Rapid Determination of Cyanides in Biological Material by HS-GC/MS

G. Asselborn and R. Wennig

Laboratoire National de Santé – Toxicology Division, Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg, 162A, av. de la Faïencerie, L-1511 LUXEMBOURG

Cyanide photometric determination following the classical microdiffusion method in body fluids is rather time consuming [1]. More recently other methods have become available by Odoul et al. [2] using HS-GC/ECD and by Marquet et al. [3] using HS-GC/MS-cyanide identification in an azide suicide case. Both methods did not meet our required quantitative forensic criteria. So a more specific HS-GC/MS method with a capillary column HP-624 of 30 was developed. The column temperature is programmed from 60°C (2-min hold) to 120°C (7-min hold) at 50°C/min. Total GC-run time is 10 min. The sample volume used in the photometric method could be reduced from 2 ml to 1 ml.

HCN is liberated during an incubation step for 60 min at 60 °C by concentrated phosphoric acid from the matrix in a headspace vial and subsequently transformed to cyanogen chloride Cl-CN by reaction with chloramine T. The ions m/e = 61 and 63 for Cl-CN are monitored by SIM/MS and 1-BuOH is used as internal standard (m/e = 56, 31 and 41).

Moreover full MS-scan is also possible, if higher amounts of HCN are present. Thus not only a more rapid, but also a more specific method is now available.

The LOD is = 0,1 mg CN⁻/L and the calibration curve is linear from 0,4 to 4 mg CN⁻/L. The method can be also applied to other biological tissues and may be useful for a routine clinical and/or forensic toxicology laboratory in case of acute cyanide poisoning.

References

