

# Research Lessons Learned by an Engineer Turned Hydrogeologist

**Neil R. Thomson**

**Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering**

**University of Waterloo**

**XVII CONGRESSO  
BRASILEIRO DE ÁGUAS  
SUBTERRÂNEAS**



# Engineering

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

- Currently an engineering professor**
- 25+ years as a researcher**
- Groundwater systems**
- Contaminant fate and remediation**
- Modelling**
- Bench-scale experiments**
- Field experiments**



# Engineering

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

**“...is the science, skill, and profession of acquiring and applying scientific, economic, social, and practical knowledge...**

**to design and also build structures, machines, devices, systems, materials and processes.”**

- Professional**
- Licensed**
- Duty to ensure public safety**

# Training

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

- Maths**
- Basic science**
- Engineering science**
- Engineering design**
- Economics**
- Social impact**





# Training

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

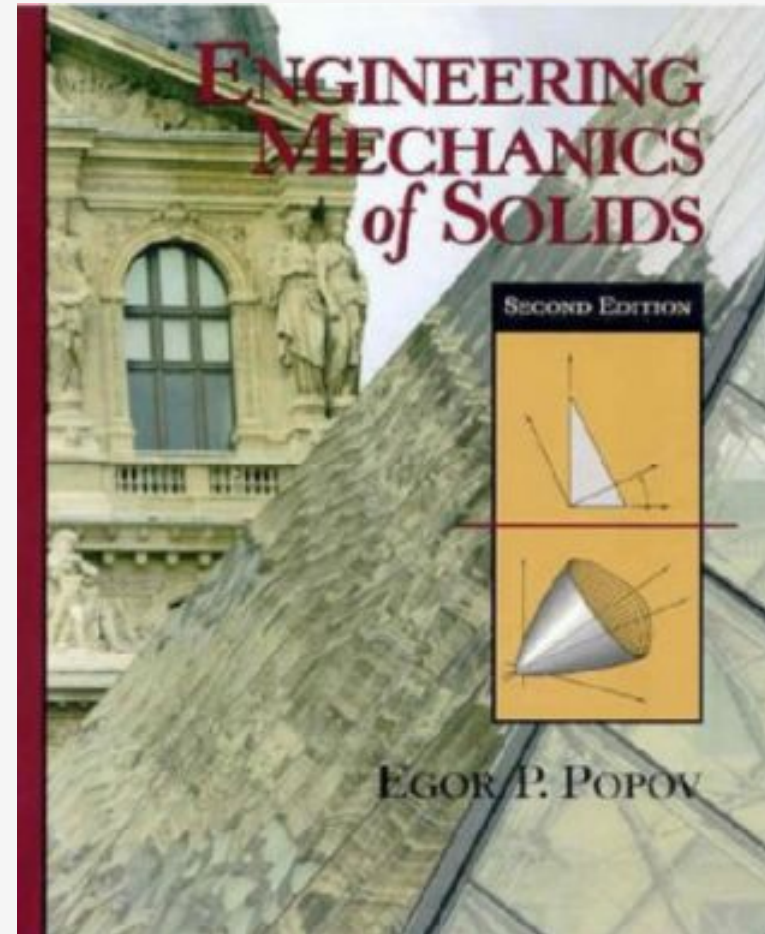


# Training

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

## Civil engineering

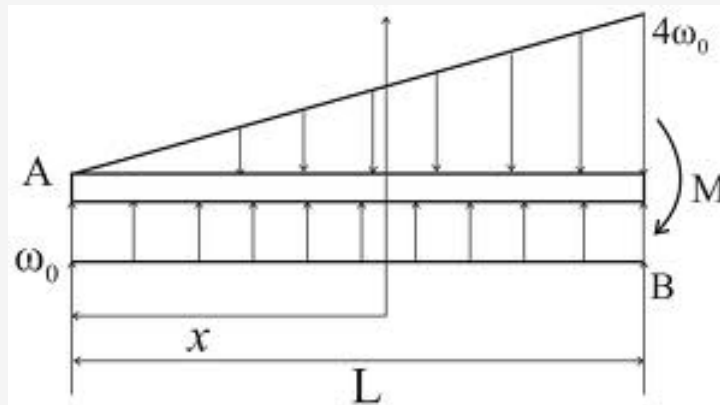
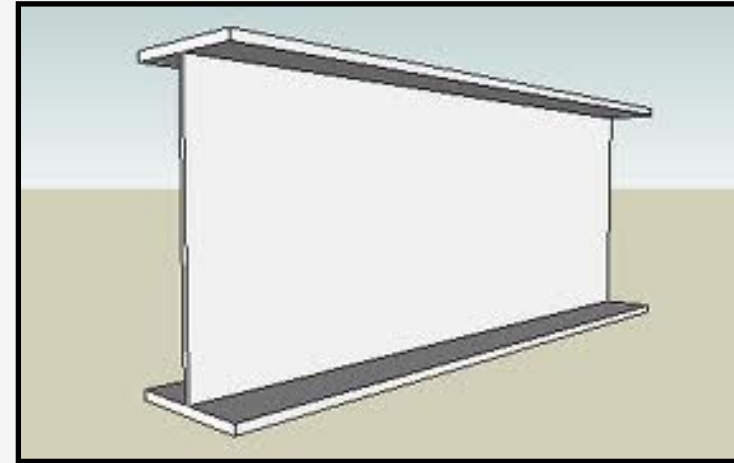
- Materials
- Steel
- Concrete
- Transportation
- Structures
- Water treatment
- Soil mechanics



# Engineering approach

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

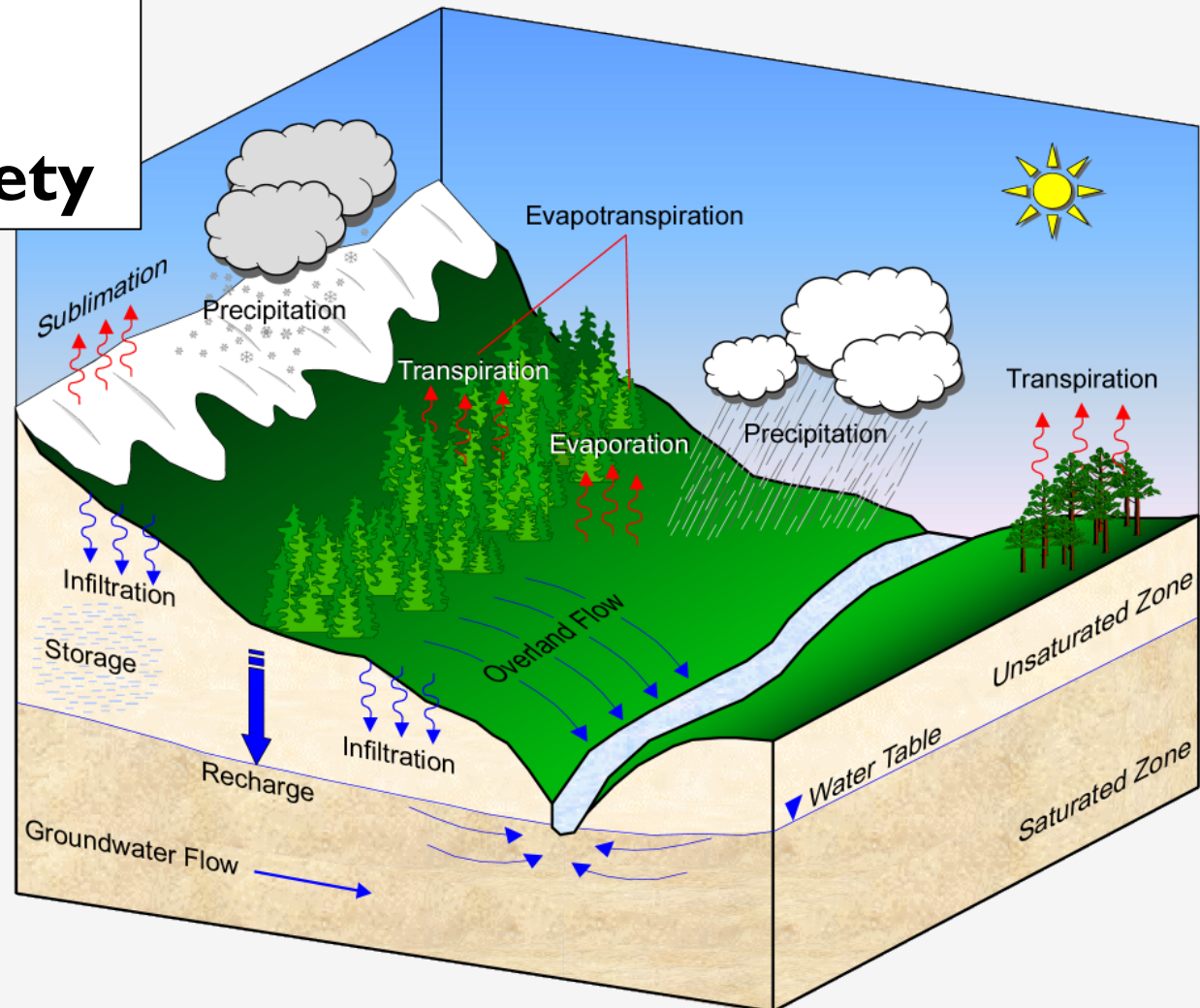
- ❑ All can be designed
- ❑ Control over most aspects
- ❑ Factor of safety
  
- ❑ Size beam to carry design load



# Environmental systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

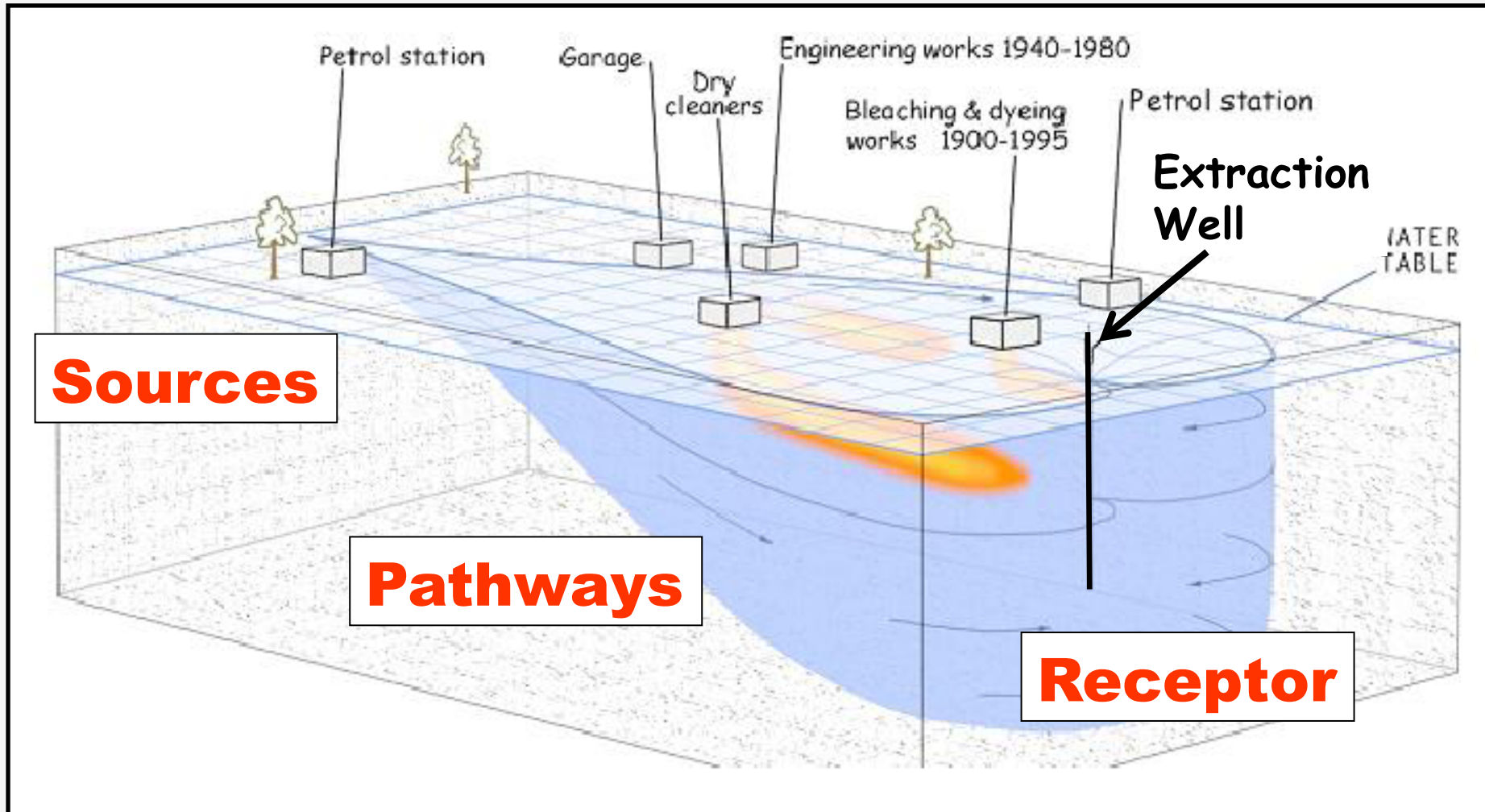
**High variability**  
**No control**  
**No factor of safety**





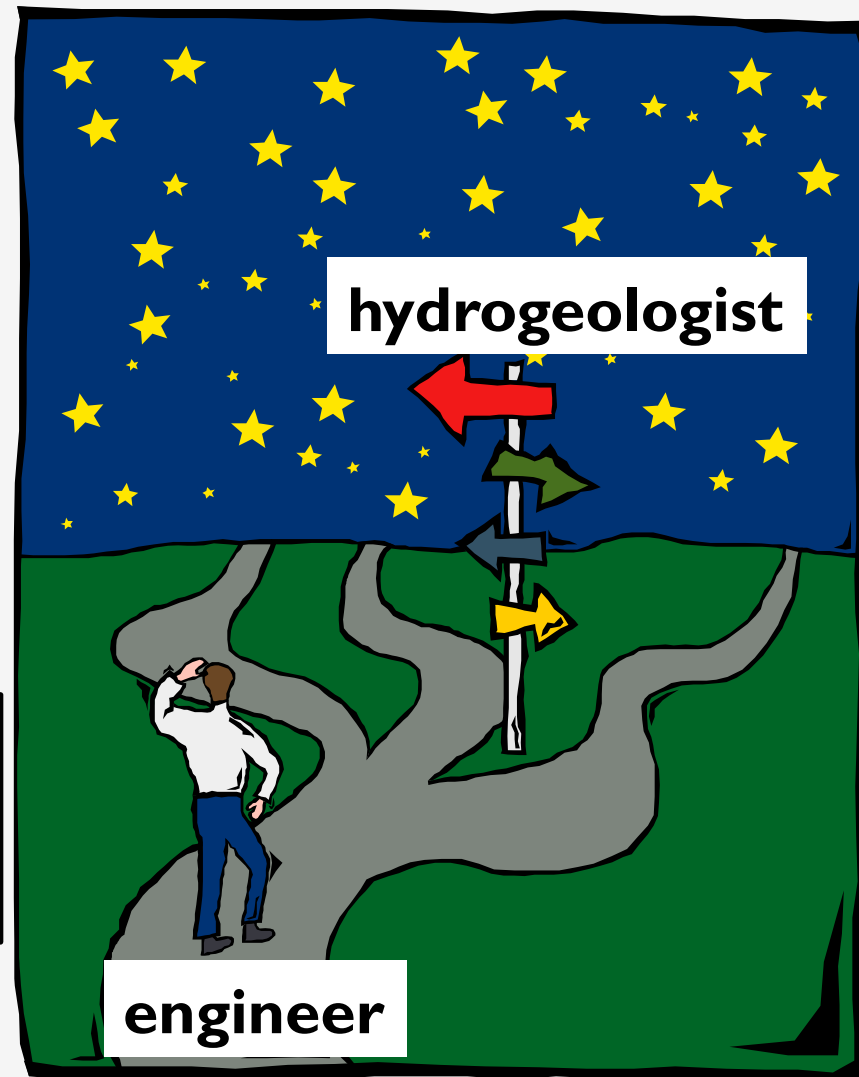
# Contamination

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Pathway...

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



**Some  
Lessons  
Learned**

**“Success is not a good teacher,  
failure makes you humble”**

**Shah Rukh Khan**



# Example I

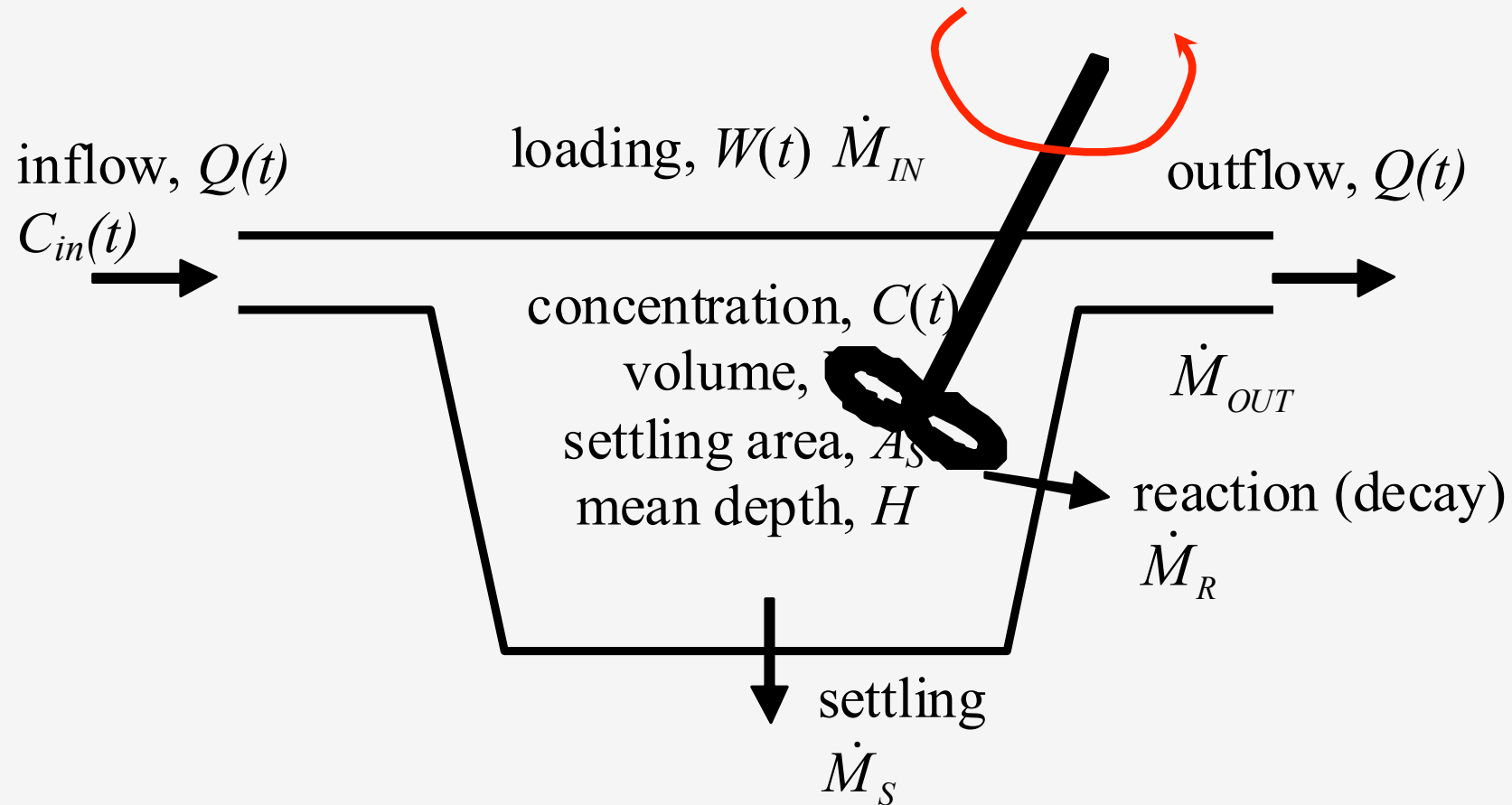
UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

**Modelling is fun...**



# Well-mixed systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Well-mixed systems

$$V \frac{dC_T}{dt} = W(t) - QC_T - kVC_T - v_s f_s A_S C_T$$

mass input

mass output

mass decay

settling

rate of change of mass

# Well-mixed systems

$$\frac{dC}{dt} + \lambda(t)C = S(t)$$

which has the solution

$$C(t)e^{\int \lambda(t)dt} = \int S(t)e^{\int \lambda(t)dt} dt + K$$

$$C(t) = \int_{t_0}^t h(t, t') [S(t') + C_0 \delta(t' - t_0)] dt'$$

where

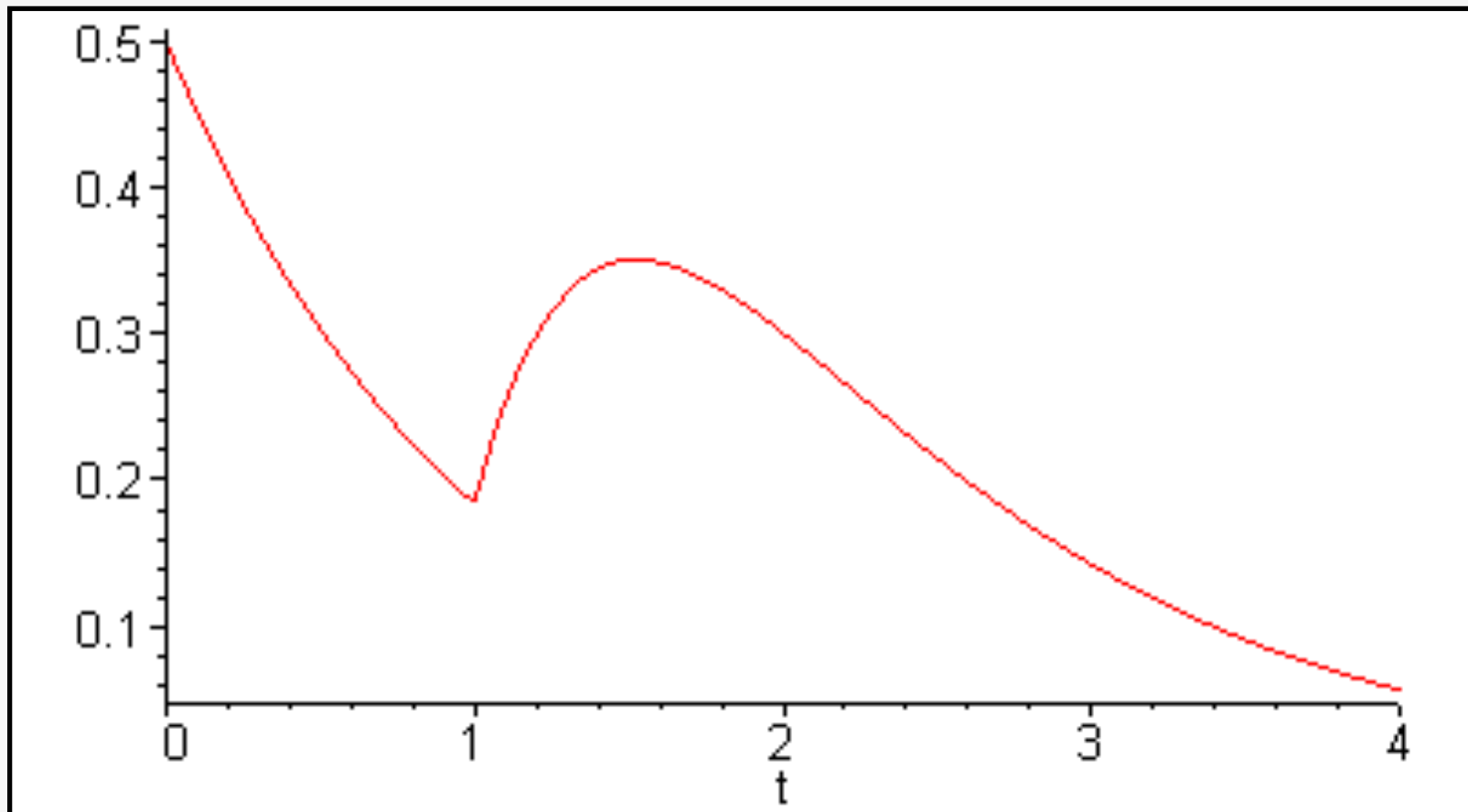
$$h(t, t') = e^{-\lambda(t-t')}$$

is the Green's function  
for the ODE

# Well-mixed systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

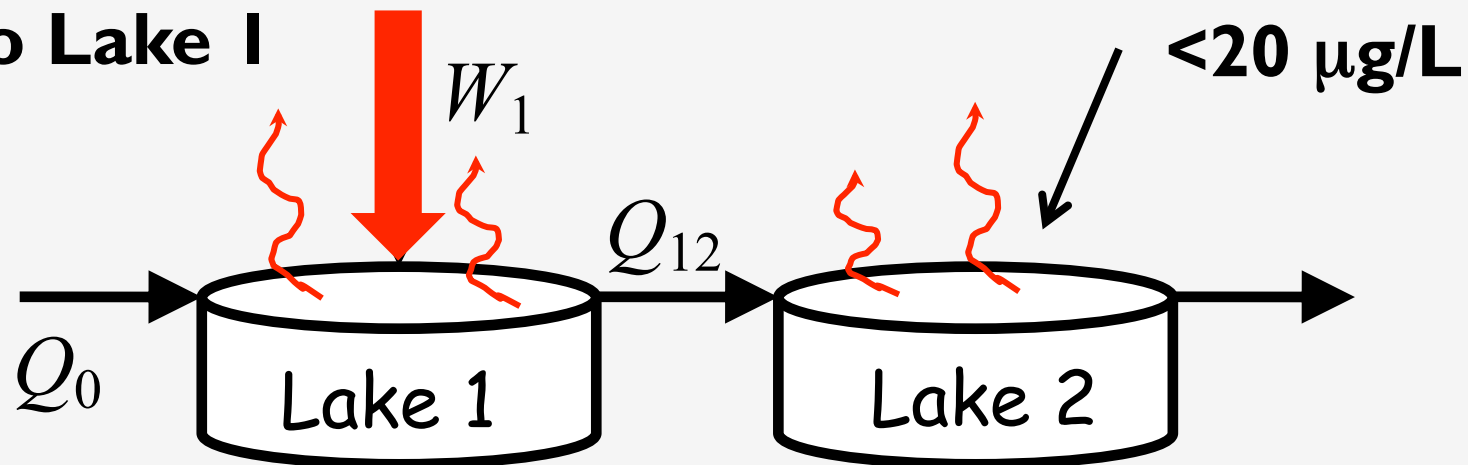
$$\frac{dC}{dt} + 1C = 1e^{-2(t-t_1)}H(t-t_1) \quad \text{with } C(0) = 0.5$$



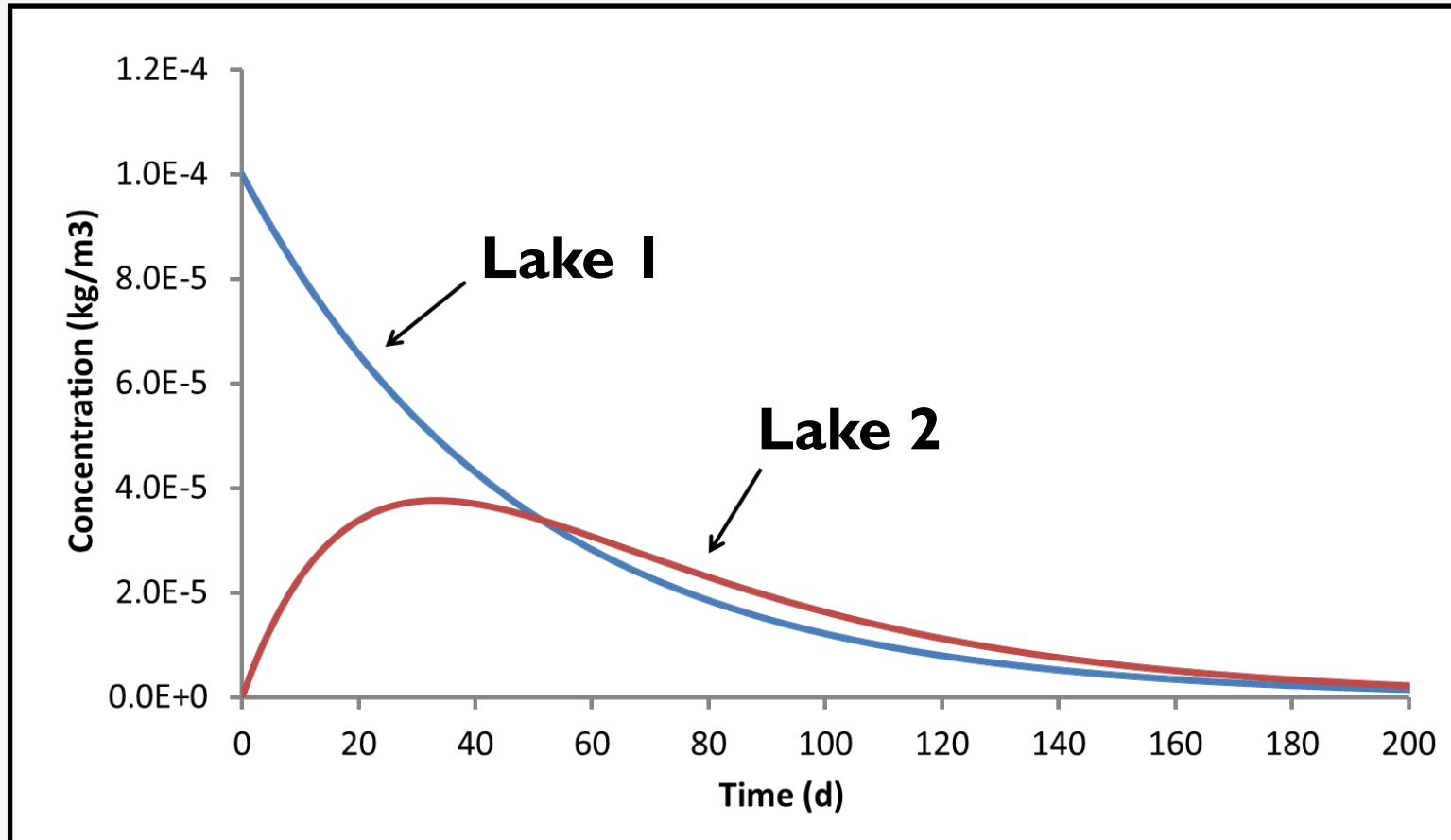
# Well-mixed systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

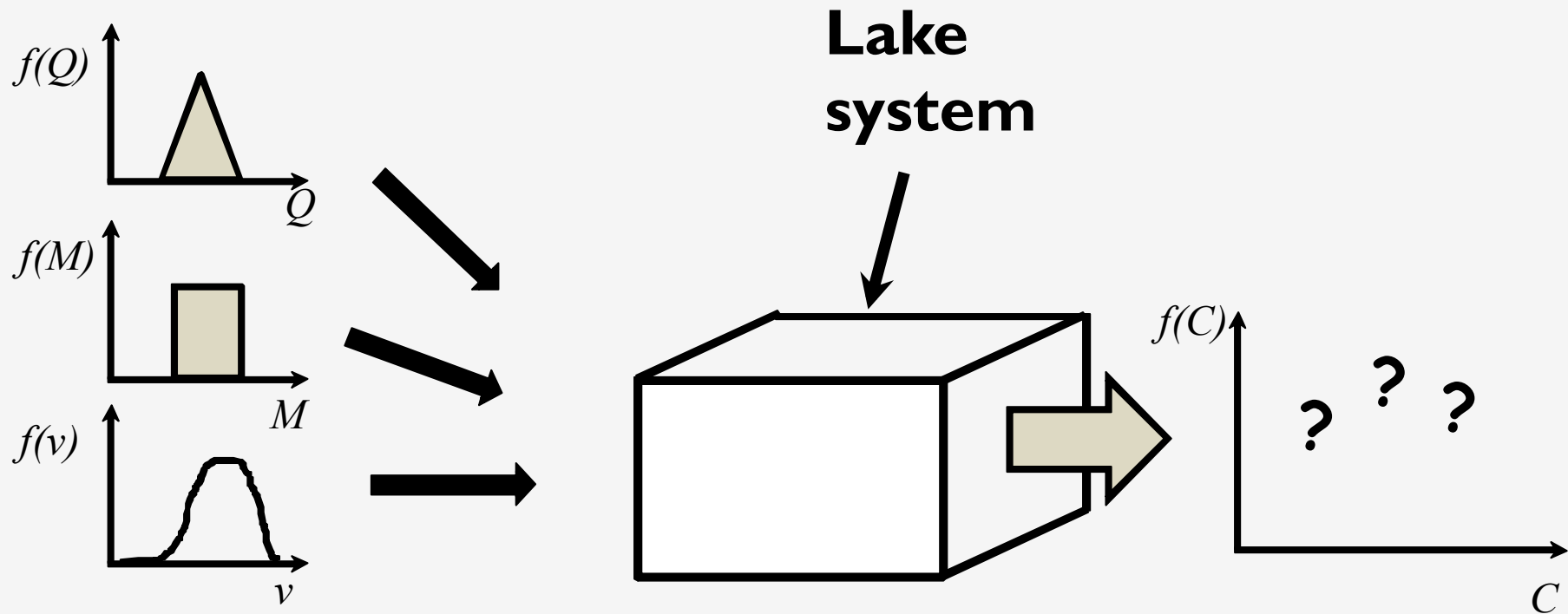
Release of contaminant  
into Lake 1



# Well-mixed systems

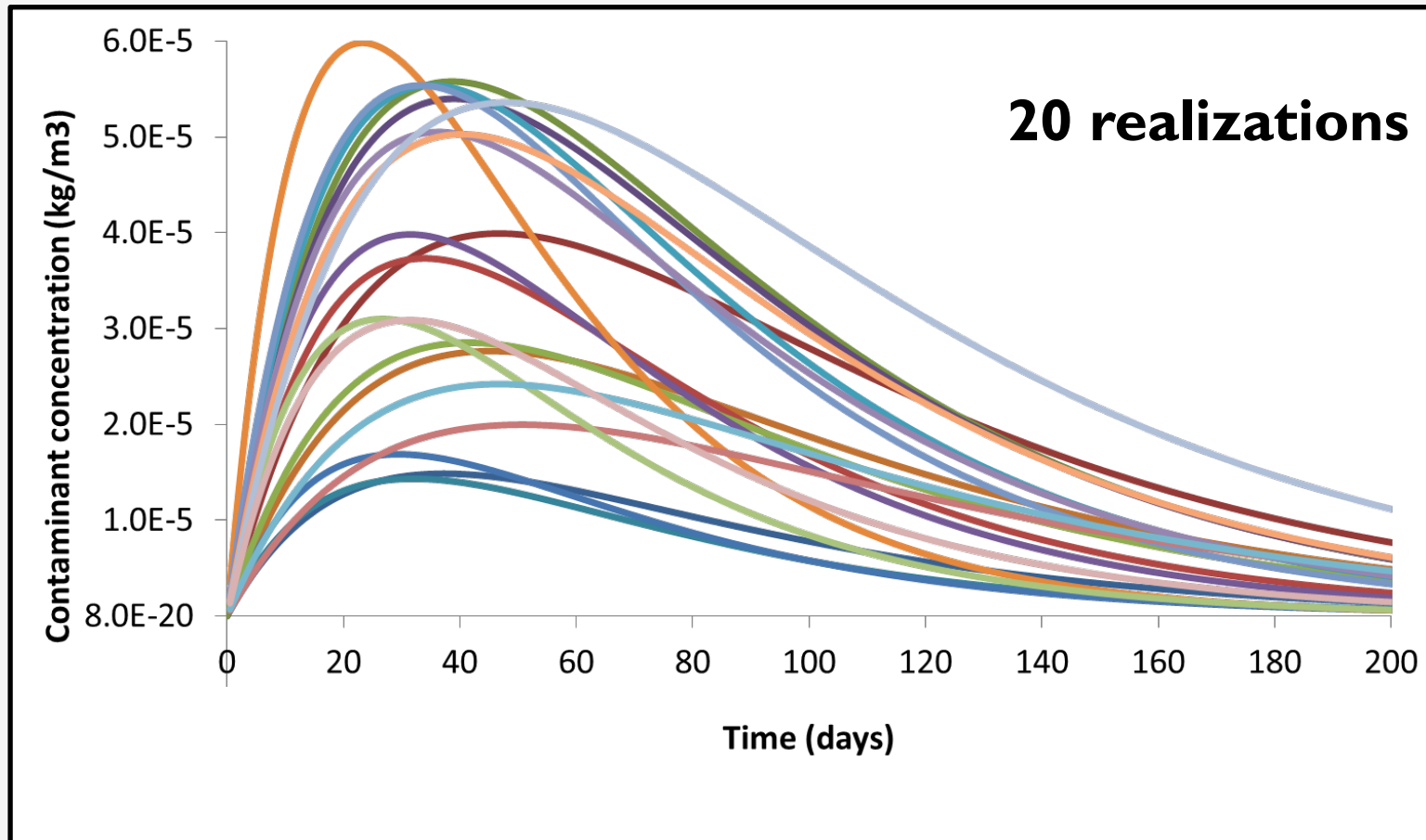


# Well-mixed systems



**Monte Carlo Method**

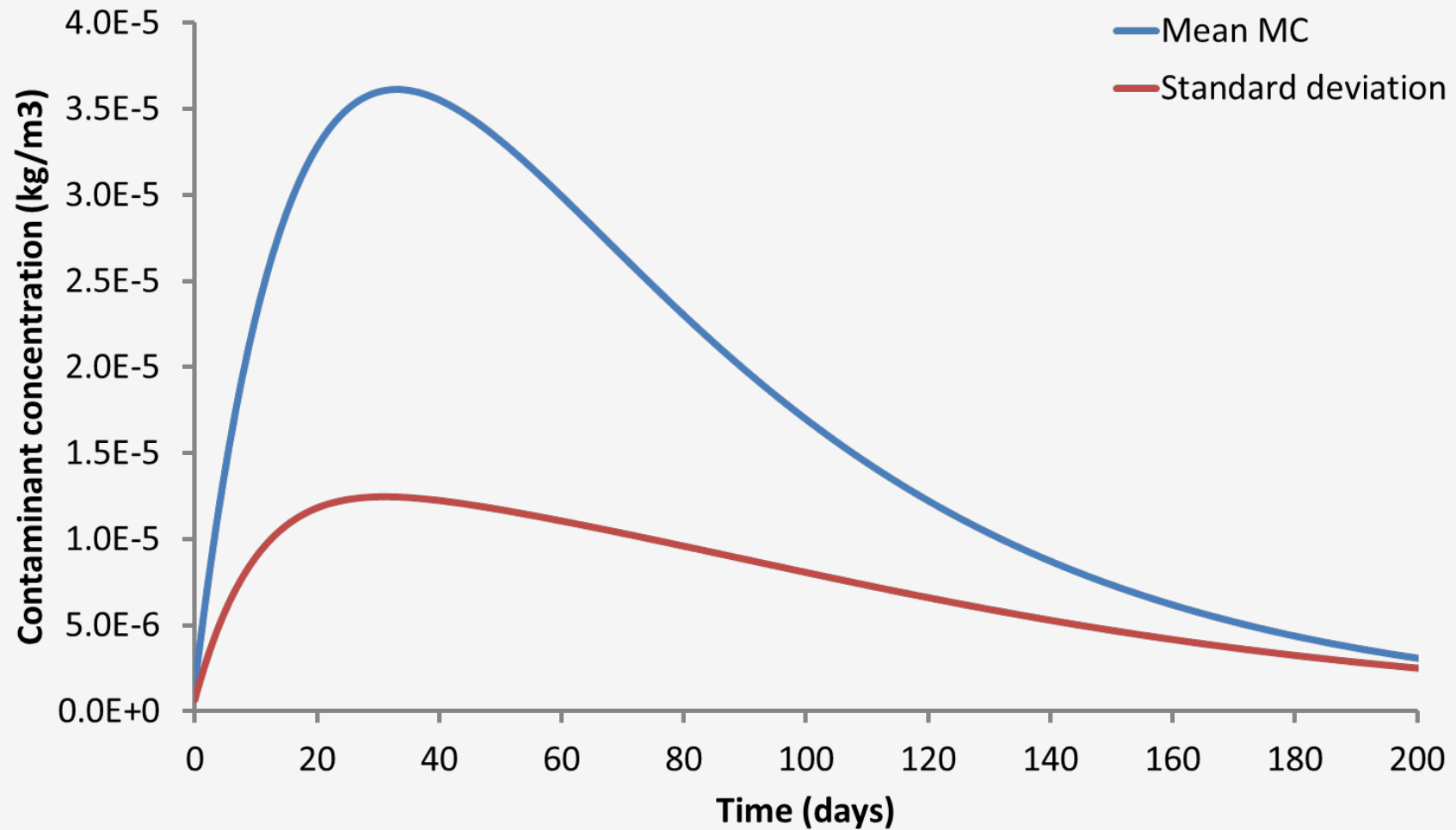
# Well-mixed systems





# Well-mixed systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Well-mixed systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

**Realistic?**



# Advance complexity + Solve bigger problems

$$\begin{aligned}
 I_{\psi_0} = & \int_R \left\{ -\psi_0^* \left[ m \psi_0 \cdot \nabla \mathbf{u}_0 + m \mathbf{u}_0 \cdot \nabla \psi_0 + m f_c \hat{k} \times \psi_0 \right. \right. \\
 & \left. \left. + \rho_w C_w \frac{|\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w|}{\partial \mathbf{u}^T} \psi_0 \mathbf{B}_w (\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w) \right. \right. \\
 & \left. \left. + \rho_w C_w |\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w| \mathbf{B}_w \psi_0 \right] \right. \\
 & \left. + \psi_0^* \left[ \frac{\partial}{\partial x_j} \left\{ \frac{\partial k_{ijrs}}{\partial u_a} \psi_{0s} \frac{\partial u_r}{\partial x_s} + k_{ijrs} \frac{\partial \psi_{0s}}{\partial x_s} \right\} \right] \right\} dR \quad (C7) \\
 I_{\alpha_i} = & \iint_R \left\{ \frac{\partial f}{\partial \alpha_i} - \psi_i^* \left[ m \frac{\partial f_c}{\partial \alpha_i} \hat{k} \times (\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w) - m f_c \hat{k} \times \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} \right. \right. \\
 & \left. \left. + \rho_w \frac{\partial C_w}{\partial \alpha_i} |\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w| \mathbf{B}_w (\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w) + \rho_w C_w \frac{\partial |\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w|}{\partial \mathbf{u}^T} \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} \mathbf{B}_w (\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w) \right. \right. \\
 & \left. \left. + \rho_w C_w |\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w| \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} (\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w) - \rho_w C_w |\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{u}_w| \mathbf{B}_w \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} \right. \right. \\
 & \left. \left. - \rho_a \frac{\partial C_a}{\partial \alpha_i} |\mathbf{u}_a| \mathbf{B}_a \mathbf{u}_a - \rho_a C_a \frac{\partial |\mathbf{u}_a|}{\partial \alpha_i} \mathbf{B}_a \mathbf{u}_a \right. \right. \\
 & \left. \left. - \rho_a C_a |\mathbf{u}_a| \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}_a}{\partial \alpha_i} \mathbf{u}_a - \rho_a C_a |\mathbf{u}_a| \mathbf{B}_a \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_a}{\partial \alpha_i} \right] \right\} dR dt \\
 & + \int_R -\psi_0^* \left[ \rho_i \left( d_0^h \frac{\partial h_0}{\partial \alpha_i} + h_0 U [A_0 - 1] \frac{\partial A_0}{\partial \alpha_i} \right) \mathbf{u}_0 \cdot \nabla \mathbf{u}_0 \right. \\
 & \left. + \rho_i f_c \left( d_0^h \frac{\partial h_0}{\partial \alpha_i} + h_0 U [A_0 - 1] \frac{\partial A_0}{\partial \alpha_i} \right) \hat{k} \times (\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w) \right. \\
 & \left. + m \frac{\partial f_c}{\partial \alpha_i} \hat{k} \times (\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w) - m f_c \hat{k} \times \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} \right. \\
 & \left. + \rho_w \frac{\partial C_w}{\partial \alpha_i} |\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w| \mathbf{B}_w (\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w) \right. \\
 & \left. + \rho_w C_w \frac{\partial |\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w|}{\partial \mathbf{u}_0^T} \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} \mathbf{B}_w (\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w) \right. \\
 & \left. + \rho_w C_w |\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w| \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} (\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w) \right. \\
 & \left. - \rho_w C_w |\mathbf{u}_0 - \mathbf{u}_w| \mathbf{B}_w \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_w}{\partial \alpha_i} - \rho_a \frac{\partial C_a}{\partial \alpha_i} |\mathbf{u}_{a_0}| \mathbf{B}_a \mathbf{u}_{a_0} \right. \\
 & \left. - \rho_a C_a \frac{\partial |\mathbf{u}_{a_0}|}{\partial \alpha_i} \mathbf{B}_a \mathbf{u}_{a_0} \right. \\
 & \left. - \rho_a C_a |\mathbf{u}_{a_0}| \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}_a}{\partial \alpha_i} \mathbf{u}_{a_0} - \rho_a C_a |\mathbf{u}_{a_0}| \mathbf{B}_a \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_{a_0}}{\partial \alpha_i} \right] \\
 & \left. + \psi_0^* \left[ \frac{\partial}{\partial x_j} \left( \frac{\partial k_{ijrs}}{\partial \alpha_i} \frac{\partial u_{0s}}{\partial x_s} - \frac{1}{2} \delta_{ij} \frac{\partial P}{\partial \alpha_i} \right) \right] \right\} dR \quad (C8)
 \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\psi_1 = \frac{\partial u}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \psi_2 = \frac{\partial h}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \psi_3 = \frac{\partial A}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \psi_0 = \frac{\partial \mathbf{u}_0}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad (C9)$$

$$d^h = 1 + U[A - 1](A - 1) \quad (C9)$$

$$d^A = 1 + U[A - 1] \quad (C10)$$

Equations (C9) and (C10) represent portions of (8) and (9), respectively. In (C4)–(C8) the ice mass, denoted by  $m$ , has been replaced by  $m = \rho_i h$  (where  $\rho_i$  is the density of ice) only where the derivatives of the ice mass are required. This is valid substitution since the ice motion model is an integrated thickness model. Associated with the integrals embodied in (C3) are the following partial derivatives (with respect to  $\alpha_i$ ) of the initial and boundary conditions for both the momentum balance equation and the redistribution equations:

$$\psi_1 = \frac{\partial u}{\partial \alpha_i} = \frac{\partial \hat{u}}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \text{on } \Gamma_1 \quad \forall t \geq t_0 \quad (C11)$$

for equation (4),

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \left[ \frac{\partial k_{ijrs}}{\partial u_a} \psi_{1s} \frac{\partial u_r}{\partial x_s} + k_{ijrs} \frac{\partial \psi_{1s}}{\partial x_s} \right. \\
 & \left. + \frac{\partial k_{ijrs}}{\partial h} (d^h \psi_2 + h U [A - 1] \psi_3) \frac{\partial u_r}{\partial x_s} \right. \\
 & \left. + \frac{\partial k_{ijrs}}{\partial A} d^A \psi_3 \frac{\partial u_r}{\partial x_s} + \frac{\partial k_{ijrs}}{\partial \alpha_i} \frac{\partial u_r}{\partial x_s} \right. \\
 & \left. - \frac{1}{2} \delta_{ij} \frac{\partial P}{\partial h} (d^h \psi_2 + h U [A - 1] \psi_3) \right. \\
 & \left. - \frac{1}{2} \delta_{ij} \frac{\partial P}{\partial A} d^A \psi_3 - \frac{1}{2} \delta_{ij} \frac{\partial P}{M \partial \alpha_i} \right] n_j = \frac{\partial T_{nj}}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \text{on } \Gamma_2 \quad \forall t \geq t_0 \quad (C12)
 \end{aligned}$$

for equation (5),

$$(\mathbf{u} \psi_2 d^h + \psi_1 h) \cdot \hat{n} = \frac{\partial \hat{u} h}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \text{on } \Gamma_4 \quad \forall t > t_0 \quad (C13)$$

For equation (13),

$$(\mathbf{u} \psi_3 d^A + \psi_1 h) \cdot \hat{n} = \frac{\partial \hat{u} A}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \text{on } \Gamma_4 \quad \forall t > t_0 \quad (C14)$$

for equation (14),

$$\psi_2(t_0) = \partial h_0 / \partial \alpha_i \quad \text{on } \Omega \quad \forall t \leq t_0 \quad (C15)$$

for equation (11), and

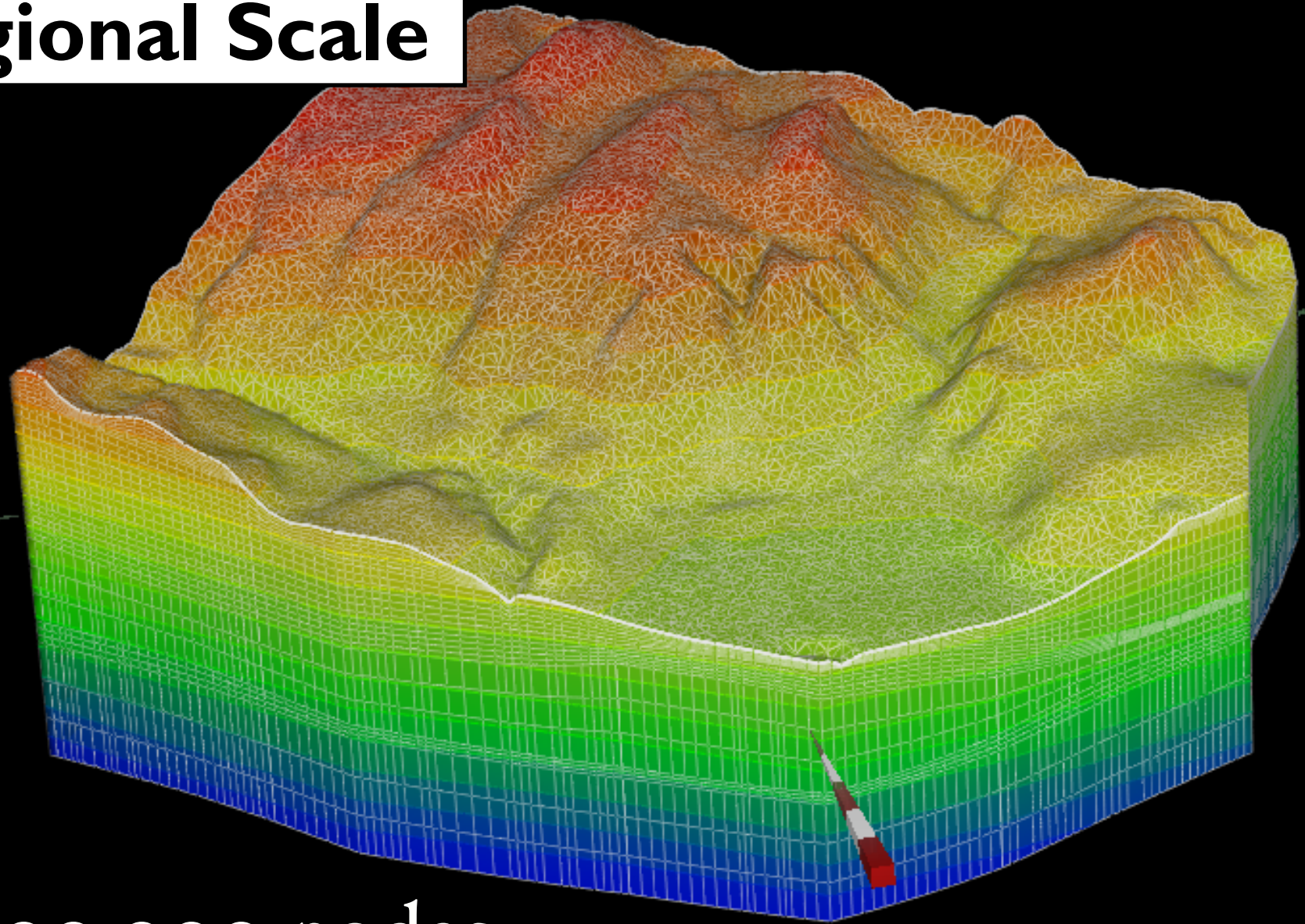
$$\psi_3(t_0) = \frac{\partial A_0}{\partial \alpha_i} \quad \text{on } \Omega \quad \forall t \leq t_0 \quad (C16)$$

for equation (12).

Equations (C4)–(C7) may be manipulated with respect to the dependent variable (i.e.,  $\psi_1$ ,  $\psi_2$ ,  $\psi_3$ , and  $\psi_0$ ) by the following operations: (1) integrate by parts for terms involving temporal derivatives, (2) use Green's first identity to



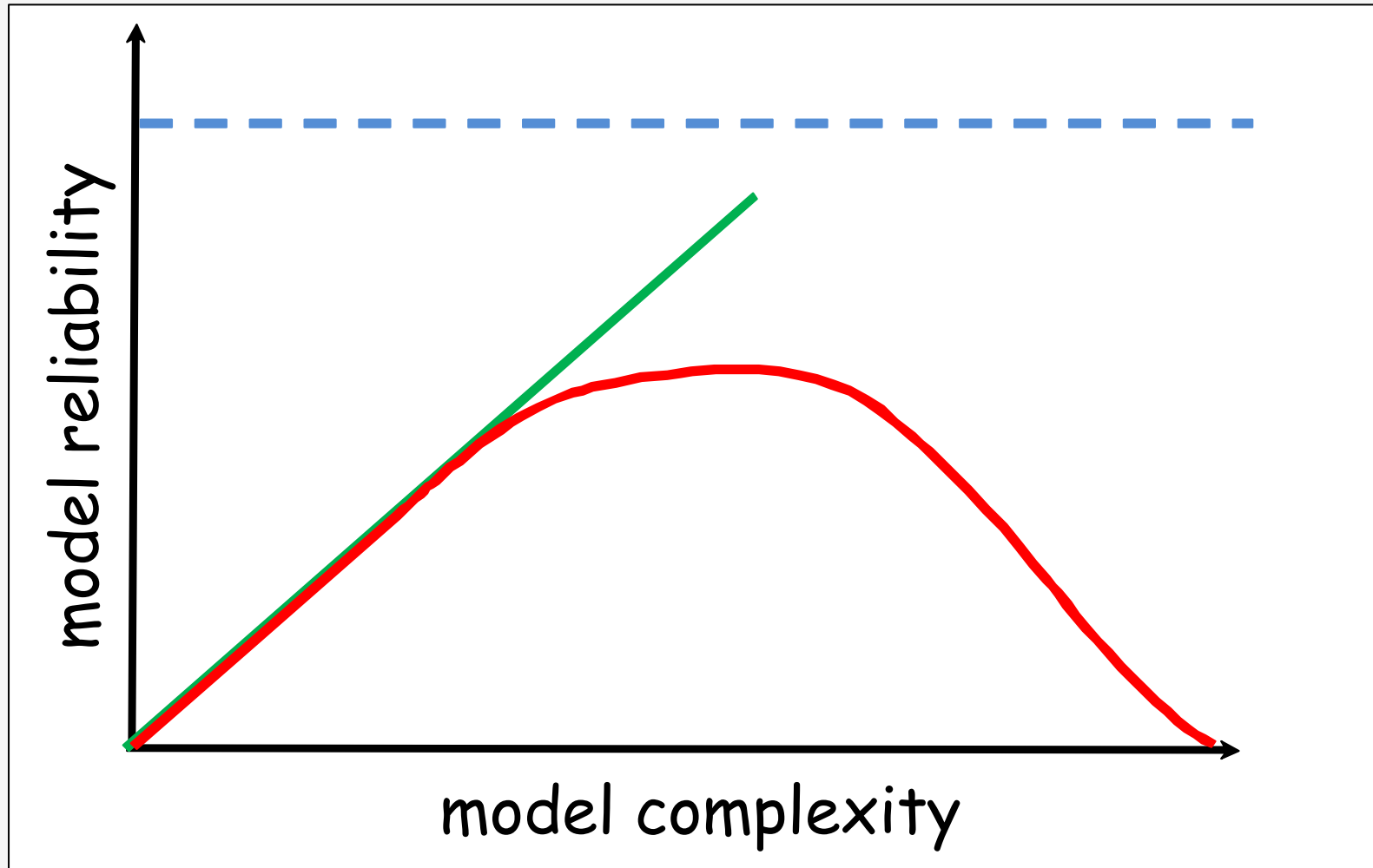
# Regional Scale



~ 400,000 nodes

# Model complexity

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Lesson learned - I

**“the natural world is a complex system and we cannot predict its behaviour  
nor should we behave as we can with any certainty”**

# Lesson learned - 2

- Models can be very complex**
- Demand more input than available**
- Need to be grounded in observational data to appreciate the complexity of groundwater systems**

# Moving time...

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO





# Example 2

**Some things just confuse...**

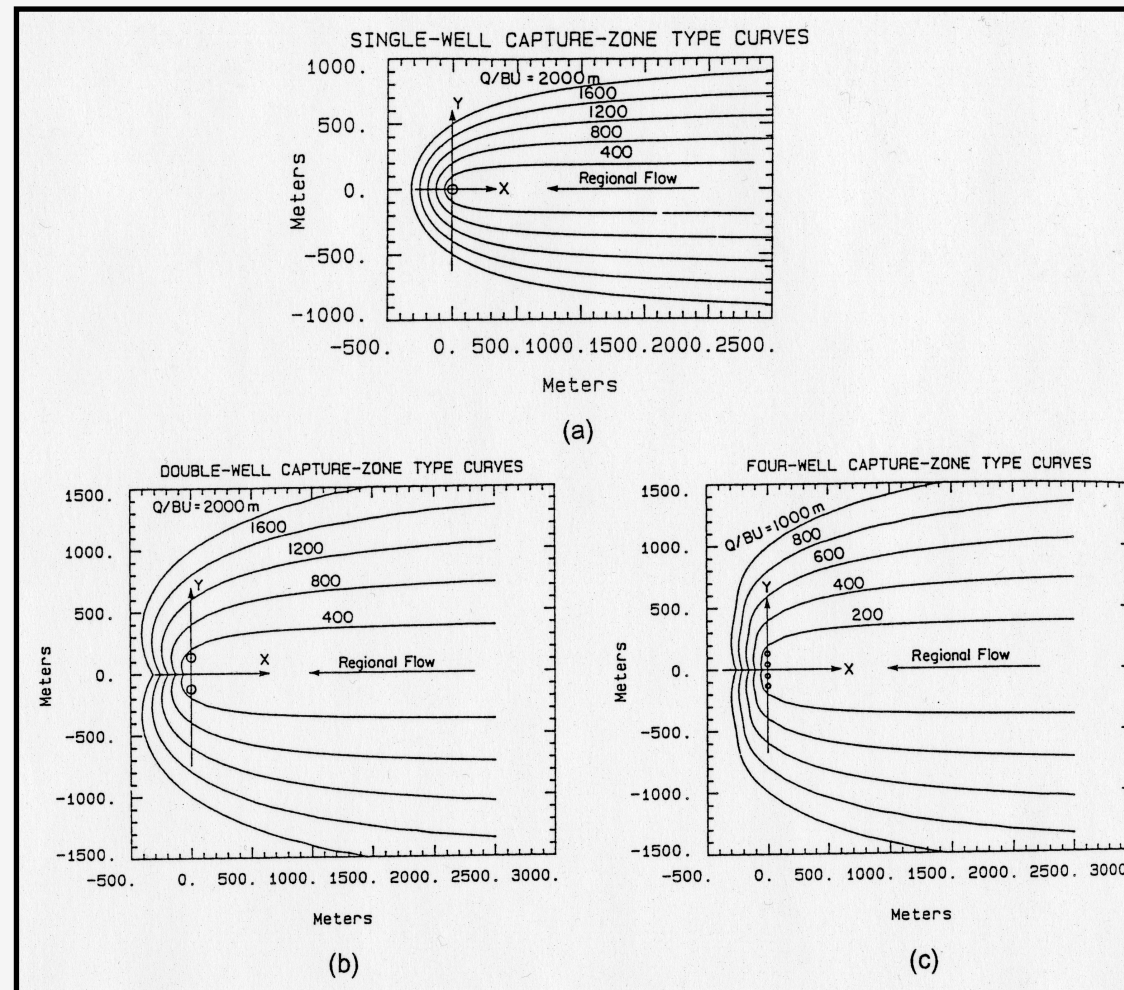


# Capture zones

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

## Capture Zones...

capture zone type  
curves & other  
tools exist to help  
design & optimize  
wells



(from Bedient et al., 1999)

# Dewatering systems

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO





# Dewatering System



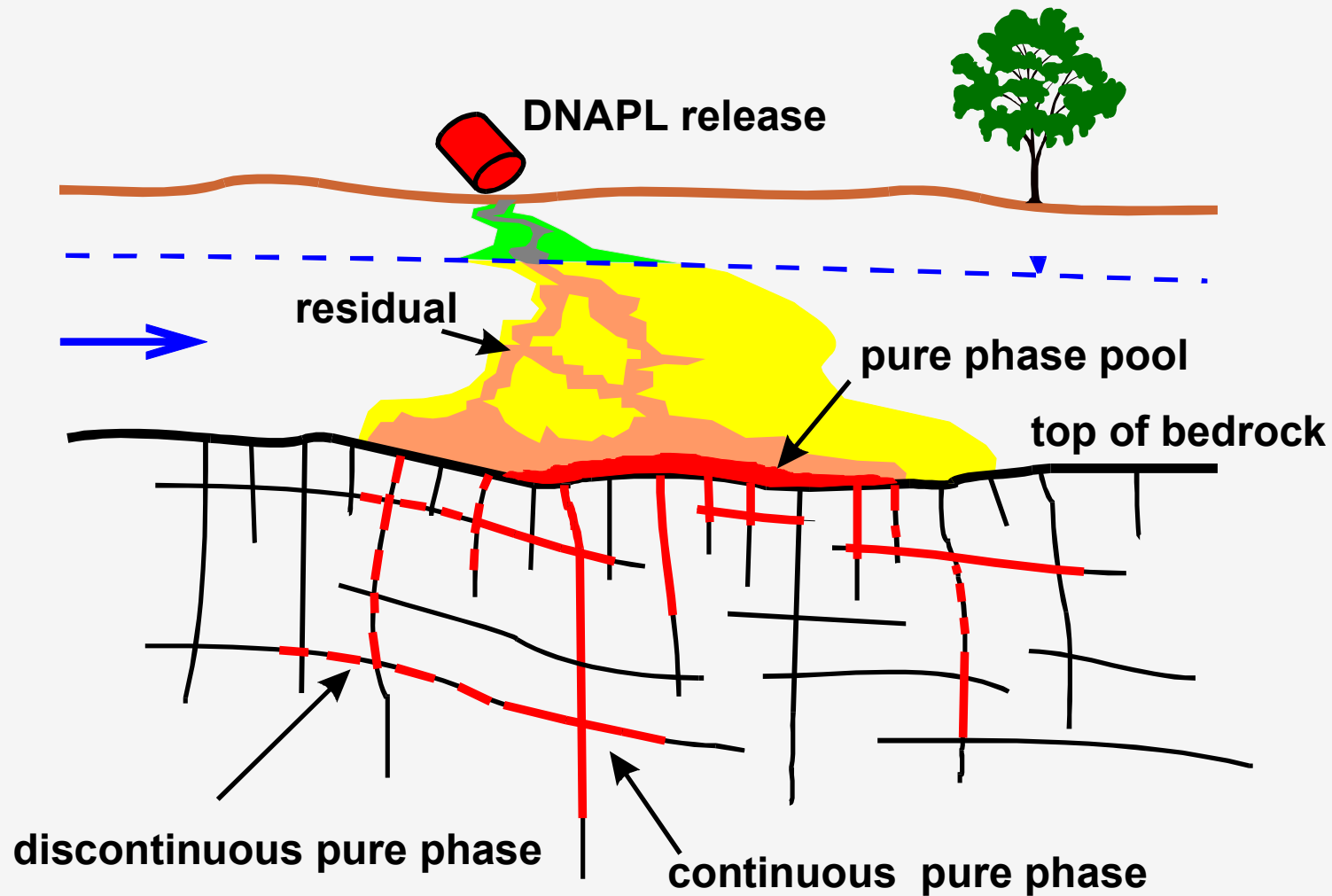


# Dewatering System



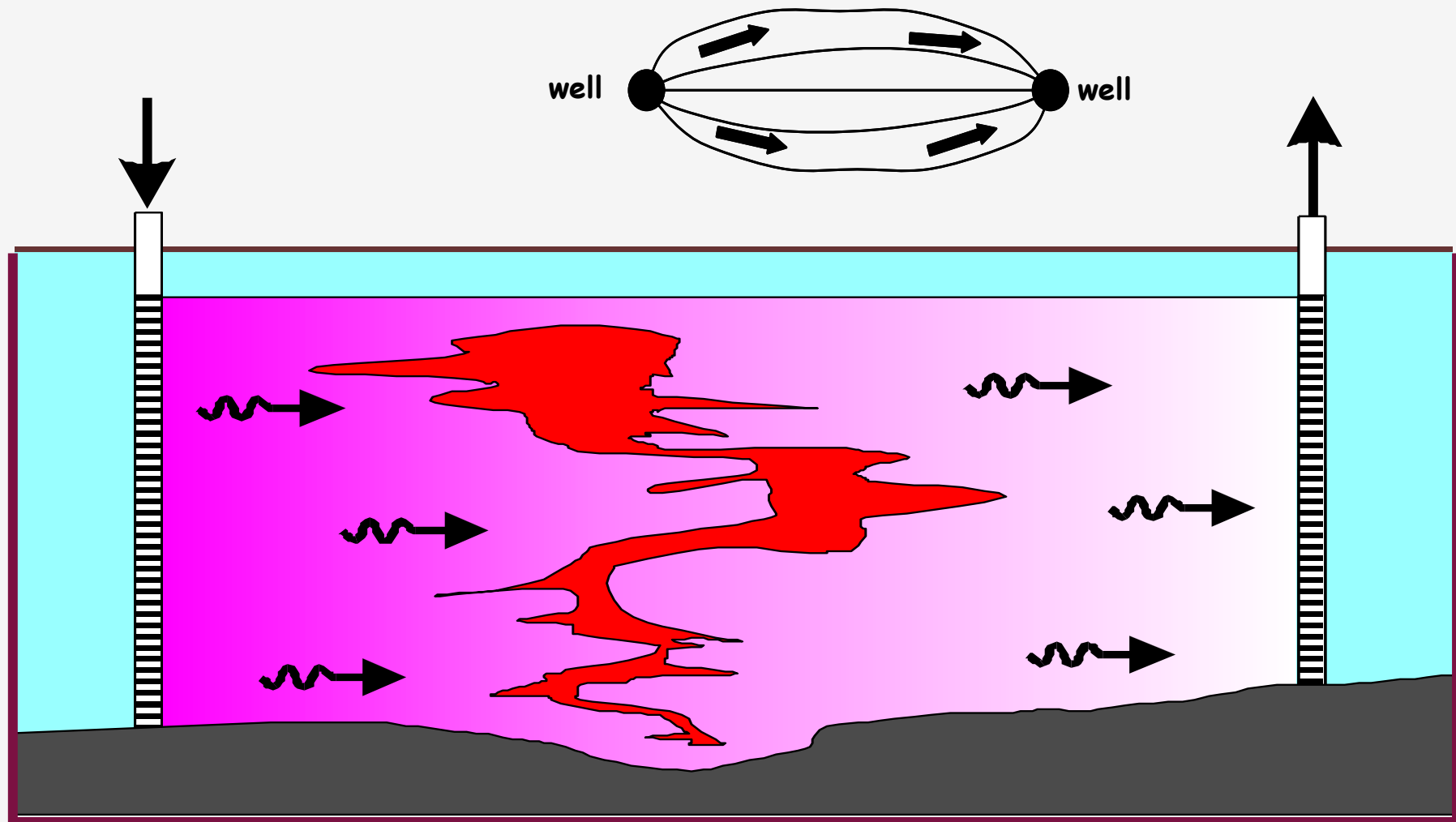
# Organic compounds

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

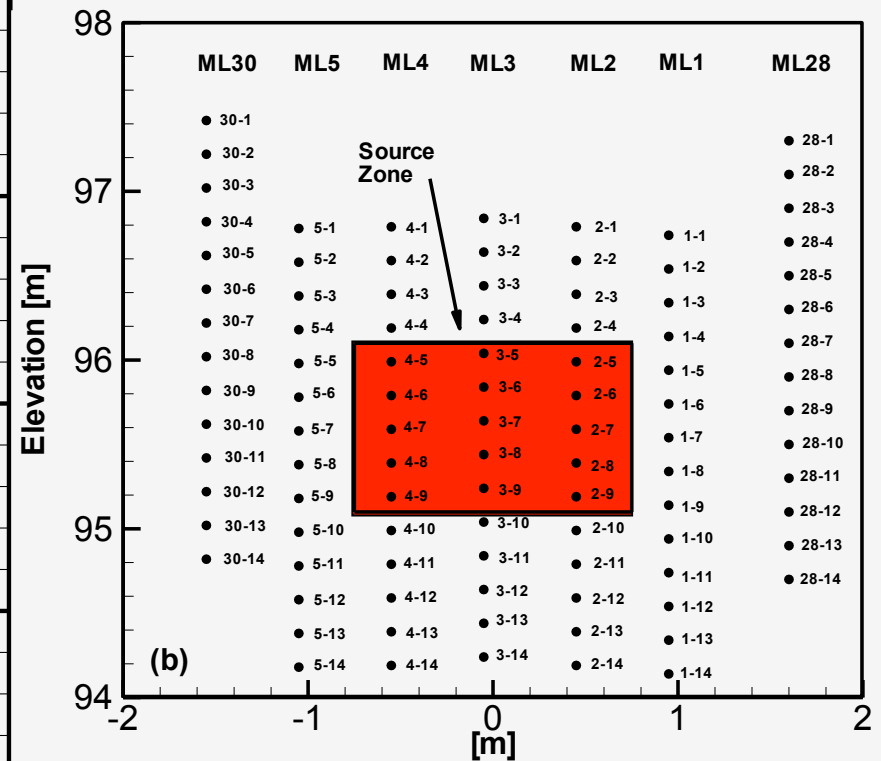
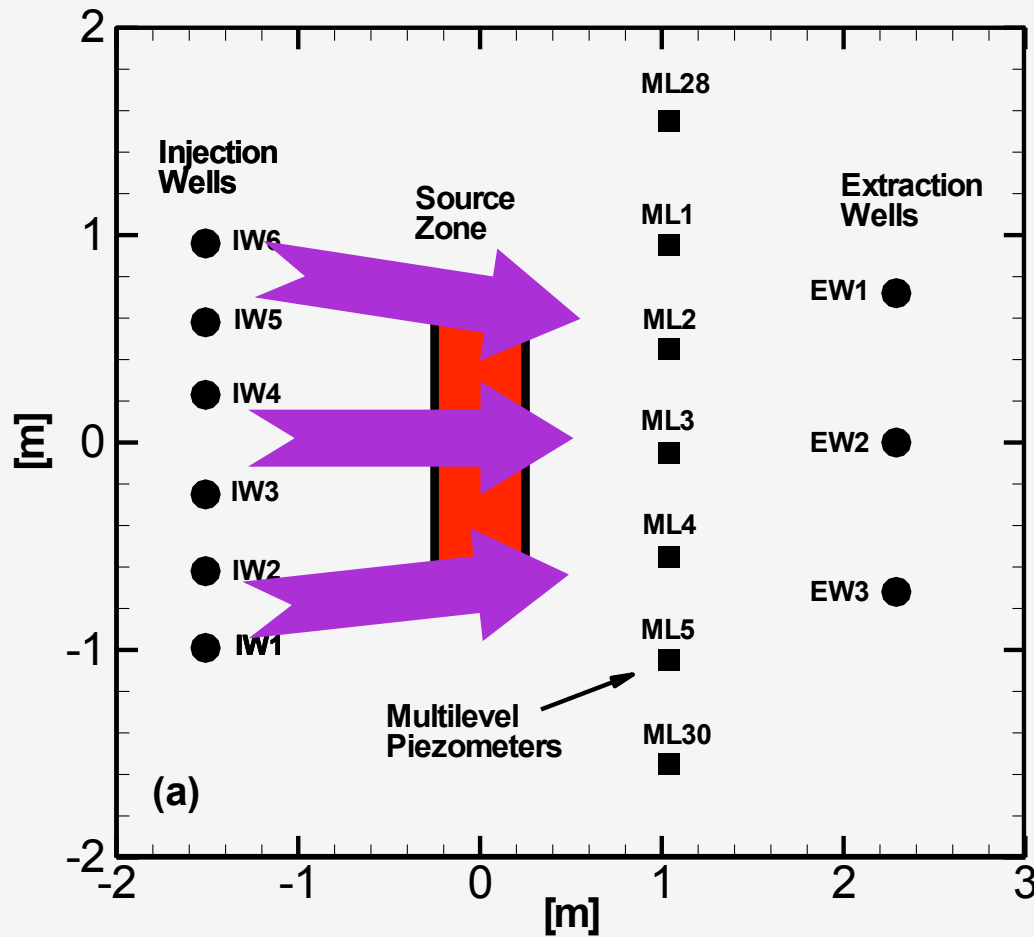


# GW Recycling

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# GW Recycling



from Thomson et al., 2007



# Mass Balance

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



**40% of the injected mass (+ by products) was recovered....**

# Lesson learned - 3

- Hard to engineer simple flow systems**
- Understanding groundwater flow is the key!**
- Transcends the practice**

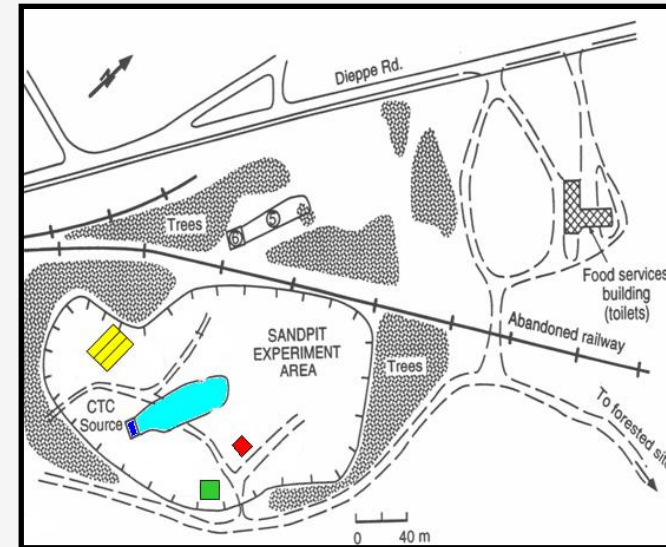
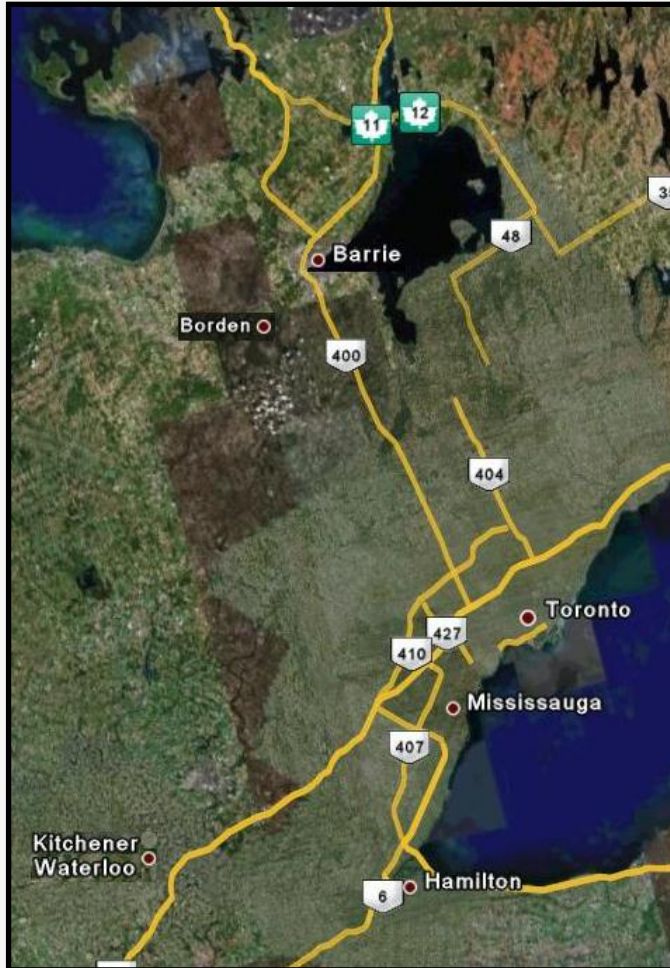
# Example 3

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

## Geology controls...

# CFB Borden

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



Porosity:	0.33
Bulk Density:	1.81 g/cm <sup>3</sup>
Hydraulic Conductivity:	7×10 <sup>-5</sup> m/s
Depth to Water Table:	varies, 0 - 1.5 mbgs
Hydraulic Gradient:	mean 0.0039
Groundwater Velocity:	0.091 m/day

# CFB Borden

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



**cm scale variations in hydraulic conductivity**



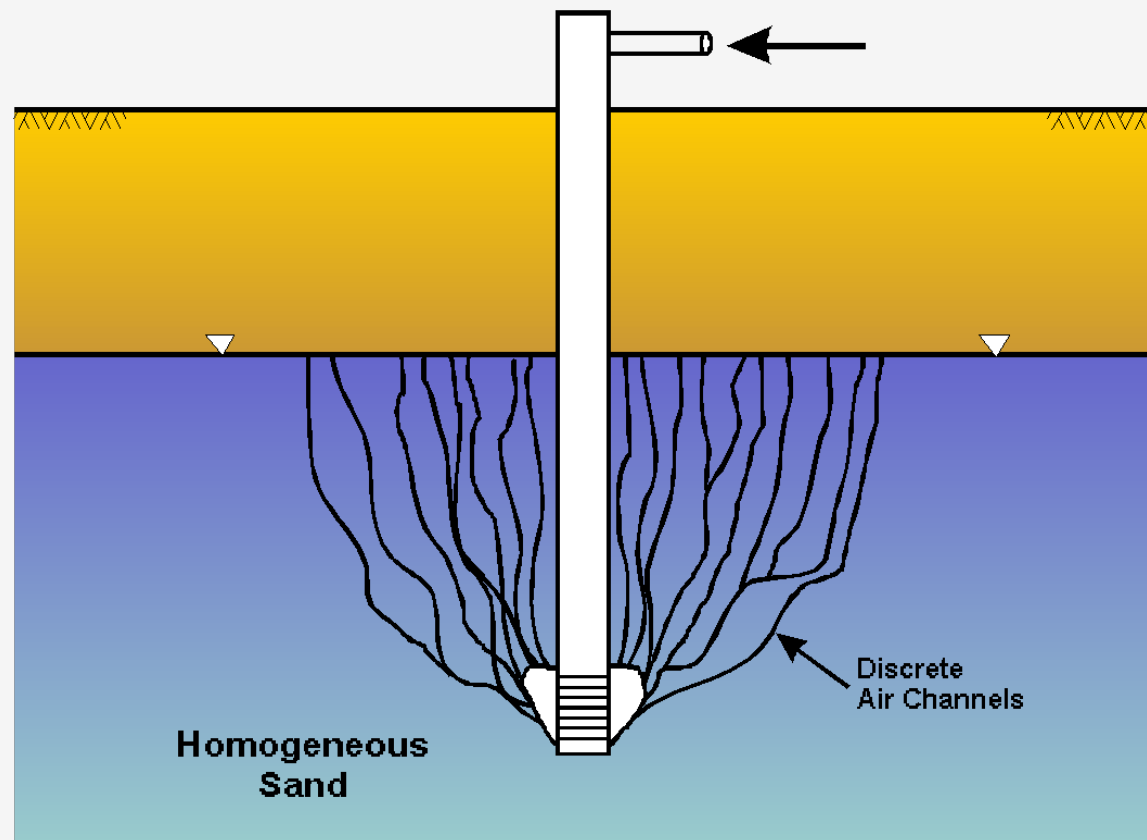
# In Situ Air Sparging



# Injection of air

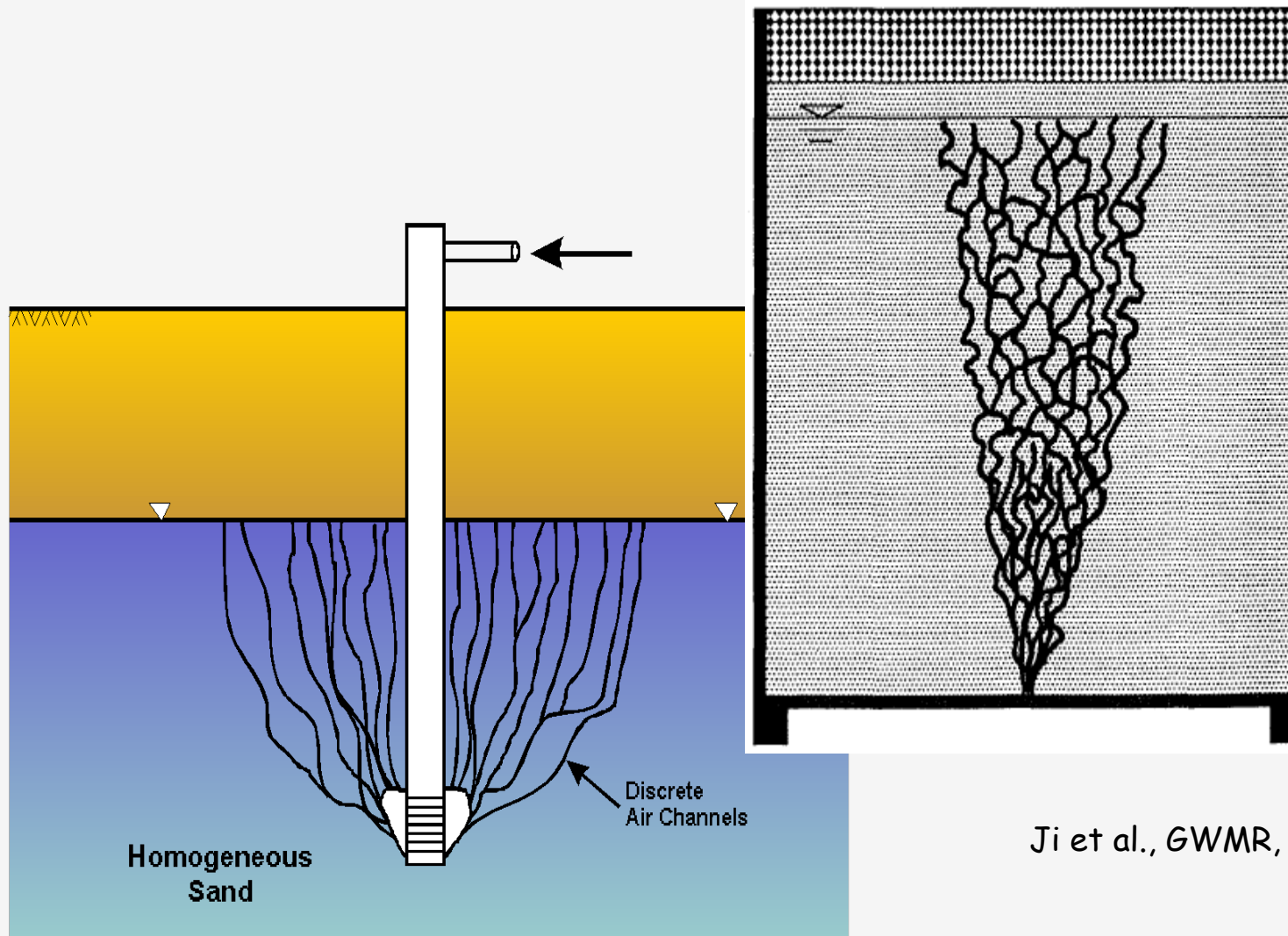
UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

## In situ air sparging



# Air channel distribution

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

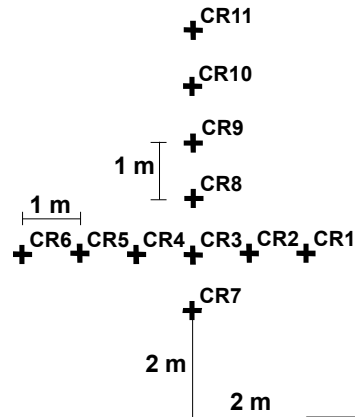


Ji et al., *GWMR*, 13(4): 115-126

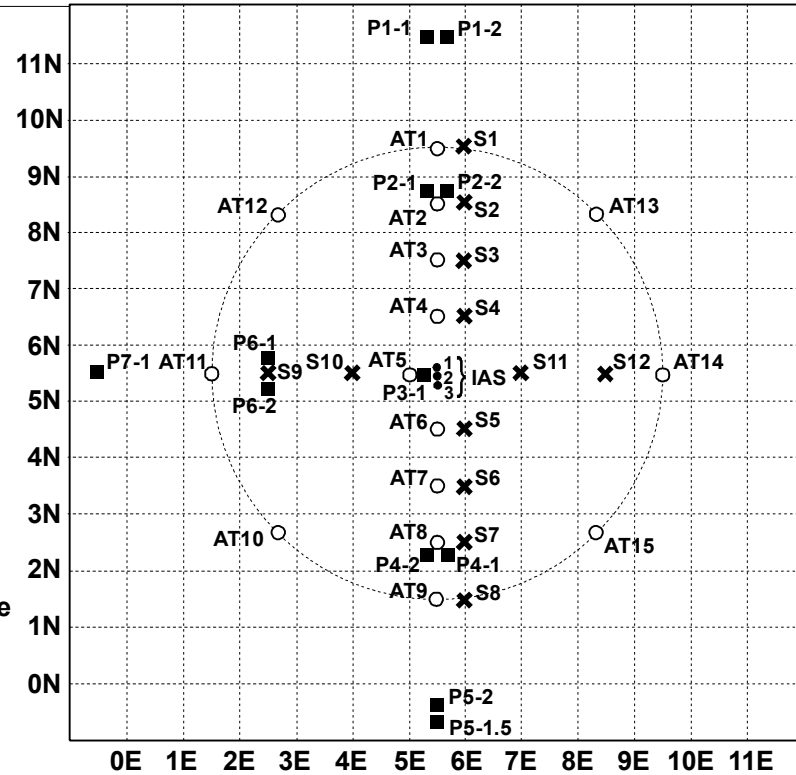
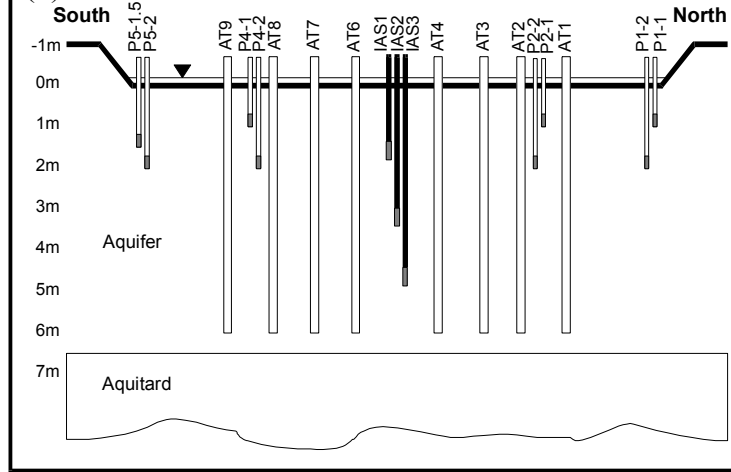


# Field Setup

(a)



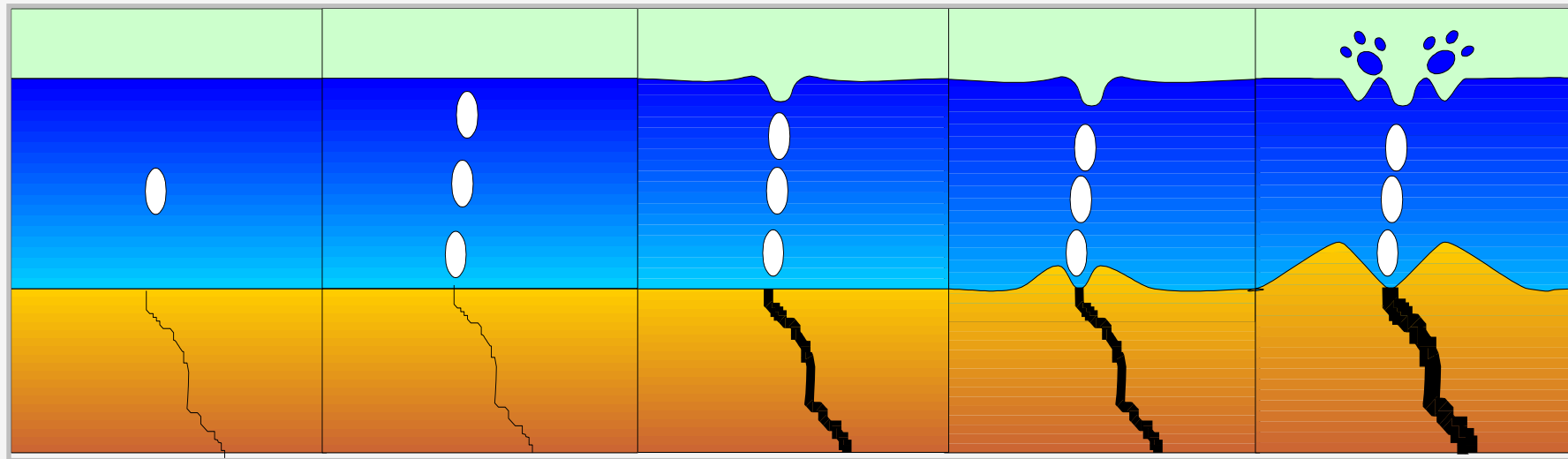
(b)



- IAS Injection Point
- 50 mm Access Tube
- 25 mm Piezometer
- × Profiling Location
- + Core Location

# Air channel descriptions

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



(a) Low/Periodic

(b) Medium

(c) High

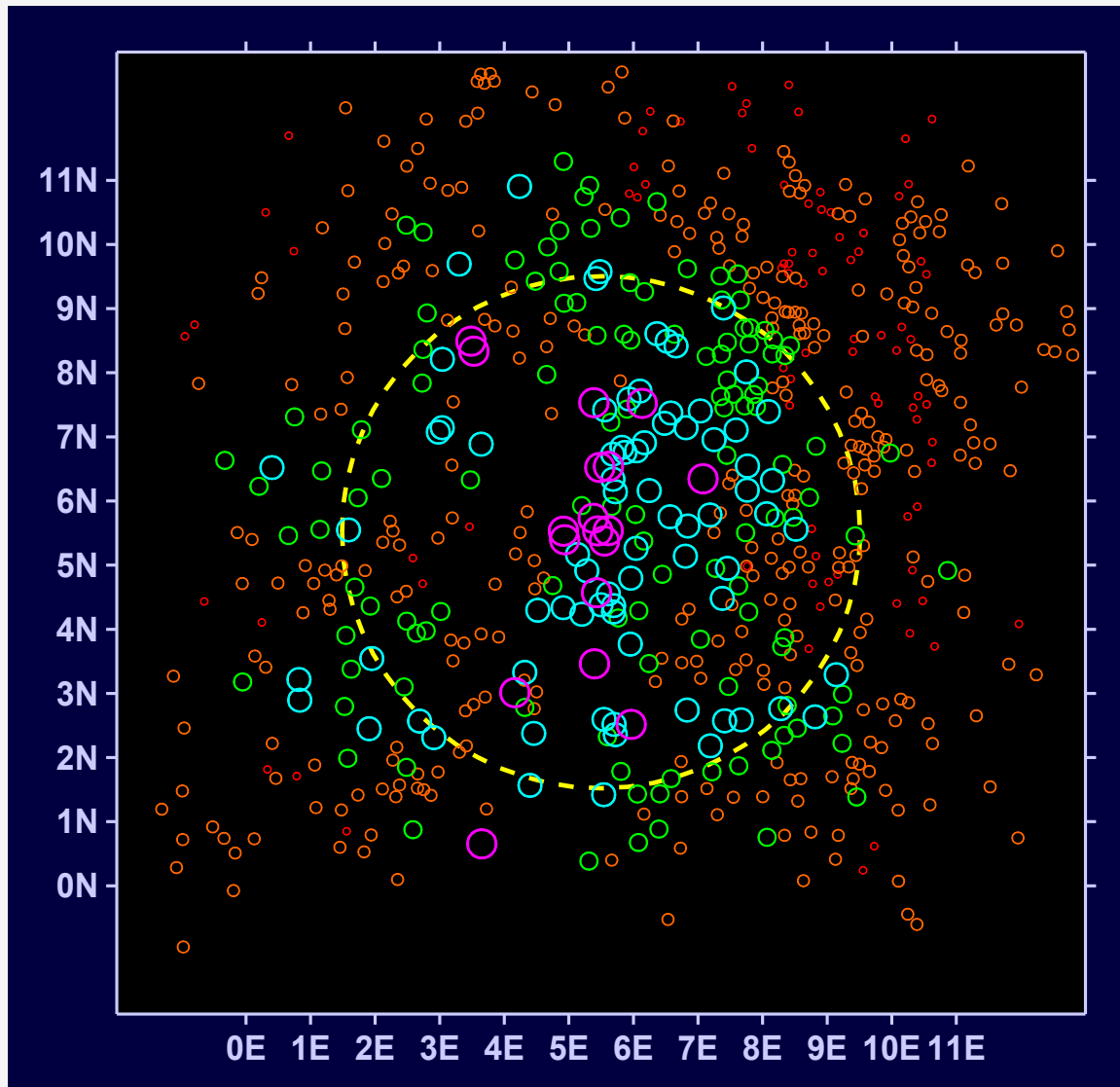
(d) Extreme

(e) Volatile

# Surface air channels

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

**Air  
channeling  
evident  
throughout**





# Lesson learned - 4

- Subtle changes in sediment structure control many important processes**
- Be prepared for the unexpected & don't be surprised**

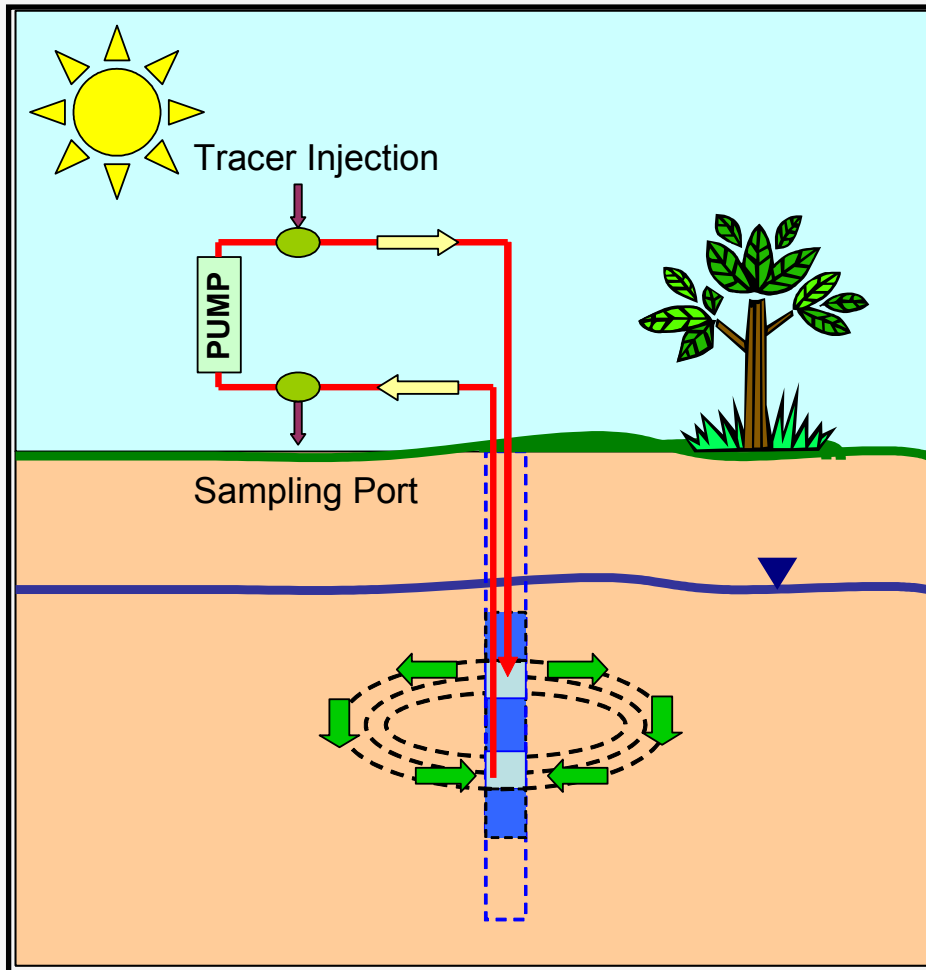
# Example 4

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

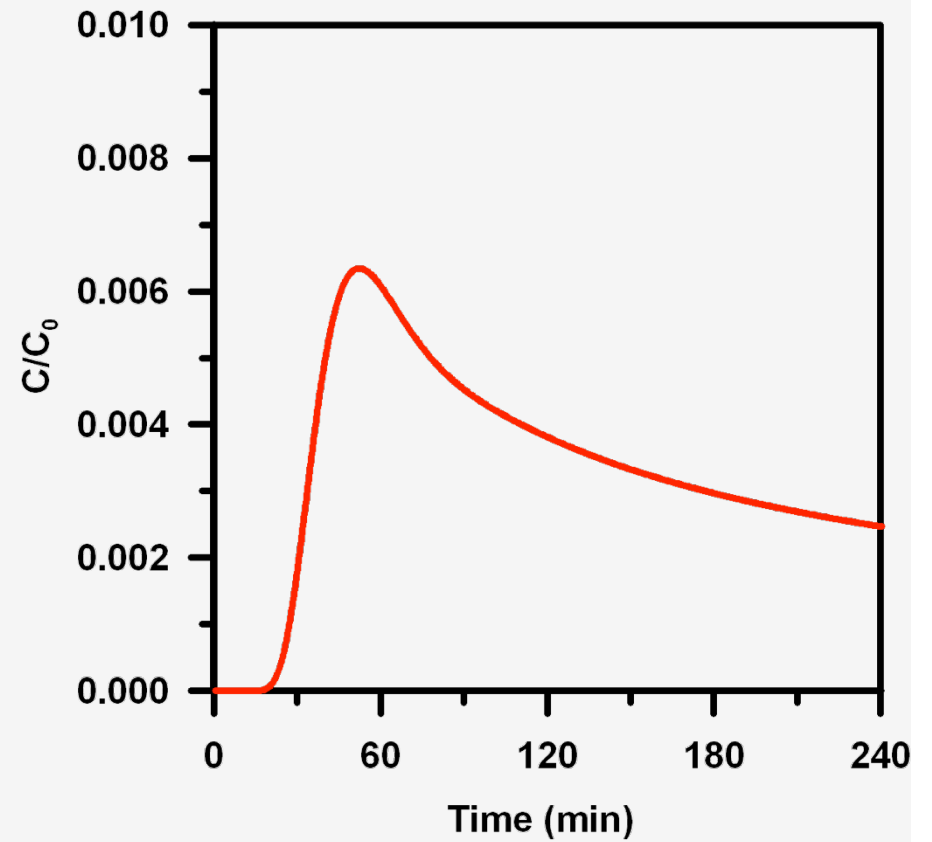
**Good ideas can stall...**

## **Dipole Flow and Reactive Tracer Test (DFRTT) for Aquifer Parameter Estimation**

Adaption of some early work by  
from Kabala and co-workers

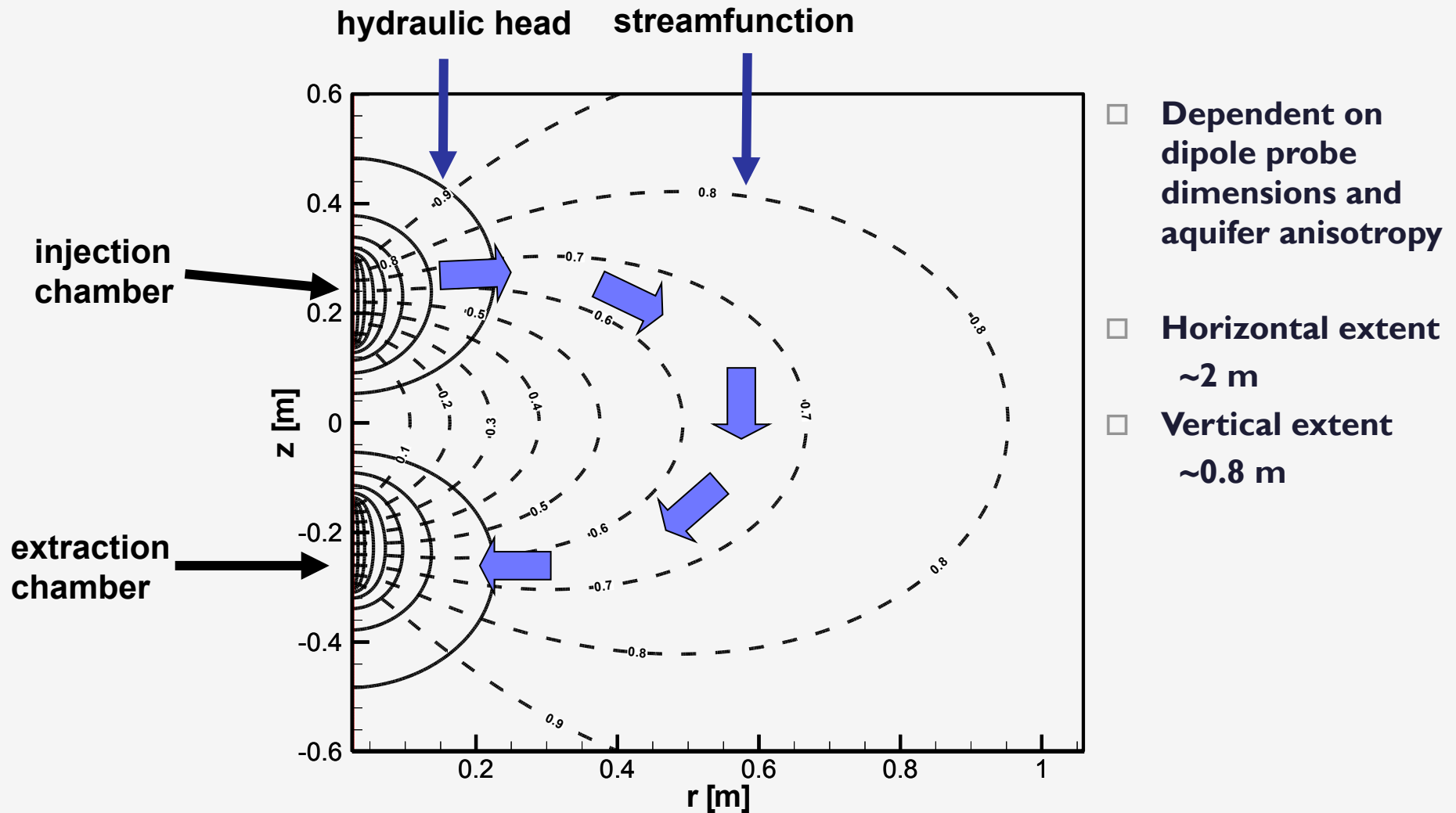


Breakthrough curve at  
sampling port



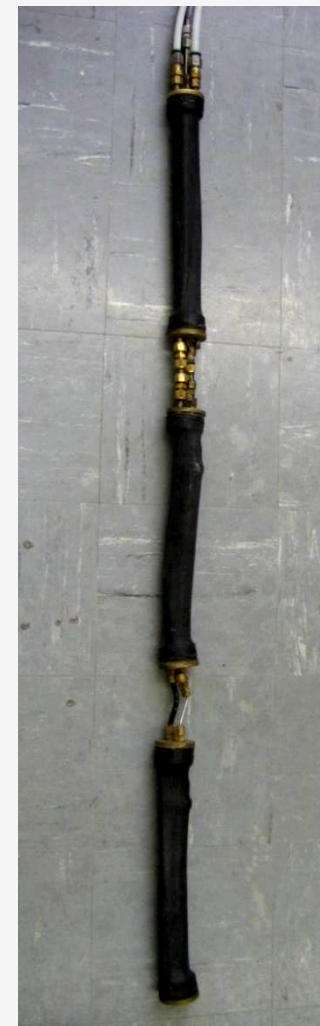
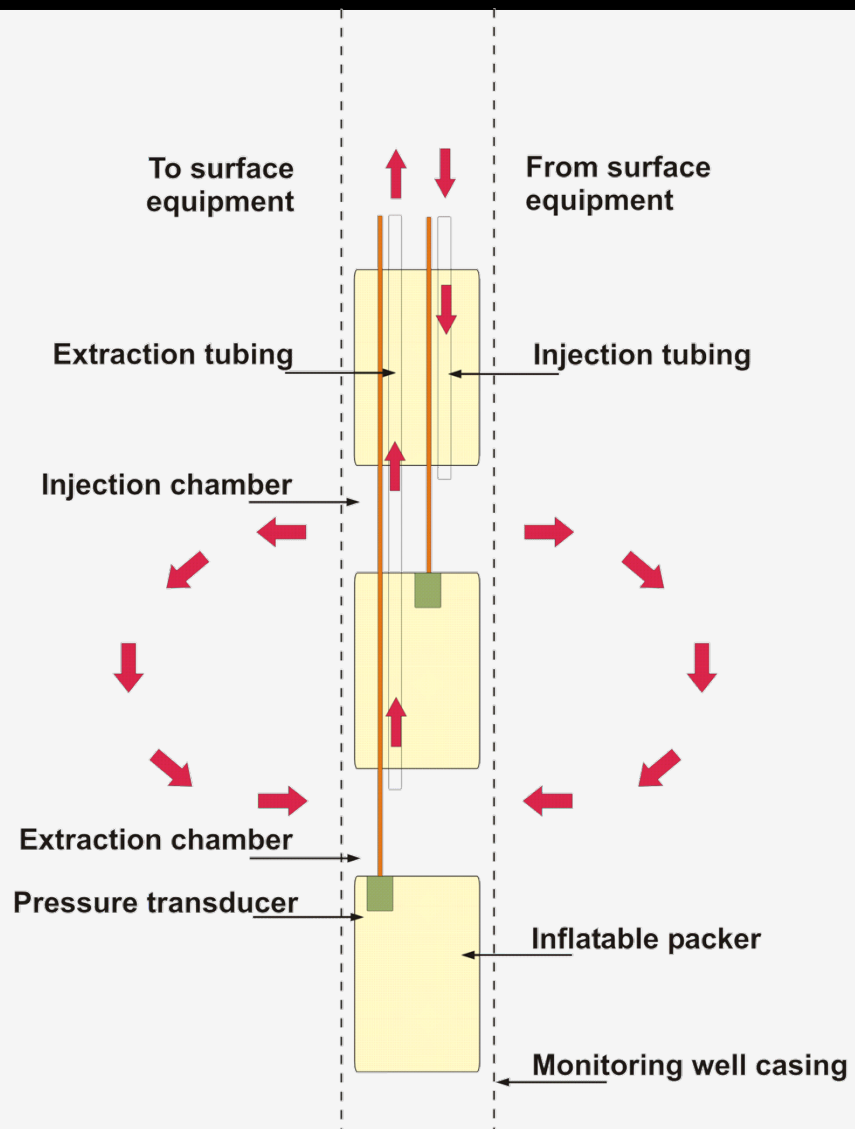


- Hydraulic conductivity (K)**
- Biodegradation properties**
- Oxidation/reduction capacity**
- Ion exchange capacity**
- Sorption properties**



# DFRTT

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



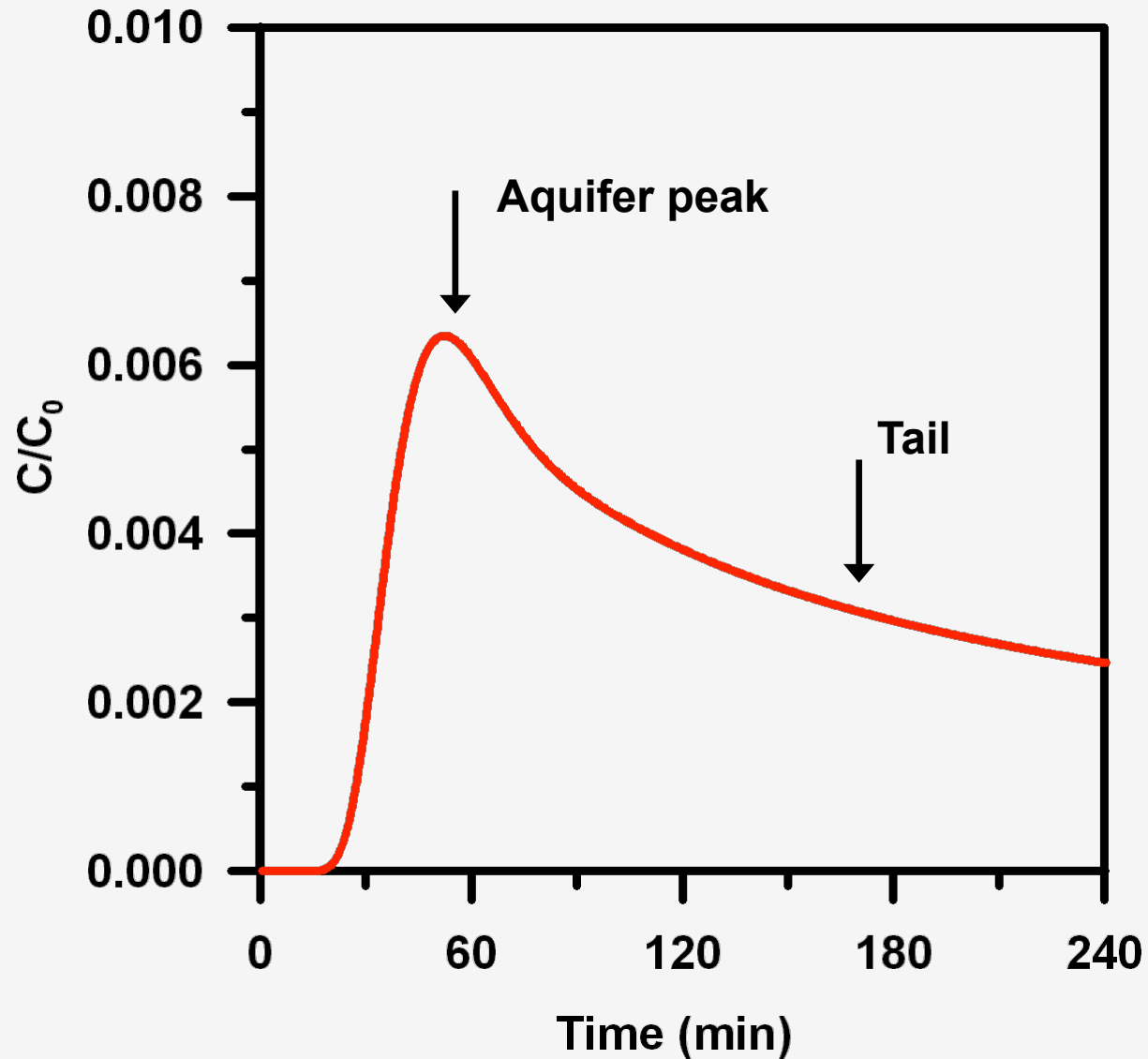
# DFRTT

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

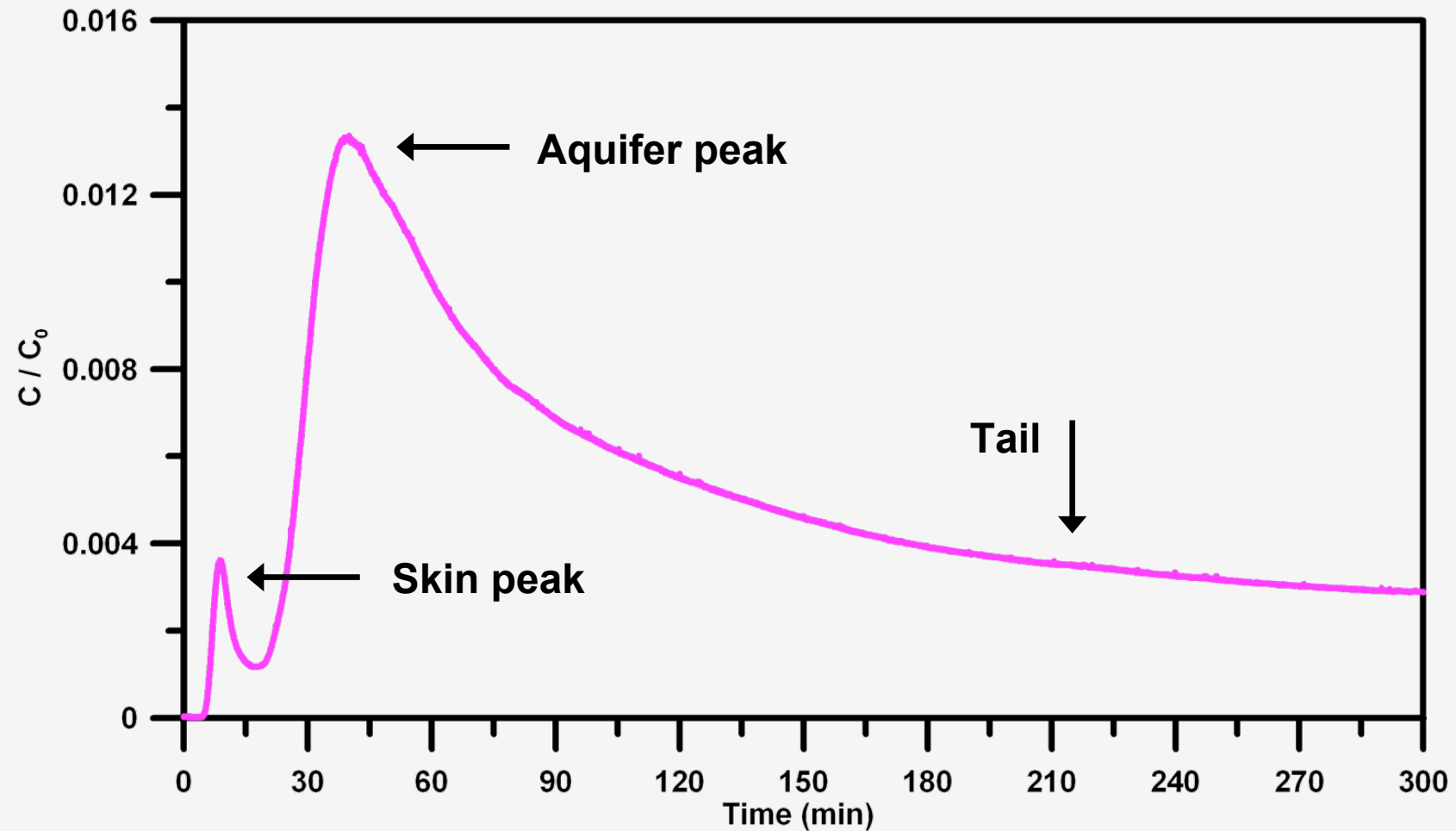


# Expected Behaviour

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

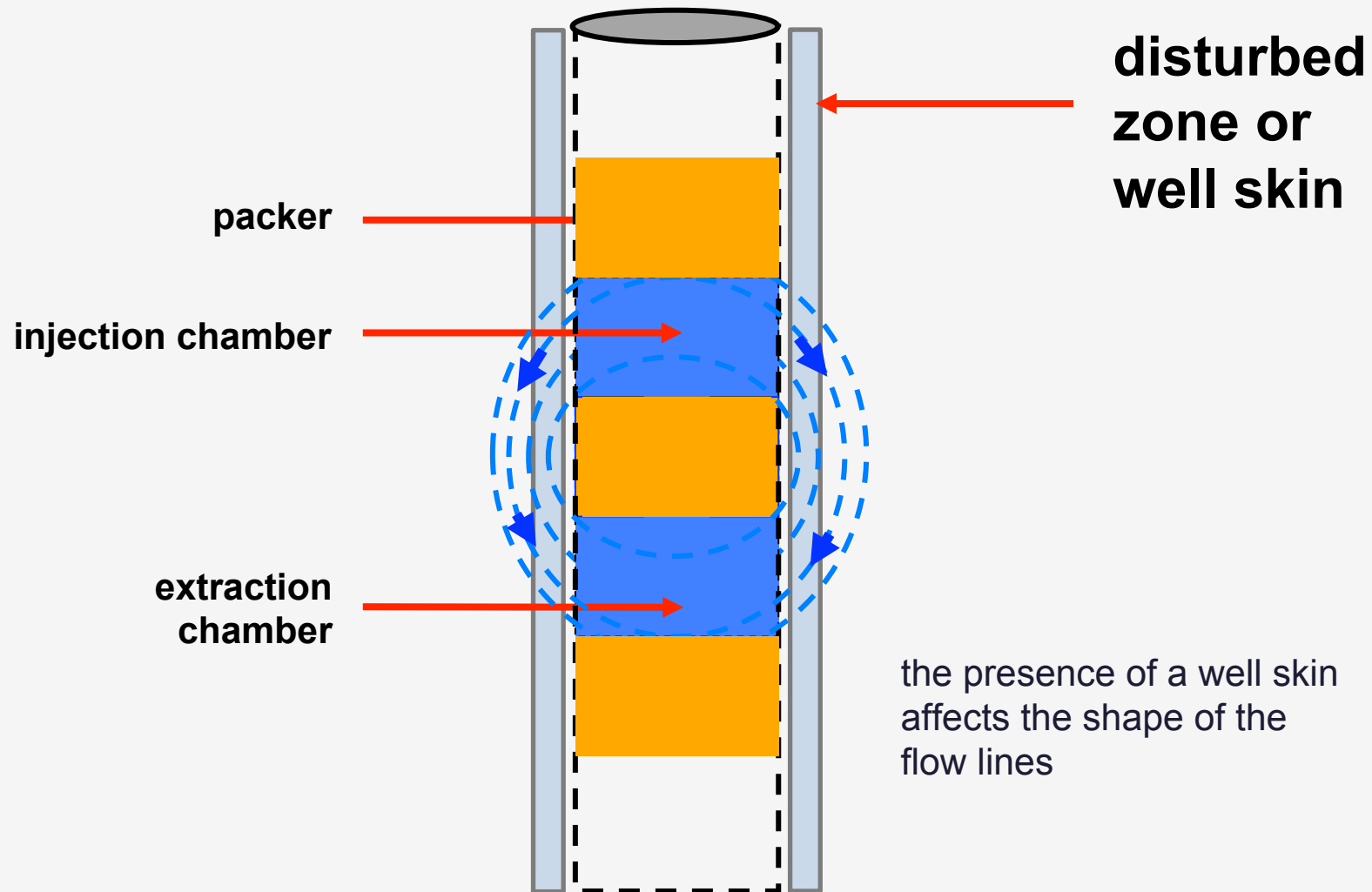


# Observed behaviour

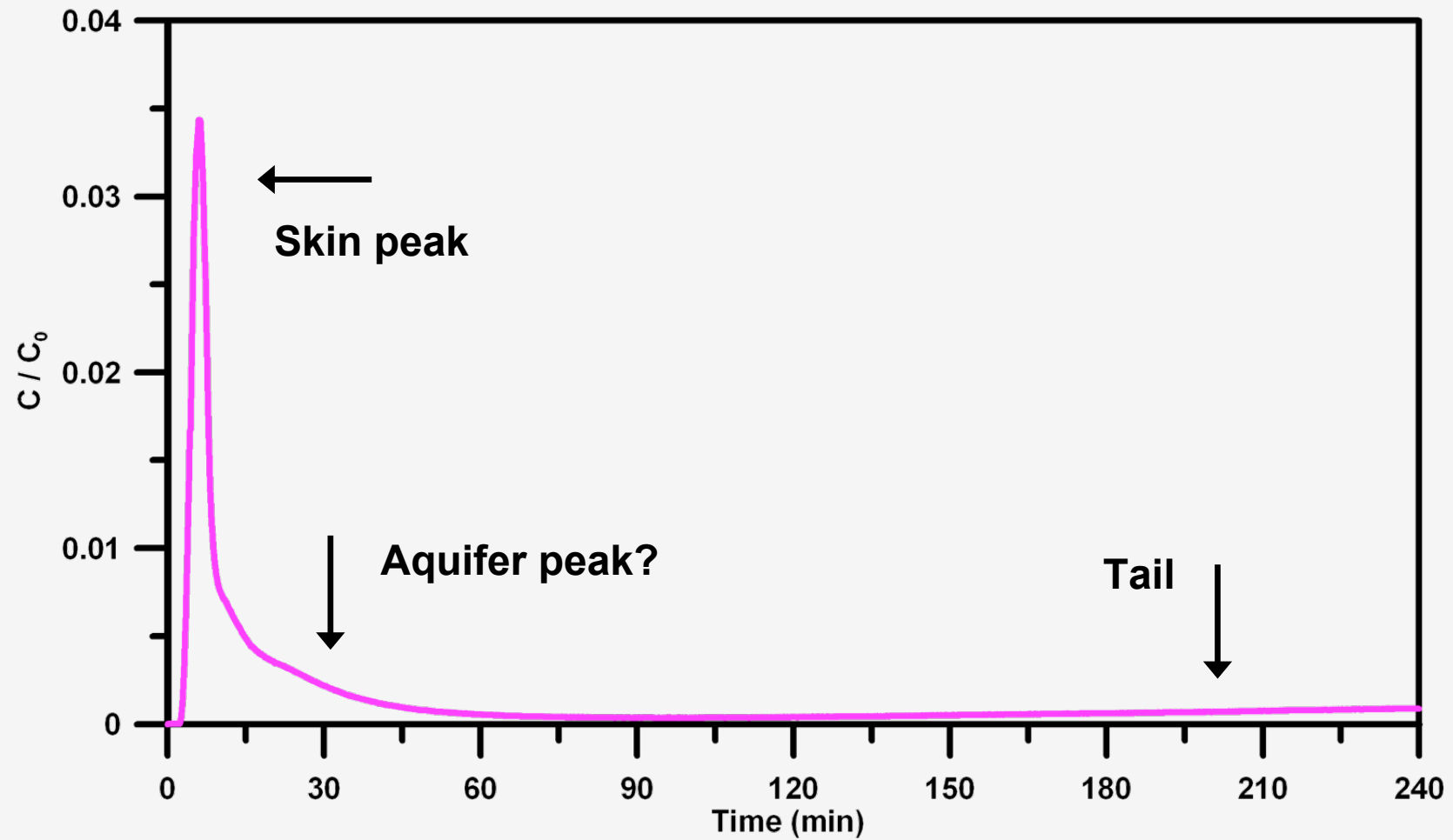


# Well skin

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

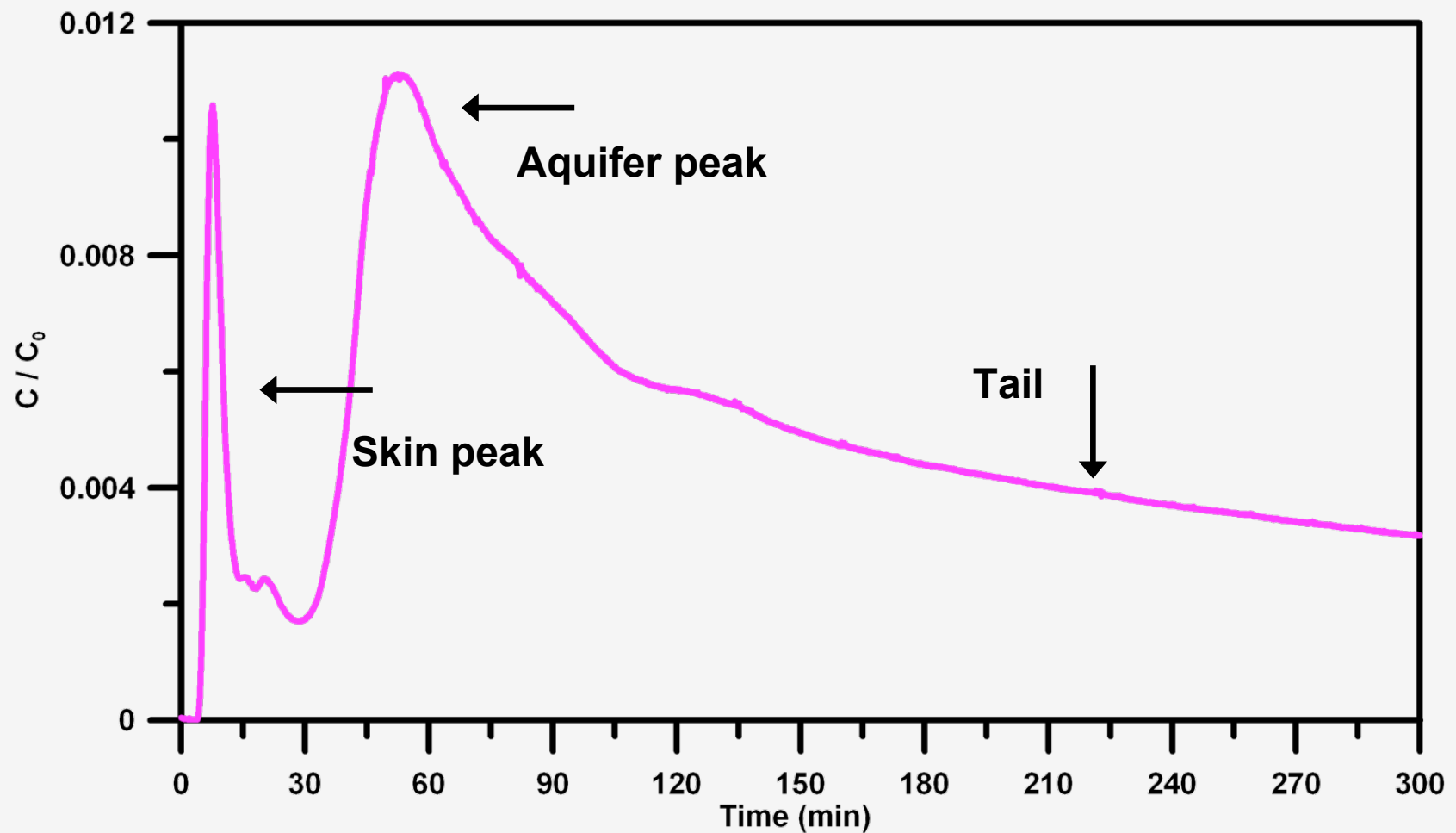


# Observed behaviour



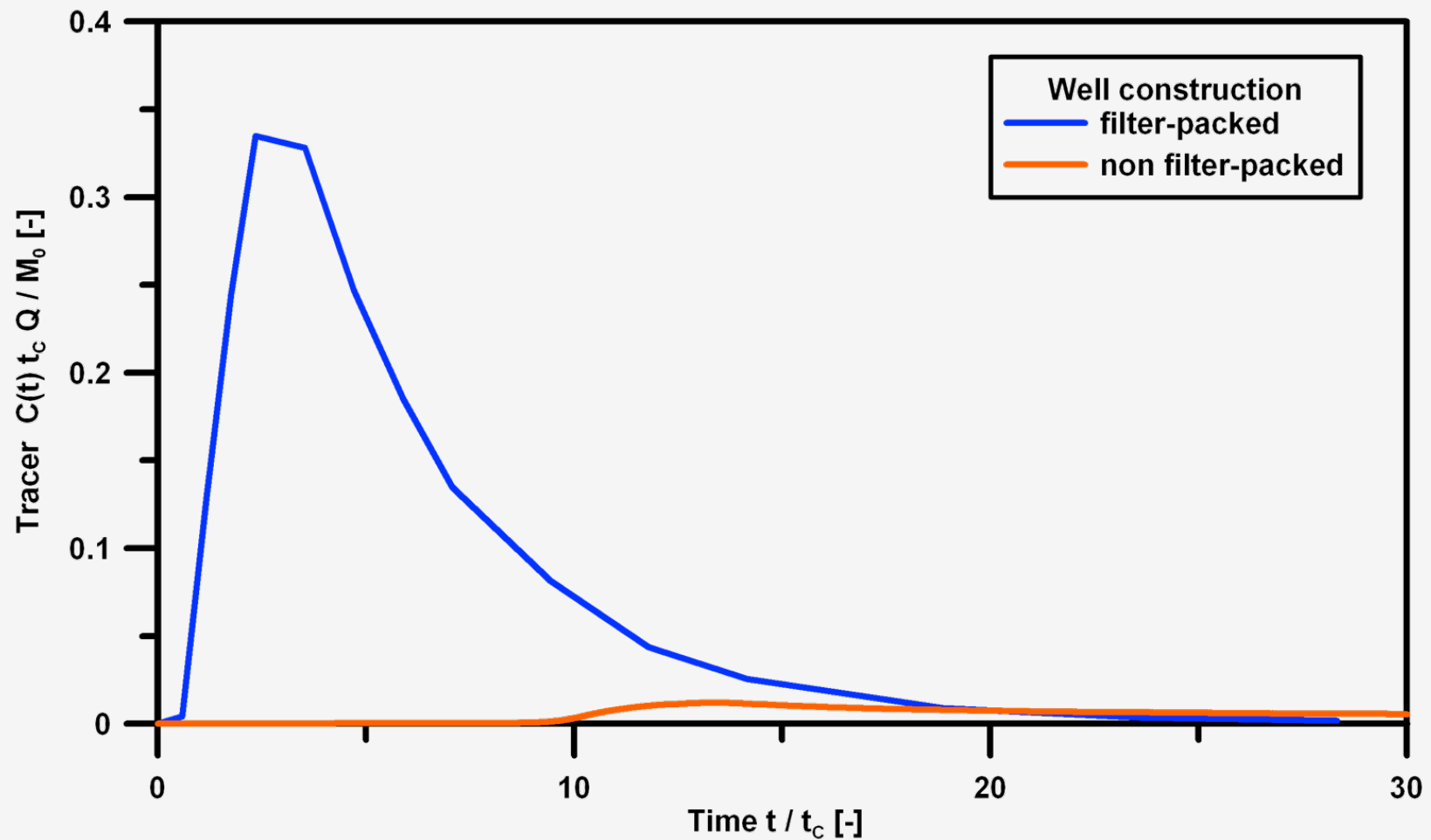


# Observed Behaviour



# Filter packed wells

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Velocity in well skin

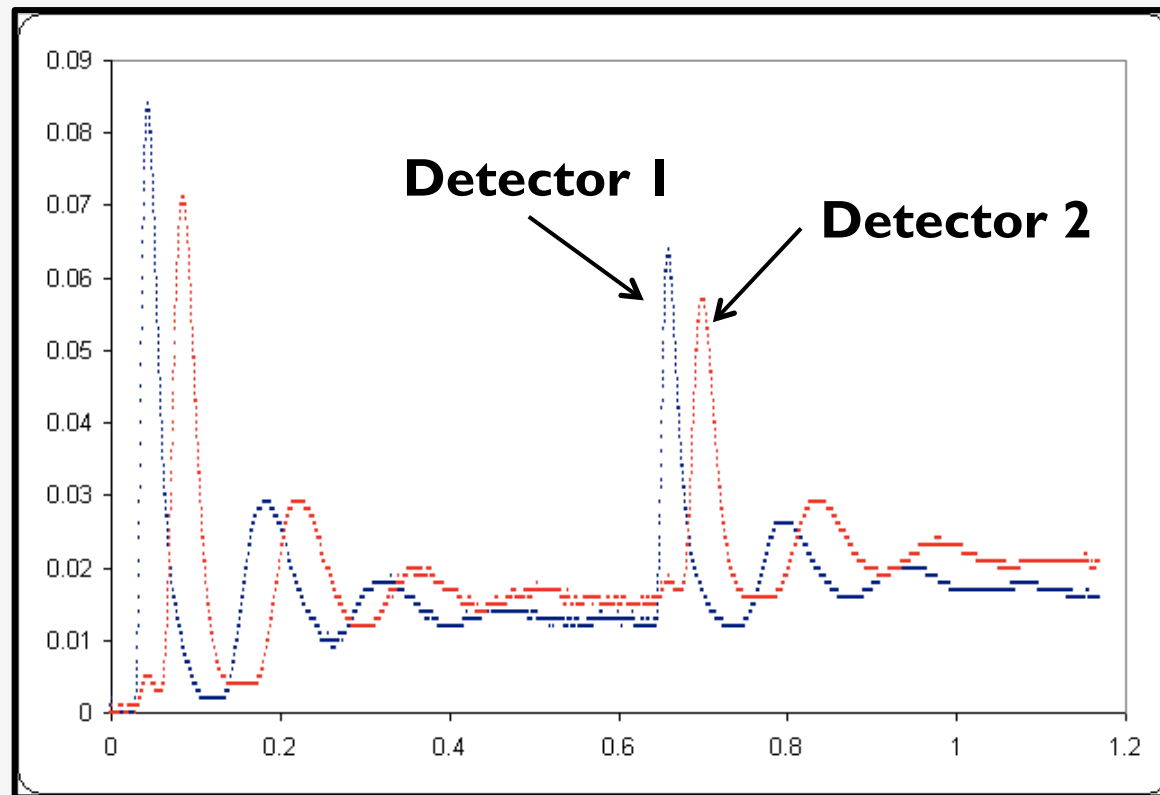
UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



- Conductivity detectors**
- Relate arrive to velocity**

# Velocity in well skin

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

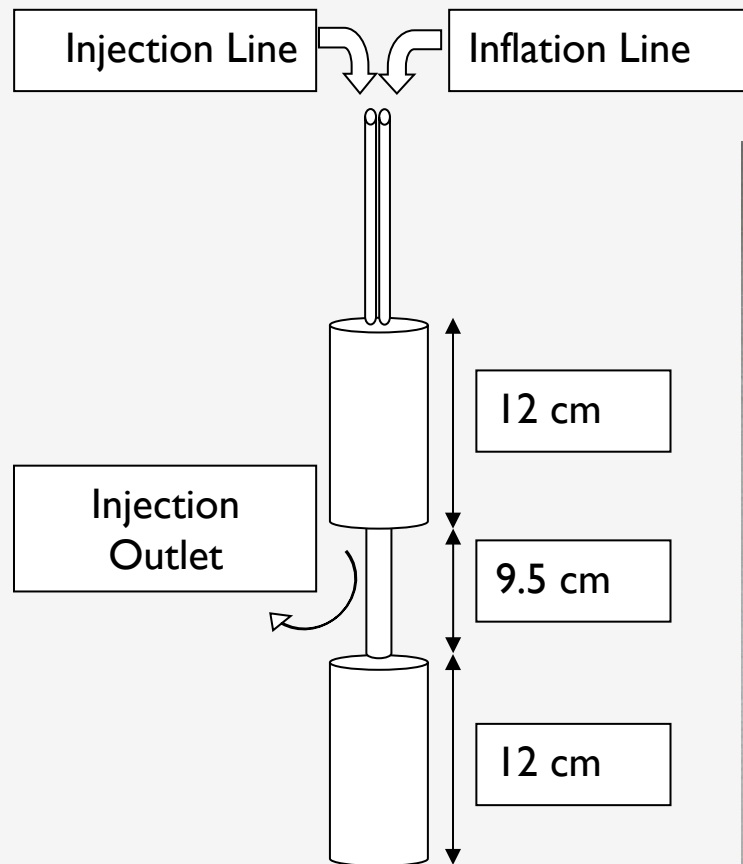


**~100 m/day!**

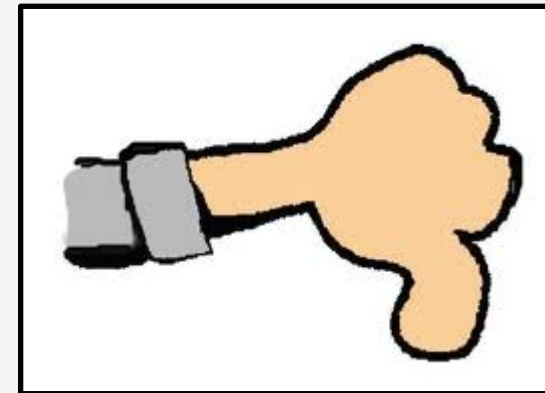


# Alterations to the well skin

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



**Added various  
drilling muds  
to temporary  
seal the skin**



# Lesson learned - 5

- Simple things are hard to change**
- Cannot engineer the system!**

# Example 6

**Be patient...**

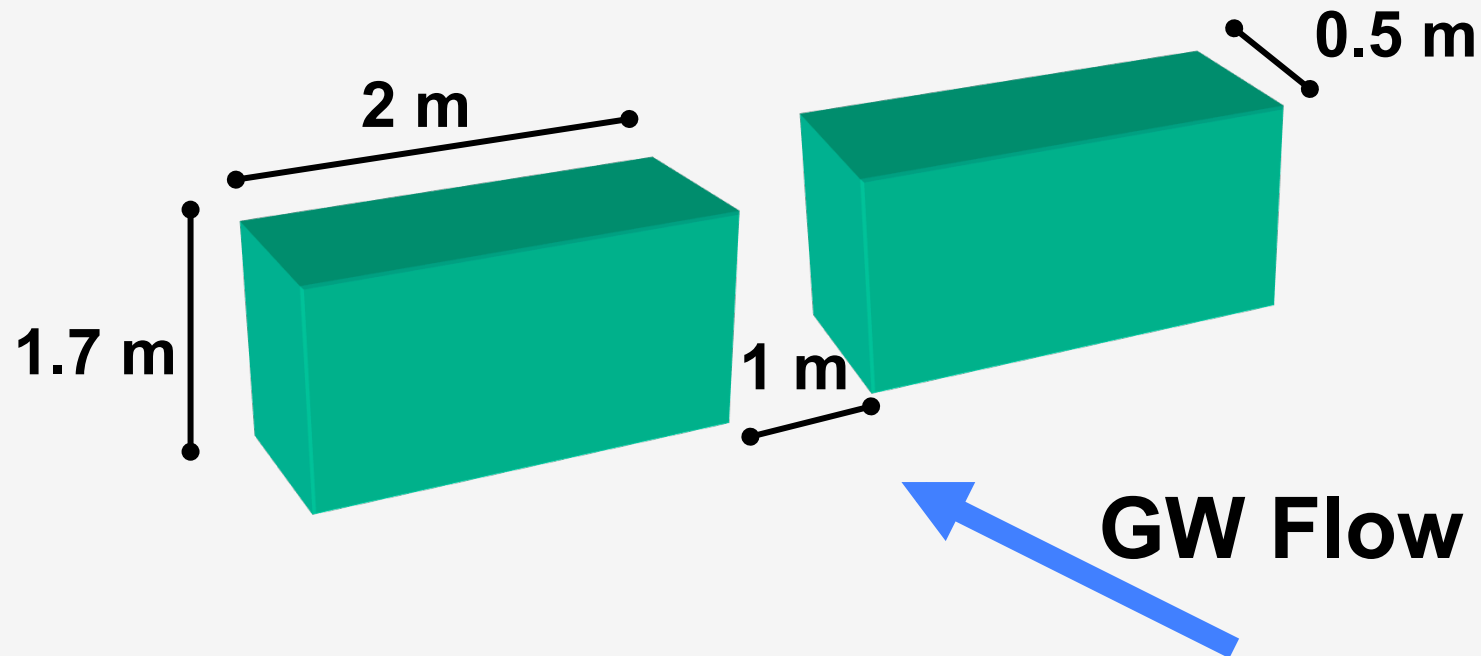
**good things will happen!**

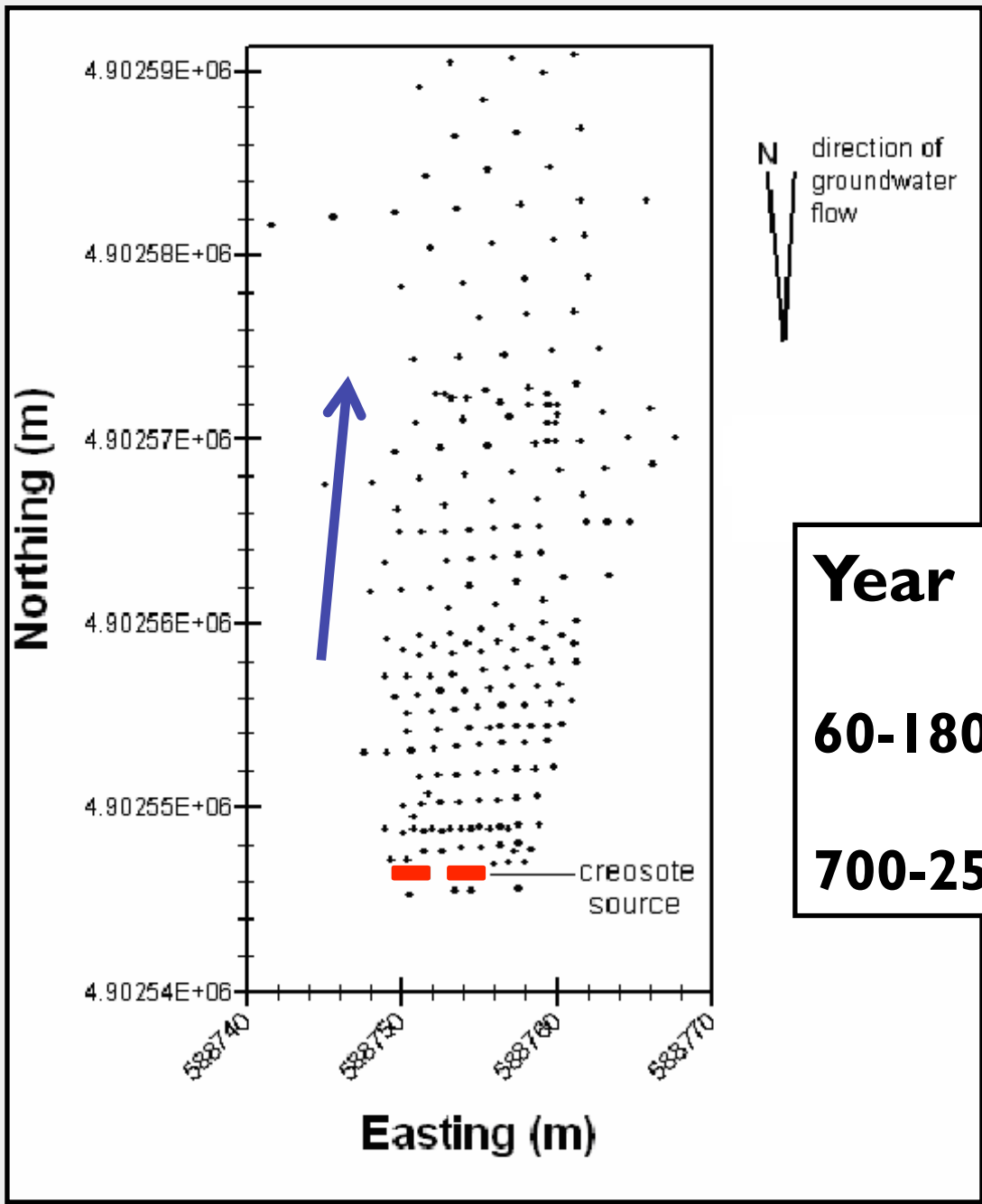


# Contaminant treatment

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

Coal tar creosote was emplaced below the water table in August 1991 (Year 0)



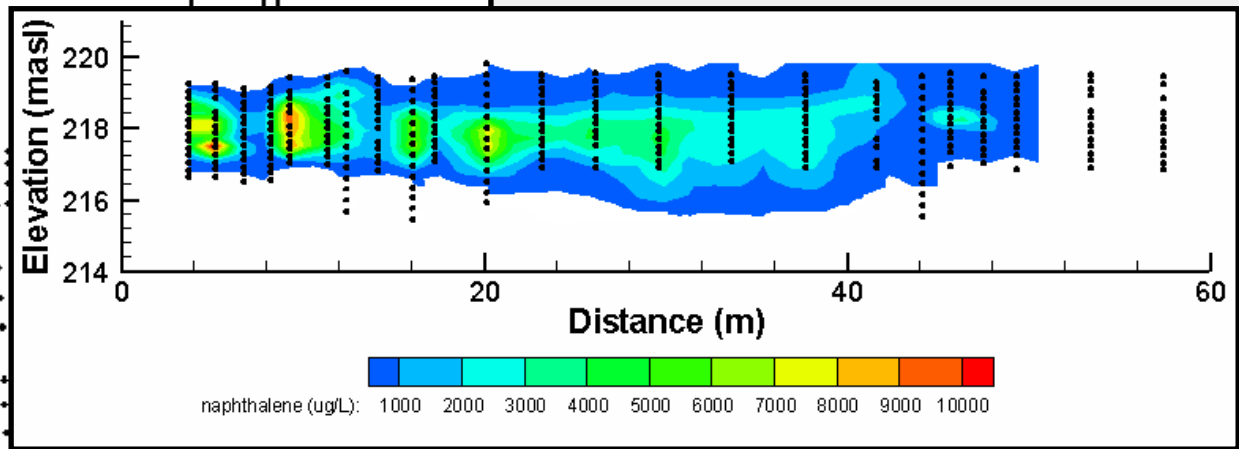
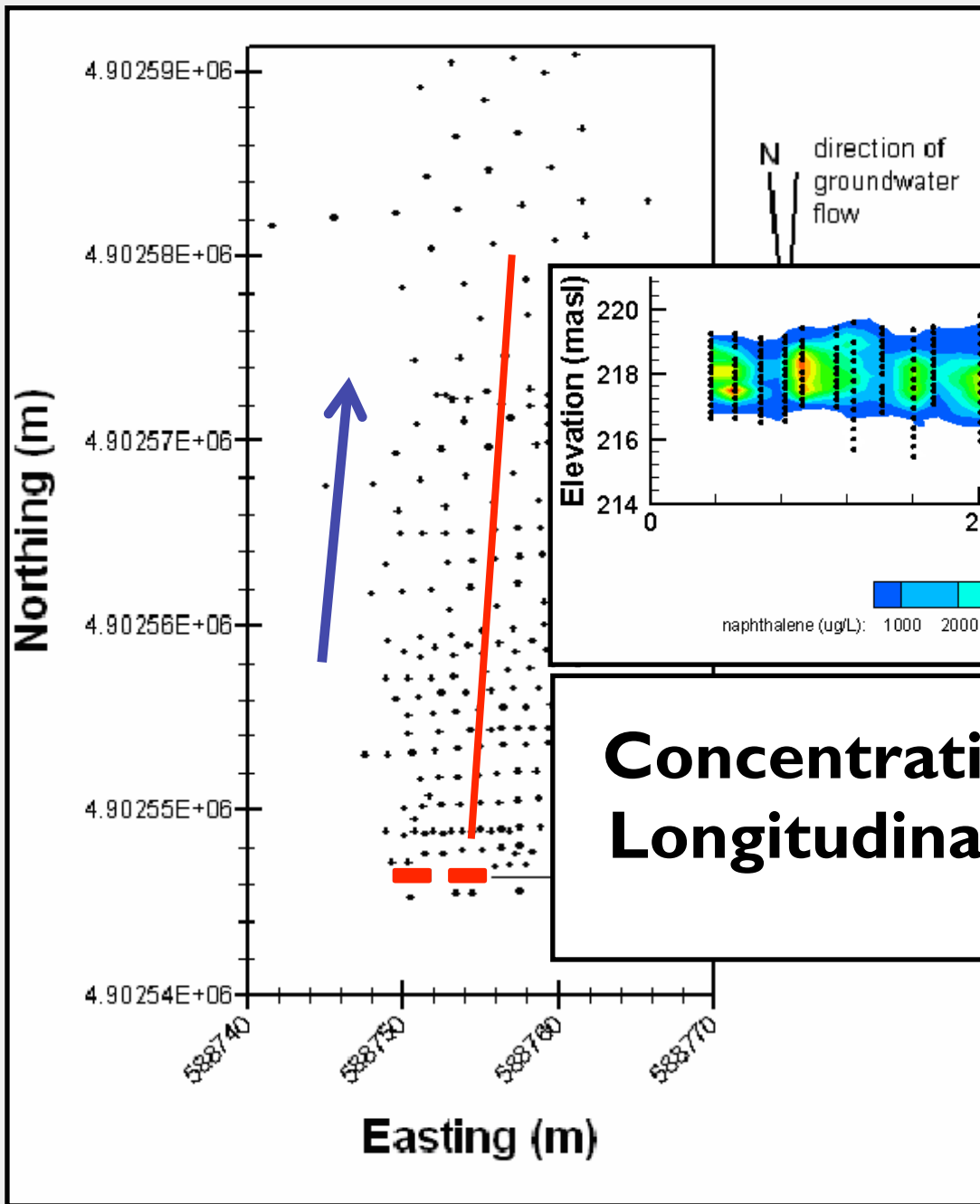


# Initial Plume Monitoring

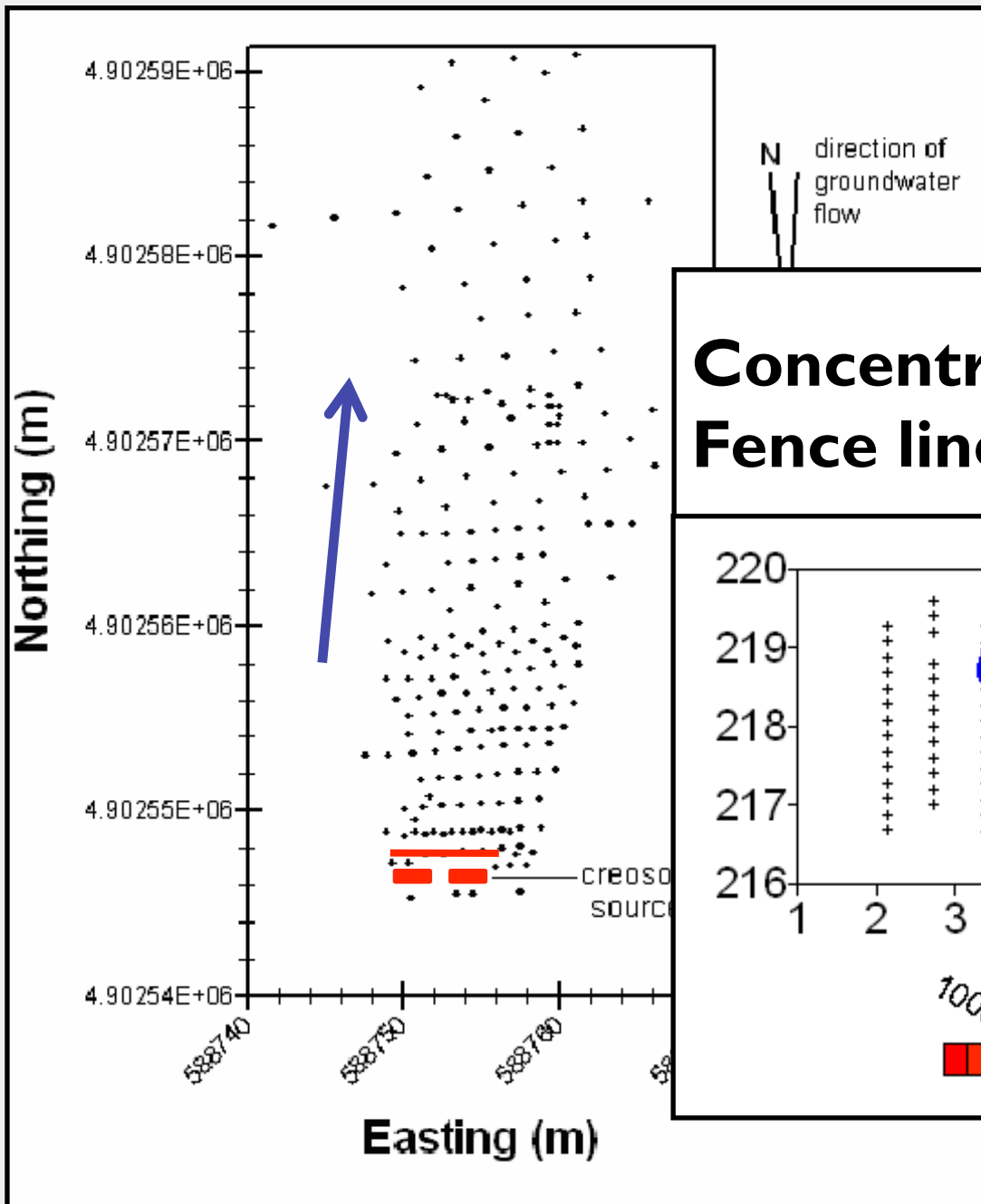
**Year 1, 2, 4, 10**

**60-180 multilevel wells**

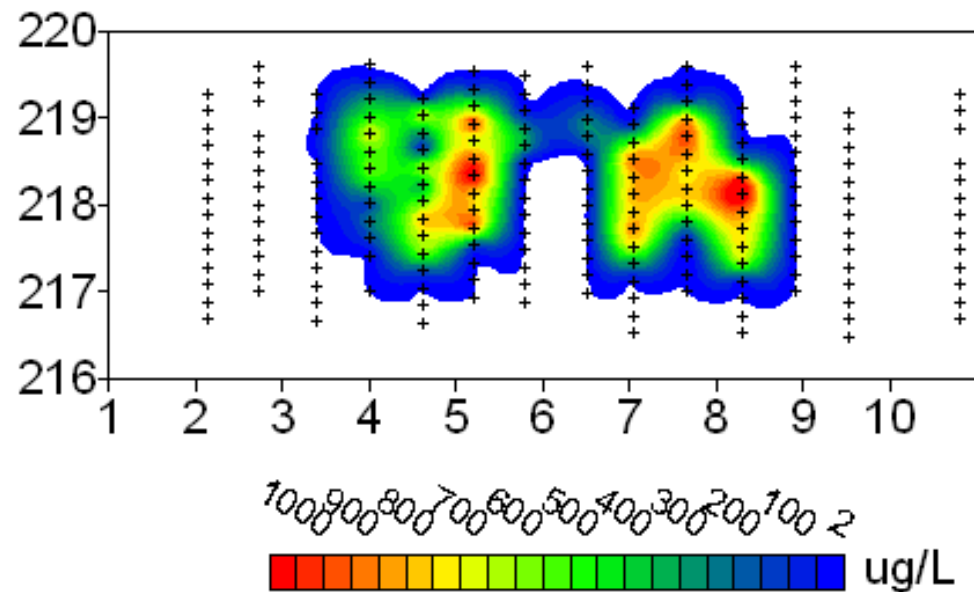
**700-2500 samples/episode**



**Concentrations along  
Longitudinal Cross-Section**

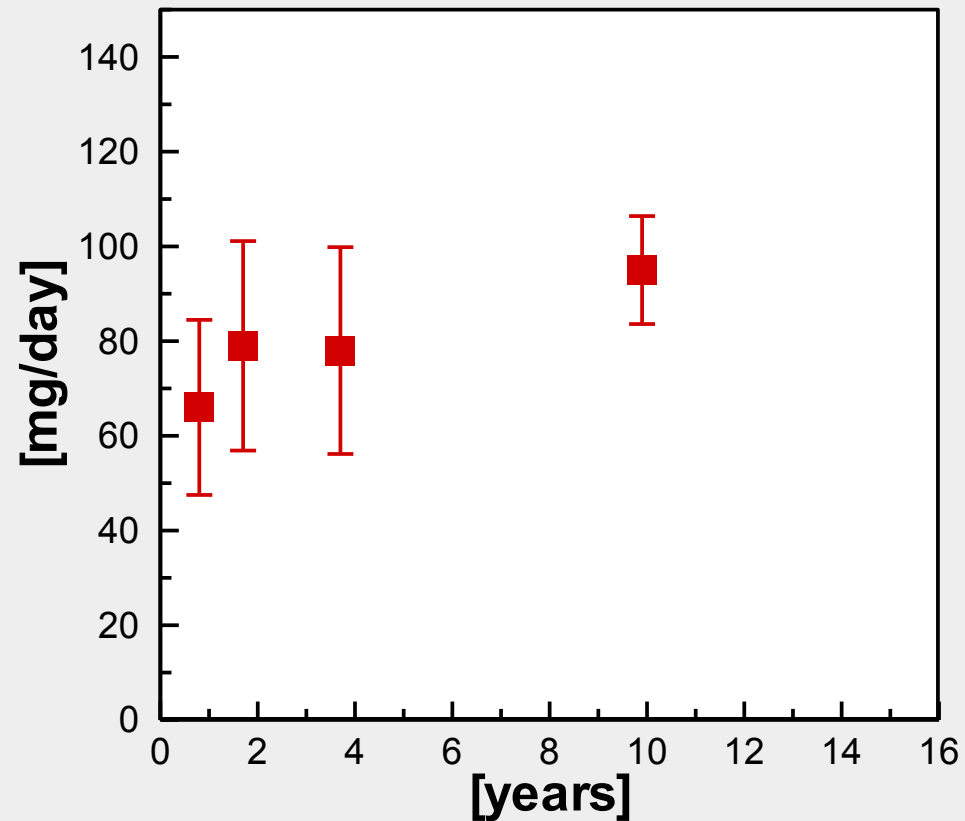


## Concentrations at the 3-m Fence line



# Mass loading

## Dibenzofuran

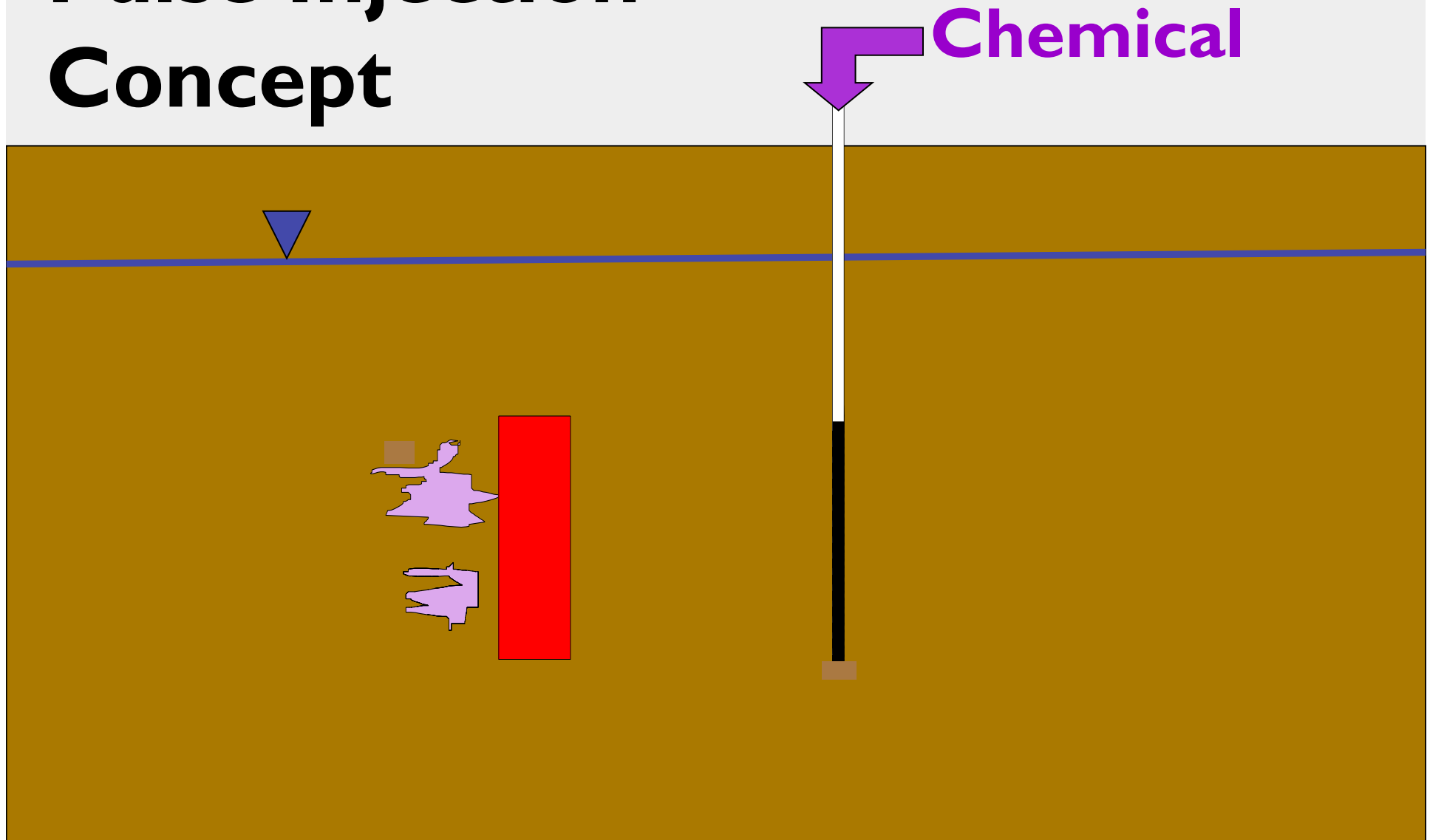


$$\dot{M} = \int q C dA$$

# Treatment details

- **semi-passive pulse injection system**
- **7-day intervals**
- **6 episodes / 125 kg**
- **~ 20 pore volumes**

# Semi-Passive Pulse Injection Concept







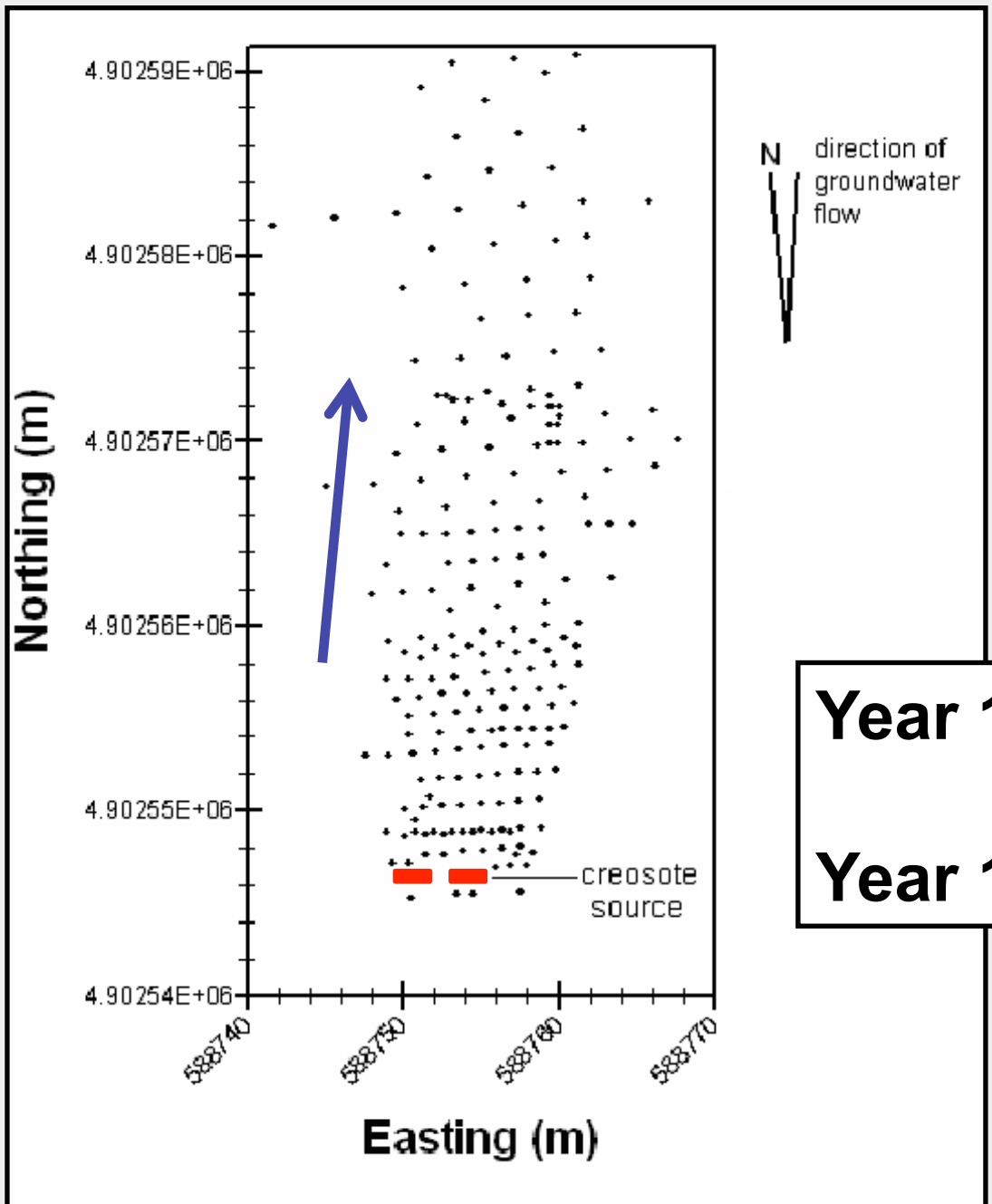
# Short-term monitoring

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

Compound	Pre [mg/day]	Post [mg/day]	Percent Change
naphthalene	750	310	-59
1-methylnaphthalene	200	120	-40
acenaphthylene	15	6	-58
biphenyl	84	71	-15
acenaphthene	430	200	-53
fluorene	110	51	-54
carbazole	61	18	-70
dibenzofuran	250	210	-16
phenanthrene	96	60	-37
anthracene	31	14	-55
fluoranthene	13	11	-11
pyrene	9	3	-63
Total	2048	1075	-47

**Changes in  
mass load  
at fence line  
150 days after  
treatment**





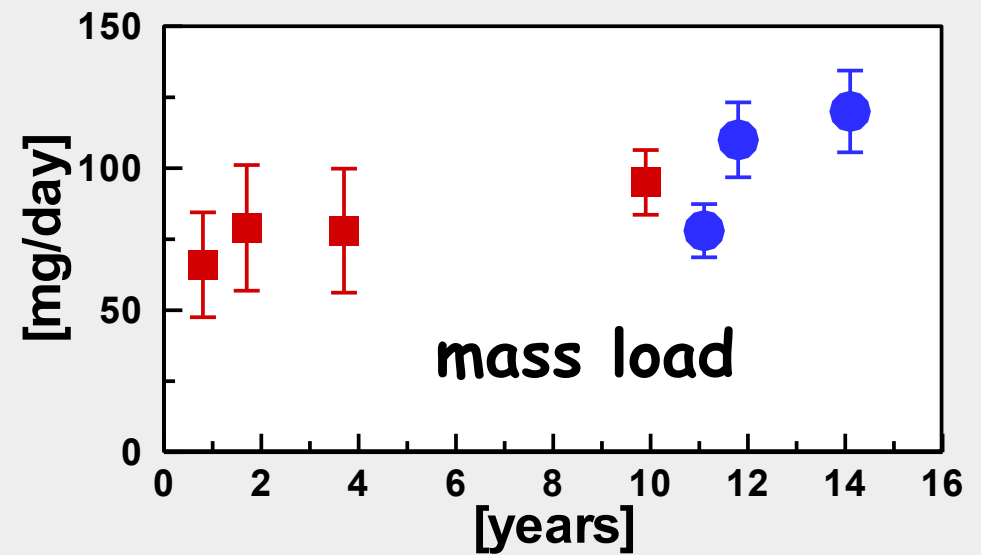
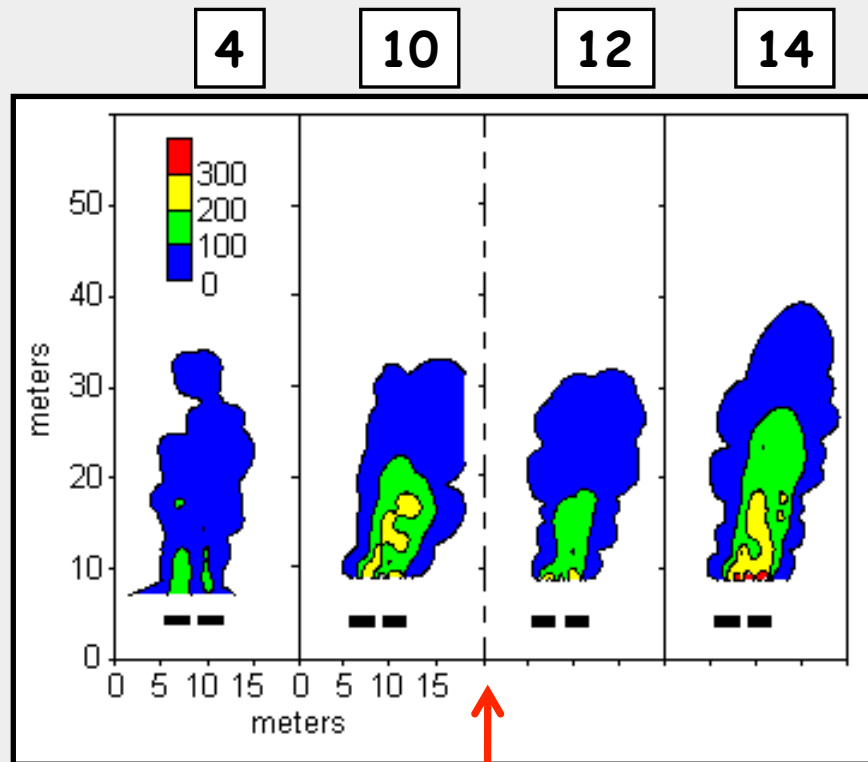
# Post-Treatment Plume Monitoring

**Year 1, 2, 4, 10 (pre)**  
**Year 11, 12, 14 (post)**

# Long-term monitoring

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

## Dibenzofuran



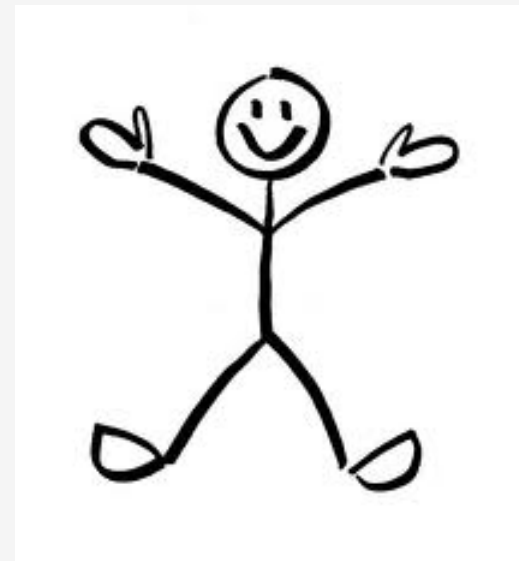
treatment

# Lesson learned - 6

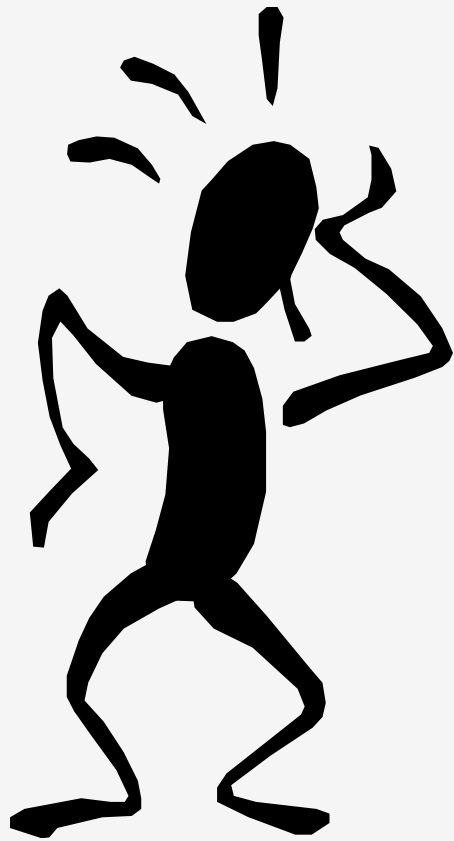
- Groundwater systems are slow to respond**
- Not chemical reactors**

# Example 7

**Dealing with difficult  
problems...**



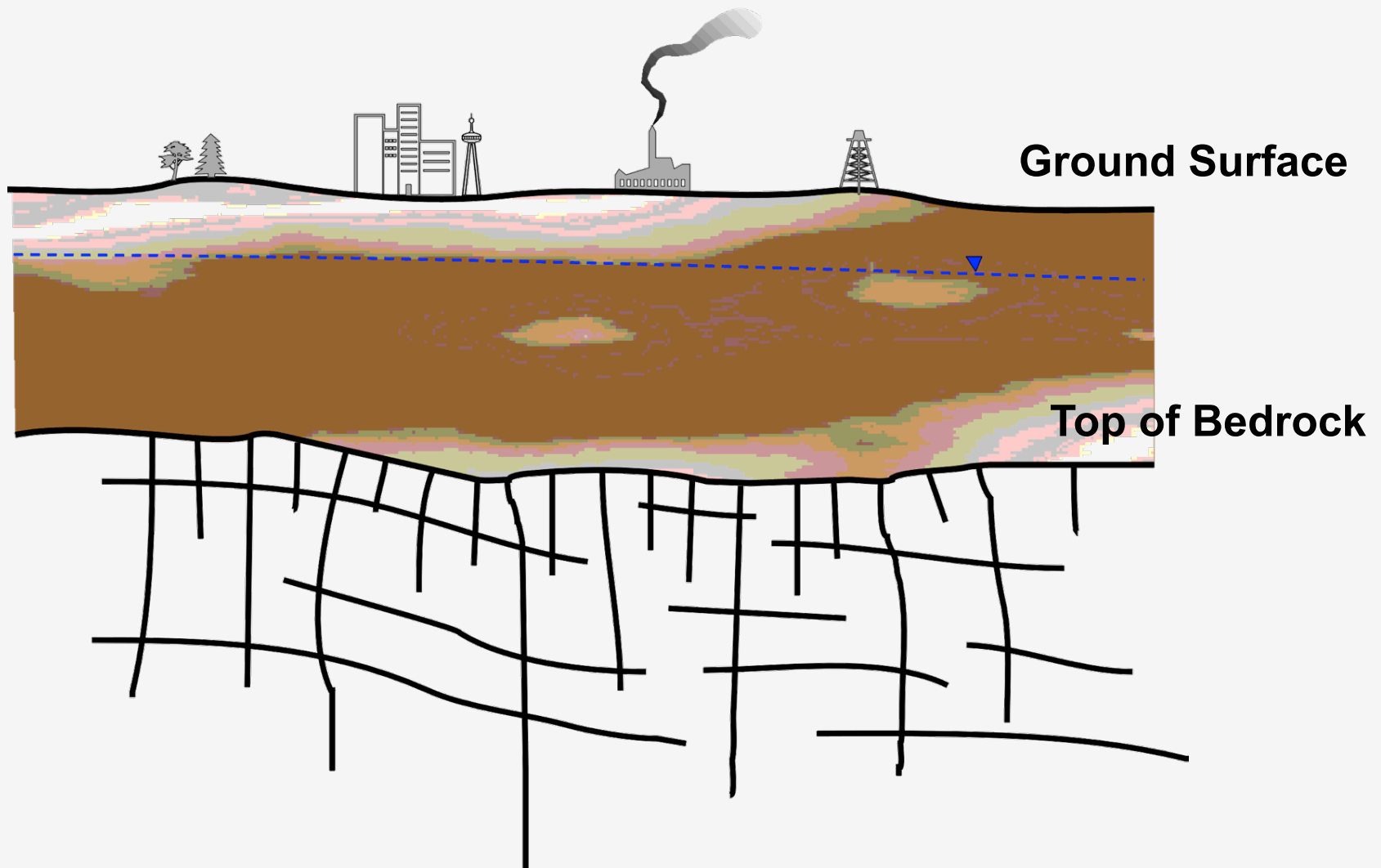
# Groundwater flow in fractured media





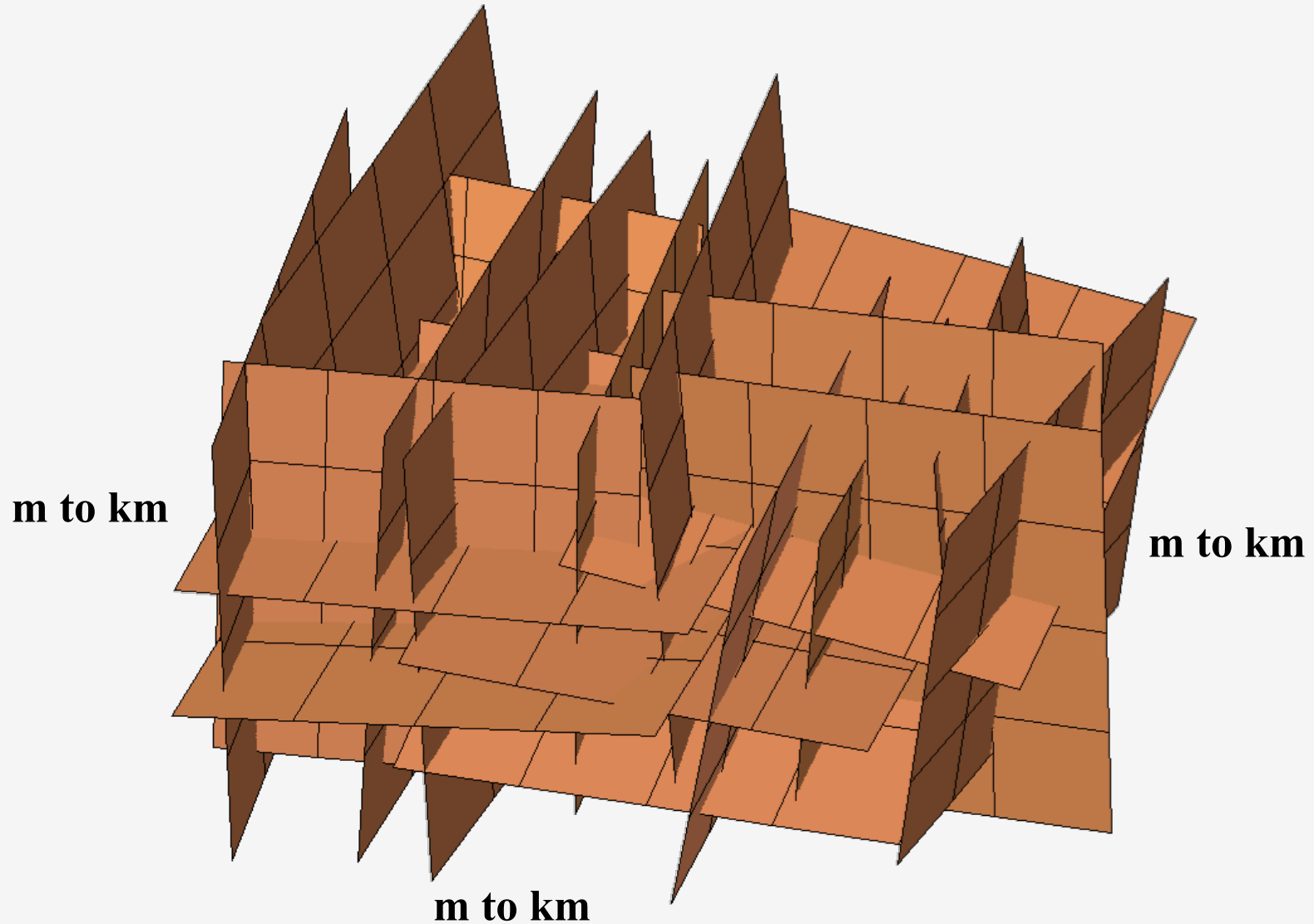
# Problem

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



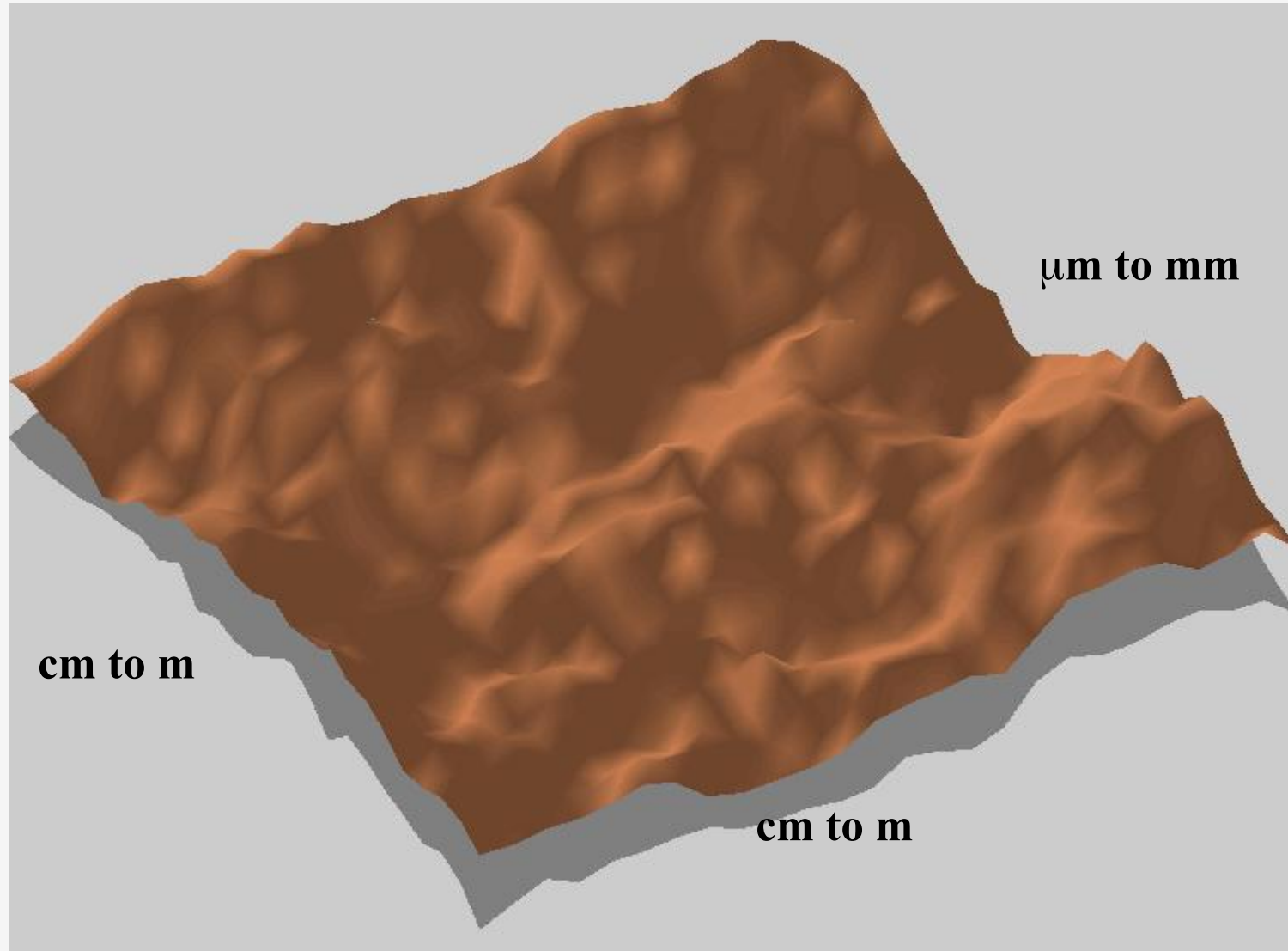
# Fracture network

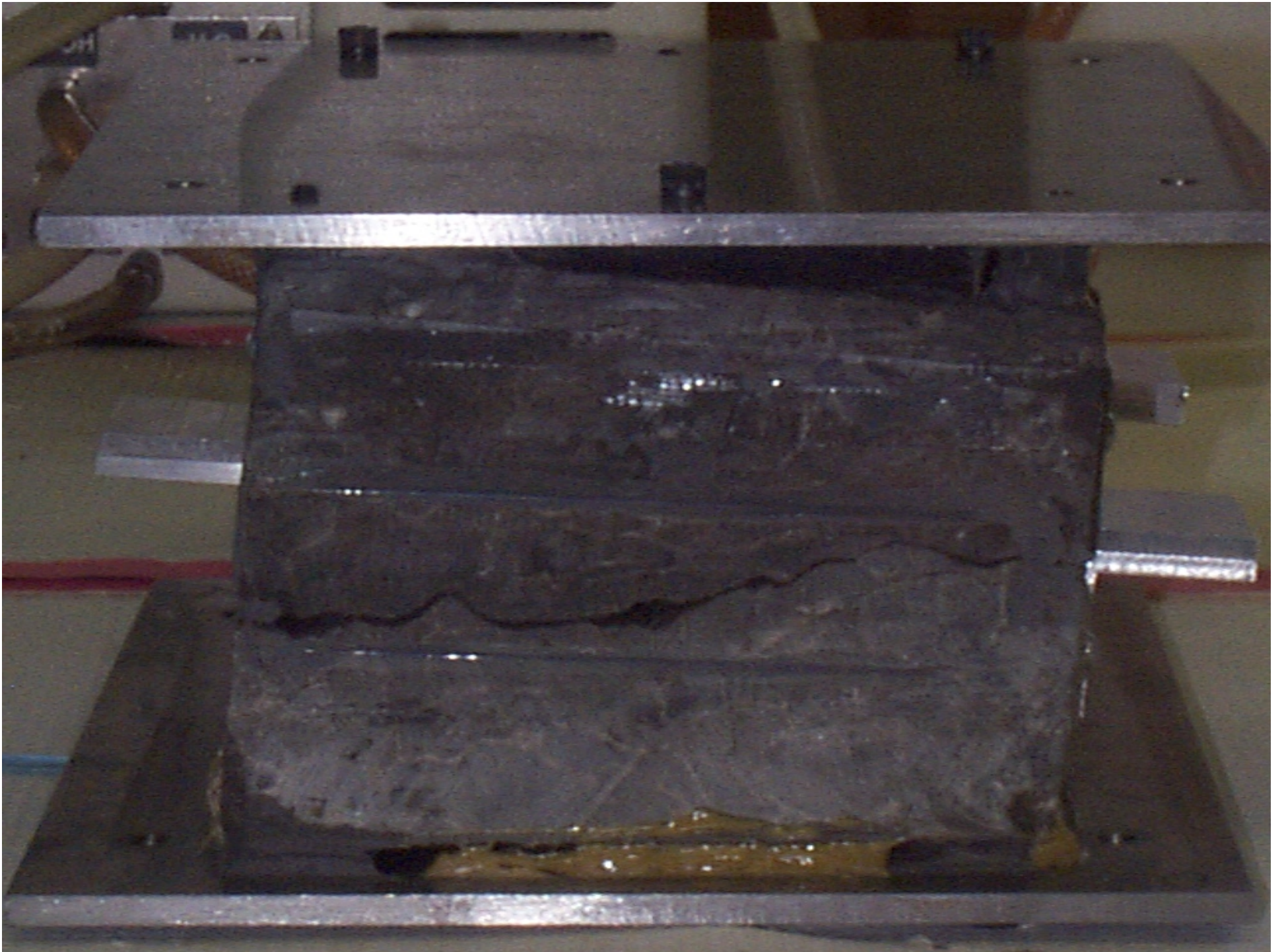
UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Single fracture

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

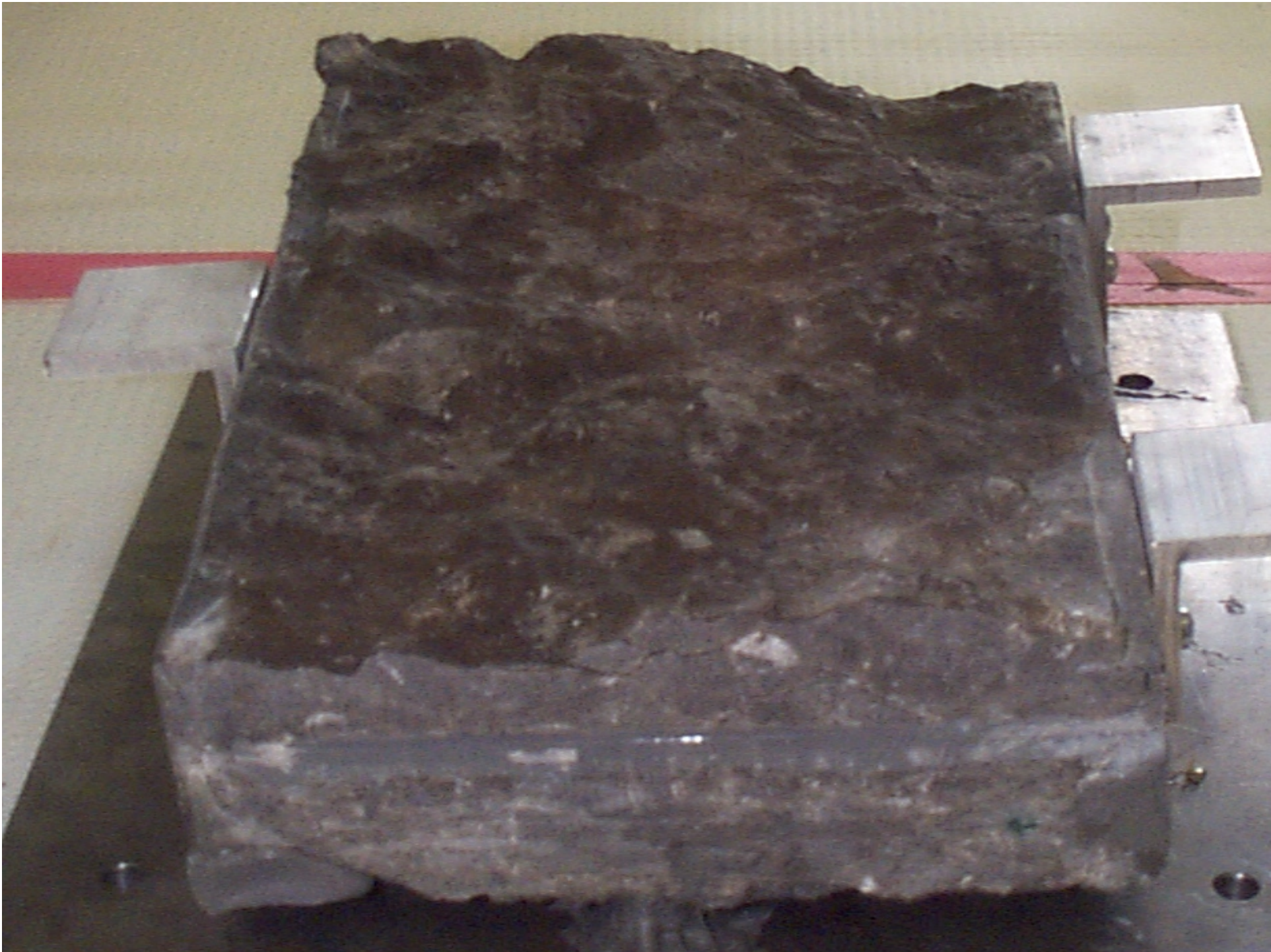


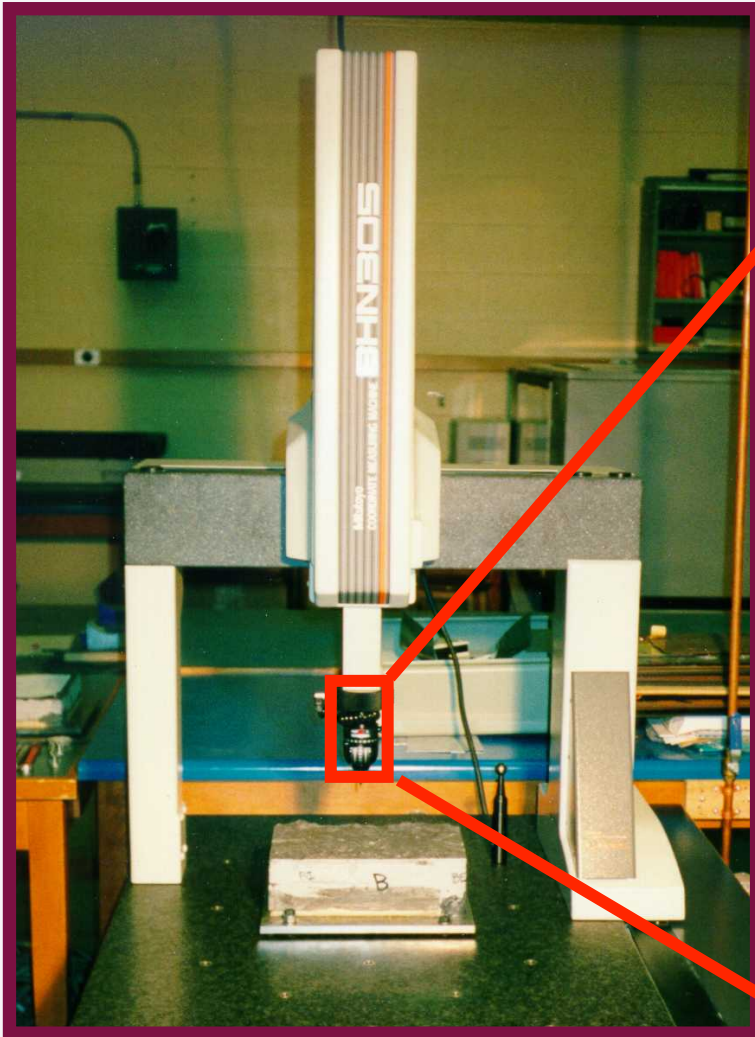












**CMM**

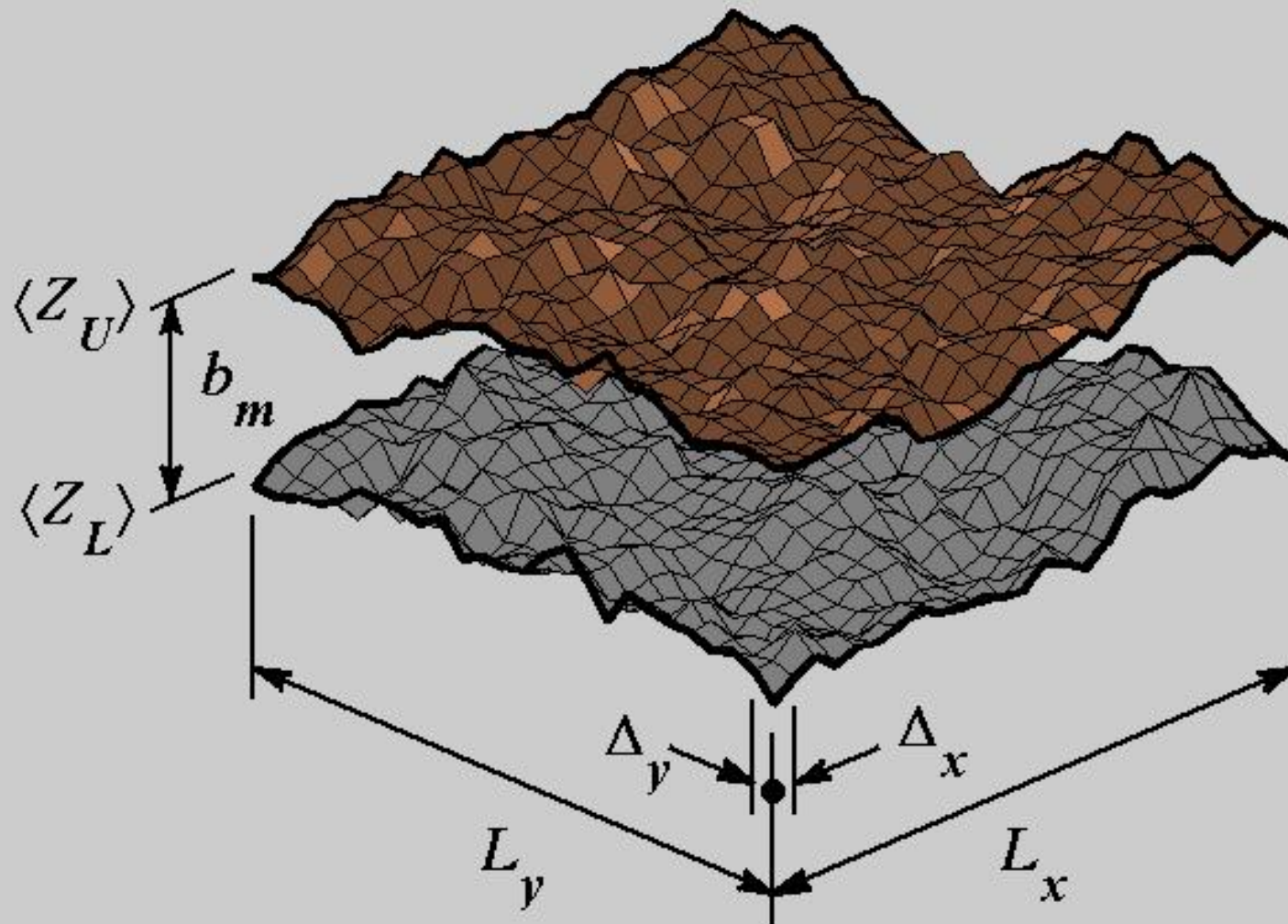
**Stylus**





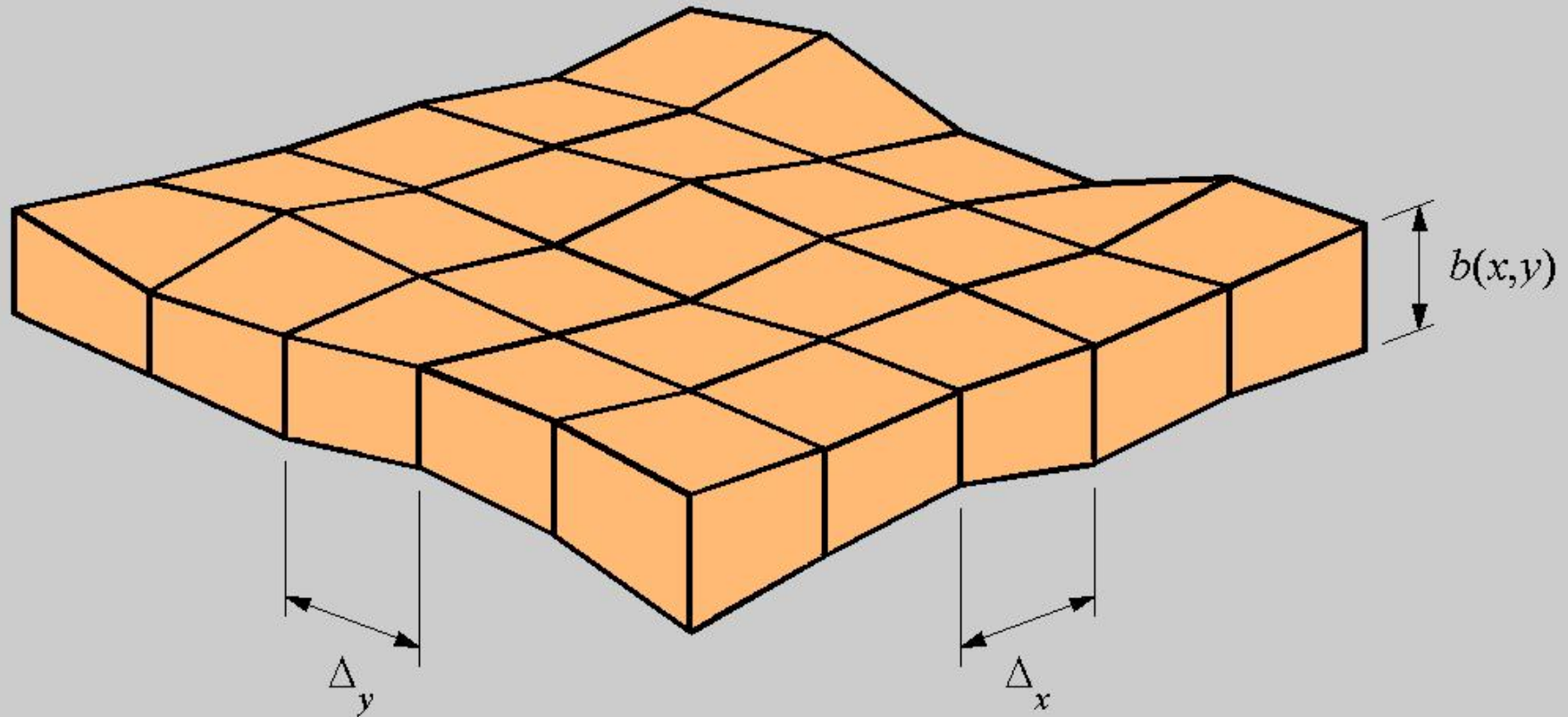
# Fracture walls

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



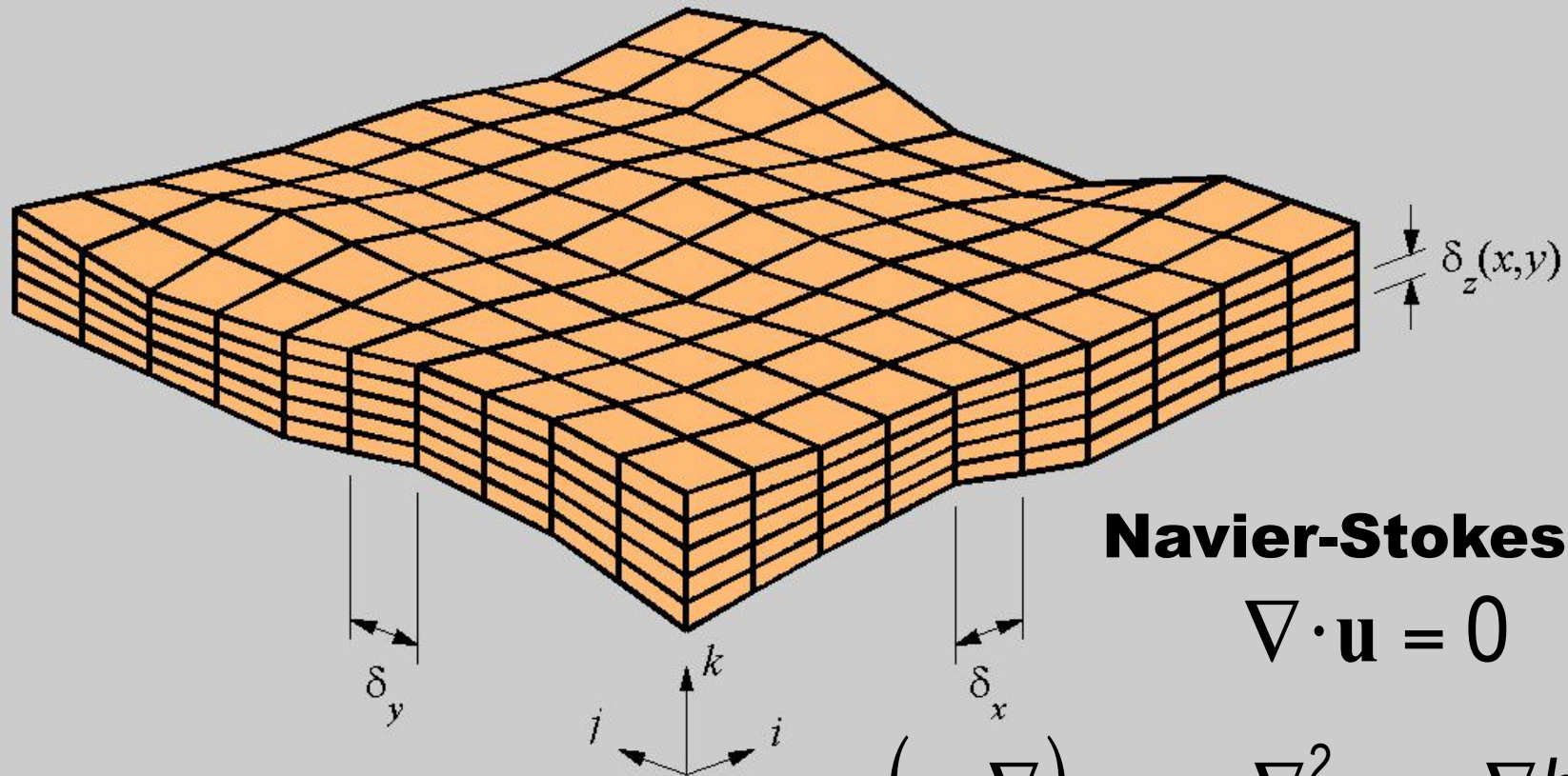
# 3D void space

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# 3-D flow

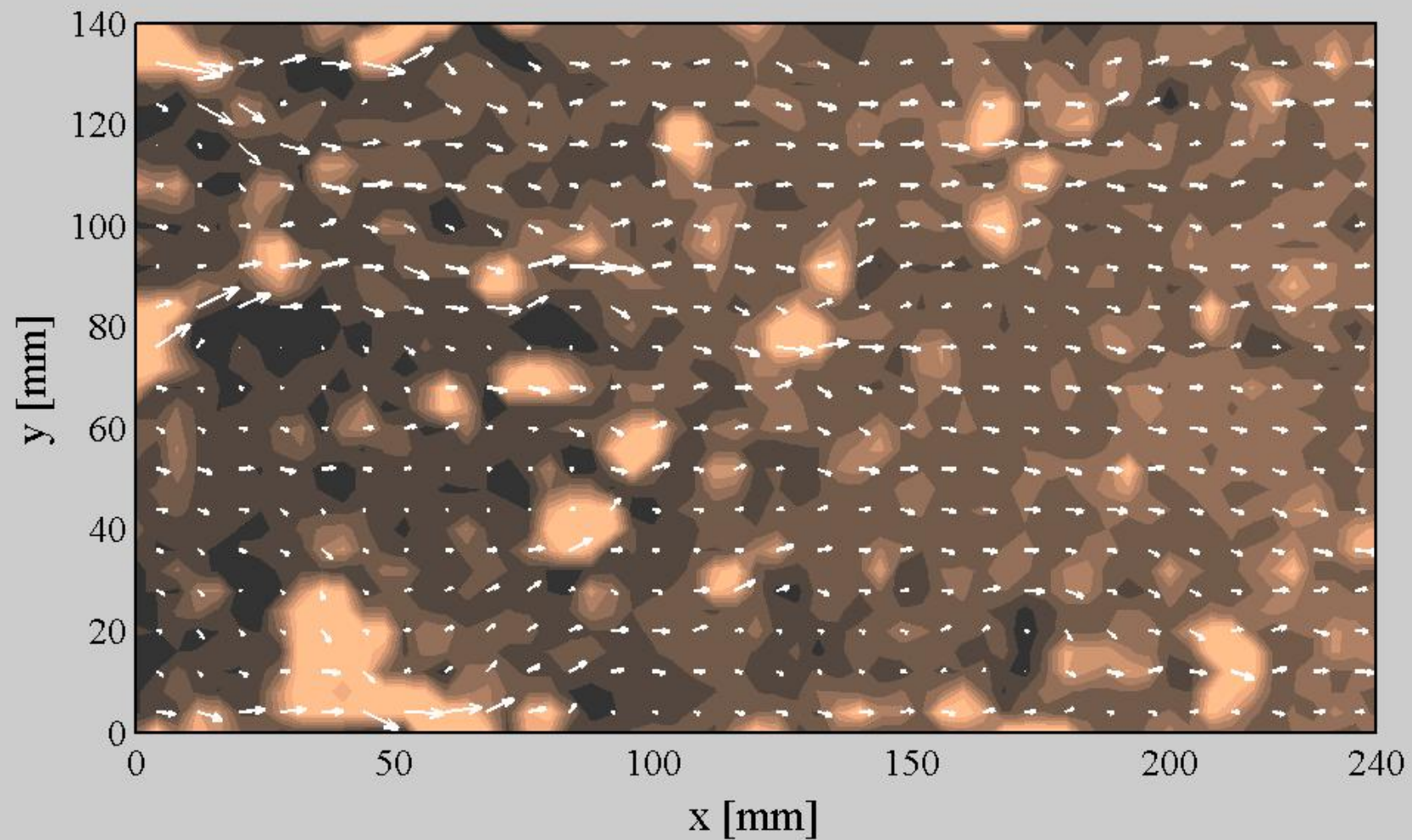
UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO





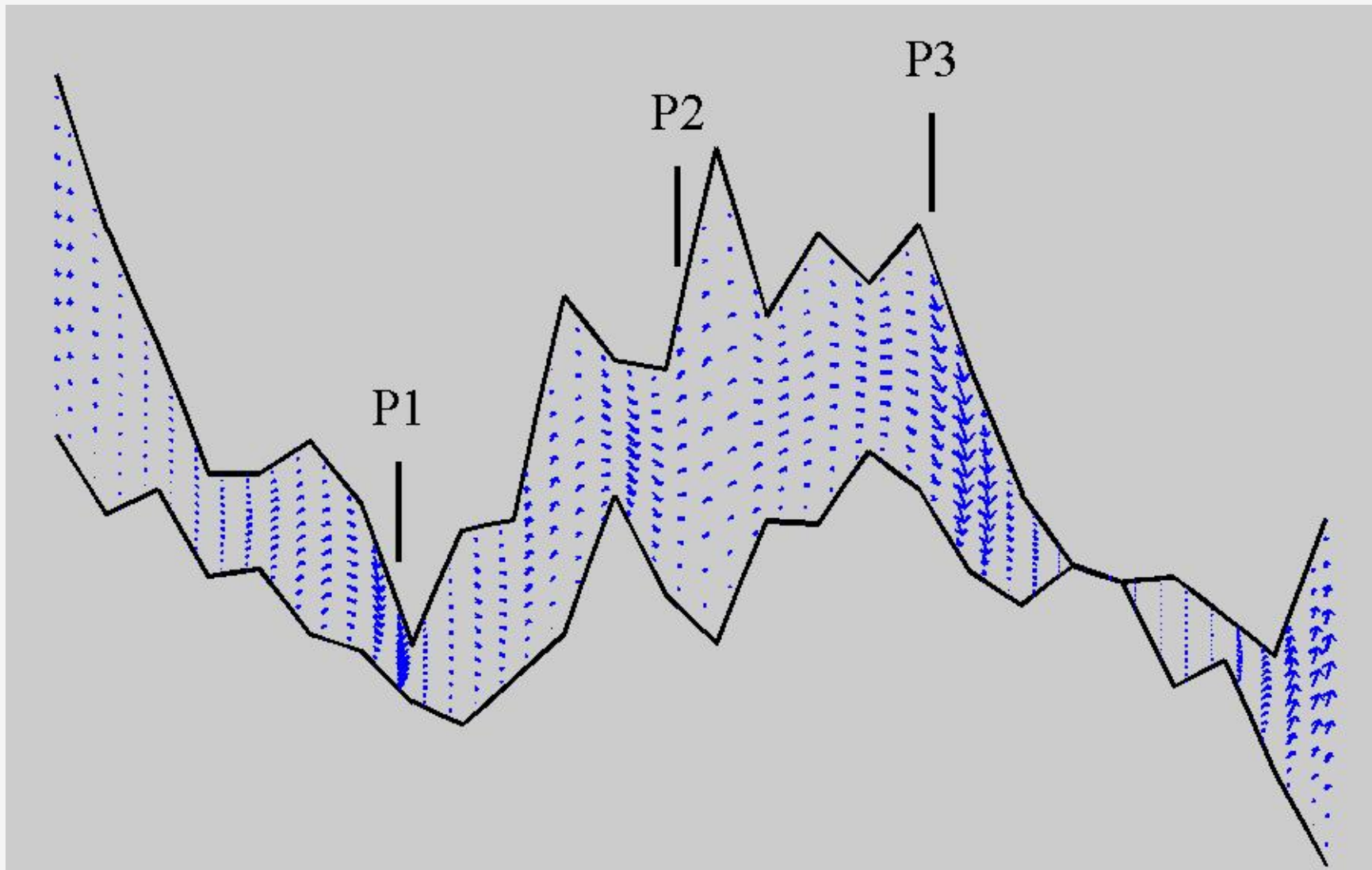
# 3-D flow

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



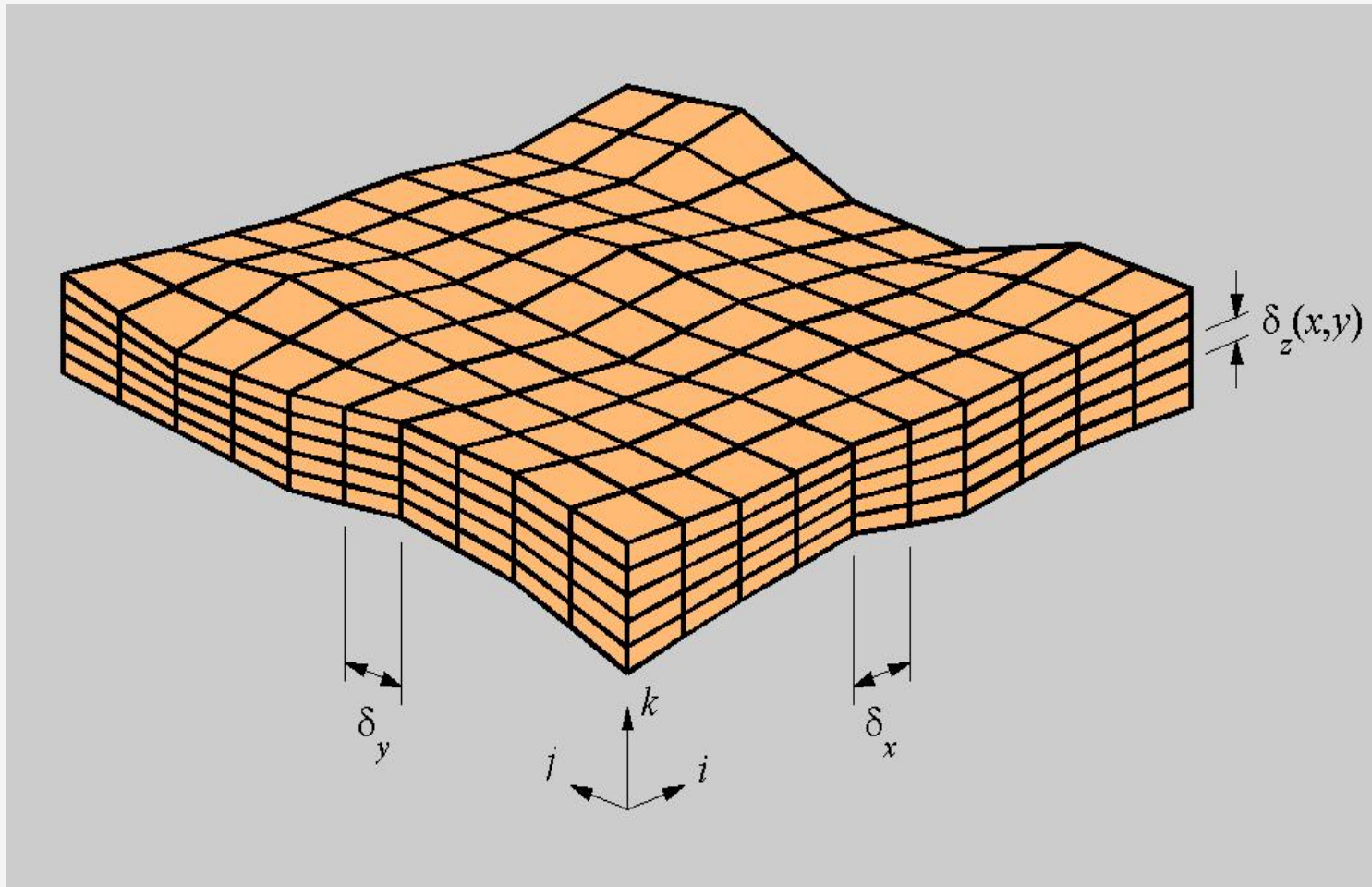
# Velocity along profile

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Solute transport

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

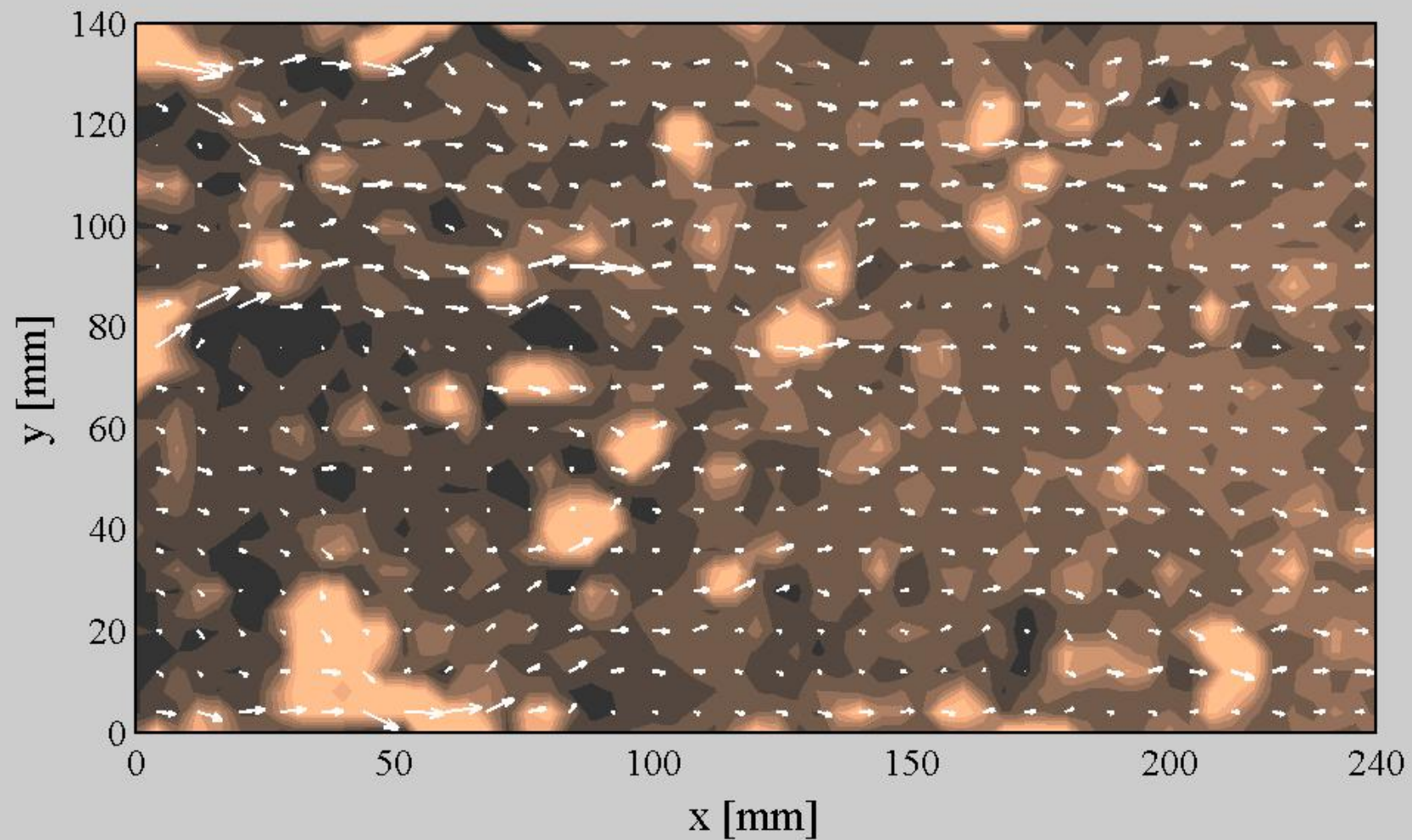


**Advection - Dispersion - Diffusion**

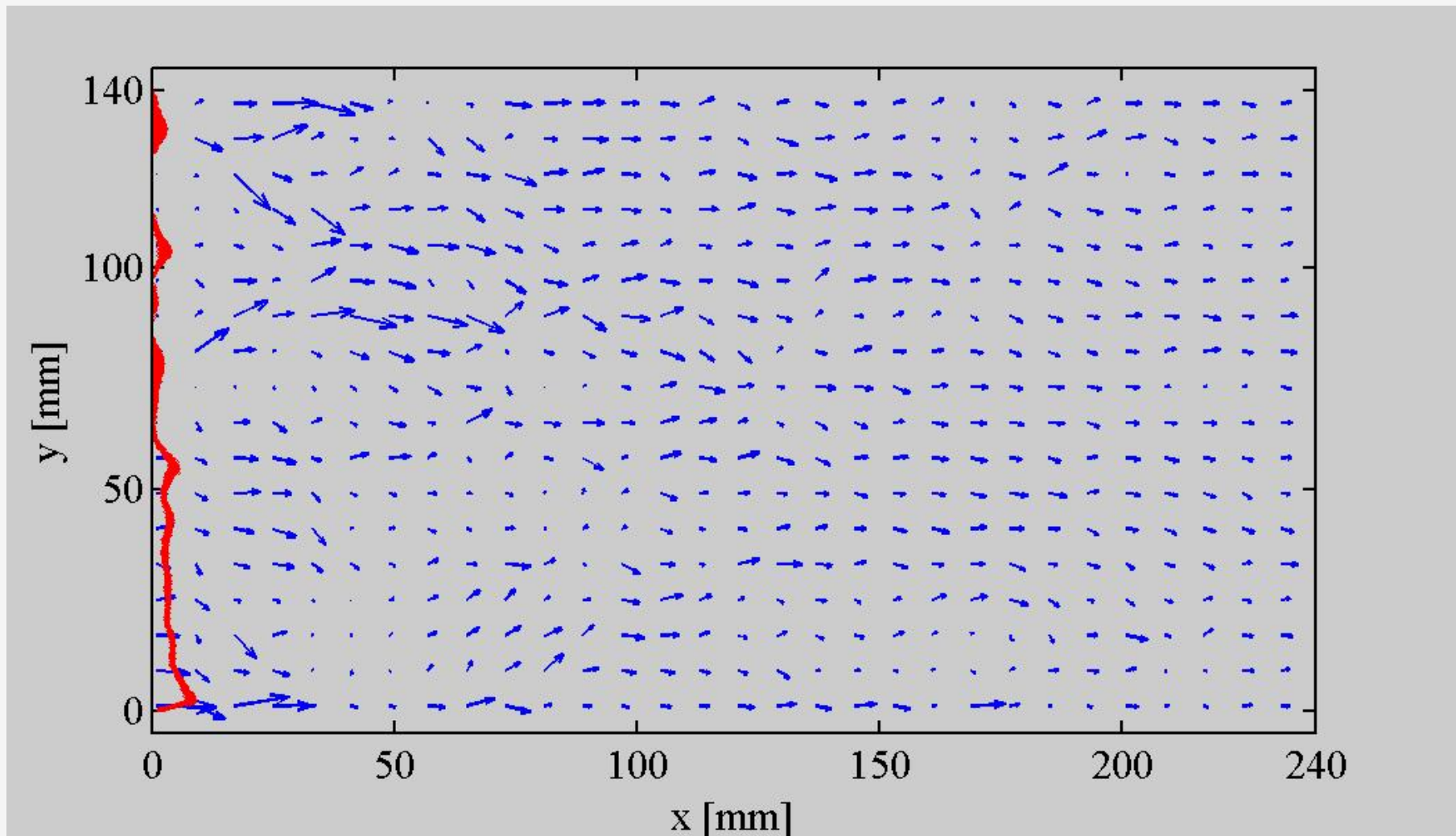


# 3-D flow

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

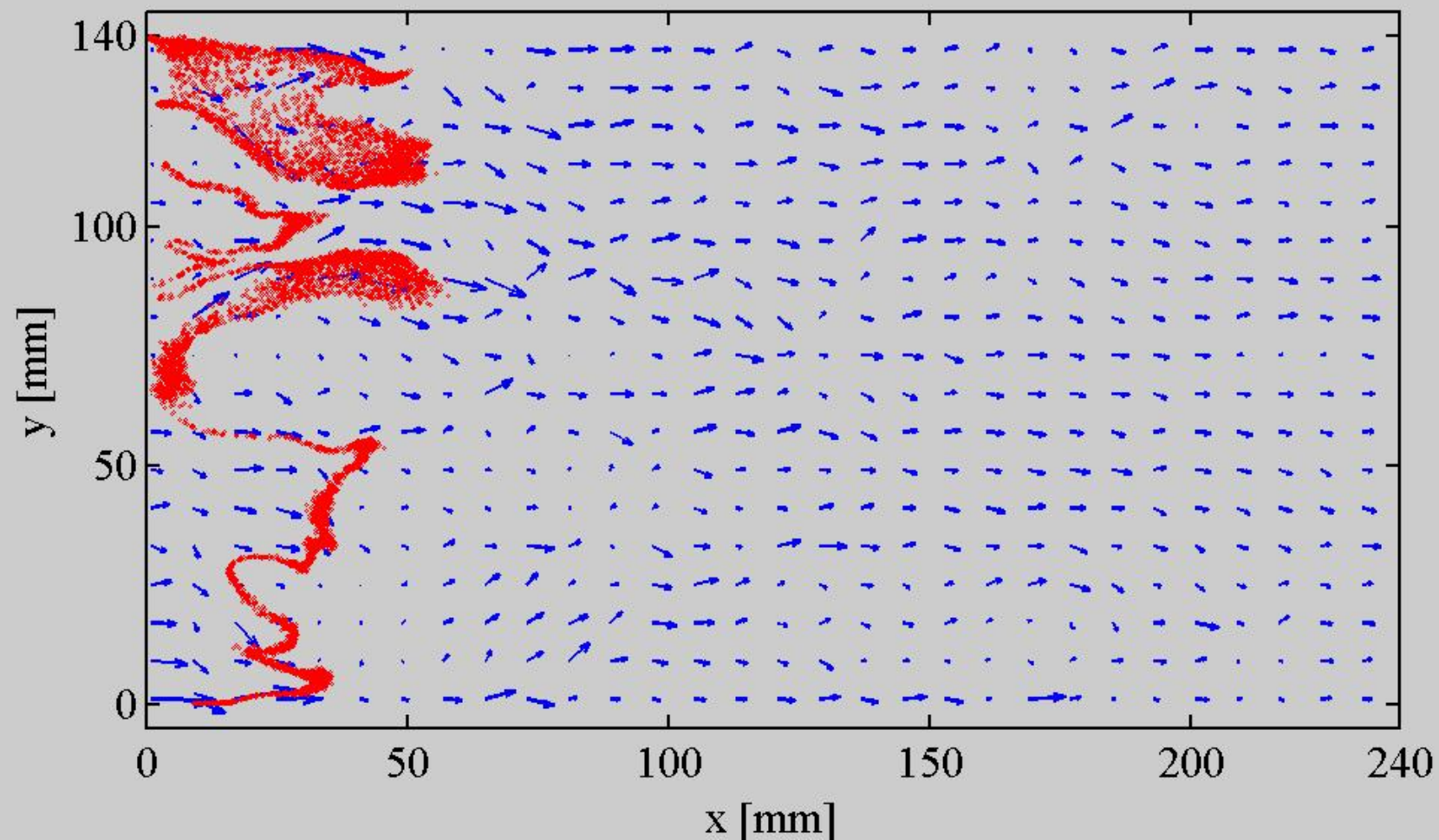


$$t/t_r = 0.01$$

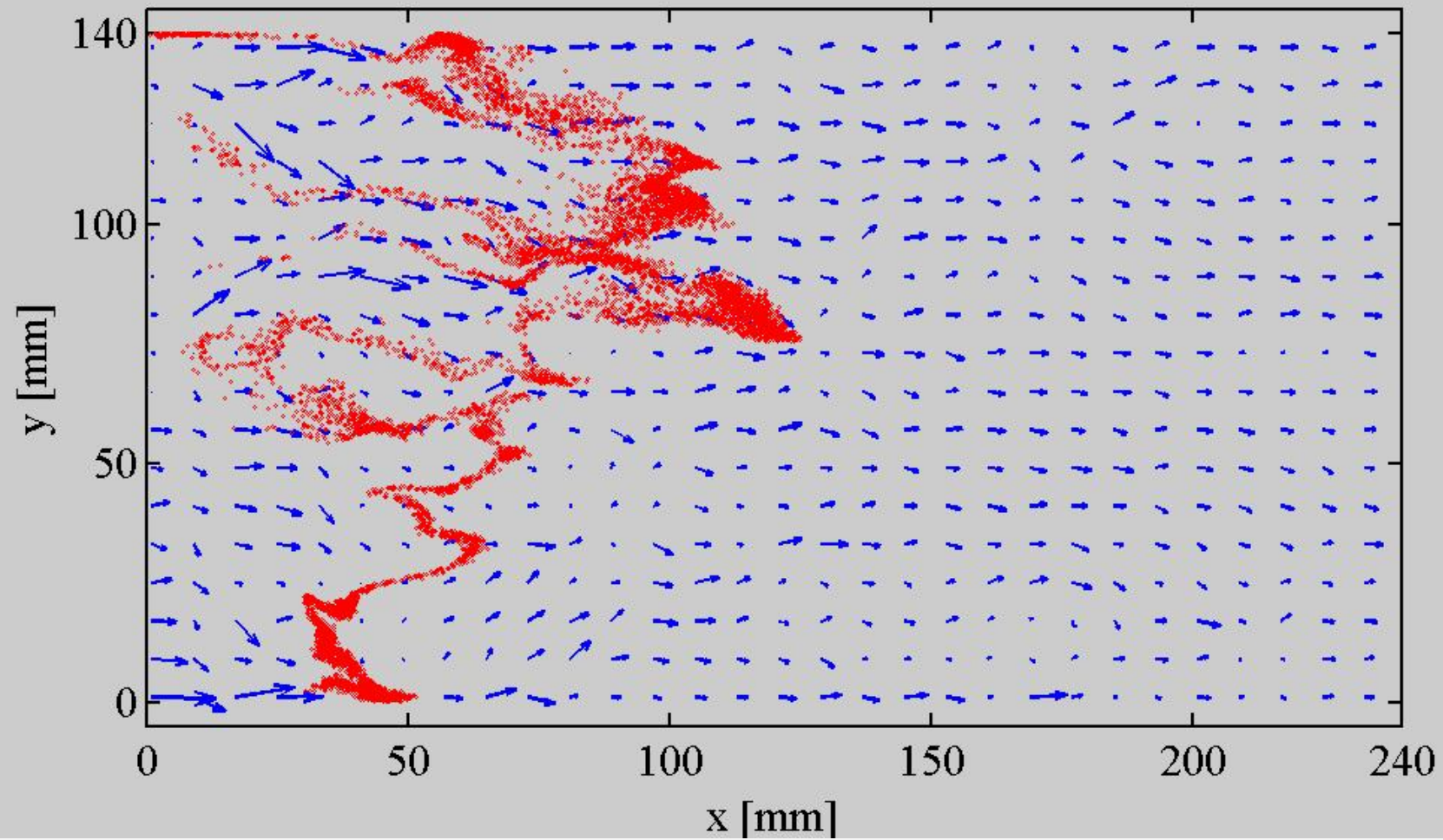




$$t/t_r = 0.1$$



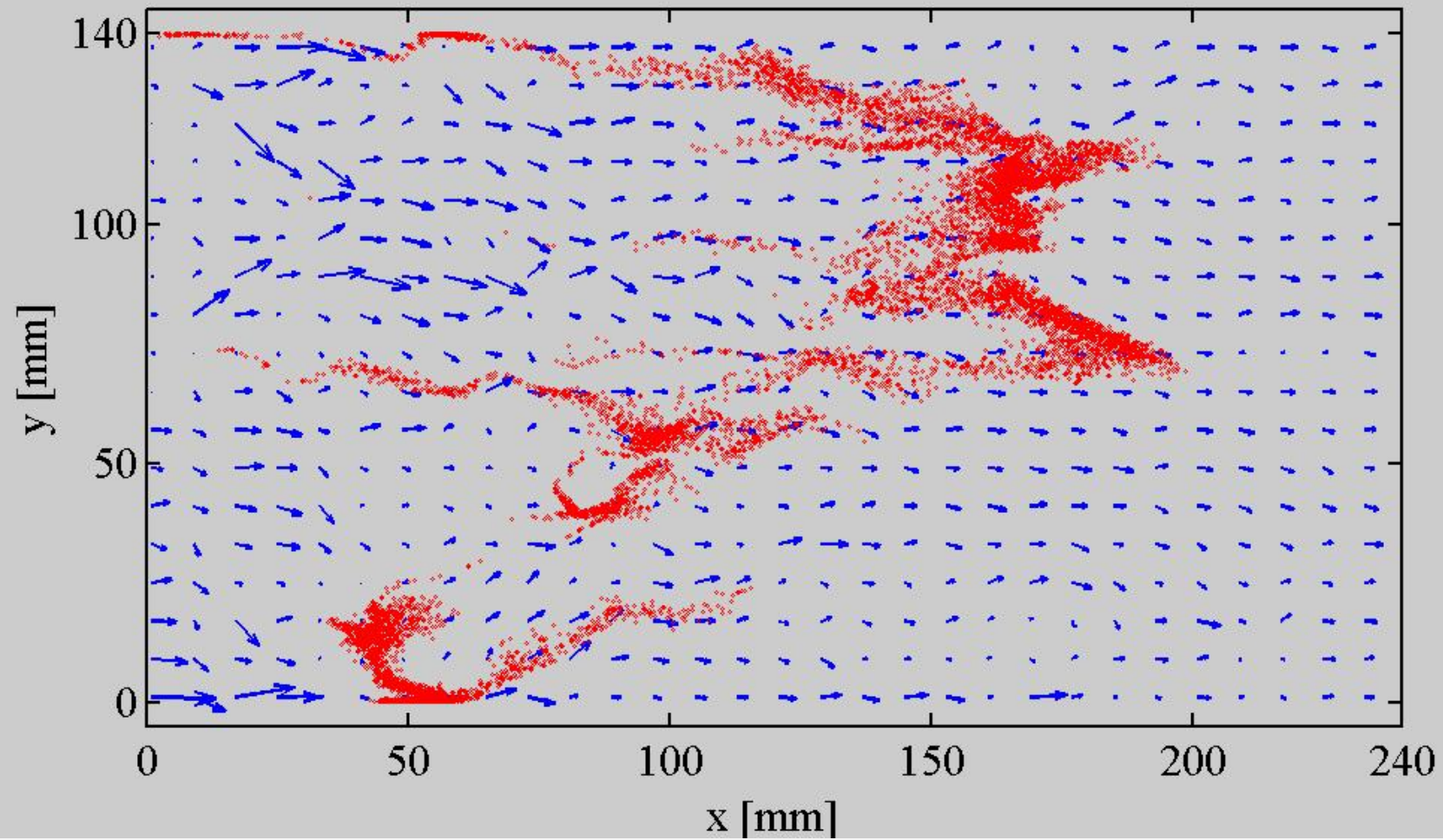
$$t/t_r = 0.25$$



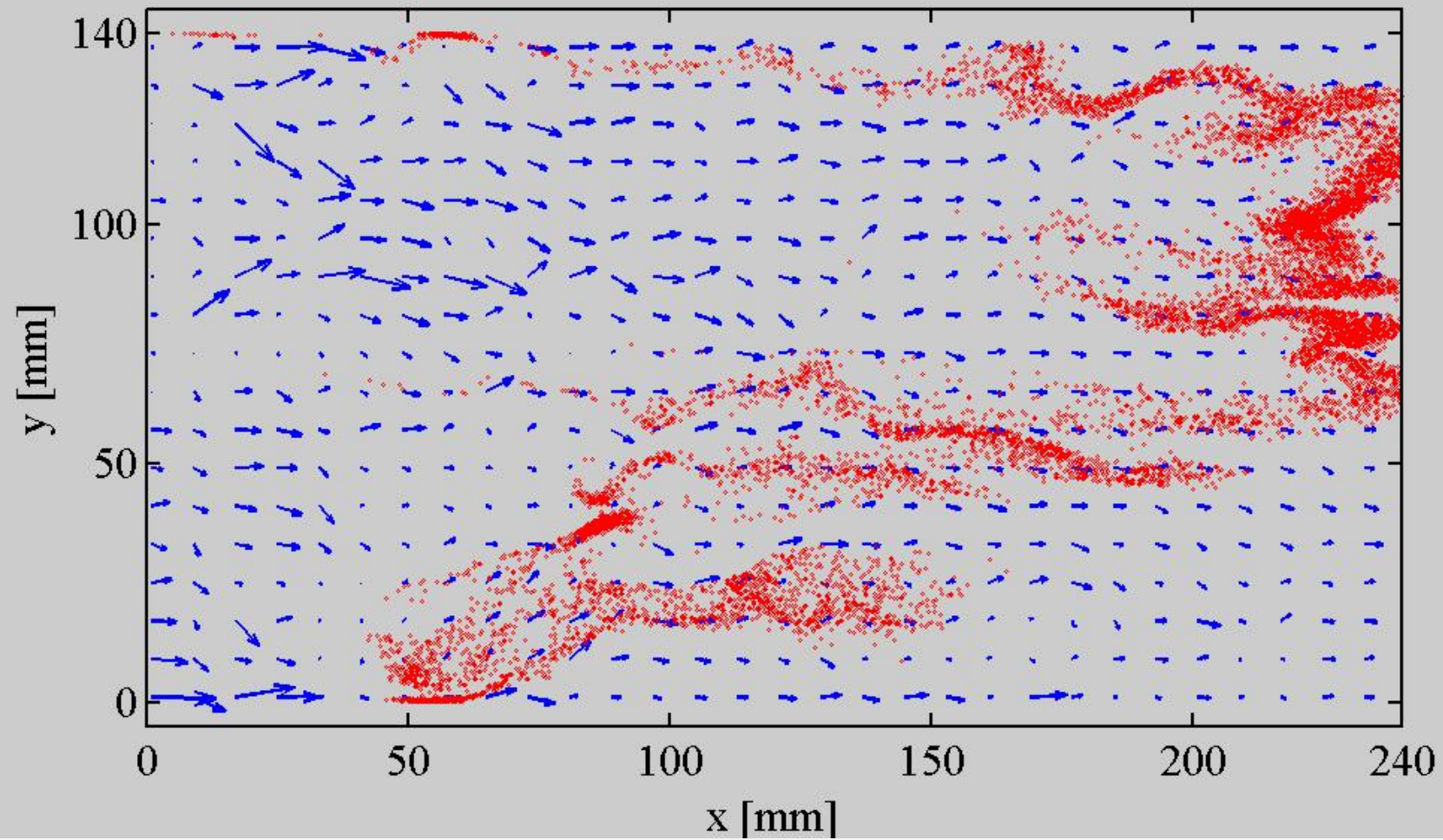


$$t/t_r = 0.50$$

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

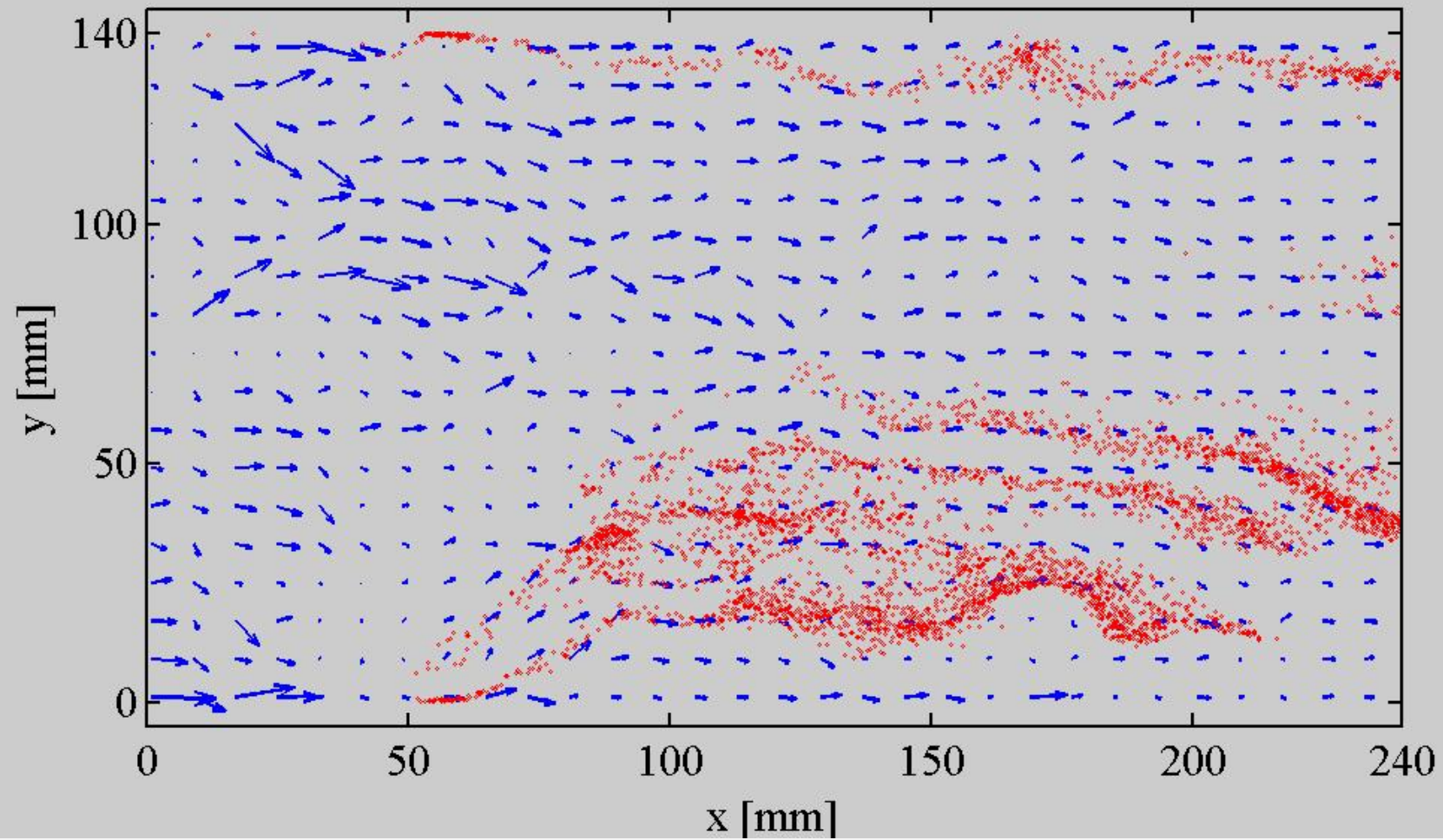


$$t/t_r = 0.75$$

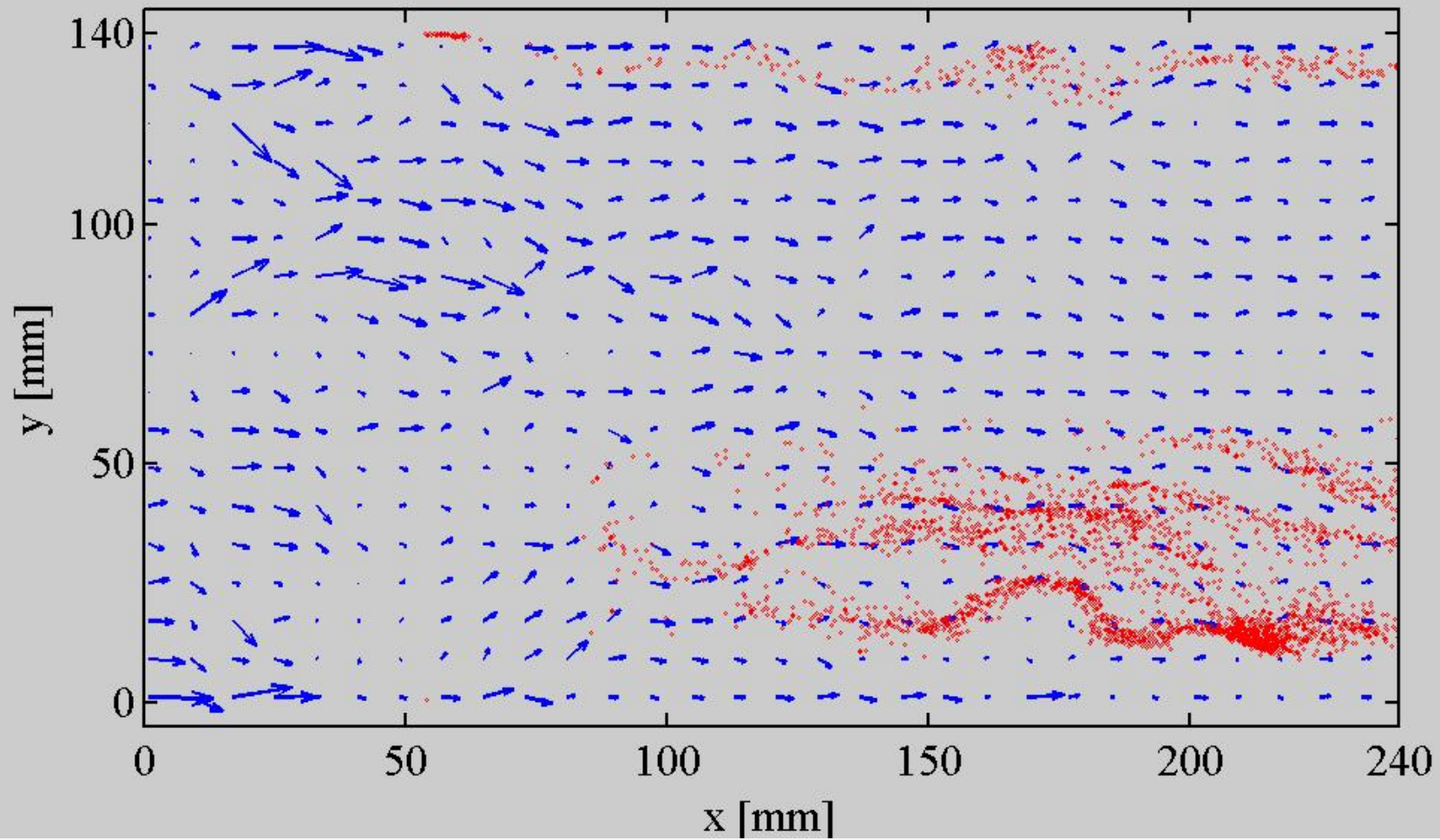




$$t/t_r = 0.10$$

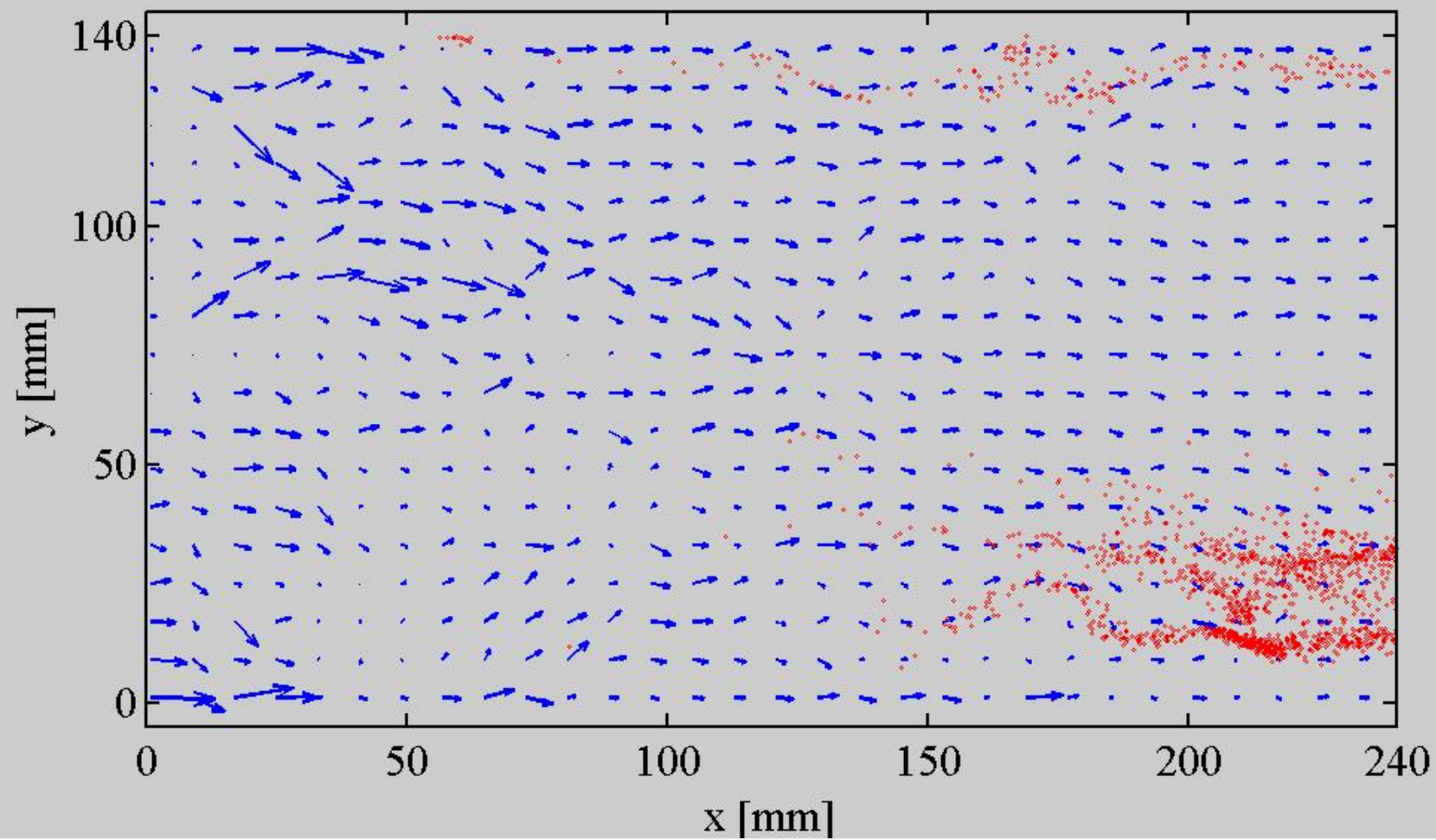


$$t/t_r = 1.25$$

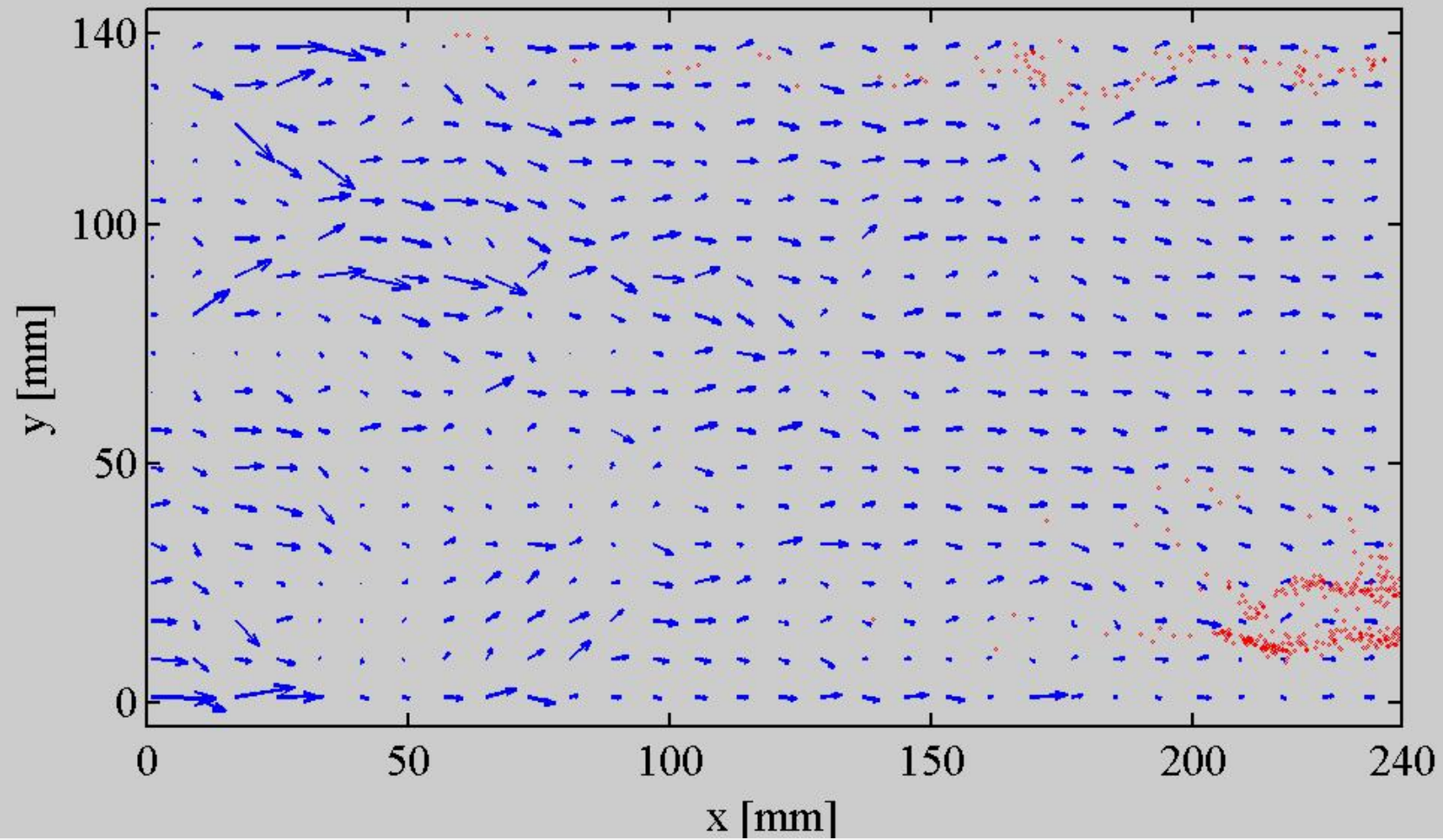




$$t/t_r = 1.50$$

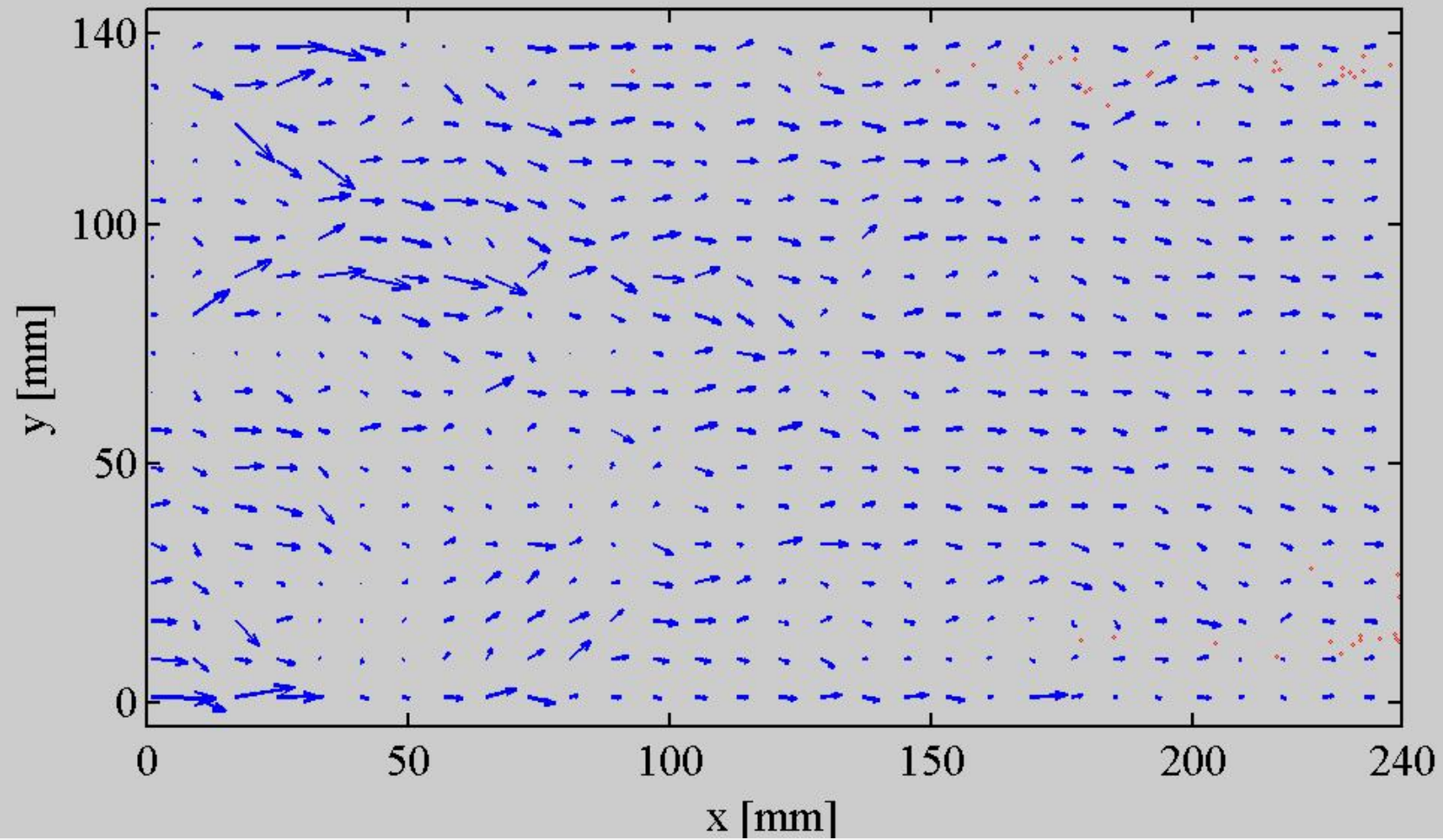


$$t/t_r = 1.75$$





$$t/t_r = 2.00$$



# Lesson learned - 7

- Fracture flow and transport not simulated as parallel plates**
- Breakdown complex problems**

# Example 8

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

## Dealing with field work...







# Winter field work

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Winter field work

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



# Lesson learned - 6

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO



**Perhaps work in Brazil?**

# Thanks to...

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

- Many, many graduate students**
- Invaluable colleagues**
- Outstanding technicians**



