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The present and potential future of aqueous mercury preservation: a review

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

*Published Version:*

King, D.C.P., Watts, M.J., Hamilton, E.M., Mortimer, R., Kilgour, D.P.A., Di Bonito, M. (2023). The present and potential future of aqueous mercury preservation: a review. ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE. PROCESSES & IMPACTS, 25(3), 351-363 [10.1039/d2em00409g].

*Availability:*

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/919662> since: 2023-03-01

*Published:*

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1039/d2em00409g>

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# 1 The Present and Potential Future of Aqueous Mercury Preservation: A Review

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## 7 Abstract

8 Mercury is considered to be one of the most toxic elements to human health. Due to pollution from  
9 industry and artisanal gold mining, mercury species are present globally in waters used for agriculture,  
10 aquaculture, and as drinking water. This review summarises methods reported for preserving mercury  
11 species in water samples and highlights the associated hazards and issues with each. This includes the  
12 handling of acids in an uncontrolled environment, breakage of sample containers, and the collection  
13 and transport of sample volumes in excess of 1 L, all of which pose difficulties to both *in-situ* collection  
14 and transportation. Literature related to aqueous mercury preservation from 2000 – 2021 was  
15 reviewed, as well as any commonly cited and relevant references. Amongst others, solid-phase  
16 extraction techniques were explored for preservation and preconcentration of total and speciated  
17 mercury in water samples. Additionally, the potential as a safe, *in-situ* preservation and storage  
18 method for mercury species was summarised.

19 The review highlighted that the stability of mercury is increased when adsorbed on a solid-phase and  
20 therefore the metal and its species can be preserved without the need for hazardous reagents or  
21 materials in the field. The mercury species can then be eluted upon return to a laboratory, where  
22 sensitive analytical detection and speciation methods can be better applied. Developments in solid  
23 phase extraction as a preservation method for unstable metals such as mercury will improve the  
24 quality of representative environmental data, and further improve toxicology and environmental  
25 monitoring studies.

## 26 1. Introduction

### 27 1.1. Background (Mercury in the environment)

28 Mercury (Hg) is ubiquitous in the environment and is one of the most toxic elements to human health,  
29 being described as one of the 13 priority hazardous substances under the Water Framework Directive.  
30 Concentrations in drinking water are restricted to just 2 µg L<sup>-1</sup> total Hg for acute poisoning<sup>1</sup> and a  
31 tolerable intake set at 2 µg total Hg kg<sup>-1</sup> body weight per day<sup>2</sup>. Both acute and long-term exposure to  
32 the metal can result in severe, irreversible neurological and developmental complications, commonly  
33 referred to as Minamata disease. It is therefore one of the most widely studied and monitored  
34 environmental pollutants. There are three main species of Hg found in natural waters: inorganic  
35 mercury (Hg<sup>2+</sup>), elemental mercury (Hg<sup>0</sup>), and organic species such as methylmercury (MeHg<sup>+</sup>) and  
36 dimethylmercury (Me<sub>2</sub>Hg). These species are often highly mobile<sup>3</sup> and their most significant  
37 environmental interactions are shown in Figure 1. Making up 1-40 % of the total Hg fraction, MeHg<sup>+</sup> is  
38 considered the most toxic Hg species. Organic Hg species are highly bioaccessible and prone to  
39 bioaccumulation. For example, predatory fish can have up to 10<sup>6</sup> times higher concentrations of total  
40 Hg than the surrounding waters, with 95 % of this being methylmercury<sup>4</sup>. Total aqueous Hg  
41 concentrations are usually less than 10 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg in uncontaminated natural freshwaters, with polluted  
42 waters generally being defined as higher than 100 ng L<sup>-1</sup> and even being reported at over 50 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>1</sup>,  
43 <sup>5-7</sup>. Monitoring total Hg and speciation data is vital to prevent human and environmental exposure to

44 harmful concentrations of the metal. Due to the naturally low concentrations of total and speciated  
 45 Hg, sample pre-treatment and preparation are vital to ensure accurate and precise measurement with  
 46 appropriate detection limits. Many preservation and preparation techniques for Hg recommend  
 47 filtration of the water sample. Dissolved Hg concentrations may adsorb to particulate matter over  
 48 time, altering the measurable dissolved concentration and posing different analytical challenges<sup>8-10</sup>.  
 49 The potential for toxicity of particulate-bound Hg is not well researched<sup>11, 12</sup>, with toxicity studies  
 50 focusing on dissolved species concentrations. For speciation analysis, sample pre-treatment methods  
 51 should generally avoid inter-species conversion, to provide representative species data of the sample.

## 52 1.2. Preservation and storage: importance and challenges

53 Preventing losses of Hg from water samples has been an ongoing problem for many years<sup>13-15</sup>. Safely  
 54 preserving and storing Hg concentrations in water samples is particularly difficult. Many species are  
 55 unstable in water, with total Hg ( $Hg_T$ ) concentrations can show losses of >70 % within 1 week<sup>13, 15</sup>.  
 56 Elemental  $Hg^0$  is volatile in solution and so readily escapes from uncapped samples or into any  
 57 container headspace<sup>13, 16</sup>. Inorganic  $Hg^{2+}$  is the most stable species in solution but is still prone to losses  
 58 through sorption to the container walls or reduction to the less stable species  $Hg^0$ <sup>13, 17, 18</sup>.  
 59 Methylmercury and other organomercurials can undergo photolytic reduction to  $Hg^0$  and can adsorb  
 60 to container walls, as well as minor losses occurring from coagulation with humic acids<sup>13, 18, 19</sup>. Any loss  
 61 of Hg from the sample or contamination of the sample will produce erroneous results and limit the  
 62 usefulness of the data, especially for samples used in environmental monitoring and human health  
 63 studies.

64 Wall-sorption of Hg has been extensively studied in the past<sup>10, 13, 15, 17, 20-22</sup> and the choice of sample  
 65 container material has been noted as a major factor in mitigating this. Glass and PTFE containers are  
 66 preferred for sampling Hg in waters, as wall sorption is greatly reduced in these materials<sup>8</sup>. However,  
 67 PTFE is relatively expensive when compared to other materials such as polyethylene, as demonstrated  
 68 in **Error! Reference source not found.** Glass containers are heavier and will become hazardous should  
 69 breakage occur. Polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP) are relatively more affordable alternatives  
 70 than PTFE or glass, are often used in water sampling<sup>9</sup> and are more robust than glass containers, but  
 71 can pose a significant risk of Hg loss if the sample is untreated<sup>15, 22</sup>.

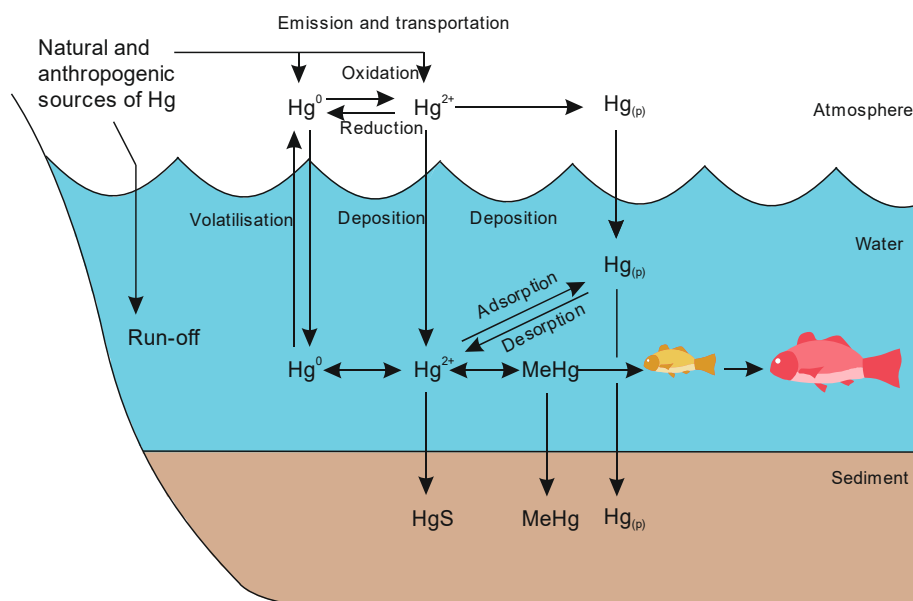
72 *Table 1 Approximate price comparison of container materials from online suppliers (sourced from FischerScientific on 4<sup>th</sup>*  
 73 *March 2022)*

Container material	Approximate price per 100 mL sample bottle*
High density polyethylene (HDPE)	\$1.50
Polypropylene (PP)	\$2
Borosilicate glass	\$1
Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE)	\$40

\* Prices are obtained from online vendors (SigmaAldrich, FischerScientific) and converted from GBP (£) to USD (\$) (4<sup>th</sup> March 2022)

74

## 75 1.3. Scope of the Review and Methodology



76

77 Figure 1 Biogeochemical cycle of mercury in the environment. Species described: Elemental mercury,  $Hg^0$ ; inorganic mercury,  
 78  $Hg^{2+}$ ; methylmercury,  $MeHg$ ; particulate bound mercury,  $Hg(p)$ ; mercury sulfide,  $HgS$  (Adapted from Kim and Zoh (2012)<sup>3</sup>)

79 The aim of this review was to critically assess the current literature related to the sampling,  
 80 preservation and storage of Hg samples during transport from field to laboratory, to improve the  
 81 likelihood of obtaining representative concentration and speciation data.

82 For the current preservation and pre-treatment methods, key benefits were highlighted and  
 83 limitations associated with the different methods were considered. Using ScienceDirect literature  
 84 database, Scopus, the WorldCat Library database and NERC library services, peer-reviewed, published  
 85 literature from 2000 to 2021 was reviewed using the search terms “mercury”, “water” or “aquatic”,  
 86 and “preservation”, “storage” or “speciation”. Literature that involved the preservation and storage  
 87 of aqueous Hg was reviewed. Any papers that were frequently cited throughout the reviewed  
 88 literature were also assessed and included if relevant. The benefits of the preservation methods were  
 89 explored, and any hazards associated with *in-situ* use and transportation were highlighted. The current  
 90 applications of solid-phase extraction (SPE) in Hg analysis were examined and the potential benefits  
 91 of the sorbents for sampling and preservation were explored. For solid-phase methods, the search  
 92 terms “mercury”, “preconcentration” or “speciation” or “removal” or “recovery”, “water” or “aquatic”  
 93 were used, and similarly any common and relevant references were assessed and included. Some key  
 94 considerations of the reviewed SPE methods were: the retention of the target analyte, the recovery  
 95 of the analyte upon desorption, and the compatibility of the desorption method with analysis  
 96 techniques.

97 A summary of literature on the preservation of Hg and its species by addition of a reagent is given in  
 98 **Error! Reference source not found.** and a summary of literature on the solid-phase extraction of Hg  
 99 and its species is given in **Error! Reference source not found.2.**

## 100 2. Current trends for field measurement, sampling and preservation

### 101 2.1. Field measurements

102 Analysis of analytes and their species *in-situ* eliminates the need for preservation and reduces the risk  
 103 of inter-species conversion and loss of analyte over time, providing a more accurate representation of  
 104 real-world chemistry. However, there is a greater risk of sample contamination and a greater difficulty

105 maintaining appropriate analytical conditions, due to a lower control over the environment when  
106 compared to a laboratory.

107 Commercially available field probes have been developed for *in-situ* Hg<sup>2+</sup> stripping voltammetry  
108 analysis. These are reported to measure Hg<sup>2+</sup> in the field with detection limits of 5 µg L<sup>-1</sup>, as well as  
109 other trace and transition metals. For pristine waters, these probes will likely struggle to produce an  
110 accurate quantitative result as mercury concentrations can be as low as 1 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup>. Rocha et al.  
111 (2019) reported detection limits of 5 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup> in river water using a portable analyser<sup>23</sup>, unsuitable  
112 for the WHO guideline value<sup>1</sup> of 2 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg but may be useful for indicating severe Hg pollution. A  
113 similar detection limit was reported by Bhardwaj et al. (2020) in pond and drain water<sup>24</sup>. Gold  
114 nanoparticle electrodes have been developed by Hwang et al. (2021) for Hg<sup>2+</sup> determination, achieving  
115 detection limits of 1.7 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup> with a linear response between 10-100 µg L<sup>-1</sup> in landfill leachates<sup>25</sup>.  
116 This highlights the ability for these technologies to be used in difficult matrices, however detection  
117 limits are currently unsuitable for speciation analysis or for Hg concentrations found in most natural  
118 waters.

119 Other methods of Hg field analysis use headspace Hg vapor analysers, relying on the evolution of  
120 elemental Hg vapour from water samples<sup>26</sup>. These probes have been reported to achieve detection  
121 limits of approximately 0.09 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>0</sup>, but are designed specifically for Hg concentration in air;  
122 preparative chemicals are required for other matrices to evolve Hg vapour and the data must be  
123 converted to other units for comparison to other analysis methods and water studies<sup>1, 5-7</sup>.

## 124 **2.2. Acidification**

125 As field measurement of Hg in natural waters is not currently possible, preservation of the dissolved  
126 metal is vital for Hg analysis. Recommended methods for preservation of Hg in natural water samples  
127 generally follow the guidance of other trace metals, namely acidifying water samples with nitric  
128 (HNO<sub>3</sub>), hydrochloric (HCl), or sulphuric acid (H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>)<sup>8-10</sup>. The choice of acid is important for Hg stability;  
129 the use of HNO<sub>3</sub> has been found to still be susceptible to large losses of Hg from water samples through  
130 both volatilisation and sorption to container walls<sup>13, 15, 17, 27</sup>.

131 Hydrochloric acid is recommended as a suitable preservation method for dissolved Hg species in  
132 freshwater samples<sup>20</sup>. Inorganic Hg<sup>2+</sup> can complex with chloride ions to form the stable HgCl<sub>2</sub> complex,  
133 and tri- or tetra-chloromercury complexes if the chloride concentration is further increased<sup>21, 28</sup>. These  
134 are more stable in solution than other species and are not co-precipitated by metal oxides and  
135 hydroxides<sup>29-31</sup>. A 1 % (v/v) HCl solution was reported to prevent loss of Hg<sup>2+</sup> over 55 days in 500 mL  
136 HDPE containers<sup>28</sup>. The lower pH and the presence of chloride ions increases the stability of Hg<sup>2+</sup>, as  
137 demonstrated by the preservative abilities of HNO<sub>3</sub> (6% v/v HNO<sub>3</sub>) for Hg in seawater reported by  
138 Gardner and Gunn (1997)<sup>32</sup> and 20 mg L<sup>-1</sup> NaCl + 0.15% (v/v) HNO<sub>3</sub> for Hg in deionised water reported  
139 by Louie et al. (2012)<sup>28</sup>.

140 These conditions also increase the stability of MeHg in water samples. In a 0.5% (v/v) HCl solution  
141 stored in Teflon containers at 1-4 °C in the dark, MeHg is reported to be stable for up to 250 days in  
142 both freshwater and seawater<sup>10</sup>. Sulphuric acid has also been recommended for the preservation of  
143 aqueous MeHg in saline media, as hydrochloric acid (>0.4% v/v) may result in the artificial formation  
144 of monomethyl mercury during the distillation and ethylation process typically used for MeHg  
145 speciation<sup>10</sup>.

146 When considering speciation, Bloom et al.<sup>5</sup> reported that acidification may alter labile Hg(II) resulting  
147 in desorption from particulates in unfiltered samples, oxidation of Hg<sup>0</sup> or coagulation of dissolved  
148 organic carbon and humic acids which can precipitate Hg from solution.

### 149 3. Solid-phase extraction

150 Solid-phase extraction offers the potential for reagent-free field sampling of Hg from water samples.  
151 Sorbents and solid-phase methods are frequently used in the analysis of dissolved Hg for sample  
152 preparation and pre-treatment, such as preconcentration<sup>33-39</sup>, speciation<sup>34, 36, 37, 40-43</sup> and removal of  
153 Hg<sup>37, 44-49</sup>. Solid-phase extraction was previously studied for retention and stabilisation of heavy metals  
154 for analysis at a later date<sup>33, 50</sup>. Adsorption of Hg to a solid-phase mitigates the risk of loss from wall  
155 sorption; there is less chance of contact between an analyte bound to a solid-phase and the container  
156 walls when compared to an analyte in an aqueous-phase. This approach has been investigated in the  
157 past<sup>14, 33, 51</sup>, but is not in widespread use.

#### 158 3.1. Thiol- functionalised resins

159 A common approach to Hg-selectivity in sorbents is to exploit the affinity for Hg of thiol-containing  
160 compounds; diphenylthiocarbazon (dithizone)<sup>42, 52, 53</sup>, 2-mercaptoethanol<sup>54</sup>,  
161 diethyldithiocarbamate<sup>33</sup>, and other compounds have been used to either functionalise resins or for  
162 complexation with aqueous Hg. These reagents provided recoveries of inorganic, methyl-, ethyl- and  
163 phenyl- species of Hg of over 70 %, with preconcentration factors suitable for aqueous Hg  
164 concentrations of between 0.1 – 50  $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ <sup>33, 42, 54, 55</sup>. While most work focuses on a deionised water  
165 matrix, Margetínová et al. (2008)<sup>54</sup> successfully extracted Hg from natural freshwaters, by complexing  
166 Hg with 2-mercaptophenol before passing samples through C18 columns. The use of 2-  
167 mercaptophenol as a complexing agent comes with separate risks as the reagent is volatile, has a  
168 strong odour, and the concentrated solution is highly toxic, so was reportedly diluted to a 5 mM 2-  
169 mercaptophenol solution before use. The high organic concentration of the methanol eluent solution  
170 limits the analytical techniques available to this method, relying on HPLC/CV-AAS for speciation  
171 analysis.

172 Blanco et al. (2000)<sup>33</sup> achieved a similar extraction by immobilising diethyldithiocarbamate onto  
173 homemade C18 microcolumns. The C18 immobilised diethyldithiocarbamate column used a 50 mL  
174 sample volume to achieve recoveries of >70 % for Hg<sup>2+</sup> and >65 % for MeHg<sup>+</sup> from freshwater river  
175 samples, with detection limits of 0.2  $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ . The diethyldithiocarbamate modified C18 columns showed  
176 potential as an in-field preservation method, as samples could be readily passed through the  
177 microcolumns in the field and inorganic Hg<sup>2+</sup> is stabilised for approximately 2 weeks. The detection  
178 limits are unsuitable for typical concentrations in many unpolluted natural water samples, primarily  
179 being suitable for areas of moderate to high Hg pollution. There was a substantial decline in recovery  
180 of MeHg after 2 weeks of storage, even when held at 4°C in the dark<sup>33</sup>. Over 85 % of the spiked MeHg  
181 could be recovered within 7 days of extraction to the cartridge, declining to <50 % by 14 days. This  
182 trend was also seen with Hg<sup>2+</sup>, albeit much less significant with a recovery of 80 % Hg<sup>2+</sup> after 30 days  
183 storage. This method was applied to LC-ICP-MS, allowing for a fraction of the sample volume required  
184 from the technique reported by Margetínová et al. (2008)<sup>54</sup>. In addition, the eluent composition (0.5%  
185 v/v HCl + 5% w/v sodium thiosulphate) is compatible with a wide variety of analytical techniques, so  
186 is suitable for a broader scope of laboratories.

187 Dithizone functionalised C18 columns were developed by Yin et al. (2010) to effectively recovery Hg  
188 species from tap water samples (Hg<sup>2+</sup>, MeHg<sup>+</sup>, EtHg<sup>+</sup>)<sup>42</sup>. The method used just 3 mL 100 mmol L<sup>-1</sup>  
189 sodium thiosulphate solution to elute the retained species, from sample volumes of 100 mL. This  
190 eluent choice allows a wide variety of analytical techniques to be applied but may show limitations  
191 where acidification or oxidation of the sample is required, due to the formation of solid sulphur which  
192 may decrease Hg concentrations by formation of solid Hg<sub>2</sub>S. Using HPLC-ICP-MS analysis, detection  
193 limits of 3 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg were reported from sample injection volumes of just 20  $\mu\text{L}$ . This work supported

194 by Wang et al. (2022), using a 1% (v/v) 2-mercaptoethanol eluent for elution of Hg species<sup>53</sup>. This  
195 eluent is still compatible with a wide range of analytical techniques with some careful adjustments,  
196 such as use of organic introduction systems for ICP-MS analysis for routine use.

### 197 **3.2. Commercially available chelating resins**

198 Commercially available ion exchange resins have been developed for the removal of Hg from industrial  
199 wastewaters; Duolite GT-73™ and AmberSep GT-74™ are examples of these. The recovery and  
200 preconcentration of Hg in solution using these resins has been explored as diffusive gradient thin-film  
201 cartridges<sup>35, 45, 56</sup>. Pelcová et al.<sup>56</sup> reported that both Duolite GT-73™ and AmberSep GT-74™ can  
202 remove inorganic, methyl-, ethyl-, and phenylmercury from both tap and river waters with limits of  
203 detection between 30 – 50 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg concentrations. The loading capacities for Hg are often high, >70  
204 mg Hg g<sup>-1</sup> resin<sup>57</sup>, as these resins were designed for the treatment of wastewaters with high Hg  
205 concentrations, often greater than 500 µg L<sup>-1</sup>. These efficiently and selectively extract Hg<sup>2+</sup> from a  
206 variety of water matrices but some studies reported difficulty in recovery from the resins by elution<sup>35,</sup>  
207 <sup>56</sup>, instead resorting to either digestion of the resin prior to analysis or direct absorption spectrometry  
208 measurement of the resin. From solutions containing up to 100 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup>, over 92 % of the total Hg  
209 concentration could be readily recovered by digestion of the Duolite GT-73 resin™, with negligible  
210 losses in the digestion step<sup>35</sup>. Duolite GT-73™ is now out of production, but AmberSep GT-74™ and  
211 other variations of this resin are still available<sup>56, 58</sup>.

### 212 **3.3. Cationic exchange resins**

213 As Hg species are predominantly cationic in the aquatic environment, cation exchange resins offer a  
214 method to remove these from solution. These resins are effective at removing cationic Hg species such  
215 as Hg(OH)<sub>2</sub><sup>2+</sup> complexes, but there may be issue with the sorption of uncharged complexes and  
216 species, such as HgCl<sub>2</sub> or MeHgCl. The conditioned resins are often washed with deionised water prior  
217 to extraction, as this decreases the likelihood of forming uncharged or negatively charged Hg  
218 complexes in the resin which impede sorption<sup>21, 28</sup>.

219 A commercially available resin, Dowex 50W X4™, was found to remove inorganic Hg and some organic  
220 Hg species from a variety of natural water matrices whilst allowing for elution using 0.1 % thiourea  
221 and 8 % hydrochloric acid<sup>59</sup>. Gomez et al.<sup>60</sup> used the commercially available Dowex Marathon™ cation  
222 exchange resin as comparison to activated carbon and treated and non-treated coals. They reported  
223 the cationic exchange resin had the best sorption capacity, 98 µg Hg g<sup>-1</sup> resin, and recoveries, >95 %  
224 Hg<sup>2+</sup>, of the studied sorbents. These experiments used 50 mL sample volume but used a high Hg  
225 concentration, between 0.1 – 998.4 mg L<sup>-1</sup>.

226 Cationic exchange columns have been used for online preconcentration of Hg species in sea waters,  
227 achieving detection limits of 42 pg L<sup>-1</sup> when using HPLC-ICP-MS analysis<sup>61</sup>. This indicates suitability for  
228 the analysis of low Hg concentrations in waters. Ion exchange sorbents, columns and cartridges are  
229 commercially available and often relatively inexpensive. Some technical knowledge and training are  
230 required for field use, but use of hazardous materials is limited in field applications. Other cations  
231 present may compete for the active sites of the resin, but high loading capacities would overcome  
232 this. Issues may also arise in samples with high chloride concentrations due to the formation of  
233 uncharged complexes that would not be retained by the sorbent and pass through to the effluent<sup>21</sup>.  
234 Metals are eluted from these columns using strong acids, such as hydrochloric acid. While this is  
235 compatible with many analysis techniques, the concentrations of acid may require a dilution and thus  
236 reduce the overall sensitivity of the method.

### 237 **3.4. Polyaniline**

238 Polyaniline is a readily available polymeric sorbent that can be used for removal of metals from  
239 aqueous solutions and preconcentration of trace metals. Studies have primarily examined inorganic  
240 Hg species by addition of a bulk resin to a water sample, but separation of methylmercury is also  
241 possible<sup>36, 41</sup>. Mercury analyses using polyaniline for preconcentration have achieved 2-3 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg  
242 limits of detection using CV-AAS and FAAS, suitable for uncontaminated natural water and drinking  
243 water; these matrices usually show Hg concentrations below 10 ng L<sup>-1</sup> <sup>62</sup>. Mercury has been  
244 successfully preconcentrated with polyaniline from a variety of matrices including bottled water, lake  
245 and groundwaters, seawater, and even fish tissue using 100 mL sample and 10 mL 0.3 % HCl + 0.5 %  
246 thiourea eluent<sup>36, 41</sup>. The eluent is suitable for a wide range of analytical detection methods, due to  
247 the relatively low organic compound concentration and acid concentration.

248 Some polyaniline composites have also been examined for Hg removal, to improve resin stability, Hg  
249 selectivity and efficiency of sorption. Polyvinyl alcohol<sup>63</sup>, humic acid<sup>15</sup>, polystyrene<sup>64</sup>, and other  
250 reagents have been used to create polyaniline composites, usually with an optimal pH range of 4-7.  
251 The predominant Hg species at this pH range is Hg(OH)<sub>2</sub> species, which will form Hg-N bonds with the  
252 polyaniline units and other bonds such as Hg-S with the composite molecules. At pH <4 the polyaniline  
253 nitrogen may be protonated, reducing the number of possible Hg-N bonds that can be formed.

### 254 **3.5. Magnetic SPE**

255 In the past decade, developments for solid-phase extraction technologies have incorporated the use  
256 of magnetic particles. By functionalising magnetic particles, the sorbent can be added to a sample to  
257 sorb Hg and then be readily removed by applying a magnetic field. The selectivity and efficiency of the  
258 sorbent is dictated by the functionalisation; some previously used compounds include 1,2-  
259 ethanedithiol<sup>65</sup>, 3-mercaptopropyltrimethoxysilane<sup>43</sup>, 1,5-diphenylcarbazide<sup>66</sup>, and other task-specific  
260 monoliths<sup>67</sup>. These have achieved 0.1-100 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup> detection limits of inorganic Hg in real-world  
261 aquatic matrices such as lake, river water and for spiked tap water. The 1,2-ethanedithiol  
262 functionalised particle also adsorbed cadmium (Cd) and lead (Pb) ions from solution with 0.82 ng L<sup>-1</sup>  
263 Cd and Pb limits of detection<sup>65</sup>, making the method more desirable commercially and for heavy metal  
264 pollution studies. Song, et al.<sup>68</sup> synthesised a task specific monolith with vinylboronic anhydride  
265 pyridine complex for functionalising the magnetic particles. This was synthesised for magnetic solid-  
266 phase extraction microextraction of inorganic Hg<sup>2+</sup>, methyl-, ethyl- and phenyl- Hg. Using the chelating  
267 sorbent, recoveries of up to 94 % and detection limits of 20-160 ng L<sup>-1</sup> could be achieved.

268 Magnetic solid-phase particles can be readily removed from solution with a magnetic field and can be  
269 used to achieve detection limits of <100 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg. Speciation of Hg<sup>2+</sup> and MeHg can be achieved and  
270 changing functional groups on the sorbent can allow for multi-elemental extraction. The sorbent can  
271 be applied to a water sample collected in a container, allowed to sit in the sample for an appropriate  
272 length of time, and then the enriched sorbent can be removed using a magnet. Elution from magnetic  
273 sorbents is generally achieved using HCl or HNO<sub>3</sub> and thiourea in relatively low concentrations.  
274 Analysis is typically conducted using ICP-MS techniques, however the composition of eluent and the  
275 preconcentration of the metal make the methods compatible with less sophisticated techniques such  
276 as AAS. The main limitation for magnetic SPE is the multi-step synthesis required to produce the  
277 sorbent, as the methods used often produce approximately 1 g of sorbent and scaling-up the synthesis  
278 has not yet been explored<sup>65</sup>. The product must also be characterised before use to ensure a  
279 homogenous and effective sorbent.

### 280 **3.6. Gold-based SPE**



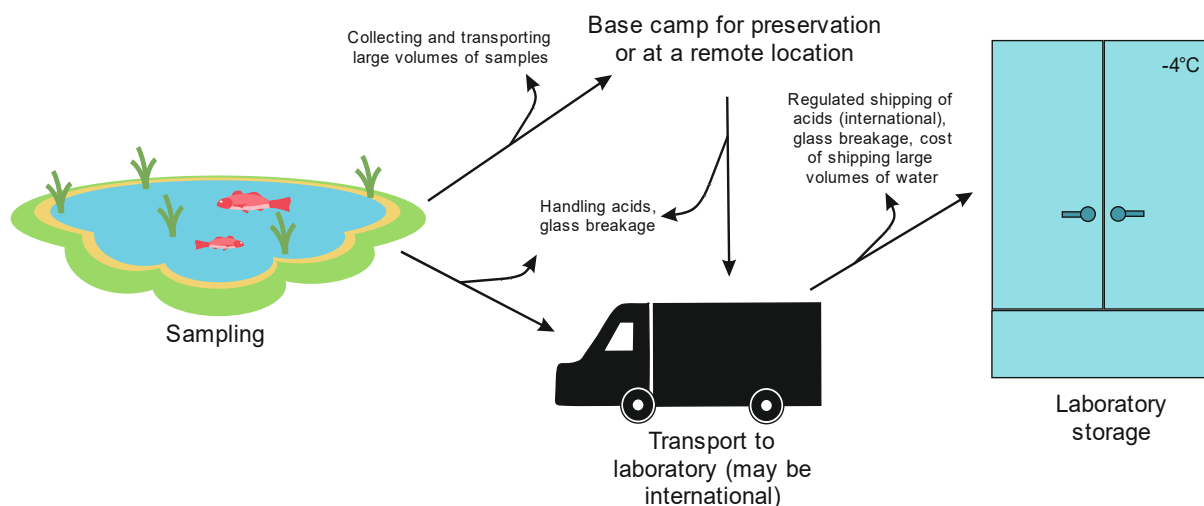
281 Many metals form amalgams with Hg and this property is frequently exploited for solid-phase  
282 extraction of Hg vapour. Cold vapour (CV) methods use gold to amalgamate reduced Hg vapour,  
283 trapping the analyte in place and allowing release of the preconcentrated Hg by thermal desorption.  
284 As the amalgam is formed on the solid particles, problems arising from interferences are often negligible  
285 and so can be readily applied to environmental matrices. This has been examined and exploited in  
286 the form of gold nanoparticle columns<sup>38, 69, 70</sup>, greatly increasing the surface area when compared to a  
287 bulk solid. Similarly, columns made using gold nanosheets offer a relatively simple method of  
288 extracting and preconcentrating aqueous Hg with very good sensitivity, as low as 80 pg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup><sup>71</sup>.  
289 Schlathauer et al.<sup>51</sup> developed a dipstick of immobilised gold nanoparticles, allowing for a simple field-  
290 sampling method that can achieve levels of sensitivity suitable for pristine waters and sea waters. As  
291 a simple dipstick, this method is easily conducted in the field without the need for extensive training  
292 or technical competency, as well as posing little hazard to the operator or during transport. While  
293 technically capable, the cost and complexity of manufacturing the dipstick alongside the need for  
294 annealing at 600 °C before each measurement currently prevents this from being easily reproduced.  
295 Additionally, gold-based SPE typically uses thermal desorption to liberate Hg from the solid-phase.  
296 While this effectively eliminates potential interferences, the detection method becomes limited to  
297 those suited for gases and vapors, such as CV-AAS.

### 298 3.7. Critical review of sample preservation and solid-phase extraction

299 While acidification of water samples for Hg analysis is commonly recommended, the handling and  
300 transportation of acids is becoming increasingly more regulated, particularly where controls over  
301 health and safety are more difficult, i.e. handling concentrated acids outside of a laboratory setting,  
302 and where limitations are imposed for international transportation of acids (**Error! Reference source  
303 not found.**). Any handling of acids comes with inherent hazards and risks due to their corrosive nature.  
304 This makes preservation methods that require concentrated acids particularly difficult to conduct in  
305 the field, as well as for transportation of acids and acidified samples particularly transport by air where  
306 regulations are becoming stricter<sup>72</sup>. Historically, oxidising agents were also recommended for Hg  
307 preservation<sup>73</sup> by oxidising the Hg species to the stable Hg<sup>2+</sup>, however this destroys speciation data  
308 and so has fallen out of favour. Other reagent-based methods for preservation show potential, but  
309 have not been fully explored<sup>13</sup>. For example, increasing the ionic strength of solution by addition of  
310 ionic salts, i.e. NaCl, allows for a less hazardous method to preserve Hg<sup>15</sup>, but literature primarily  
311 focuses on Hg<sup>2+</sup> in spiked and synthetic matrices with little assessment of un-spiked water  
312 environmental samples. In addition, elevated chloride concentrations can co-precipitate in MeHg  
313 distillation and ethylation procedures<sup>10</sup>, making the procedure unsuitable for traditional speciation  
314 analysis.

315 Due to the importance of Hg speciation analysis for toxicity studies, there is a concern for interspecies  
316 conversion and loss of sample integrity during preparation and storage of water samples<sup>74-77</sup>.  
317 Individual samples are often taken for each desired species and preserved using different methods<sup>78</sup>.  
318 This approach allows the operator to collect speciation data for Hg, but vastly increases sample volumes  
319 required and limits the environments in which Hg studies can be conducted. For example, studies in  
320 developing countries and remote areas must ship samples internationally for analysis<sup>79, 80</sup>. If samples  
321 are shipped unpreserved, then speciation data may not be considered as representative of the  
322 sampled environment.

323



324

325 *Figure 2 The sampling and preservation process, with key challenges highlighted*

326 Recent developments in SPE for Hg analysis have focused on preparative methods such as online-  
 327 speciation and -preconcentration; hyphenating a chromatographic separation to the detection  
 328 method to enrich the analyte, improving detection limits and analytical sensitivity. The SPE  
 329 preparation methods often operate in a broad pH range, usually optimal at pH 4-7 so suitable for many  
 330 natural waters. These methods are often developed for mass spectrometry techniques<sup>33, 65, 68</sup> and  
 331 atomic absorption and fluorescence techniques<sup>33, 39, 52, 54, 81, 82</sup>, due to their comparatively high  
 332 sensitivity for environmental metal analysis.

333 Ion exchange resins sorbents and columns are commercially available and have been shown to sorb  
 334 both inorganic and organic Hg species from aquatic media. Chelating resins are the more prominent  
 335 choice for Hg sorption in the literature, as the affinity for sulphur allows for selective extraction of  
 336 Hg<sup>33, 42, 53, 54</sup>. Some chelating resins, however, require synthesis or processing to create columns and  
 337 cartridges for field use<sup>33, 42</sup>. Commercially available resins are available but have shown difficulty in  
 338 eluting retained Hg species, requiring digestion processes to liberate the adsorbed Hg<sup>56, 58</sup> which may  
 339 affect speciation data through oxidation of the retained species. Cation exchange resins only require  
 340 an acid, HCl in this case, and thiourea to efficiently elute Hg<sup>59</sup>, but these may be more susceptible to  
 341 competition with other cations in the sample. Typically, ion exchange resins use dilute acids and weak  
 342 organic concentrations to elute immobilised Hg species. The eluent composition allows for analysis  
 343 using a wide range of instruments and can therefore be applied in most laboratories.

344 Functionalised magnetic sorbents can be added to a collected water sample and then readily removed  
 345 by application of a magnetic field, either an electro-magnet or a strong, permanent magnet<sup>43, 65-67</sup>.  
 346 These sorbents are relatively simple to use in the field, with minimal training requirements and a high  
 347 Hg extraction efficiency. The eluent can typically be used with a wide variety of analysis techniques,  
 348 although some developed sorbents require methanol<sup>67</sup> which will limit the compatibility of the  
 349 methods. The synthesis of these sorbents is often more complicated than other sorbent materials,  
 350 and may require work to scale-up synthesis to be viable as a widespread sampling procedure.

351 Gold-based sorbents are some of the most selective and efficient sorbents available for Hg extraction  
 352 and preservation, but come with a considerable cost due to the raw materials price<sup>38, 51, 71</sup>. Therefore,  
 353 a high reusability is necessary to offset the cost. Desorption of the retained Hg is conducted via  
 354 thermal desorption, which limits the compatible analysis techniques to those which can measure Hg  
 355 vapour, such as AAS.

356 Another technology, diffusive gradient thin-film (DGT), was investigated for the sorption and storage  
357 of Hg in the field<sup>56, 83</sup>, with analysis after transport to the laboratory. These are usually deployed into  
358 a water source, for example a river or waste treatment water tank, for 4 – 24 hours, where the Hg  
359 species become bound to the resin<sup>58, 84</sup>. For some DGT resins, Hg is irreversibly bound and so must be  
360 digested before analysis or alternative analysis methods must be used<sup>56, 58</sup>. For other resins, Hg species  
361 are elutable with either thiourea or HCl the latter being preferable for many analysis techniques and  
362 when ethylation of the Hg species is required for MeHg quantification<sup>84</sup>.

363 A current deficiency in literature is the exploration of adequate storage capacities and times for SPE  
364 methods (Supplementary Table 2). When investigating sorption of Hg species, there is a tendency to  
365 focus on trace metal concentrations, such as  $<0.1 \mu\text{g L}^{-1} \text{Hg}^{2+}$ <sup>43, 51, 69, 71</sup>. While this is adequate for  
366 unpolluted waters, the usefulness of the developed methods for contaminated water samples is in  
367 question. Resins developed for Hg removal show comparatively higher storage capacities, often over  
368  $10 \text{ mg Hg g}^{-1} \text{resin}$ <sup>36, 48, 63-66</sup>, and storage capacities of functionalised columns are dependent on the  
369 amount of functionalising agent immobilised on the solid phase<sup>33, 42, 53</sup>. Storage times are also under-  
370 represented in literature, often only being investigated for around 1-week of storage<sup>33, 42, 51, 53</sup>. Filling  
371 this gap in knowledge will provide necessary information for applying SPE as an offline field sampling  
372 and preservation method.

#### 373 4. Future perspectives of field analysis and preservation

##### 374 4.1. The future of Hg field analysis

375 Emerging technologies use nanoparticles and colorimetric methods to determine  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  in natural  
376 waters. Fluorescence probes have been developed for  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  determination, for example Kaewnok et  
377 al.<sup>85</sup> developed a [5]helicene-based probe highly selective for  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  which can be used as a test-strip  
378 with a detection limit of  $6.5 \mu\text{g L}^{-1} \text{Hg}^{2+}$ . This work requires development for the in-field screening of  
379  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  in environmental samples. Rhodamine nanoparticles have been developed for smartphone-based  
380 colorimetric analysis, as a method to detect  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  in pristine water matrices<sup>86, 87</sup>. These nanoparticles  
381 are highly selective for  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$ , showing little interference with other metals. Recoveries of over 95 %  
382 were reported for both drinking water and dam water with a limit of detection of  $1.3 \mu\text{g L}^{-1} \text{Hg}^{2+}$ <sup>87</sup>,  
383 and  $0.1 \mu\text{g L}^{-1} \text{Hg}^{2+}$  in spiked deionised water with recoveries  $>80 \%$   $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  in river and lake water<sup>86</sup>.  
384 Lopreside et al. reported colorimetric smartphone detection of  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  using an orthogonal paper  
385 biosensor<sup>88</sup>. Using three different biotic “reagents”,  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$  concentrations and toxicity can be evaluated  
386 simultaneously. The sensors each determine Hg over different periods of time, between 17 – 60  
387 minutes, and with varying limits of detection,  $0.58 – 17 \mu\text{g L}^{-1} \text{Hg}^{2+}$ . This allows for either quantitative  
388 or semi-quantitative analysis, if required. The use of multiple sensors reduces the chance of  
389 interference by other compounds and elements in the matrix, however silver and cadmium reportedly  
390 inhibit the activity of the sensors.

391 With the prevalence of smartphones and simplicity of use, colorimetric methods are likely to become  
392 a mainstay in field analysis methods for trace metals in the future. The biggest challenges to analysis  
393 in the field are the limit of detection in relevant matrices, determination of different Hg species and  
394 contamination of the sample. While good practice can overcome sample contamination issues, the  
395 sensitivity of portable instruments is currently not suitable for mercury concentrations less than the  
396 WHO guideline limit of  $2 \mu\text{g L}^{-1}$  total Hg, or for speciation analysis. Current field analyses of Hg species  
397 are unable to achieve appropriate sensitivity, as Hg species are often found in concentrations  $<10 \text{ ng}$   
398  $\text{L}^{-1}$  particularly in unpolluted sites. The portable instruments tend to favour analysis of  $\text{Hg}^{2+}$ , neglecting  
399 the determination of MeHg and other relevant species. This limits their usefulness for toxicological  
400 and monitoring studies, as organic Hg species data is vital for assessing the health impact of Hg

401 concentrations in waters. With these current restraints, analysts must weigh up improved analysis and  
402 sensitivity in laboratory measurements versus representative but less accurate data measured in the  
403 field.

#### 404 **4.2. Solid-phase extraction as a sampling and preservation method**

405 Solid-phase extraction shows potential as future reagent-free sampling methods for Hg in natural  
406 water samples, as columns and microcolumns<sup>33, 38, 42, 54, 59, 71</sup>, as DGT cartridges<sup>56, 58</sup>, particles added  
407 directly to samples<sup>43</sup>, or as a dipstick<sup>51</sup>. The ability to extract Hg from solution and retain the metal on  
408 a solid bed reduces the likelihood of Hg loss over time; volatilisation is reduced due to strong  
409 interactions with the stationary phase and wall sorption is reduced as the analyte is immobilised on a  
410 solid phase with little interaction with the container walls. By immobilising the analyte to a solid phase,  
411 the likelihood of chemical changes is reduced, and speciation data can be preserved<sup>33, 43, 53</sup>. Most  
412 column-based SPE methods are relatively simple to conduct and, once prepared, can be used in the  
413 field to extract dissolved Hg without the need for additional reagents. The use of columns and  
414 cartridges also eliminate the need for glass containers, reducing hazards from breakages.

415 One promising SPE methods for Hg preservation, gold-nanoparticle dipsticks, are effective at removing  
416 Hg from natural water samples<sup>51</sup>. The dipsticks can be simply dipped into a water sample, with little  
417 knowledge required for field-use, few possible interferents and is a relatively quick method at only 10  
418 – 20 minutes per sample. The dipstick must be annealed at 600 °C to ensure gold nanoparticle  
419 formation and the synthesis was reported to require a system for depositing a gold vapour to a defined  
420 area on the stick. This limits the ability to scale-up production of the dipstick for routine use, however  
421 the article reported excellent reusability at 145 cycles of sampling and annealing without performance  
422 loss. While offering superb extraction and recovery, the gold-based sorbents are limited to techniques  
423 for analysing Hg vapours, such as AAS, due to the requirement for thermal desorption. This may limit  
424 the overall usefulness of the technique, as other analysis methods cannot be used as readily.

425 Other sorbents, such as thiol-functionalised sorbents or functionalised magnetic solid-phases, are  
426 typically compatible with a wider variety of analytical techniques due to eluent composition. Often,  
427 the eluents used are a dilute acid<sup>33, 36, 43, 59, 63, 65</sup> or a low organic compound concentration<sup>33, 36, 42, 43, 59,</sup>  
428 <sup>65</sup>, so are not as restricted as thermal desorption. In addition, inorganic and methyl- Hg species were  
429 retained and stored on diethyldithiocarbamate immobilized C18 microcolumns for up to 2-weeks and  
430 1 week respectively before elution<sup>33</sup>, highlighting the potential for reagent-free field sampling while  
431 preserving speciation. These columns, microcolumns, and cartridges are simple to use in the field, with  
432 minimal training requirements and little-to-no risk to the operator. With high recoveries and readily  
433 incorporating preconcentration of Hg species, SPE methods offer the ability to collect and preserve  
434 representative Hg concentration and speciation data, while being suitable to many analysis techniques  
435 and laboratory settings.

436 The cost of the SPE methods is often higher than that of sample acidification but the reduction in  
437 storage space and sample volume, as well as reduced risk to the operator and simpler field-  
438 application, offset the cost (Table 2). Preconcentration, usually via SPE, may be required for samples  
439 only treated by acidification, so sorbents may already be required. A currently unexplored risk of  
440 columns and cartridges is the accumulation of Hg from ambient storage conditions; this is likely  
441 mitigated by choice of casing material and appropriate storage, but further work on this is needed.  
442 However, avoiding storage in areas of with Hg vapour contamination may make this concern  
443 negligible.

444 Another important, yet unresolved issue is the lack of validated *in-situ* analytical techniques that can  
445 accurately measure Hg species concentrations. Without the determination of species concentration  
446 at the point of collection, interspecies conversion during storage and transportation cannot be fully  
447 validated for environmental samples and so speciation data determined in the laboratory may not be  
448 representative of the real-world concentrations.

449

450

Table 2 Approximate cost-per-sample of some suggested Hg preservation and solid-phase extraction methods

Preservation/ preparation method	Relevant species	Main costs	Approximate reagent cost per sample*	Sample holding time	Application in the field	Cost-benefit
Acidification (HCl and HNO <sub>3</sub> )	Total Hg, Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg	HCl and HNO <sub>3</sub> divided by samples at 1 %	\$2.50 per 500 mL sample	6-12 months	Addition of 1% (v/v) acid to a collected water sample, either at a base-camp or in a laboratory after shipping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Relatively cheap per sample</li> <li>+ Recommended</li> <li>– Separate samples are usually required for speciation techniques (i.e. distillation for MeHg)</li> <li>– Needs to be added to samples when at a base-camp or laboratory, to ensure safety measures</li> <li>– Potential difficulties and regulations in transportation of samples</li> </ul>
Thiol-functionalised ion exchange cartridges	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg	Price of cartridges and approximate price of functionalising reagents	\$5 per sample	Not investigated beyond 2 weeks	Water samples are passed through homemade microcolumns or cartridges in the field, transported to a laboratory for elution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Highly selective for Hg and can be filled with water prior to sampling, reducing the amount of hazardous waste in-field.</li> <li>+ Can be re-used and regenerated several times, improving cost-effectiveness</li> <li>– Preservation and storage of Hg species has not been fully explored</li> <li>– A time-cost must be considered for preparation of SPE-phases, albeit relatively labour un-intensive</li> </ul>
Commercially available resins	Total Hg, Hg <sup>2+</sup>	Initial price of resin	\$10 per sample	Not investigated	Water samples passed through pre-prepared DGT cartridges, or applied as a batch sorbent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Selective for Hg in water samples, usually applied for Hg removal in waste-water</li> <li>+ High analyte capacity relative to other resins and sorbents</li> <li>– Resins are often expensive (~\$500 for 250g resin)</li> <li>– For a column/cartridge, column loading and preparation time must be considered</li> </ul>

Gold sorbents	Total Hg, Hg <sup>2+</sup>	Price of gold metal for synthesising sorbent	\$5 for sample	Not investigated	A dipstick, which can be dipped into a water sample, or passing water through preprepared microcolumns or cartridges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ These offer high levels of reusability (&gt;145 cycles), and Hg desorption can be conducted thermally</li> <li>+ Minimal interference/competition for the sorbent, due to selective amalgamation</li> <li>– Synthesis requires controlled sputtering and vapour deposition technologies, which may not be readily available</li> <li>– Gold is an expensive reagent, not readily available in most laboratories for preparation of the columns/dipsticks, therefore has a high initial cost</li> </ul>
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\*Prices are obtained from online vendors (sigmaaldrich.com, fishersci.co.uk, accessed 21 August 2022) converted from GDP (£) to USD (\$)

451

452 **5. Conclusion**

453 While the mechanisms for dissolved Hg loss have become more well defined over the years, safe  
454 methods for preservation, storage and transportation of samples to the laboratory for measurement  
455 of both total Hg and individual Hg species still remains a challenge. Different species require separate  
456 preservation methods, hazardous or expensive materials, and large sample volumes to improve  
457 detection limits for trace and ultra-trace Hg analysis and speciation analysis. This makes routine Hg  
458 studies and monitoring impractical in challenging environments such as remote locations or lower-  
459 and middle-income countries. Current literature on preserving Hg species in water samples has shown  
460 minimal developments on limiting the use of hazardous materials, instead highlighting the need for  
461 rapid transportation to a laboratory for preservation. In remote areas and uncontrolled environments,  
462 the use of concentrated acids can pose a significant risk to the operator and increase the challenges  
463 of transporting samples to laboratories in a timely manner.

464 Solid-phases methods and sorbents are already used in Hg analysis for preconcentration, removal, and  
465 speciation of Hg, immobilising the chemical species without altering the chemical forms. Mercury-  
466 specific functionalized sorbents, in particular functionalisation with diethyldithiocarbamate or  
467 diphenylthiocarbazone, have shown effective extraction of Hg<sup>2+</sup> and some organic Hg species from  
468 natural water samples and suitable recovery after 1 week of storage. There is a lack of literature on  
469 the concentrations of adsorbed Hg species after 1-week of storage, therefore research into the long-  
470 term storage of Hg-species, particularly MeHg, is necessary for the development of SPE as a  
471 preservation method. However, SPE is a relatively inexpensive and safe method for *in-situ* sampling  
472 and preserving Hg species from natural water samples for transport from field-to-laboratory and  
473 obtaining representative dissolved Hg data.

474 **Acknowledgements**

475 Funding for D.C.P.K was provided by Nottingham Trent University and The British Geological Survey  
476 University Funding Initiative (contract number: GA/21S/002). This work is published with the  
477 permission of the Executive Director, British Geological Survey.



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## Supplementary information

Supplementary Table 1 Reagent-based preservation methods for Hg, reported storage times, analytical merit and challenges

Reagent	Mercury species	Storage time	Sample volume reported	Analytical merit and challenges	References
<b>Acidification</b>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommended for many metals and trace elements</li> <li>In an uncontrolled environment, there is a risk of acid burns and skin irritation from spills</li> <li>A pH &lt;4 promotes stable chloro-mercury complexes in the presence of chloride ions</li> </ul>	
Hydrochloric acid (0.4-1 %)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> in freshwater	6-12 months (>90 % recovery)	0.5-1 L in polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) or glass containers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;90 % recovery over long term storage (12 months)</li> <li>Recommended container materials are either hazardous (glass, risk of cuts from breakage) or expensive (PTFE, £15-30 per bottle)</li> </ul>	8-10,28
Nitric (1 %) and hydrochloric acid (0.005 %)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> in deionised water	53 days (>90 % recovery)	500 mL in high-density polyethylene (HDPE) containers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recoveries of &gt;90 % Hg<sup>2+</sup> can be obtained with small quantities of acid</li> <li>A nitric and hydrochloric acid mixture is a common matrix for ICP-MS analysis, which is sensitive enough for Hg analysis</li> </ul>	8,9,28
Sulphuric acid (0.2 %)	MeHg in seawater	6 months	Not specified as a series of different experiments – PE container material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mitigates formation of artificial MeHg during speciation by distillation and ethylation</li> <li>This speciation method is less prevalent nowadays, due to the development of HPLC speciation</li> </ul>	10
<b>Oxidising agent</b>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oxidises species to inorganic Hg<sup>2+</sup> (comparatively more stable than Hg<sup>0</sup>)</li> <li>Risk of oxidising atmospheric Hg<sup>0</sup> and artificially increasing Hg concentration (particularly for trace Hg concentrations of relatively high atmospheric Hg<sup>0</sup> concentrations)</li> <li>Oxidising chemicals are often harmful, risk of spillage and harm to the operator</li> </ul>	
Potassium permanganate-persulphate digestive solution	Hg <sup>2+</sup> in deionised water	560 days (negligible losses)	50 mL in polypropylene (PP) containers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negligible losses by adsorption for 0.2 – 1 µg L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup></li> <li>Improves cost-effectiveness by allowing use of polypropylene containers</li> <li>Increased risk of spills and harm to the operator in an uncontrolled environment</li> </ul>	15





Dithizone functionalised silica (for preconcentration)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg, EtHg	DI water, tap water ( <b>filtered</b> waters)	100 mmol L <sup>-1</sup> sodium thiosulphate or 1% 2-mercaptoethanol	3 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by HPLC-ICP-MS	83.4 % Hg <sup>2+</sup> 93.7 % MeHg 71.7 % EtHg	Storage capacity: not investigated, dependent on load of functional reagent, 20 µg L <sup>-1</sup> Hg tested with a 12.5 µg dithizone load Pore size: 60 Å Particle size: 45 µm	+ + - -	Selective for Hg and its species Extraction efficiency and elution were not affected after 7 days storage at 4 °C Must be functionalised before use, so time between functionalisation and sampling needs to be accounted for Optimised for pH 4 samples, higher and lower pH values may affect performance High chloride concentration lowers Hg adsorption	42,53
2-mercaptophenol-Hg complex on C18 microcolumn (for preconcentration)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg, EtHg, PhHg	Sediments, zoobenthos, river water ( <b>filtered</b> and acidified to pH3 with HCl)	Solid samples were microwave digested with HCl (3 mol L <sup>-1</sup> ), citric acid (0.2 mol L <sup>-1</sup> ), methanol (50%) (10 mL). Elution with methanol	Hg <sup>2+</sup> =0.9 µg L <sup>-1</sup> , MeHg=4.3 µg L <sup>-1</sup> , EtHg=1.4 µg L <sup>-1</sup> , PhHg=0.8 µg L <sup>-1</sup> by AMA mercury analyser and HPLC/CV-AFS	>90 %	Storage capacity: up to 155 µg Hg (500 mL sample) with 20 mL 14 mmol L <sup>-1</sup> complexing agent Pore size: 80 Å Particle size: 5 µm	+ + -	No functionalisation of resin is required, instead a complexing agent (2-mercaptophenol) is added to the sample ~95 % extraction efficiency was reported with preconcentration factors of up to 1000 using 500 mL sample 2-mercaptoethanol has a strong, unpleasant odour and is harmful in high concentrations and must be diluted before use Any iron may compete with Hg for complexation with the 2-mercaptoethanol and interfere with extraction	54
Diethyldithiocarbamate functionalised C18 microcolumn (for preservation and storage)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg	River water ( <b>filtered</b> waters)	5% (v/v) thiosulphate + 0.5% (v/v) HCl	Hg <sup>2+</sup> =5.2 ng L <sup>-1</sup> , MeHg=5.6 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by LC-ICP-MS	97 %	Storage capacity not investigated, but 30 ng Hg successfully recovered Unspecified pore and particle sizes.	+ +	The sorbent operates under a wide range of pH values, so suitable for a variety of matrices Spiked river waters showed >80 % Hg <sup>2+</sup> recovery reported for up to 30 days storage at 4°C in the dark (80 % MeHg recovery up to 7 days storage)	33
<b>Commercially available resins</b> Duolite GT-73™ as a diffusive gradient thin film (for preconcentration and removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	DI water, tap water, river water ( <b>filtered</b> in the DGT apparatus)	Thermal decomposition (total Hg)	0.05 µg L <sup>-1</sup> by LC-AFS	95 %	Storage capacity: 2.4 mg per DGT disk Particle size: sieved to <150 µm	+ + -	The resin has a high sorption capacity and is selective for Hg Can be synthesised as a diffusive thin film, so can be immersed directly into the water source The resin is no longer commercially available, but alternatives are available Desorption of Hg is difficult, so the resin must be digested using a nitric and hydrochloric acid mixture, eliminating the possibility of re-use	56

AmberSep GT-74™ as a diffusive gradient thin film (for preconcentration and removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg EtHg PhHg	DI water, tap water, river water <b>(filtered in the DGT apparatus)</b>	Thermal decomposition (total Hg), microwave extraction with 6 mol L <sup>-1</sup> HCl	Hg <sup>2+</sup> =13 ng L <sup>-1</sup> , MeHg=38 ng L <sup>-1</sup> , EtHg=34 ng L <sup>-1</sup> , PhHg=30 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by Advanced Mercury Analyser (AMA245) for absorption spectroscopy	>95 %	Storage capacity: 3.8 mg per DGT disk Particle size: sieved to <150 µm	+ + - -	The resin has a high sorption capacity and is selective for Hg Can be synthesised as a diffusive thin film, so can be immersed directly into the water source The resin is no longer commercially available, but alternatives are available The resin is reluctant to release Hg, so other analysis methods are required such as thermal desorption and atomic absorption	56, 58
<b>Cationic exchange resins</b> Dowex 50W X4™ as a microcolumn (for preconcentration and removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	Mineral, spring and tap-water	0.1% thiourea + 8% HCl	27 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by CV-AAS	>79 %	Storage capacity: Not investigated, but 860 µg Hg was totally adsorbed by 0.5 g sorbent Particle size: 150-300 µm	+ + - -	Recoveries of >79 % were reported for natural water samples spiked to 10 µg L <sup>-1</sup> Hg <sup>2+</sup> As a non-specific sorbent, multi-elemental analysis is possible Copper and iron significantly decrease the recovery of Hg by direct determination and selenium (IV) cause signal suppression in CV-AAS analysis A sequential elution is required to remove interfering ions	59
<b>Polyaniline</b> Polyaniline (PANi) as a microcolumn (for preconcentration and removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg	Lake water, groundwater, seawater, fish tissue	0.3% HCl (for MeHg) and 0.3% HCl + 0.02% thiourea (for Hg <sup>2+</sup> )	0.05 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by CV-AAS	>96 %	Storage capacity: 100 mg Hg <sup>2+</sup> g <sup>-1</sup> resin, 2.5 mg MeHg g <sup>-1</sup> resin Particle size: 100-150 µm	+ + - - -	The resin has a high sorption capacity (100 mg g <sup>-1</sup> Hg <sup>2+</sup> and 2.5 mg g <sup>-1</sup> MeHg) A 100 mL sample can be used to achieve preconcentration factors of 120 for Hg <sup>2+</sup> and 60 for MeHg from lake water, ground water and seawater Lower pH values (<2) significantly affect the Hg removal ratio to <20 %, higher pH values (>6) also decrease the Hg removal ratio (<80 %) A pH of 4-5 is preferred to ensure nitrogen atoms are not fully protonated and can bind to Hg from solution The sorbent must be synthesised and homogenised before use	36

Polyaniline-polyvinyl alcohol (PANi-PVA) as batch sorbent applied to solution (for removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	DI water	0.1 mol L <sup>-1</sup> HNO <sub>3</sub>	FAAS. No detection limit was reported	90 % Hg removal after 30 mins contact time	Storage capacity: 7.5 mg Hg g <sup>-1</sup> resin No specification for particle or pore size	+ + - -	The sorbent has a high sorption capacity (>90 % removal from a 35 mg L <sup>-1</sup> Hg <sup>2+</sup> solution at pH 6) Desorption of Hg was reported with 0.1 M HNO <sub>3</sub> , although this required 90 minutes to achieve 90 % recovery Chloride at 30 mmol L <sup>-1</sup> significantly decreases adsorption of Hg to <15 %, likely due to chloro-mercury complexation The sorbent must be synthesised and homogenised before use	63
Polyaniline-humic acid (PANi-HA) as batch sorbent applied to solution (for removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	DI water	No desorption investigated	AFS of supernatant. No detection limit was reported	95 %	Storage capacity: 671 mg Hg g <sup>-1</sup> resin Particle size: 50-60 nm	+ + + - - -	The addition of humic acid widens the operable pH range to between 4 – 7, with Hg removal at >90 %. The additional humic acid stabilises PANi by mitigating aggregation of the sorbent The sorption capacity is high (671 mg g <sup>-1</sup> Hg <sup>2+</sup> ) and most other ions in samples do not significantly affect Hg removal Chloride concentrations of 50 mg L <sup>-1</sup> significantly decrease removal of Hg from samples to <20 % Desorption from the composite has not been explored, nor stability of retained Hg species over time Humic acid is a broad term to define many naturally occurring organic molecules, so extraction efficiency may vary between batches of synthesised sorbent	48
Polyaniline-polystyrene (PANi-PE) as batch sorbent applied to solution (for removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	DI water	DI water, no desorption noted	β-activity by an end window Geiger-Müller counter. No detection limit was reported	67 %	Storage capacity: 0.15 mg Hg g <sup>-1</sup> resin No particle size specified	+ + - -	The stability of the sorbent is improved, as polyethylene prevents aggregation of PANi The composite was reported to adsorb 79 % Hg from a 10 ng L <sup>-1</sup> Hg <sup>2+</sup> solution Mercury is not readily desorbed from the composite. 47 % was desorbed with 0.1 M HNO <sub>3</sub> after 30 minutes Interfering ions and characteristics have not been explored	64

#### Magnetic SPE

1,2-ethanedithiol as batch sorbent applied to solution (for preconcentration)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	DI water, lake water ( <b>filtered</b> waters)	0.1 mol L <sup>-1</sup> HNO <sub>3</sub> + 2% (m/v) thiourea	0.82 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by ICP-MS	>90 %	Storage capacity: 254 mg Hg g <sup>-1</sup> resin Particle size: 400 nm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ &gt;95 % adsorption of Hg over pH 2 – 8 and &gt;95 % recover using a 4 % thiourea, 0.5 M HNO<sub>3</sub> eluent solution</li> <li>+ Common cations and anions do not significantly impact the adsorption or recovery of Hg at 5000 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Ca<sup>2+</sup>, Mg<sup>2+</sup>, Cl<sup>-</sup>, SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup>, NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Al<sup>3+</sup>, Zn<sup>2+</sup>, Fe<sup>2+ or 3+</sup>, and 1 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Cu<sup>2+</sup></li> <li>+ The sorbent has a high sorption capacity (254 mg g<sup>-1</sup> Hg) and can extract lead and cadmium, so is potentially suitable for multi-elemental analysis</li> <li>+ Recoveries of &gt;93 % were reported for river water and lake waters spiked with 50 – 1000 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg<sup>2+</sup></li> <li>– The multi-step synthesis has a yield of &lt;50 % and may not be readily scaled up</li> <li>– The stability of the sorbent and of Hg retained on the sorbent has not been investigated</li> <li>– Speciation analysis has not been investigated for this sorbent, so the usefulness for toxicity studies and monitoring is not fully defined</li> </ul>	65
3-mercaptopropyl-trimethoxysilane as batch sorbent applied to solution (for removal)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg	DI water, lake water, tap water, sea water ( <b>unfiltered</b> waters)	0.5 mol L <sup>-1</sup> HCl + 1% thiourea	0.1, 0.3 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by HPLC-ICP-MS	>90 %	Storage capacity: Not investigated, focused on trace Hg (10 ng L <sup>-1</sup> Hg, 500 mL sample) No particle size specified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ A &gt;90 % recovery of Hg<sup>2+</sup> and MeHg using 500 mL of a 20 ng L<sup>-1</sup> Hg spiked tap, sea and lake waters</li> <li>+ The sorbent can be freely added to the sample and removed with a magnet after 10 minutes stabilisation time</li> <li>+ The sorbent can be reused up to 5 times without significant degradation of performance</li> <li>– The sorbent requires a multi-step synthesis and characterisation, which may not be readily scaled up</li> <li>– Common ions and interferences were not investigated</li> </ul>	43

1,5-diphenylcarbazide as batch sorbent applied to solution (for preconcentration)	Hg <sup>2+</sup>	DI water, river water, tap water, (oxidised with H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> , acidified to pH1 with HCl, <b>filtered</b> ) vegetation (microwave digested with HNO <sub>3</sub> )	Regeneration with 0.5 mol L <sup>-1</sup> HNO <sub>3</sub> ( <b>No elution assessed</b> )	0.16 µg L <sup>-1</sup> by CV-AAS	>95 %	Storage capacity: 44 mg Hg g <sup>-1</sup> resin Particle size: 60-80 nm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Common ions in water (Ca<sup>2+</sup>, Mg<sup>2+</sup>, Cl<sup>-</sup>) have no significant effect on Hg adsorption up to 4 mg L<sup>-1</sup> interferent</li> <li>+ Other metals (Cu<sup>2+</sup>, Zn<sup>2+</sup>, Cd<sup>2+</sup>) have no significant effect on Hg adsorption up to 50 µg L<sup>-1</sup> interferent</li> <li>+ The sorbent can be reused up to 8 times without noticeable degradation in performance</li> <li>+ The sorbent is stable up to 6 months</li> <li>- The sorbent is sensitive to pH, with adsorption of Hg decreasing from 95 % at pH &gt;6 to &lt;40 % at pH &lt;5 (active sites become protonated at lower pH values)</li> <li>- Speciation and MeHg sorption were not investigated</li> </ul>	66	
Task-specific monolith with vinylboronic anhydride pyridine complex as a microcolumn (for preconcentration)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg, EtHg, PhHg	DI water, seawater, river water, lake water ( <b>filtered</b> and acidified to pH4 with HCl)	Methanol	102, 22, 28, 162 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by HPLC-diode array detector	>80 %	Storage capacity: Not investigated, 100 ng Hg per prepared column fully sorbed Pore size: 230 nm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ &gt;94 % of Hg<sup>2+</sup>, MeHg, ethylmercury and phenylmercury can be recovered under optimised conditions</li> <li>+ Recovery of Hg from river, sea, lake and tap water is &gt;80 % Hg</li> <li>- A complexing agent is required to promote Hg extraction, which may be a source of contamination and is not readily useable in an uncontrolled environment</li> <li>- A pH of 4 is necessary, as lower pH values promote H<sup>+</sup>-complexing agent formation and higher pH values may hydrolyse Hg species</li> </ul>	67	
<b>Gold-based SPE</b>									
Gold nanoparticles as a microcolumn (AuNP) (for preconcentration)	Total Hg	DI water, river water ( <b>filtered</b> and acidified with 0.5% v/v HCl)	Thermal desorption	180 pg L <sup>-1</sup> by AFS	>90 %	Storage capacity: Not investigated, 0.007 ng Hg fully recovered from 1 g sorbent Particle size: 100-350 µm Pore size: 60 Å	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Highly selective for Hg due to Au-Hg amalgamation</li> <li>+ A &gt;99 % Hg recovery can be achieved from river waters</li> <li>+ No additional reagents are required for extraction of Hg</li> <li>+ Extracted Hg is stable for at least 2 days with no significant losses</li> <li>+ Speciation analysis is possible, as Hg<sup>2+</sup> thermally desorbs at approximately 550 °C and MeHg thermally desorbs at approximately 20 °C (columns should be stored at 4 °C in the dark to mitigate loss of MeHg)</li> <li>+ The column can be reused 180 times without loss of precision or sensitivity</li> <li>- Synthesis of column should be done in Hg vapour-free conditions and reagents require purging before use</li> </ul>	38	

Gold nano-sheets as a column (for preconcentration)	Hg <sup>2+</sup> , MeHg	DI water, seawater, river water, lake water ( <b>filtered</b> and acidified with 0.5% v/v HCl)	Thermal desorption	0.08 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by AFS	>96 %	Storage capacity: Not investigated, work focused on trace Hg, 0.002 ng Hg adsorbed per column "Mesh size": 1024 meshes cm <sup>-2</sup>	+ + - -	The columns are highly selective for Hg with a high tolerance for interfering matrix components >95 % recovery Hg can be achieved from river, sea and lake waters at trace concentrations (0-3 ng L <sup>-1</sup> Hg <sup>2+</sup> ) The columns were developed for online preconcentration, so may not be suitable for offline extraction and storage Reusability of the column was not fully explored	71
Immobilised gold nanoparticle dipstick (for preservation and storage)	Total Hg	DI water, river water, seawater ( <b>unfiltered</b> water, acidified with 0.5% v/v HCl)	Thermal desorption	0.06 ng L <sup>-1</sup> by AFS	>94 %	Storage capacity: Not investigated, work focused on trace Hg, 0.0015 ng Hg per dipstick Particle size: 38 nm (14 µg Au cm <sup>-2</sup> )	+ + + + - -	The dipstick is highly selective for Hg with little interferences Hg is thermally desorbed from the stick, so limits the opportunity for contamination Low variation was reported between individually prepared dipsticks The dipsticks can be reused 145 times without significant degradation to Hg recovery Specialised sputtering technology is required to synthesise the dipsticks, so synthesis may not be readily scaled up The dipsticks must be annealed at 600 °C before each use, which may be challenging in the field and so must be stored in Hg-free conditions during transport to and from the field	51