Virtual Chromatographic Modeling Software for Optimizing Separation of Isobaric Compounds

Jessi Collier[1] , Erika Pack[1], Sandra Ruiz Perez[2] and Chris English[1]

[1]Restek Cooperation, Bellefonte, PA, USA, [2]Restek GmbH, Bad Homburg v. d. H., Germany

Introduction

Chromatographic separation modeling tools are increasingly used in high-throughput laboratories to accelerate GC-MS method development and reduce instrument downtime. While many co-elutions can be resolved by ion-selective MS detection, isobaric compounds still require chromatographic separation through appropriate column phase selection. Balancing separation efficiency, run time, and detector capabilities often requires significant user intervention.

The virtual modeling tool used in this study integrates mass spectral library data to optimize separations more efficiently. In “MS mode”, the software prioritizes separation of isobaric compounds while allowing acceptable MS-resolvable co-elutions, whereas “FID mode” targets full chromatographic resolution. This approach helps laboratories streamline method optimization, reduce development time, and improve analytical efficiency.

Traditional Method Development – Trial and Error

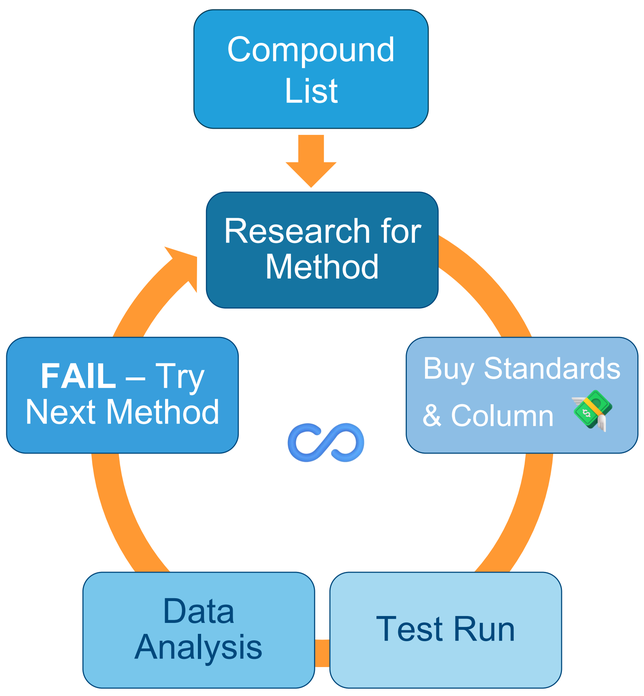

Figure 1: Traditional method development workflow: a continuous cycle of trial and error. Disadvantages include high time consumption, increased costs, and extensive use of instrument and personnel resources.

Method development in GC–MS remains a major bottleneck in analytical laboratories, particularly for complex samples containing structurally related and isobaric compounds. Achieving robust baseline separation typically requires extensive experimental iteration, consuming instrument time, consumables, and expert capacity (Figure 1). This is further challenged by routine requirements such as long-term stability, reproducibility, and transferability across instruments and operators.

Virtual Method Development

Trying to Modernize a Method with Isobaric Compounds Manually:

Manual modification of an existing method **changes** compound **elution temperatures** and can easily lead to unpredictable chromatographic effects (Figure 2)

x Some Separations Worsen

x Some Separations Improve

x Elution Order Changes

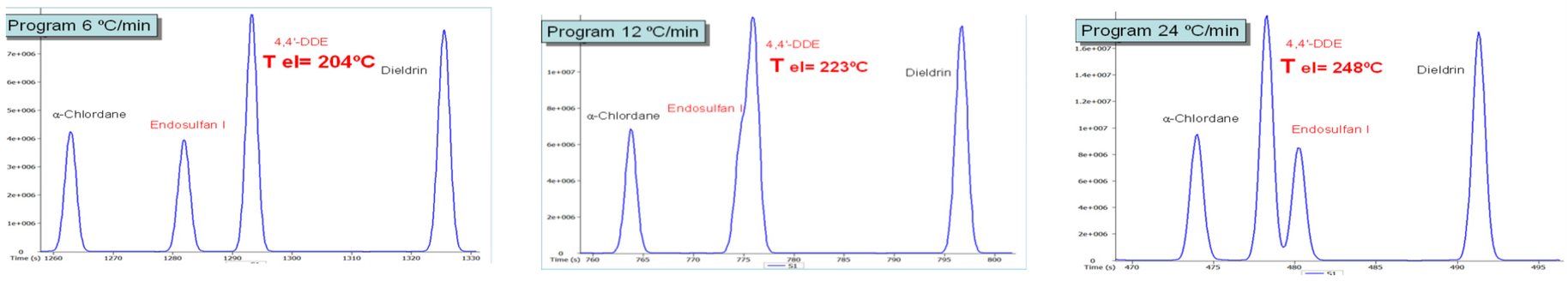

Figure 2: Increasing the temperature ramp from 6 °C/min to 12 °C/min and 24 °C/min raises the elution temperature T_{el} of Endosulfan I from 204 °C to 223 °C and 248 °C. As a result, the elution order of 4,4´-DDE and Endosulfan I is reversed.

The more complex the sample, the higher the risk of separation & elution order changes!

This is especially critical for **isobaric compounds** that require **chromatographic separation** for correct identification by MS. Virtual tools like the free ***EZ*GC Method Translator** help to **modernize methods** and maintain the original elution order, so isobaric compounds stay chromatographically separated.

*EZ*GC Method Translator keeps the elution order

Isobaric Compounds stay chromatographically separated

You can redesign your GC method for speed or efficiency while the *EZ*GC software ensures compounds still come out in the same elution order. The stationary phase stays the same and you can change:

- ✓ Run Time
- ✓ Carrier Gas
- ✓ Column Dimensions
- ✓ Detector (including vacuum systems)

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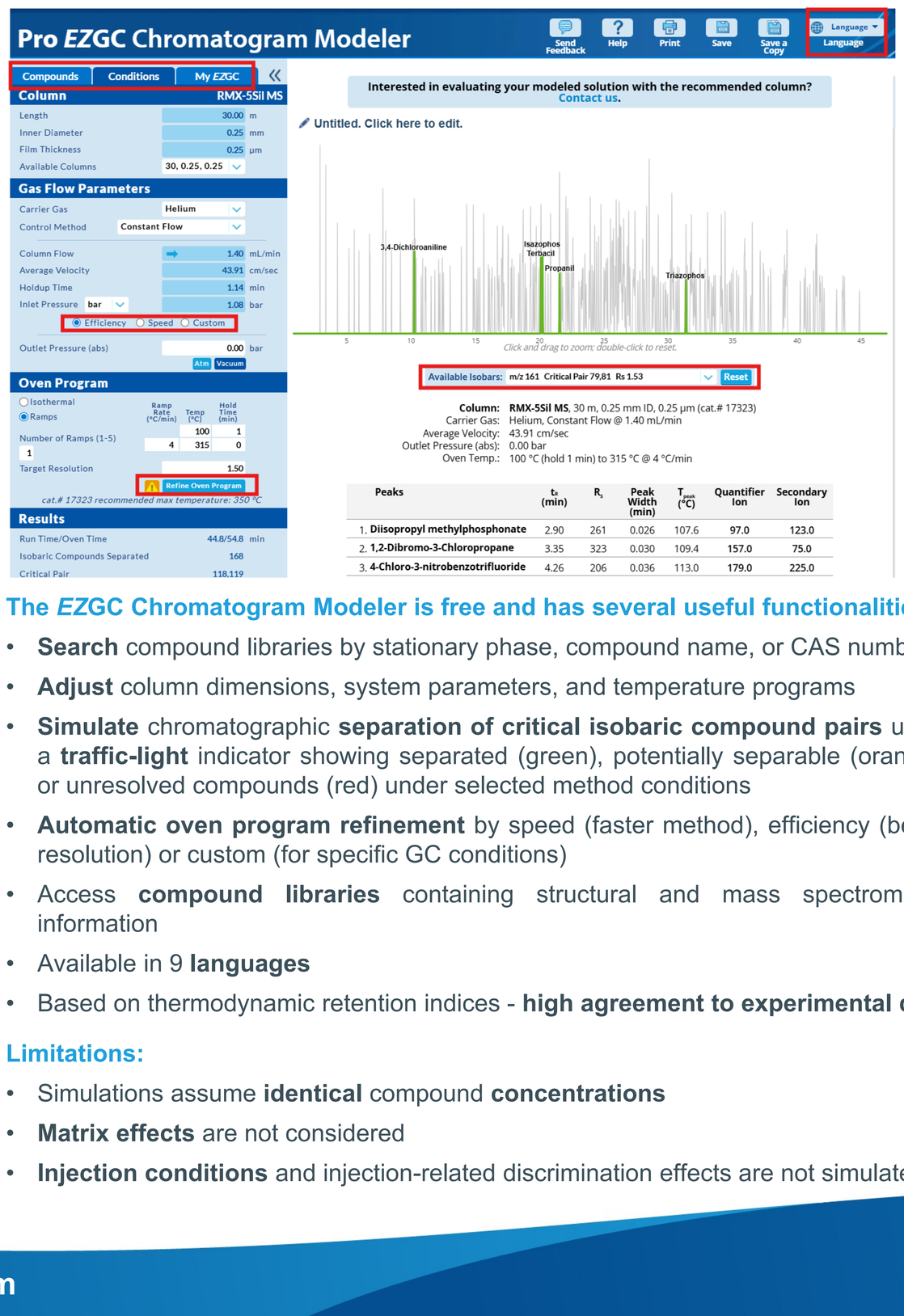
*EZ*GC Chromatogram Modeler simulates separations

Developing a New Method with Isobaric Compounds

Typical **pain points** when developing a method are:

1. **Time:** Method development often takes longer than expected, as multiple requirements must be met, including robustness, repeatability, matrix tolerance, simple sample preparation, and column stability
2. **Cost:** Trial-and-error approaches are costly due to material consumption and reduced instrument uptime.
3. **Compatibility with Routine Analysis:** Methods must balance analytical performance with robustness and suitability for routine use.

Virtual method development software such as ***EZ*GC Chromatogram Modeler** can help **address these challenges** by reducing experimental iterations, minimizing instrument usage, and limiting consumable consumption. This enables faster in-silico optimization prior to laboratory validation



The *EZ*GC Chromatogram Modeler is free and has several useful functionalities:

- **Search** compound libraries by stationary phase, compound name, or CAS number
- **Adjust** column dimensions, system parameters, and temperature programs
- **Simulate** chromatographic **separation of critical isobaric compound pairs** using a **traffic-light** indicator showing separated (green), potentially separable (orange), or unresolved compounds (red) under selected method conditions
- **Automatic oven program refinement** by speed (faster method), efficiency (better resolution) or custom (for specific GC conditions)
- Access **compound libraries** containing structural and mass spectrometric information
- Available in 9 **languages**
- Based on thermodynamic retention indices - **high agreement to experimental data**

Limitations:

- Simulations assume **identical** compound **concentrations**
- **Matrix effects** are not considered
- **Injection conditions** and injection-related discrimination effects are not simulated

Conclusion

GC–MS method development and transfer remain bottlenecks due to time-consuming trial-and-error, instrument usage, and the challenge of separating complex isobaric compounds. Method translation tools preserve elution order and critical separations during method migration, while virtual method development predicts chromatographic performance and isobaric resolution before experimental work. Together, they reduce experimental effort and instrument downtime, enabling faster and more efficient high-throughput GC–MS workflows.

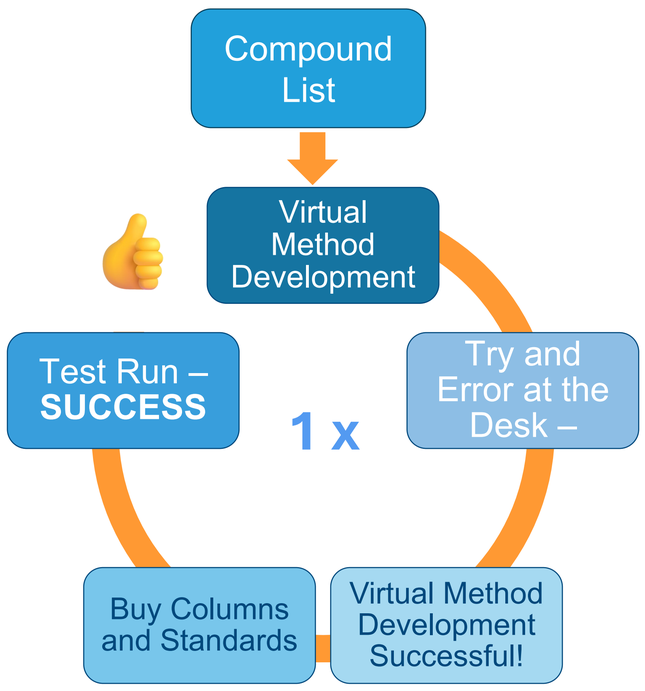


Figure 2: Advantages include less instrument down time, low investment in equipment like columns, 24/7 availability, cost-free.

Contact: Jessi.Collier@restek.com