots in biomedical diagnostics.<sup>10,11</sup> Beyond these uses, NMs can also be polymer fillers, catalysts, cosmetics, and drug carriers.<sup>9</sup>

Despite their benefits, NMs and their associated nano-enabled products have significant concerns regarding their potential environmental release and toxicity. The small size of NMs, coupled with their high reactivity can make them particularly potent toxicants while their colloidal nature also enables vector transport of co-contaminants upon release into the environment.<sup>9,12,13</sup>

Some NMs can pass through cell membranes and are capable of causing biological effects that would not be possible for larger materials. Similar to mineral dusts and asbestos fibers, titanium dioxide (TiO2) and carbonaceous NMs can induce oxidative stress, pulmonary inflammation, and cytotoxicity in animal lungs. Current research indicates that the surface areato-volume ratio and reactive oxygen species (ROS) generation can be used to predict pulmonary toxicity.<sup>9</sup>

The toxicity of metal oxides and carbonaceous NMs can be particularly concerning. Karlsson et al. (2008) investigated the cytotoxic and genotoxic potentials of several metal oxide NMs including copper oxide, TiO2, zinc oxide, and iron oxides in human lung epithelial cells. The epithelial cells were exposed to 40 and 80 µg/mL of NMs for 18 h. Copper oxide was found to be the most toxic in relation to cytotoxicity and DNA damage, while zinc oxide affected cell viability and damaged DNA. TiO<sub>2</sub> was shown to cause DNA damage, while iron oxides showed little to no toxicity. These results were compared to carbon nanotubes which demonstrated both cytotoxicity and DNA damage at 40  $\mu$ g/mL.<sup>14</sup>

#### <span id="page-11-0"></span>*1.2 Polymer Additives and Monomers*

When NMs are used as polymer fillers, they can improve mechanical strength and reduce the degradation potential of these polymers.<sup>15–19</sup> This potentially improves the safety of these materials, as polymers are less likely to leach toxic additives if they are not weathered or aged.<sup>20–</sup>  $23$  NMs are commonly used as fillers in epoxies which have a wide range of applications ranging from food packaging, countertop and flooring surfaces, furniture, and automobiles.<sup>24</sup> The versatility of epoxy polymers makes them attractive for NM fillers, and a significant portion of composites on the market use epoxy polymers.<sup>25</sup> In 2021, the global epoxy composite market was valued at 30.02 billion USD with an estimated compound annual growth rate of 6.52% from 2021 to 2027 due to increasing use in automotive, aerospace, and construction industries.<sup>26</sup>

Epoxies are thermoset polymers often synthesized via reaction of bisphenol A diglycidyl ether (BADGE) monomer resin with a chemical hardener that enables the cross-linking of the monomeric chains. These hardeners are often amine mixtures that contain additives with known endocrine disrupting capability such as 4-*tert*-butylphenol (TBP) and 4-*n*-nonylphenol (NP).<sup>24</sup> Other polymer additives such as plasticizers, UV stabilizers, antioxidants, and pigments provide desirable mechanical, aesthetic, and economic benefits.<sup>27,28</sup> Two common additives, NP and TBP, are both added to polymers as antioxidants and plasticizers.<sup>29</sup> NP is commonly used in coatings, fillers, putties, plasters, modeling clay, inks, and toners, while TBP is often used in adhesives, sealants, and coatings.<sup>30,31</sup> These organic compounds can potentially leach out of the polymers over time through aging and weathering, releasing them into the environment.<sup>32–34</sup> Any BADGE monomers that do not polymerize also have the potential to degrade into bisphenol A (BPA) and leach from the polymer matrix.

Upon release, these additives and monomers can have detrimental effects on the environment.28,33,35–40 Many are endocrine disrupting compounds (EDCs) which can interfere with hormonal processes such as reproduction, development, cancer, and metabolism.<sup>33,41</sup> Endocrine disruption toxicology is a growing area of research due to the prevalence in pharmaceuticals, pesticides, and plastic additives. BPA has been of particular concern for the last 30 years when it was discovered to leach out of polycarbonate bottles and epoxy-lined cans. $42,43$ 

EDCs such as BPA bind with estrogen receptors (ER) to produce estrogenic effects and can adversely impact the reproductive system, development, metabolism, obesity, the nervous system, and certain cancers.<sup>44,45</sup> Through the ER pathway, BPA can induce cell proliferation which may cause ovarian cancer at high doses. This pathway is dose-dependent, meaning that even at low doses it can cause estrogenic effects.<sup>46</sup> The lethal concentration for half of the population  $(LC_{50})$  of aquatic invertebrates and fish is 1.1 to 10 mg/L of BPA.<sup>47</sup>

TBP and NP are also known EDCs, with TBP also acting as an irritant and a potential reproductive toxicant, and has shown lethal effects in *Cyprinus carpio* (LC<sub>50</sub> 6.9 mg/L).<sup>30,35,38,39</sup> After LC<sub>50</sub> determination, *C. carpio* were exposed to TBP concentrations ranging up to 2.30 mg/L in 280-L tanks for 4 weeks to test sublethal effects and conduct behavioral monitoring. At the lowest concentration (0.69 mg/L), organ size, metabolic enzyme activity, and vitellogenin production were all altered while behavior was not affected.<sup>35</sup> NP is the most toxic to aquatic organisms of the three additives with 96-h LC<sup>50</sup> values of 20.7 µg/L in *Hyalella azteca* and 128 µg/L in *Pimephales promelas*. <sup>36</sup> In addition to being an EDC, NP bioaccumulates and persists in the environment.<sup>40,48,49</sup>

#### <span id="page-13-0"></span>*1.3 Polymer Nanocomposites*

A composite is any combination of two or more materials resulting in improved mechanical, thermal, or optical properties.<sup>50</sup> Material composites have been in use since the 1960s in the marine, aerospace, and automobile industries. Common composites are concrete-polymer mixtures that are often fiber-reinforced with glass, aramid, or carbon fibers.<sup>51,52</sup> These composites are common in the construction industry due to the high specific strength, low density, high fatigue endurance, high damping, and low thermal coefficient. Early uses involved flexural strengthening of reinforced concrete beams, columns, and bridges where glass fiber increased strength by 40% and carbon fiber increased strength by 200%.<sup>51</sup>

Although this technology originated with concrete-polymer mixtures, it has since progressed into polymers mixed with fillers such as nanoclay, carbon nanotubes, and carbon fiber. When these NMs are added to polymers, new materials known as polymer nanocomposites (PNCs)

are created. The added NMs can stiffen and strengthen polymers and alter mechanical, electrical, and thermal properties.<sup>53</sup> There are many practical uses for this technology; with PNCs being used in aircrafts, spacecrafts, and sporting equipment, among other things.<sup>10,54</sup> The first PNC was made with layered silicate by Toyota in 1988.<sup>55</sup> A loading of 4% nanoclay by weight increased stiffness by 100% and strength by 50%. The nanoclay inclusion was also able to improve heat resistance and reduce gas permeability.<sup>56</sup>

Other common NMs used in PNCs include TiO2, single- and multi-walled carbon nanotubes (SWCNTs, MWCNTs), and graphene oxide (GO). TiO<sup>2</sup> NMs are used in PNCs to improve the stiffness, toughness, maximum strain, crack resistance, and thermal stability of the polymer.<sup>15,18,25,53,57,58</sup> Additionally, the photoactivity of  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  nanoparticles can create ROS which makes them effective at killing microorganisms and removing pollutants. However, this may also be an environmental concern upon release due to the potential for oxidative stress in organisms as mentioned previously.<sup>12,19,59</sup>

Carbonaceous NMs such as GO, SWCNTs, and MWCNTs are incorporated into polymers to improve corrosion resistance and strength. They are all carbon allotropes consisting of covalently bonded carbon atoms in a honeycomb structure either as flat sheets (GO) or rolled into cylindrical shapes (CNTs). SWCNTs and MWCNTs differ depending on the number of concentric graphene cylinders surrounding the main carbon nanotube.<sup>53,57</sup> These materials are attractive for use in polymers due to their unique thermal, electrical, and mechanical characteristics.<sup>25</sup> Today, the use of carbon-polymer composites is widespread in planes, cars, and other high-impact materials.<sup>54</sup>

## <span id="page-15-0"></span>*1.4 Plastic Pollution and Degradation*

With plastics, as with any consumer and industrial material such as a PNC, it is important to consider their ultimate life cycle to better understand potential deleterious effects. While natural polymers have been used for thousands of years as natural rubber, waxes, and resins, the polymers that we now refer to as "plastics" are a recent invention. The first plastic, Bakelite, was invented in 1907 by Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland using phenol and formaldehyde. Bakelite was widely used in the electrical and automobile industries for its electrical, heat, and chemical resistance. It was also used in household products such as telephones and jewelry.<sup>60–62</sup> The seemingly limitless possibilities of plastics have led to unforeseen difficulties ever since production and development progressed in the 1900s. The versatility and durability of plastics made them ideal for packaging film, containers, water pipes, bowls, combs, fabrics, and many other uses.<sup>63</sup> This widespread use led to widespread disposal and pollution.

In 2016, approximately 320 million tons of plastic were produced worldwide and 5 to 13 million tons deposit into the oceans annually, with over 250,000 tons floating in the oceans at any moment.<sup>27,28</sup> Plastic is also the fastest growing component of municipal solid waste, comprising a total 12.2% in 2018 with only 8.7% of it being recycled.<sup>64</sup> The portion that ends up in our oceans causes numerous issues for humans, animals, and the environment including, marine life entanglement, ingestion by animals, xenoestrogen sinks, interfering with carbon dioxide sequestration, and dispersing invasive species.<sup>65</sup>

Plastics have demonstratively long environmental half-lives and are resistant to breakdown in the environment. Chamas et al. (2020) studied the half-lives of several common plastics including polystyrene which is used in Styrofoam, and polyethylene and polypropylene which are both used in disposable bottles. They found that high-density polyethylene had a half-life of 26 years, while polypropylene had a half-life of 87 years, and polystyrene showed no measurable degradation. Factors such as UV light exposure, temperature, and humidity can impact plastic degradation.<sup>66</sup>

For the 75.6% of generated plastic that ends up in landfills, the environmental risk does not end there.<sup>64</sup> Municipal solid waste landfills went unregulated until the 1970s, meaning that many older landfills lack liners to contain leachates. In 1988, the US Environmental Protection Agency concluded that all landfills have a high potential for leakage due to lack of liner or failure of leachate collection pipes.<sup>67,68</sup> The potential for elevated temperature landfill events which can result in temperatures from 30 to 65 °C also pose a concern when it comes to landfill leachates leaking into the environment. These elevated temperatures are due to biological and chemical processes occurring within the landfill and can damage landfill liners, increasing environmental release.69,70

Upon disposal and entry into the environment, polymers undergo chemical weathering in the forms of thermo-oxidation, hydrolysis, photolysis, oxidation, and mechanical stressors.<sup>65,71–73</sup> The energy in UV light triggers photo-oxidative reactions within the polymer causing chain scission and crosslinking. This leads to brittleness, microcracking, and reduced strength which results in smaller and smaller pieces of the polymer until it becomes the individual, bioavailable monomers.<sup>65,74</sup> Additionally, there is potential for increased release of polymer additives from the polymer matrix into other mediums due to this environmental weathering.<sup>23,75,76</sup>

When polymers degrade into microplastics and nanoplastics, defined as smaller than 5 mm and smaller than 100 nm, respectively, they pose a whole new set of challenges. Micro- and nanoplastics are notoriously difficult to detect, identify, and quantify in the environment due to size limitations of current instrumentation.<sup>27</sup> In addition to their small size making it easy for organisms to consume them, the large surface area of micro- and nanoplastics increases polymer additive release and allows for increased adsorption of contaminants.<sup>77–79</sup>

#### <span id="page-17-0"></span>*1.5 Experimental Design*

While the bulk of PNC environmental research has focused on the release of NMs from the polymer matrix,  $80-82$  few studies have examined the interaction between NMs and polymer additive release. This project aims to study how nanomaterial chemistry and environmental weathering impacts the release and transformation of relevant PNC systems.

The study builds on work by Walker et al. (2021) who researched the influence of singlewalled carbon nanotube (SWCNT) loading on polymer additive release from epoxy and polycarbonate PNCs.<sup>83</sup> In Walker's study, PNCs with SWCNT loadings varying from 0 to 1 wt-% were leached for five days and analyzed for BPA and TBP under variable conditions of pH, temperature, UV exposure, and natural organic matter. Results demonstrated that pH, temperature, and UV exposure all influence polymer additive release and that the higher loading of SWCNTs in either polymer type decreased polymer additive release.<sup>83</sup>

Extending beyond the amount of NM loading, it is necessary to determine how NM type influences the leaching behavior of additives. To that end, this project involved the synthesis of BADGE epoxy PNCs containing different NMs and subjecting them to both simulated and natural weathering conditions to quantify and characterize their capacity to leach harmful chemicals such as BPA, TBP, and NP (Figure 1). Environmental variables such as temperature and UV light were investigated for their impact on additive release. The UV exposure and increased temperatures may induce photodegradation and thermal degradation respectively, which would increase additive release. 20–23,59,72



**Figure 1.** Experimental design of PNC leaching experiments involved the inclusion of NMs in BADGE epoxy and quantification of additive release in leachate using HPLC-QTOF-MS.

The NMs chosen for this project were  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$ , MWCNT, and GO. TiO<sub>2</sub> particles are often used in sunscreen, toothpaste, cosmetics, and as a food colorant, owing to their bright, white color and photoactivity.<sup>84,85</sup> This photoactivity makes them capable of photodegrading polymer additives when exposed to UV radiation, potentially decreasing the quantity of additives released from the PNCs.<sup>86,87</sup> The two carbonaceous NMs, MWCNTs and GO, have the potential to sorb BPA, NP, and TBP, inhibiting their release.  $88-90$ 

The possible interactions between polymer additives and nanomaterials within nanocomposites is a knowledge gap that needs to be explored to fully understand the health and environmental risks of nanomaterials and polymer additives.

### <span id="page-18-0"></span>**Chapter 2: Methods**

#### <span id="page-18-1"></span>*2.1 Reagents and Supplies*

Graphene Oxide (GO) (15-20 sheets, 4-10% edge-oxidized, Lot #MCKP6914), TiO<sub>2</sub> (mix of rutile and anatase, <100 nm, 99.5% purity, Lot #MKCK7661), MWCNTs (>98% carbon basis, O.D. x L 6-13 nm x 2.5-20  $\mu$ m, Lot #MKCM4355), and SWCNTs (6,5 chirality, 0.78 nm average diameter, >95% purity, Lot #MKCM1708) NMs were all purchased from Sigma Aldrich, while the functionalized SWCNTs ( $>90\%$  purity, O.D. x L 1-4 nm x 5-30  $\mu$ m) were purchased from Cheap Tubes Inc. For the epoxy, SystemThree Silvertip epoxy system with fast hardener was used, having a cure time of 3 h. The resin (part A) is a low viscosity (700 cps) BADGE epoxy resin and the hardener (part B) is isophorone diamine with 5-10% TBP and 5-10% NP.

All solvents used were HPLC grade including acetonitrile (Thermo Scientific, 99.8% purity), acetone (Fisher Chemical, 99.5% purity), and methanol (Fisher Chemical, 99.9% purity). Standards of BPA (97% purity) and NP (98% purity) were purchased from Thermo Scientific, while the ring-deuterated (d8) BPA (98% purity) was from Cambridge Isotope Laboratories, Inc., and the TBP (98% purity) was from TCI America. For HPLC method development, the ammonium acetate (HPLC grade) and ammonium fluoride (ACS grade) were both from Fisher Chemical.

#### <span id="page-19-0"></span>*2.2 Nanomaterial Characterization*

The nanomaterials were characterized with Scanning Transmission Electron Microscopy (STEM) imaging using Field Emission SEM (JEOL JSM-7200F). To prepare the SEM grid, the nanomaterials were suspended in acetone in 2 mL LC vials then pipetted onto the grids. The graphene oxide was characterized on a lacey carbon 300-mesh Cu grid while the MWCNT and TiO<sup>2</sup> were characterized on a Formvar/carbon 300-mesh Cu grid. The NMs were also characterized using a Confocal Raman microscope with a 532 nm Nd:YAG laser (Renishaw). The Raman spectrometer was calibrated daily with a silicon standard.

### <span id="page-19-1"></span>*2.3 Polymer Nanocomposite Synthesis*

A necessary first experiment was to determine an appropriate NM loading for the weathering experiments by performing leaching experiment with a low  $(0.1\%$  w/w) and high (1%)  $w/w$ ). For these experiments, the PNCs were made by first weighing out 0.043 g or 0.0043 g of the NMs into a 40 mL pre-muffled glass scintillation vial. Next, 1.3 g hardener was added, and hand stirred with a glass stir rod for 1 min. The scintillation vials were bath sonicated in a Branson 2800 sonicator for 15 min before adding 3 g of resin, hand stirring for 1 min, and poured into an aluminum weigh dish to cure for 24 h. After curing, the PNCs were wrapped in muffled foil and stored at room temperature until use.

For the subsequent weathering experiments,  $0.0700 \text{ g}$  (0.1%) of each NM were added to separate Hauschild PP100L (250 mL) tubs prior to the addition of 48.84 g epoxy resin and 21.16 g hardener. The tubs were placed into a Hauschild SpeedMixer<sup>TM</sup> (DAC 150.1 FVZ-K) set to 2000 rpm for 1 min. After mixing, 20 mL syringes were used to add 4 mL of epoxy to each of 15 aluminum weigh dishes for each NM and cured at room temperature for 24 h. Cured PNCs were weighed on a top-loading balance then wrapped in muffled foil and refrigerated until use.

## <span id="page-20-0"></span>*2.4 Polymer Nanocomposite Characterization*

Fabricated PNCs were spectroscopically characterized using both Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) and Raman microscopy to assess any structural differences brought on by NM inclusion; as well as to characterize differences between the leached versus unleached and weathered versus unweathered PNCs. Raman microscopy was performed with a 532 nm Nd:YAG laser. Imaging was performed on whole PNCs in three locations on duplicate PNCs for each NM type. FTIR spectroscopy was performed using a Thermo Scientific Nicolet iS FTIR with Smart iTR on composite samples hand-filed from five PNCs of each type.

In addition to characterizing PNCs, the Raman microscope was used to characterize standards of the chosen polymer additives. The powdered forms were analyzed for spectra used to compare leached vs unleached PNCs.

## <span id="page-21-0"></span>*2.5 Leaching Experimental Design*

For the leaching experiments, each PNC was placed into a pre-muffled (450 °C for 8 h) Pyrex glass crystallizing dish filled with 100 mL of EPA moderately hard water (EPA MHW) $91$ and capped with a glass Petri dish. Each experiment consisted of replicates of five for each NM type and a set of blanks. The crystallizing dishes were weighed then randomly placed into a drying oven (Quincy Lab, Inc. Model 10 Lab Oven) at either room temperature (~22°C), 45 °C, or 65 °C (Figure 2). Temperature data was collected using a NeuLog Temperature Logger Sensor (Eisco Scientific, LLC).



**Figure 2.** Glass crystallizing dishes each containing one PNC and 100 mL of EPA MHW were placed in a drying oven at room temperature, 45°C, or 65°C.

Initial leaching experiments lasted for five days. For these experiments, the crystallizing dishes were removed and weighed every 24 h before sampling 2 mL using a Luer lock syringe with a 0.20 µm filter (Pall Laboratory Acrodisc, PVDF membrane) then topped off with EPA MHW to account for evaporation and sampling. Of the 2 mL sample removed, 700 µL was added to a 2 mL LC vial and mixed with 200  $\mu$ L of acetonitrile prior to storing in a -20 °C freezer. Given preliminary results of rapid polymer additive release, the experiment was changed to only focus on the first 24 h of leaching (see results section).

For the 24-h leaching experiments, the crystallizing dishes were removed and weighed after 2, 4, 8, 12, and 24 h before sampling 2 mL using a Luer lock syringe with a 0.20  $\mu$ m PVDF filter then topping off with EMD Millipore Milli-Q water (EQ 7000, resistivity 18.2 MΩ∙cm, TOC ≤5 ppb). Milli-Q was used this time instead of EPA MHW to prevent the water hardness from increasing with evaporation. As before, 700 µL of the sample was added to a 2 mL LC vial and mixed with 200  $\mu$ L of acetonitrile prior to storing in a freezer.

## <span id="page-22-0"></span>*2.6 Weathering Experimental Design*

For outdoor weathering experiments, PNCs were suspended with galvanized steel wire and mesh over the opening of empty 16-ounce Mason jars. This experimental setup was adapted from Lankone et al. (2017) which used Teflon netting in jar lids to secure similar PNCs for outdoor weathering.<sup>81</sup> The jars were stabilized in cinderblocks and placed end to end along the roof of the Environmental Studies building at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington (Figure 3). The PNCs were weathered in five-day sessions from April  $28<sup>th</sup>$  to May  $3<sup>rd</sup>$ , May  $31<sup>st</sup>$  to June  $5<sup>th</sup>$ , and June  $27<sup>th</sup>$  to July  $2<sup>nd</sup>$ , 2022, with outdoor conditions reported in Tables 3A and 4A. After the fifth day, PNCs were removed and subjected to leaching temperatures of 45 °C, 25 °C, and 25 °C, respectively. Preliminary data showed inconsistent heating at 45 °C, so the second and third experiments involved leaching at 25 °C which is more environmentally relevant. After five days, the PNCs were removed, foil-wrapped, and refrigerated until leaching.



**Figure 3.** Outdoor weathering experimental setup utilized 16-ounce Mason jars with galvanized steel wire and mesh lids stabilized within cinderblocks on the roof of the Environmental Studies building at Western Washington University.

For the UV weathering experiments, PNCs were placed on wire racks in an environmental chamber (Percival Scientific, Inc., Model #166LLVLX) at 22.7°C on a 12-h day/night cycle using UVA-340 lamps (Q-Lab Corp.). After five days, the PNCs were removed, foil-wrapped, and refrigerated until leaching.

#### <span id="page-23-0"></span>*2.7 Polymer Additive Sorption Procedure*

A sorption experiment was performed to test the potential of the polymer additives in question to sorb to the chosen NMs under light and dark conditions. To do this, 100 mg of each NM were added to separate 40 mL amber glass vials containing 20 mL of EPA MHW with 50 µg/L each of BPA, TBP, and NP in duplicate. For each NM, one vial was placed on the roof of the Environmental Studies building on WWU's campus where it was exposed to light while the other went into a sealed cardboard box that was also kept on the roof to ensure temperature consistency. To account for sorption to the glass, an additional set of blank test chambers were prepared without NMs. After 0, 6, 12, and 24 h, 1 mL samples were collected from each vial using a Luer lock syringe and 700  $\mu$ L of that was added to a 2 mL LC vial with 200  $\mu$ L of acetonitrile.

## <span id="page-24-0"></span>*2.8 Polymer Additive Quantification*

The polymer additives were quantified using an Agilent 6545XT Advance Bio highperformance liquid chromatography quadrupole time-of-flight mass spectrometer (HPLC-QTOF-MS) using a Zorbax Eclipse Plus C18 column (2.1 mm x 50 mm, 1.8 µm). This method used a 4.5 min gradient elution (Table 1A) with mobile phases of acetonitrile and water buffered with  $20 \mu M$ ammonium acetate at a flow rate of 0.3 mL/min and an injection volume of 5  $\mu$ L in negative ionization mode (Table 2A). Extensive method development involved trials with ammonium fluoride, acetic acid, methanol, and isocratic elution. Samples consisted of 700 µL leachate water with 200 µL acetonitrile and 100 µL of 500 µg/L d8-BPA spiked in the morning of analysis as an internal standard. Each HPLC-QTOF-MS run began with a methanol blank, calibration curve, methanol blank, then a Milli-Q blank prior to samples. After every ten samples was a 200  $\mu$ g/L standard followed by a methanol blank. The calibration curve was analyzed a second time at the end of the sample run.

Calibration standards were made ranging from 1 to  $50,000 \mu g/L$  depending on the experimental parameters and designed to encompass relevant sample concentrations (Figure 4). Each standard was made using acetonitrile working solutions added to 700 µL Milli-Q water with additional acetonitrile and 100 µL d8-BPA for a final mix of 70% water and 30% acetonitrile.



Figure 4. HPLC-QTOF-MS chromatogram of 1,000 µg/L standard of BPA (MW: 228.29 g/mol, log K<sub>ow</sub>= 3.32), TBP (MW: 150.22 g/mol, log K<sub>ow</sub>= 3.31), and NP (MW: 220.35 g/mol, log K<sub>ow</sub>= 5.76).

The Agilent MassHunter software was used to refine peak selection and acquire the response for each polymer additive. Concentrations of the samples were calculated using the response factor of the analyte signal to the internal standard signal (d8-BPA).

#### <span id="page-25-0"></span>*2.9 Statistical Analyses and Graphing*

All statistical analyses used R (version 4.2.2) with R Studio. Linear mixed-effect (LME) modeling analysis method was used due to the repeated measures of this study which removes the independence of data points assumptions required for many analyses. The goal of LME modeling was to test for significant effects of NM inclusion on TBP concentration in the form of differences in slopes or means using a significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05. Full and reduced models were applied to test effects of individual fixed factors followed by maximum likelihood ratio tests to determine significance. For experiments with significant differences between NM types, the R-squared values were also calculated in R to determine the percent of variance explained by the fixed effects in the model and the percent of variance explained by variability between PNCs. All graphs were created in OriginPro (2022b, Learning Edition).

### <span id="page-26-0"></span>**Chapter 3: Results**

#### <span id="page-26-1"></span>*3.1 LC-MS Method*

Prior to the leachate experiment, it was necessary to develop an accurate and sensitive quantification method for the intended polymer additives. The goal for LC-MS method development was to achieve good separation between BPA, NP, and TBP at relevant concentrations (low µg/L) while maintaining a short enough elution time to run 100 samples with good throughput. The method development began with attempting both isocratic and gradient elution using acetonitrile:water with ammonium fluoride (70:30 v/v) with an Agilent Zorbax Eclipse Plus C18 column. The ammonium fluoride was added with the intent that it might improve negative polarity ionization of our analytes.<sup>92</sup> However, this method resulted in low intensities for all three target polymer additives. Another method for detection was explored using an isocratic elution of methanol: water with 0.1% acetic acid (70:30 v/v).<sup>93</sup> This worked well for detecting BPA, NP, and TBP, but did not achieve the desired sensitivity. The switch was made back to acetonitrile: water with the addition of  $20 \mu$ M ammonium acetate as a buffer to help with negative ionization. This combination of solvents with ammonium acetate successfully separated all three target molecules with adequate sensitivity (Figure 4).

### <span id="page-26-2"></span>*3.2 NM Characterization and Additive Reactivity*

Prior to assembling the PNCs, independent characterization of the NMs were carried out by Raman microscopy and STEM imaging. Raman microscopy of carbonaceous NMs in Figure 5 showed the typical 2D/G' ( $\sim$ 2685 cm<sup>-1</sup>), G ( $\sim$ 1582 cm<sup>-1</sup>), and D ( $\sim$ 1350 cm<sup>-1</sup>) bands of graphene<sup>94</sup> at 10% laser power for 10 sec. The  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  spectrum was more intense than GO or MWCNT despite

using only 5% laser power for 10 sec, likely due to its unique optical properties.<sup>95</sup> STEM imaging of the NMs confirmed a number of nano-specific features, including the somewhat polydisperse nature of TiO<sub>2</sub> particles and the presence of residual metal catalysts on the surfaces of MWCNTs (Figure  $6)^{96}$ .



Figure 6. Raman spectra of (a) GO, (b) MWCNT, (c) TiO<sub>2</sub>, and (d) all three overlaid to show lower intensity TiO<sub>2</sub> peaks.



**Figure 5.** STEM images of (a) multi-walled carbon nanotubes, (b) titanium dioxide nanoparticles, and (c) graphene oxide nanoparticles.

Though outside the focus of this project, a preliminary sorption experiment was performed to examine the impact of pristine NMs on tert-butylphenol presence in light and dark scenarios. The results showed a decrease in TBP concentration over time in the  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  test chamber that was exposed to light. In contrast, the blank (no NMs) showed no change in TBP concentration over time regardless of light exposure. The carbonaceous NM-containing chambers had very little detectable TBP in the light or dark (Figure 7). The polymer additives were also independently characterized by Raman microscopy (Figure 1A).



**Figure 7.** TBP concentration over time in test chambers containing no NMs, or pristine TiO<sub>2</sub>, GO, or MWCNTs, either kept in the dark or exposed to light for 24 h.

#### <span id="page-28-0"></span>*3.3 PNC Preparation*

Different methods were examined for the preparation of PNCs. The initial technique of hand-mixing individual epoxy PNCs resulted in inconsistent batches and took several hours to make the required 20 PNCs for one experiment. The SpeedMixer<sup>TM</sup> allowed for a homogenous mixture of epoxy and NMs for greater consistency between and within batches, while cutting down time to 30 min for 60 PNCs (Figure 8). The unfunctionalized SWCNTs from Sigma Aldrich did not disperse well in the epoxy and were replaced with carboxylated (COOH) SWCNTs, which dispersed better. However, after initial observations, it was hypothesized that the SWCNTs had too strong of van der Waal forces to allow for dispersion within the epoxy, so they were removed from the study. This was also justified as the SWCNTs had been previously studied in Walker et



**Figure 8.** Batches of PNCs made of BADGE epoxy and (a) GO, (b) MWCNTs, (c) TiO<sub>2</sub>, or (d) no NMs were cured at room temperature in aluminum dishes for 24 h.

al. (2021). 83

## <span id="page-29-0"></span>*3.4 Spectroscopic Characterization of PNCs*

Confocal Raman microscopy was used to examine the chemical structure of PNCs pre- and post-weathering. When comparing the Raman spectra of unleached PNCs, the inclusion of NMs in the BADGE epoxy did not change the structure of the epoxy (Figure 9).



**Figure 9.** Raman microscopy of unleached PNCs and a blank (normalized).

#### <span id="page-30-0"></span>*3.5 Loading and Temperature Range-Finding Experiments*

Initial loading experiments were designed to determine if 0.1% or 1.0% NM loading would work best for the remaining experiments. There was less TBP release from the PNCs containing 1.0% MWCNT and TiO<sup>2</sup> compared to the blank BADGE PNCs (Figure 2A). However, there were concerns that if the release was too low, it would be difficult to detect differences between treatments and that 1.0% may not be a realistic NM loading.

Temperature range-finding experiments included leaching at 25, 45, and 65 °C for five days or 24 h to assess the potential for polymer additive release. Five-day leaching experiments are shown in Figure 10 and subsequent 24-h leaching experiments are shown in Figures 11-13, 16- 18. Initial loading experiments were done at 25 °C and 65 °C (Figure 2A), followed by temperature range-finding experiments at 25 °C, 45 °C, and 65 °C (Tables 13A-15A).



**Figure 11.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for unweathered PNCs leached at 25°C for five days  $(\pm SD, n=5)$ .

The unweathered PNCs leached at 45 °C increased in TBP concentration over time ( $F_{1,76}$ = 40.528, *p* < 0.0001) but did not differ between NM treatments (*F*3,16= 0.6425, *p* > 0.05; Table 5A). Uneven heating in the oven at 45 °C led to inconsistent evaporation (Figure 3A, Figure 4A) and additive release (Figure 11), thus future experiments involved leaching at room temperature or 25 °C to remove this variation.



**Figure 10.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for unweathered PNCs leached at 45°C for 24  $h$  ( $\pm SD$ ,  $n=5$ ).

The unweathered PNCs leached at 25 °C increased in TBP concentration over time  $(F_{1,76}=$ 719.582, *p* < 0.0001) but did not differ between NM treatments (*F*3,16= 2.175, *p* > 0.05; Table 6A). At 25 °C, the TBP release appears more consistent (Figure 12).



**Figure 12.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for unweathered PNCs leached at 25 °C for 24 h  $(\pm SD, n=5)$ .

#### <span id="page-32-0"></span>*3.6 Simulated Weathering*

Using LME modeling in R, the time and treatment effects were both significant  $(p < 0.05)$ for the UV-weathered PNCs (Figures 13, 9A, Tables 7A, 8A) however the time:treatment interaction term was not significant  $(p > 0.05)$  and was removed from the model, meaning that the slopes were not significantly different. The model determined that at time 0, a blank epoxy PNC leachate should have an average TBP concentration of 0.356 mg/kg (*p* < 0.0001) and as each hour passed, the average TBP leachate concentration increased by  $0.012 \text{ mg/kg}$  ( $p < 0.0001$ ) for all treatments. The mean TBP concentration for the GO treatment was 0.063 mg/kg less than that of blank epoxy ( $p < 0.05$ ) and for the TiO<sub>2</sub> treatment was 0.050 mg/kg less than that of blank epoxy  $(p < 0.05)$ . The mean TBP concentration for the MWCNT treatment was 0.017 mg/kg more than that of blank epoxy, but the difference was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The R-squared values

indicated that 79.9% of the variance was explained by only the fixed effects of the model and 84.0% was explained by the entire model.



**Figure 13.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for PNCs weathered with UV light and leached at  $25^{\circ}$ C for 24 h ( $\pm$ SD, n=5) presented as (a) a bar graph to compare means, and (b) a line graph to compare rates of release.

## <span id="page-33-0"></span>*3.7 Outdoor Weathering*

All PNCs were characterized after leaching to assess for structural degradation of the epoxy. Representative data shown for Raman (Figure 14, Figure 5A) and FTIR (Figure 15) demonstrate that the changes in peak intensity or percent transmittance are consistent across all samples including the blank.



**Figure 14.** Raman spectra of PNCs weathered on the roof of the Environmental Studies building at WWU in (a) April (45°C), (b) May (25°C), and (c) June (25°C) (inset: of 1500 to 1100 cm<sup>-1</sup> range showing changes in intensity consistent across all samples).



**Figure 15.** FTIR spectra of composite sample of filed PNCs that were weathered outdoors in April and leached at 45°C (inset: of fingerprint region showing changes in transmittance consistent across all samples).

The PNCs that were weathered outdoors during April were the last batch to be leached at 45 °C before the switch was made to only leach at 25 °C for all subsequent experiments. Visually, there is more variation in TBP release for the PNCs leached at 45 °C with overlap of standard deviations among all sampling times (Figure 16). The PNCs weathered outdoors in April and leached at 45 °C increased in TBP concentration over time  $(F_{1,76}= 52.348, p < 0.0001)$  but did not differ between NM treatments  $(F_{3,16}=0.352, p>0.05;$  Table 9A).


**Figure 16.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for PNCs weathered outdoors in April and leached at  $45^{\circ}$ C for 24 h ( $\pm$ SD) presented as (a) a bar graph to compare means, and (b) a line graph to compare rates of release.

The LME modeling in R found that the time, treatment, and time:treatment interaction effects were all significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the PNCs weathered in May (Figures 17, 10A, Table 10A). The model determined that at time 0, a blank epoxy PNC leachate should have an average TBP concentration of 0.185 mg/kg ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and as each hour passed, the average TBP concentration increased by 0.011 mg/kg (*p* < 0.0001) for the blank epoxy leachate. The slope of leachate TBP concentration for the GO treatment was 0.002 less than that of blank epoxy ( $p <$ 0.05) and for the MWCNT treatment was 0.003 less than that of blank epoxy ( $p < 0.05$ ). The slope of leachate TBP concentration for the  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  treatment was 0.001 less than that of blank epoxy, but the difference was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The R-squared values indicated that 84.2% of the variance was explained by only the fixed effects of the model and 87.1% was explained by the entire model.



**Figure 17.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for PNCs weathered outdoors in May and leached at 25°C for 24 h (±SD) presented as (a) a bar graph to compare means, and (b) a line graph to compare rates of release.

The LME modeling in R determined that the time, treatment, and time:treatment interaction effects were all significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the PNCs weathered in June (Figures 18, 11A, Table 11A). The model determined that at time 0, blank epoxy PNC leachate should have an average TBP concentration of 0.107 mg/kg ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and as each hour passed, the average TBP concentration increased by 0.013 mg/kg (*p* < 0.0001) for the blank epoxy leachate. The slope of leachate TBP concentration for the GO treatment was 0.005 less than that of blank epoxy and the difference was significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The slope of leachate TBP concentration for the MWCNT treatment was  $0.006$  less than that of blank epoxy and for the  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  treatment was  $0.001$  greater than that of blank epoxy, but the differences were not significant  $(p > 0.05)$ . The R-squared values indicated that 62.3% of the variance was explained by only the fixed effects of the model and 64.2% was explained by the entire model.



**Figure 18.** TBP concentration in mg per kg BADGE epoxy for PNCs weathered outdoors in June and leached at 25°C for 24 h (±SD) presented as (a) a bar graph to compare means, and (b) a line graph to compare rates of release.

#### **Chapter 4: Discussion**

#### *4.1 No Observed Chemical Structure Changes to BADGE Epoxy from Leaching or Weathering*

Structural changes to the epoxy due to NM inclusion were investigated to understand the effects NM type has on polymer degradation. Any resulting modifications to the surface of the epoxy may change the reactions that are able to occur which would impact adsorption, desorption, and degradation. Additionally, FTIR was performed on a powdered sample of PNC while Raman was performed on only the surface of the PNCs so these results may not provide the full picture of the material characteristics.

The PNCs were characterized using FTIR and Raman to investigate potential structural changes due to leaching and weathering. When compared to the unleached PNCs, the leached PNCs showed some decreases in Raman shifts around 1000 (aromatic rings) and 3000 (sp<sup>2</sup> and sp<sup>3</sup> hybridized carbons) cm<sup>-1</sup> (Figure 6A) relative to other prominent peaks in the spectrum which may be indicative of degradation. However, if the BADGE epoxy were degrading, it would create degradation products that may create new peaks.<sup>97,98</sup> A more likely explanation is that the loss of

TBP during leaching resulted in the decreased Raman shifts at 1000 and 3000 cm<sup>-1</sup> since the spectra of TBP appears to overlap (Figure 1A). The unweathered (Figure 5A) compared to the weathered (Figure 14, Figure 7A, Figure 8A) PNCs showed no apparent changes in the FTIR or Raman spectra. Characterization was also used to assess any changes to the polymer matrix from the inclusion of NMs. At 0.1% loading, the NM inclusion did not change the polymer matrix (Figure 9, Figure 15).

This study did not address the release of NMs themselves from the polymer matrix given that previous research suggests little release of these materials. A 2017 study found that a maximum of 3.5% of the incorporated NMs were released from all PNC samples after 13 months of weathering in three climates.<sup>81</sup> Another study on MWCNTs in epoxy found that when exposed to UV radiation, the epoxy matrix did degrade, however the exposed MWCNTs formed an interconnected surface network with no evidence of release.<sup>99</sup>

The FTIR and Raman characterization indicate that NM inclusion does not seem to influence the chemical structure of the epoxy itself. However, there is still a possibility of interactions between the NMs and the polymer additives within the epoxy that may influence leaching behavior.

#### *4.2 Polymer Additive Release from PNCs*

When leached at 25 °C, 45 °C, and 65 °C (Tables 13A-15A), there was no detectable BPA or NP release. TBP release could be detected at 25 °C. Additive release appeared to mostly occur within the first 24 h during the five-day leaching experiments (Figure 10). This informed the decision to switch to 24 h leaching experiments to focus on the rate of release prior to the steady state condition and attempt to detect differences between NMs. Analyses were also adjusted to emphasize comparing TBP release between treatments since BPA and NP were not detected after five days of leaching. The HPLC-QTOF-MS detector was saturated with high TBP release from samples leached at 65 °C, so the focus was shifted to 45 °C and 25 °C to allow for concentration calculations and statistical analyses. Additionally,  $65^{\circ}$ C is not an environmentally relevant temperature.

Inconsistent heating in the oven used for leaching experiments resulted in uneven evaporation and high standard deviations in the HPLC-QTOF-MS data (Figure 11, Figure 16). At 25 °C, the TBP release appears more stable (Figure 12), likely due to the removal of the inconsistent heating factor. Thus, additional experiments were conducted at room temperature. At 25 °C, the unweathered PNCs leached the most TBP with GO PNCs releasing 1.75 mg/kg at 24 h.

#### *4.3 Influence of Weathering on PNCs*

The influence of weathering on polymer additive release was investigated by comparing unweathered, UV-weathered, and outdoor-weathered PNCs. When compared to the blank epoxy, GO PNCs leached significantly less ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the UV and May outdoor weathered experiments, MWCNT PNCs leached significantly less ( $p < 0.05$ ) when weathered outdoors in May and June, and TiO<sub>2</sub> PNCs leached significantly less ( $p < 0.05$ ) when UV weathered. When unweathered, there were no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ) between NM inclusions.

Each of the NMs has potential to decrease TBP release through sorption or photodegradation. The carbonaceous NMs (GO and MWCNT) are effective adsorbents due to their strong  $\pi$ - $\pi$  interactions, hydrogen bonding, and large surface area<sup>100–104</sup> and may sorb TBP<sup>88–90,105</sup>, inhibiting its release. TiO<sub>2</sub> however, may photodegrade TBP<sup>86,106</sup> due to its ability to absorb photons when exposed to UV light which results in the formation of ROS such as superoxide radicals and singlet oxygen to photocatalyze degradation.<sup>107</sup>

The unweathered PNCs leached the most TBP, followed by the UV weathered PNCs, then the outdoor weathered PNCs. One possible explanation for this pattern is photodegradation of TBP due to UV exposure in the UV and outdoor weathered PNCs. While UV lamps and sunlight can both cause photodegradation, the UV lamps used were limited to a narrow section of the broader solar spectrum. Data from Fortner (2009) compared the spectral irradiance and wavelengths of sunlight in the Bellingham area to the Q-Lab UVA-340 lamps, showing that the lamps encompass only a small fraction of the solar spectrum.<sup>108</sup> Other studies have shown that UV light can induce photodegradation in polymer additives. Mergenbayeva and Poulopoulos (2021) studied photodegradation of TBP by pumping 30 mg/L TBP in water through a 300 mL photoreactor (254 nm) for 120 min. They collected aliquots of 15 mL at 10, 20, 40, 60 and 120 min in duplicate and found that after 10 min, 51.3% of the TBP had degraded, and 89.3% degraded after 120 min.<sup>109</sup> With this in mind, it is possible that five days of UV exposure through simulated or natural sunlight would degrade TBP in the PNCs.

### *4.4 Titanium Dioxide NMs May Photodegrade Polymer Additives*

The preliminary sorption experiments indicated that  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  when exposed to light may be photodegrading additives while the carbonaceous NMs removed additives regardless of light exposure (Figure 7). Further experiments are warranted to fully explore this relationship and perform statistical analyses.

The photoactivity of  $TiO<sub>2</sub>$  has been used to degrade both TBP and BPA in water due to its ability to form ROS when exposed to UV light. Ohko et al. (2001) investigated the capabilities of TiO<sub>2</sub> as a photocatalyst to degrade BPA. After 20 h of exposure to TiO<sub>2</sub> and 10 mW/cm<sup>2</sup> UV irradiation, the initial  $175 \mu M$  of BPA was degraded into carbon dioxide. The estrogenic effects of

BPA were assessed before and after degradation, concluding that the estrogenic activity decreased to less than 1% within 4 h of degradation. $86$ 

Another study by Mergenbayeva et al. (2021) explored the utility of  $Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>$  or a  $Ti<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub>$ mixture as a photocatalyst to degrade TBP in water. In 500 mL of water, 2.5 mg of TBP and 100 mg of photocatalyst were combined. After 150 min of 100 W simulated solar irradiation, the Ti2O3/TiO<sup>2</sup> mixture degraded 89.8% of TBP. Without any photocatalyst, the TBP degraded by 8.3%.<sup>106</sup> Both of these studies support the possible conclusion that TBP was photodegraded by TiO<sup>2</sup> when exposed to UV light in both simulated and natural weathering conditions.

#### *4.5 Sorption of Polymer Additives by Carbonaceous NMs*

In the May and June outdoor-weathered experiments, GO and/or MWCNT accounted for the lowest rate of TBP release, and in the UV-weathered experiment, GO accounted for the lowest mean TBP concentration (Figures 8A, 10A, 11A). This may be on account of the known adsorption capabilities of carbonaceous NMs such as GO, MWCNTs, and SWCNTs due to  $\pi$ - $\pi$  stacking interactions and hydrogen bonding. Cai et al. (2003) investigated MWCNTs as a solid-phase extraction adsorbent for analytes BPA, NP, and 4-tert-octylphenol. A solid-phase extraction cartridge was packed with 0.5 g MWCNTs for the 0.40 ng/mL sample to pass through, then eluted with methanol, and the eluate was analyzed using HPLC to quantify the analytes. In four water types, 89.8% minimum recovery was achieved for all analytes. SWCNTs at a concentration of 10 mg/L successfully adsorbed 19.4 mg/g BPA at 280 K after 72 h in a study by Zaib et al. (2012).<sup>90</sup> This indicates that carbon nanotubes can effectively adsorb BPA and alkylphenols.

GO has been used as an effective adsorbent for phenolic compounds and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.100,102,103 Catherine et al. (2018) concluded that GO can adsorb 19-30 mg/g for several different phenolic compounds including BPA and NP, mainly due to van der Waals forces,  $\pi$ - $\pi$  interactions, and hydrogen bonding. GO sorption was saturated for all compounds after 480 min.<sup>102</sup> The superior sorption capabilities of carbonaceous NMs make them potentially useful for removal of EDCs from wastewater.<sup>101,110</sup> In addition to their strength-inducing properties in PNCs, they can likely prevent the release of polymer additives from the PNC matrix.

#### *4.6 Environmental Context of Experimental Results*

As discussed previously, TBP has an  $LC_{50}$  of 6.9 mg/L in *C. carpio*, and has been shown to affect the liver, testes, and kidney mass at concentrations as low as  $0.69 \text{ mg/L}^{35}$  Current environmental concentrations of TBP range from 10 to 50 ng/L in water samples from three rivers in Japan<sup>111</sup>, however, a US Geological Survey study conducted in  $2008$  sampled 11 lakes in Minnesota and found <0.01  $\mu$ g/L TBP in all samples.<sup>112</sup> While the present study detected 1.75 mg of TBP release per kg of GO PNCs, this means that 390 g of GO PNCs (nearly 100 of the PNCs used in this study) per liter of water would be required to reach the 0.69 mg/L TBP to affect organ mass of *C. carpio*. These are not environmentally relevant quantities of PNCs. As a local example, it would require 407 million US tons of GO PNC for the 250-billion-gallon Lake Whatcom<sup>113</sup> reach a TBP concentration of 0.69 mg/L. However, it is important to note that this does not consider mixture toxicity. When combined with other chemicals in the environment, toxicity may occur at lower concentrations than with TBP alone.<sup>114</sup>

Degradation of polymers in the environment can create microplastics which have greater polymer additive release due to increased surface area.<sup>83,115</sup> Walker et al. (2021) found that SWCNT epoxy nanocomposites, when cryomilled intro microplastics, released 61 times more BPA and 76 times more TBP.<sup>83</sup> Assuming similar results with other NMs, it would only take about 5 g of GO PNCs per liter of water to reach the 0.69 mg/L required to affect organ mass of *C.* 

*carpio*. Epoxy microplastics have been detected in environmental systems including groundwater and estuaries.<sup>116,117</sup>

#### *4.7 Conclusions*

This study aimed to assess the impact of NM inclusion on polymer additive release from epoxy PNCs. The BADGE epoxy PNCs and NMs were characterized using Raman microscopy, FTIR, and SEM imaging. PNCs containing GO, MWCNT, TiO<sub>2</sub>, or no NMs were exposed to various conditions including leaching temperatures of 25, 45, and 65 °C for five days or 24 h and simulated or natural weathering. Following leaching, the water was analyzed using HPLC-QTOF-MS to quantify release of BPA, TBP, and NP.

After only detecting TBP release in all experiments, statistical analyses concluded that there were significant differences in polymer additive release between NM types for PNCs leached at 25 °C that were weathered outdoors or with UV lamps. This is likely due to photodegradation of TBP in the weathering scenarios, however all three NMs also have mechanisms for sorbing (GO and MWCNT) or catalyzing the photodegradation of  $(TiO<sub>2</sub>)$  TBP in water. While the greatest release occurred from unweathered GO PNCs leached at 25 °C, this concentration is not relevant to current environmental concentrations and toxicity data.

Future directions for this project should involve repeat  $45^{\circ}$ C leaching experiments using a more stable heating source to investigate simulated long-term degradation and potentially longterm natural weathering utilizing a portable weather station. Long-term weathering and degradation could also involve microplastic generation to study characteristics and leaching behaviors of PNCs after physical weathering. Additional relevant NM topics to address include nanoclay and nanosilver as well as the impact of different PNC fabrication techniques.

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# **Appendix**

**Table 1A.** The HPLC method used a gradient elution with mobile phases of acetonitrile and water with 20 µM ammonium acetate to quantify BPA, TBP, and NP.



Table 2A. Typical MS conditions used to quantify BPA, TBP, and NP in negative ionization mode.





**Figure 1A.** Raman microscopy of polymer additives of interest.



Figure 2A. Concentration of TBP in EPA MHW leachate from MWCNT, GO, and TiO<sub>2</sub> NM types. The dashed blue line indicates BADGE epoxy release (±SD).



Figure 3A. Evaporation of leachate water recorded at each sampling during 45 °C leaching of unweathered PNCs.

![](_page_58_Figure_0.jpeg)

Figure 4A. Temperature data for 24-hr leaching experiments at (a) 25 °C on unweathered PNCs, (b) 45 °C on unweathered PNCs, (c) 65 °C on unweathered PNCs, (d) 45 °C on outdoor weathered PNCs, (e) 25 °C on outdoor weathered PNCs, (f) 25 °C on outdoor weathered PNCs, and (g) 25 °C on UV weathered PNCs.

![](_page_59_Figure_0.jpeg)

**Figure 5A.** Raman spectra of unweathered PNCs leached at (a) 25 °C and (b) 45 °C for 24 h.

![](_page_59_Figure_2.jpeg)

**Figure 6A.** Raman spectra of PNCs before and after leaching at 65 °C for five days.

![](_page_60_Figure_0.jpeg)

**Figure 7A.** Raman spectra of UV weathered PNCs leached at 25 °C for 24 h.

![](_page_60_Picture_76.jpeg)

![](_page_60_Picture_77.jpeg)

	Temperature $(F)$					
	Year	Month	Day	High	Low	<b>Precipitation (in)</b>
<b>Outdoor Weathering</b>	2022	$\overline{4}$	28	57	42	0.00
<b>Experiment 1</b>	2022	$\overline{4}$	29	61	41	0.04
"April"	2022	$\overline{4}$	30	61	47	0.21
	2022	5	$\bf{l}$	61	42	0.00
	2022	5	$\overline{2}$	60	48	0.62
	2022	5	3	54	47	0.12
<b>Outdoor Weathering</b>	2022	5	31	60	45	0.00
<b>Experiment 2</b>	2022	6	1	64	46	0.00
"May"	2022	6	$\overline{2}$	66	52	0.10
	2022	6	3	64	54	0.88
	2022	6	4	70	53	0.03
	2022	6	5	65	54	0.74
<b>Outdoor Weathering</b>	2022	6	27	76	55	0.00
<b>Experiment 3</b>	2022	6	28	76	57	0.00
"June"	2022	6	29	67	55	0.00
	2022	6	30	71	51	0.00
	2022	7		70	53	0.01
	2022	7	$\overline{2}$	70	52	0.00

**Table 4A.** Bellingham, WA temperature and precipitation data from NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI).

![](_page_62_Figure_0.jpeg)

Figure 8A. FTIR spectra for (a) unweathered PNCs leached at 25 °C, (b) unweathered PNCs leached at 45 °C, (c) May outdoor weathered PNCs leached at 25 °C, (d) June outdoor weathered PNCs leached at 25 °C, and (e) UV weathered PNCs leached at 25 °C.

![](_page_63_Picture_271.jpeg)

Table 5A. ANOVA table of LME results for unweathered PNCs leached at 45 °C.

Table 6A. ANOVA table of LME results for unweathered PNCs leached at 25 °C.

	numDF	denDF	<b>F-value</b>	p-value
(Intercept)			5391.852	$< 0.001*$
<b>Time</b>			719.582	$-0001*$
<b>Treatment</b>			2.175	0.1309
Time:treatment			0.464	0.7084

Table 7A. ANOVA table of LME results for UV-weathered PNCs leached at 25 °C.

	numDF	denDF	<b>F-value</b>	p-value
(Intercept)			5226.967	$< 0.001*$
<b>Time</b>			440.520	<.0001*
<b>Treatment</b>			9.562	$0.0007*$
Time:treatment			.994	0.1219

**Table 8A.** LME results for UV-weathered PNCs leached at 25 °C.

![](_page_63_Picture_272.jpeg)

![](_page_64_Figure_0.jpeg)

Figure 9A. LME models for PNCs weathered under UV light and leached at 25 °C. Within each quadrant, the five shaded lines indicate 5 replicates.

	numDF	denDF	<b>F-value</b>	p-value
(Intercept)			48.00810	$< 0.001*$
<b>Time</b>			52.34827	$< 0.001*$
<b>Treatment</b>			0.35221	0.7881
Time:treatment		'6	0.30906	0.8188

**Table 9A.** ANOVA table for PNCs outdoor-weathered in April and leached at 45 °C.

Table 10A. LME results for PNCs outdoor-weathered in May and leached at 25 °C.

	<b>Value</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	DF	t-value	p-value
(Intercept)	0.1854	0.0114	76	16.2371	$0.0000*$
<b>Time</b>	0.0109	0.0008	76	14.4014	$0.0000*$
<b>Treatmentgraphene</b>	$-0.0175$	0.0161	16	$-1.0840$	0.2944
<b>Treatmentmwcnt</b>	$-0.0111$	0.0161	16	$-0.6855$	0.5028
<b>Treatmenttitanium</b>	$-0.0095$	0.0161	16	$-0.5860$	0.5661
Time:treatmentgraphene	$-0.0021$	0.0011	76	$-2.0058$	$0.0484*$
Time:treatmentmwcnt	$-0.0031$	0.0011	76	$-2.9188$	$0.0046*$
Time:treatmenttitanium	$-0.0011$	0.0011	76	$-1.0784$	0.2842

![](_page_65_Figure_0.jpeg)

Figure 10A. LME models for PNCs weathered outdoors in May and leached at 25 °C. Within each quadrant, the five shaded lines indicate 5 replicates.

![](_page_65_Picture_159.jpeg)

![](_page_65_Picture_160.jpeg)

![](_page_66_Figure_0.jpeg)

Figure 11A. LME models for PNCs weathered outdoors in June and leached at 25 °C. Within each quadrant, the five shaded lines indicate 5 replicates.

				<b>Tert-butylphenol</b>		<b>Bisphenol A d8 (ISTD)</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	Level	Exp. Conc.	RT	Resp.	RT	Resp.
No injection 1	Sample			1.895	305	1.878	298
Methanol blank 1	Sample					1.802	790775
MHW std 1	<b>Blank</b>			2.133	2050	1.808	1727840
MHW std 2	Cal	1	$\mathbf{1}$	2.167	8202	1.811	1634856
MHW std 3	Cal	$\overline{2}$	10	2.141	60529	1.812	1652226
MHW std 4	Cal	3	20	2.136	113255	1.81	1690977
MHW std 5	Cal	$\overline{4}$	50	2.14	270737	1.811	1671240
MHW std 6	Cal	5	100	2.145	533802	1.816	1684139
MHW std 7	Cal	6	200	2.139	1092875	1.81	1678313
MHW std 8	Cal	7	500	2.14	2813733	1.817	1659019
MHW std 9	Cal	8	1000	2.14	6036702	1.801	1667558
MHW std 10	Cal	9	10000	2.135	31354017	1.779	760180
Methanol blank 2	Sample			2.144	2084	1.811	727910
MQ blank 1	Sample			2.141	7206	1.805	158
MQ blank 2	Sample			2.144	5086	1.782	169
MQ blank 3	Sample			2.131	3768	1.739	155
Methanol blank 3	Sample					1.811	788658

**Table 12A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs leached at 25 °C for five days.

![](_page_67_Picture_708.jpeg)

TiO2 1- Day 3	Sample	2.129	311050	1.803	1618441
TiO <sub>2</sub> 2- Day 3	Sample	2.135	341628	1.806	1619532
TiO <sub>2</sub> 3- Day 3	Sample	2.131	335594	1.802	1655981
TiO <sub>2</sub> 4- Day 3	Sample	2.139	353768	1.81	1609749
TiO2 5- Day 3	Sample	2.126	351071	1.79	1594880
200 ppb (std 7) 4	Sample	2.174	667	1.829	304
Methanol blank 7	Sample	2.164	259	1.805	627983
Blank 1- Day 5	Sample	2.133	330388	1.801	1615200
Blank 2- Day 5	Sample	2.131	410285	1.809	1641290
Blank 3- Day 5	Sample	2.132	401374	1.8	1595544
Blank 4- Day 5	Sample	2.132	398437	1.813	1566638
Blank 5- Day 5	Sample	2.127	389481	1.785	1583700
GO 1- Day 5	Sample	2.136	371238	1.807	1608349
GO 2- Day 5	Sample	2.126	436692	1.797	1572424
GO 3- Day 5	Sample	2.127	419760	1.801	1633302
GO 4- Day 5	Sample	2.133	434827	1.798	1600815
GO 5- Day 5	Sample	2.14	447966	1.814	1565101
200 ppb (std 7) 5	Sample	2.127	1174	1.825	238
Methanol blank 8	Sample			1.801	532995
MWCNT 1- Day 5	Sample	2.131	398068	1.805	1673915
MWCNT 2- Day 5	Sample	2.141	509156	1.815	1697706
MWCNT 3- Day 5	Sample	2.146	469419	1.817	1618757
MWCNT 4- Day 5	Sample	2.132	454935	1.809	1613875
MWCNT 5- Day 5	Sample	2.147	442823	1.814	1577857
TiO <sub>2</sub> 1- Day 5	Sample	2.139	367214	1.807	1568300
TiO <sub>2</sub> 2- Day 5	Sample	2.143	420691	1.827	1616394
TiO <sub>2</sub> 3- Day 5	Sample	2.131	404549	1.809	1608059
TiO <sub>2</sub> 4- Day 5	Sample				

**Table 13A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs leached at 65 °C for 24 h.

![](_page_68_Picture_546.jpeg)

![](_page_69_Picture_709.jpeg)

![](_page_70_Picture_700.jpeg)

![](_page_71_Picture_670.jpeg)
200 ppb (MQ std							
7)9	Cal	6	200	2.129	1618944	1.8	1123449
Methanol blank							
12	Sample			2.058	152108	1.793	1133997
MWCNT 1-24hr	Sample			2.121	50826161	1.808	1096557
MWCNT 2-24hr	Sample			2.118	51059013	1.799	1151546
MWCNT 3-24hr	Sample			2.111	40723696	1.789	1043774
MWCNT 4-24hr	Sample			2.093	40866848	1.783	1013852
MWCNT 5-24hr	Sample			2.106	45161061	1.787	1027294
TiO2 1-24hr	Sample			2.148	42388374	1.798	1137581
TiO2 2-24hr	Sample			2.152	42381085	1.803	1141085
TiO2 3-24hr	Sample			2.109	38156065	1.796	1141328
TiO2 4-24hr	Sample			2.117	40830310	1.801	1143679
TiO2 5-24hr	Sample			2.144	43346464	1.795	1123062
200 ppb (MQ std							
7)10	Cal	6	200	2.125	1766499	1.793	1127684
Methanol blank							
13	Sample			2.13	268111	1.798	1124609
MHW std 1-2	<b>Blank</b>			2.132	156622	1.793	1179982
MHW std 2-2	Sample			2.117	151517	1.795	1176597
MHW std 3-2	Sample			2.127	234857	1.795	1166416
MHW std 4-2	Cal	3	20	2.124	319282	1.798	1180980
MHW std 5-2	Cal	$\overline{4}$	50	2.124	627479	1.798	1145046
MHW std 6-2	Cal	$\overline{5}$	100	2.119	1257809	1.797	1133077
MHW std 7-2	Cal	6	200	2.126	1666848	1.794	1139863
MHW std 8-2	Cal	$\overline{7}$	500	2.12	5424118	1.797	1106946
MHW std 9-2	Cal	8	1000	2.118	10454262	1.793	1075422
MHW std 10-2	Cal	9	20000	2.102	46474230	1.796	1227446
MHW std 11-2	Cal	10	40000	2.115	56561575	1.799	1121906
no injection	Sample			2.126	114773	1.711	$\overline{0}$

**Table 14A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs leached at 45 °C for 24 h.









MWCNT 3-24hr	Sample			2.065	26416900	1.753	514781
MWCNT 4-24hr	Sample			2.06	12897976	1.745	514824
MWCNT 5-24hr	Sample			2.061	9452376	1.752	497702
TiO2 1-24hr	Sample			2.063	17914905	1.747	510613
TiO2 2-24hr	Sample			2.059	16038723	1.753	500593
TiO <sub>2</sub> 3-24hr	Sample			2.057	17008437	1.748	504393
TiO2 4-24hr	Sample			2.06	13327736	1.747	510787
TiO2 5-24hr	Sample			2.057	7403668	1.755	515141
200 ppb (MQ std 7) 10	Sample			2.059	3501608	1.743	473355
Methanol blank 13	Sample			2.068	46880	1.743	81
MHW std 1-2	<b>Blank</b>			2.054	50602	1.755	521547
MHW std 2-2	Cal	1	1	2.058	111778	1.752	517783
MHW std 3-2	Cal	$\overline{2}$	10	2.055	182591	1.743	520492
MHW std 4-2	Cal	3	20	2.066	384020	1.75	511191
MHW std 5-2	Cal	4	50	2.061	1474734	1.752	501647
MHW std 6-2	Cal	5	100	2.058	774791	1.759	509480
MHW std 7-2	Cal	6	200	2.062	3527087	1.75	489576
MHW std 8-2	Cal	7	500	2.065	6808757	1.759	451056
MHW std 9-2	Cal	8	1000	2.058	30565115	1.726	266640
no injection	Sample			2.09	8298		

**Table 15A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs leached at 25 °C for 24 h.









TiO <sub>2</sub> 5-24hr	Sample			2.062	237702	1.746	253195
500 ppb (MQ std 7)							
10	Sample			2.048	1542439	1.739	242608
Methanol blank 13	Sample			2.033	9188	1.697	217
MHW std 1-2	<b>Blank</b>			2.07	7600	1.754	206587
MHW std 2-2	Cal		10	2.061	43158	1.739	254725
MHW std 3-2	Cal	2	20	2.05	70032	1.738	261632
MHW std 4-2	Cal	3	50	2.045	168874	1.749	260606
MHW std 5-2	Cal	4	100	2.048	346370	1.739	257200
MHW std 6-2	Cal	5	200	2.046	628537	1.733	256479
MHW std 7-2	Cal	6	500	2.047	1592012	1.745	252466
MHW std 8-2	Cal	7	1000	2.044	3065892	1.749	238666
MHW std 9-2	Cal	8	10000	2.048	20252361	1.729	173521
no injection	Sample			2.06	9585	2.014	645

**Table 16A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs UV-weathered for five days and leached at 25 °C for 24 h.









MHW std 4-2	Cal	3	50	2.041	202775	1.729	361488
MHW std 5-2	Cal	4	100	2.033	357681	1.717	255676
MHW std 6-2	Cal	5	200	2.026	808120	1.731	359227
MHW std 7-2	Cal	6	500	2.032	2053779	1.72	242805
MHW std 8-2	Cal	7	1000	2.032	4047823	1.726	336897
MHW std 9-2	Cal	8	10000	2.038	28459774	1.712	246203
no injection	Sample			2.034	9029	2.203	675

**Table 17A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs outdoor-weathered for five days in April and leached at 45 °C for 24 h.









<b>MHW</b> $\cdot$ Q_ std ∼	Cal	1000	റാ 2.U38	37975581	710	22572 ΔZ ັ້
no injection	Sample		2.078	31299 $\overline{1}$		

**Table 18A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs outdoor-weathered for five days in May and leached at 25 °C for 24 h.









				<b>Tert-butylphenol</b>		<b>Bisphenol A d8 (ISTD)</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	Level	Exp. Conc.	<b>RT</b>	Resp.	<b>RT</b>	Resp.
No injection 1	Sample			2.129	168	2.123	359
Methanol blank 1	Sample			2.387	216	1.885	235
MHW std 1	<b>Blank</b>			2.148	269	2.019	306
MHW std 2	Cal	1	10	2.334	364	1.729	5323
MHW std 3	Cal	$\overline{2}$	20			1.727	15553
MHW std 4	Cal	$\overline{3}$	50	2.05	4614	1.754	16395
MHW std 5	Cal	$\overline{4}$	100	2.076	10848	1.737	18860
MHW std 6	Cal	5	200	2.06	42321	1.751	16543
MHW std 7	Cal	6	500	2.049	225863	1.73	46435
MHW std 8	Cal	$\overline{7}$	1000	2.045	655536	1.736	68088
MHW std 9	Cal	$8\,$	10000	2.051	7727205	1.738	72646
Methanol blank 2	Sample			2.02	972	1.418	242
MQ blank 1	Sample			2.061	1428	2.184	139
MQ blank 2	Sample			2.054	1384	1.269	830
MQ blank 3	Sample			2.047	5154	2.193	95
Methanol blank 3	Sample			2.044	3590	2.181	479
Blank 1-2hr	Sample			2.065	17990	1.739	162895
Blank 2-2hr	Sample			2.064	18491	1.738	157519
Blank 3-2hr	Sample			2.054	19929	1.712	124373
Blank 4-2hr	Sample			2.042	23248	1.739	197731
Blank 5-2hr	Sample			2.057	24000	1.747	196392
GO 1-2hr	Sample			2.044	23439	1.738	206839
GO 2-2hr	Sample			2.085	23200	1.752	212337
GO 3-2hr	Sample			2.047	24077	1.742	219418
GO 4-2hr	Sample			2.052	25697	1.746	158163
GO 5-2hr	Sample			2.042	26647	1.733	230973
500 ppb (std 7) 1	Sample			2.044	1404437	1.742	209557
Methanol blank 4	Sample			2.05	4506		
MWCNT 1-2hr	Sample			2.045	24978	1.742	235237
MWCNT 2-2hr	Sample			2.042	32449	1.737	240372
MWCNT 3-2hr	Sample			2.057	24564	1.728	151305
MWCNT 4-2hr	Sample			2.081	32442	1.752	245459
MWCNT 5-2hr	Sample			2.034	27806	1.751	171572
TiO2 1-2hr	Sample			2.051	28669	1.739	215211
TiO <sub>2</sub> 2- 2hr	Sample			2.045	29070	1.736	259118

**Table 19A.** TBP quantification results for PNCs outdoor-weathered for five days in June and leached at 25 °C for 24 h.





