Feasibility Study of a Wearable Carbon Monoxide Warning System for Construction Workers

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***Abstract*—This paper presents a feasibility study of a wearable computing system to protect construction workers from carbon monoxide poisoning. A pulse oximetry sensor has been integrated into a typical construction helmet to allow continuous and non-invasive monitoring of workers' blood saturation levels. To show the feasibility of monitoring for carbon monoxide poisoning without subjecting users to dangerous conditions, a prototype for monitoring blood O_2 was constructed and tested during a user study involving typical construction tasks to determine its reliability while undergoing motion. Because monitoring for blood O_2 and CO involve the same principles and technologies, if monitoring O_2 is feasible, then monitoring for CO will be feasible as well. The results of this initial study show that integrating an oximeter into a construction helmet will warn the user of impeding carbon monoxide poisoning with a probability greater than 99%.**

I. Introduction

This paper presents a feasibility study for a wearable computing system to protect construction workers from carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide poisoning is a significant problem for construction workers both in residential and industrial settings. This danger exists because the exhaust from gasoline-powered hand tools can quickly build up in enclosed spaces and easily overcome not only the tool's user but co-workers as well. Of the construction-related inhalation deaths in the U.S. from 1990 to 1999, nearly 20% were due to carbon monoxide poisoning [1]. From 1992-1996, 14% of unintentional carbon monoxide deaths in the U.S. were in the construction industry [2]. Even more troubling, some workers knew the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning and attempted to ventilate work areas, however, their efforts were not sufficient and they were still overcome [3]. Initial symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, such as headache, fatigue, and muscle ache, can easily be dismissed as symptoms of the work day and not as indicators of the onset of poisoning.

While the danger of carbon monoxide is known, current safety systems for construction workers only monitor environmental concentrations of carbon monoxide. This is insufficient because carbon monoxide exposure affects people at different rates based on their activity level, body size, and, more significantly, their background risk factors such as smoking, anemia, or prior exposure on the job site. Thus environmental monitoring alone will not save the worker who is a daily smoker, or the person who has been sick and has a reduced red blood count as they may be overcome by carbon monoxide well before the environmental concentrations rise to the level of concern for their co-workers. In a large population, it is impossible to estimate all the potential physiological factors that will affect each individual worker. Therefore it is desirable to monitor workers individually to avoid the shortcomings of environmental monitoring.

A successful individual warning system can then be tied into a construction site-wide warning system that can summon help for workers who are overcome before they can rescue themselves. The prototype described in this paper is the first step toward our vision of improving safety on construction sites by having a network of wearable personal protective gear, vehicles, tools, environmental sensors, and a site-wide planning and monitoring system. An intelligent construction site safety system would reduce injuries and fatalities by providing better protection from accidents, improving response times to accidents, and providing more thorough data collection that can be used to analyze accidents and near-accidents to prevent future occurrences.

To assess the feasibility of individual monitoring of construction workers, we integrated a pulse oximetry sensor into a typical construction helmet to non-invasively monitor the hemoglobin concentrations of the wearer. As explained in Section II-A, we conducted this study with a blood oxygen sensor to avoid exposing subjects to harmful environments, but without loss of generality towards carbon monoxide exposure. A user study was conducted to validate the prototype under typical construction tasks and assess the effect of motion on the sensor's performance. As this is the first study to monitor workers in real time, novice users were selected for the study. Novice users are more readily available and allow the device to rapidly tested to determine basic feasibility of the design. Additional tests with typical construction workers are warranted, but only if the helmet can pass these initial studies. The results of the study show that the helmet will warn the wearer before becoming impaired from carbon monoxide with a probability greater than 99%.

This work presents a novel analysis of the reliability of helmet-based pulse oximetry while undergoing motion. While previous works have explored the use of pulse oximetry during motion [4] [5], no study has classified the behavior of motion artifacts to determine the reliability of obtaining a valid measurement during a given time period. Additionally, we outline both physiological and wearability requirements

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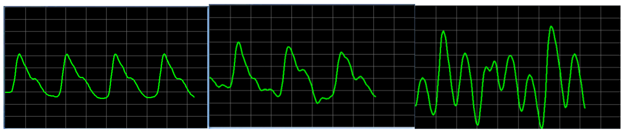


(a) (b) (c)

Fig. 1. Pulse oximeter output showing volumetric changes in blood over several heart beats. (a) Typical signal with no errors present. (b) Signal with errors when sensor location moves from side to side and (c) up and down.

that direct placement of the sensor within the helmet.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section II describes the function of a pulse oximetry and reviews related wearable designs. Section III outlines the wearability requirements required when designing for construction workers and motivates placement of the sensor. Section IV describes the design and construction of the helmet prototype as well as discusses the methodology and user study performed to validate the design. Section V discusses the results of the user study. Section VI presents conclusions and future work.

II. Background & Related Work

A. Review of Pulse Oximetry

To monitor workers for the presence of carbon monoxide, pulse oximetry is used to non-invasively measure hemoglobin concentrations in the blood stream. Pulse oximetry is an application of Beer's Law, which relates the attenuation of light through a medium dependent upon the compounds it passes through [6]. In the case of pulse oximetry, as light passes through vascular tissue, it is absorbed at different rates and frequencies for each species of hemoglobin. The oximeter consists of a set of light emitting diodes (LEDs) of different wavelengths and a photo detector (PD). The LED and PD orientations can be either transmissive or reflective. For a transmissive design, light shines through the tissue and is received on the other side by the PD. In a reflective design, light reflects off a surface within the body, such as bone, and returns to the PD. While the most common application in hospitals uses a transmissive oximeter, shining through the finger, the usability constraints of the construction site have led us to choose a reflective sensor on the forehead, as described in Section III.

The pulse oximeter is used to create a photoplethysmograph (PPG) showing the volumetric changes of blood through the monitoring site. The PPG value rises and falls as the heart pumps blood through the body with each peak in the signal indicating a heart beat. A typical PPG signal is shown in Figure 1a. A person's hemoglobin concentration is found by comparing the relative values of the maximum and minimum points of the PPG signal for each frequency of light. However, errors in calculating the concentration can occur when the person moves, because the blood volume at the measurement site will change due to the motion rather than the heart beat, as shown in 1b and 1c. These motion induced errors we term as *motion artifacts*.

Equivalence of SpCO and SpO_2 Oximeters: For each hemoglobin concentration of interest, a unique wavelength LED is required. Typically, in determination of blood oxygen saturation (SpO_2), two LEDs are required. For blood carbon monoxide saturation (SpCO), up to seven LEDs are required to distinguish between carboxyhemoglobin and lesser dysfunctional hemoglobins [7]. However, the difference between the two sensing technologies is simply the number of LEDs employed.

A key assumption in this feasibility study is that we can determine how the pulse oximeter would respond in the presence of carbon monoxide without having to subject participants to dangerous environments. As described in the previous paragraphs, SpCO and SpO_2 sensors are both based on the principles of Beer's Law and are of similar construction; they simply differ in the wavelengths of light used, i.e., in the number of LEDs employed. Both SpCO and SpO_2 sensors are susceptible to the same motion artifacts. Thus we can use a SpO_2 sensor to understand how the technology performs during construction tasks, without having to expose subjects to carbon monoxide. Consequently, if we can show that SpO_2 oximeters are reliable in construction environments, then by their equivalent construction, we can be confident that SpCO oximeters will be reliable as well.

B. Related Work

By integrating medical sensors into clothing or other personal objects, the capabilities provided by wearable computing can be extended proactively to develop systems that protect from harmful environments. Several examples include haptic indicators to provide orderly crowd evacuation [8] and spatial awareness to avoid head injury [9], smart textiles that record impact to detect the patterns of physical abuse [10], and embedded accelerometers and core temperature data to detect shivering and avoid hypothermia in soldiers [11].

While many oximeter designs are "wearable", few have been tested in real-life environments that would be required by a product to be deployed on a construction site. While many oximeter designs have been tested while undergoing motion, usually this motion is simply walking on a treadmill, shaking a hand, or a random tapping of the fingers. More complex tasks have been performed by Johnston *et al.* [12] and Nagre *et al.* [5] that involved a helmet-based oximeter undergoing simulated military activities that examined, forehead, jaw, and chin locations that were integrated into a military helmet. Their results were compared to a finger-based oximeter to determine, relative to each other, which location was best. Dresher investigated the optimal pressure required to maintain a good measurement signal from the forehead and developed a fitted military helmet insert to allow proper blood flow [4] [13].

While these studies are useful as a starting point for a construction helmet, their results might not apply because of differences in the helmet (e.g., a military helmet has a chin strap to hold it in place whereas construction helmets do not) and activities tested. Also, our study deals with the motion

TABLE I
COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF OXIMETER PLACEMENT

Author	Locations Compared	Motion	Preferred Site
Mendelson & Pujary [15]	forehead[R], wrist[R]	N	forehead
Narge & Mendelson [5]	forehead[R], finger tip[T], jaw[R], chin[R]	Y	forehead
Nogawa *et al* [16]	forehead[R], chest[R]	N	forehead
Rhee *et al* [17]	fingertip[T], finger[R]	Y	finger

artifacts directly, while some studies have manually removed those effects from the data set [13].

Aside from using a similar measuring platform, the work presented here is distinct in several ways. First, in determining reliability, we monitor the workers in real-time to determine the distribution of good measurement intervals. That distribution is compared to a worst-case estimate impairment for carbon monoxide to determine how likely a subject will be overcome. Second, Dresher monitored his subjects during breaks while the subjects were motionless by comparing the forehead sensor results to a finger-based oximeter to determine accuracy of the helmet [4, p.26]. Third, while both systems monitor from the forehead because of physiological and motion-resistance concerns [4, p.9], our treatment is more extensive concerning the wearability for the construction worker by comparing other potential locations such as the finger, ear, and hand.

III. Wearability for Construction Workers

Physical design in wearable computing is different than in other computing fields. Not only must the form and functionality of the computing elements be considered, but also the impact of those elements on the human body. As described by Gemperle, the wearable computer must follow guidelines that meet the human form in terms of placement, form language, and movement [14]. Applying those guidelines to the construction population, we must seek a design that is comfortable to wear and does not interfere with their daily tasks, but also attaches at a location that permits monitoring of the worker. Furthermore, we require a design that can be worn year round, which rules out seasonal clothing such as overalls or coats, and we would like a design that workers will find socially acceptable. In the end, a balance must be struck between comfort, usability and feasibility.

A. Potential Placement Locations

In terms of placement on the body, we first consider the locations where pulse oximetry has been shown to be feasible. Having these locations, we can then assess each one in terms of wearability considerations to find an appropriate solution for construction workers. There are several body locations that have shown to be acceptable monitoring locations for pulse oximetry including the finger, wrist, earlobe, forehead, and facial regions. Table I summarizes several comparative studies of oximeter sensor placement. The table shows the types of sensors compared, where [R] denotes a reflective sensor and [T] denotes a transmissive, whether the subjects were in motion or at rest, and which measurement site provided the best result.

The finger has long been the traditional measurement location of pulse oximetry with one of the first wearable designs being a large ring where the oximeter was housed [17]. Furthermore, measuring from the fingertip is very common in hospital settings and many medical devices use this location. Finger designs are usually envisioned as sensors embedded into a ring shaped housing, whereas designs on the fingertip typically clip on to the end of the finger. Wrist-based monitoring has also been attempted [15] [18], but the wrist's complex bone structure does not lend itself to being a stable location for light back-scattering.

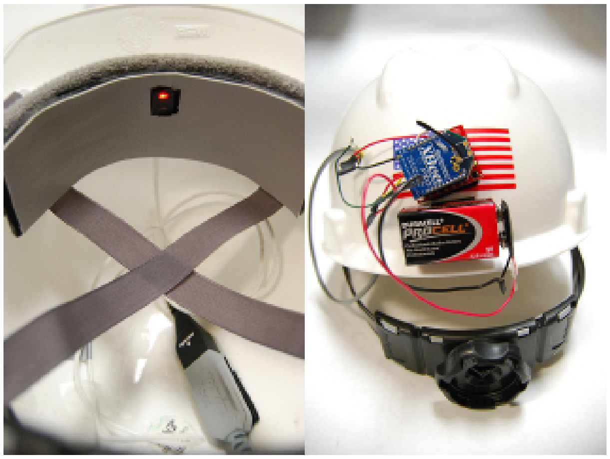
In terms of wearability, finger-based designs restrict the dexterity of the worker because each design covers a significant portion of the finger. Considering the target population often works with hand tools, it is unlikely that any designs encumbering the hands will be accepted. Furthermore, in a field deployment, measurement from the finger suffers in cold weather because of decreased perfusion in the extremities and is subject to frequent motion artifacts from movement and impact to the hands.

Early oximeter designs also used the ear as a potential location, but no comparative study has been performed to compare measurement on the ear to other locations. Early designs encased the entire ear and were uncomfortable. More recent designs have integrated the sensor within a common Bluetooth ear piece [19], potentially making the device desirable to be worn.

A design attached to the ear maybe uncomfortable or obtrusive whereas a forehead sensor can be embedded in the headband of the helmet such that it is comfortable and hidden from the worker. The weight of the sensor or additional components adds little to the mass of the helmet whereas an ear-based design would need to clamp or hang from the ear and would likely become uncomfortable during the workday. Stabilizing the ear during movement with an attached sensor mass would need to be addressed.

Several studies have examined regions of the face for possible oximetry monitoring including the forehead, jaw, and chin [5] [12]. These studies integrated the oximeters into the headband and chin straps of a military helmet. They found that during motion or even talking the jaw and chin sensors would be unusable due to motion artifacts. During combat simulation exercises, the forehead sensor was found to be less affected by motion than chin or jaw sensors.

From the analysis above, the most likely measurement locations are the hands, the ear, and the forehead. Among these three locations, we choose the forehead as the best choice for construction workers. Compared against other facial regions, the forehead is superior and more resistant to motion [5, p.2].



(a) Interior View (b) Back View

Fig. 2. Interior and Back of Prototype

Unlike the complex structure of the wrist, the forehead bone structure is more regular and provides a more even location to capture reflected light. Addressing wearability concerns, the forehead is a prime location because it does not affect the dexterity of the worker and can be easily integrated into existing headgear [4] [13] in a manner that is comfortable to the wearer.

IV. Design and Evaluation of Prototype

We selected the Xpod pulse oximetry from Nonin utilizing a reflective sensor attachment. Marketed as an easy to use development kit, the Xpod is frequently used in prototypes that monitor from the forehead [4] [5] [12] [15]. To enable wireless transmission of readings, the output of the Xpod was connected to an Xbee radio from Digi Inc. that transmits the readings of the Xpod to a base station connected to a laptop. The final prototype is shown in Figure 2a, with the interior view showing the attached Xpod and sensor integrated into the headband. The back view shows the Xpod connection to the Xbee and 9V alkaline battery.

A. Headband Design

In general, the design process was driven by a desire to shape the internal headband such that it minimized motion artifacts, and to place the electronics to reduce the impact of their weight. The headband insert shown in Figure 2a was not the only form factor considered for the user study. An earlier design did not have the sensor surrounded by the foam insert, causing the sensor to easily slip out of place when the helmet was removed. The current design is a vinyl front with a foam backing that attaches to the natural helmet headband by Velcro. The sensor is recessed into the headband such that it is pressed against the forehead, but the extra foam padding softens the design and provides even pressure across the forehead.

The final design was a compromise between comfort and the desire to reduce motion artifacts, the main obstacle in helmet based monitoring. Since a reflective oximeter is required for use on the forehead, the sensor must remain still such that the backscattering reflections off the frontal bone are consistent over time. If the sensor moves relative to the forehead, motion errors are induced and a reading may not be possible. For reference, a normal PPG signal from the helmet prototype is shown in Figure 1a. In moving the helmet side to side, as if shaking the head “No”, slight motion errors are induced in Figure 1b. However in Figure 1c, moving the helmet up and down, as if to nod “Yes”, induces major errors and the signal becomes unusable. A major cause of motion is the torque moment applied by the helmet to the sensor. Because the sensor is physically integrated into the helmet, as it moves, so does the sensor and depending on the amplitude and frequency of movement, no measurement may be possible.

Several design iterations were conducted that attempted to isolate the sensor from helmet motion. Overall these attempts were unsuccessful because specific pressure is required at the measurement location to hold the sensor in place. This singular pressure point is extremely uncomfortable given that during typical wear the headband pressure is distributed evenly across the forehead. A better solution would be to mechanically isolate the internal assembly from the outer protective shell of the helmet. This strategy was used by Rhee in designing a ring sensor, by separating the internal sensors closest to the finger from the outer metal shell with only thin wires connecting the two parts [17]. Applying this method to the helmet, the internal assembly could be a simple elastic headband to which the sensor is integrated. The outer hard part of the helmet would still be attached, but such that it moves freely apart from the headband, much like the independent sections of a gyroscope. Additionally, accelerometers could be employed to help reduce the effect of motion artifacts [20] [21].

B. Battery Lifetimes

Beyond the wearability requirements discussed in Section III, the helmet must have an battery lifetime that does not cause the worker to constantly replace batteries or switch out their helmet for newly charged ones. Currently, the lifetime of the prototype is only several hours when powered by a 9V battery. The large energy drain is caused by the continuous transmission of measurements by the Xbee radio. In a deployed system, monitoring of the worker would be localized and power consumption could be much less. To enable local monitoring, a small microcontroller should be added to the system to monitor the oximetry readings. The Xbee radio would remain but would only be activated in case of an emergency where an alert was required. Additionally, the current design uses a simple linear power regulator, which could be replaced with a more power efficient switching regulator.

In modifying the helmet to transmit only during significant events or to sound an alarm, and implementing a new power regulator, the lifetime of the system could be dramatically increased. The lifetimes of the current and future systems are estimated using typical alkaline [22] and lithium 9V battery [23] in Table II. The microcontroller on the future deployed

TABLE II
ESTIMATED SYSTEM LIFETIMES IN HOURS OF CURRENT AND FUTURE DEPLOYED DESIGNS FOR LINEAR AND SWITCHING REGULATORS

Design	I_{nom}	P_{nom}	**9V Alkaline**	**9V Lithium**
Current	91mA	303mW	6h (15h)	8h (20h)
Future	26.1mA	86mW	21h (54h)	29h (76h)

system is estimated with a PIC18 [24].The system lifetime estimates were derived as follows. For a linear regulator, such as the one presently used, the system lifetime L_{linear} can be found from equation (1) where C_{nom} and I_{nom} are the nominal battery charge capacity and nominal current draw, respectively. For a switching regulator, the system lifetime L_{switch} are given by equation (2) where V_{nom} and the P_{nom} are the nominal battery voltage and nominal system power, respectively.

$$L_{linear} \approx \frac{C_{nom}}{I_{nom}} \tag{1}$$

$$L_{switch} \approx \frac{V_{nom}C_{nom}}{P_{nom}} \tag{2}$$

At our operating currents, the alkaline and lithium batteries have charge capacities of 550mAh and 762 mAh, respectively. Additionally, different types of power regulators are shown with the linear regulator lifetimes shown directly, and the switching regulation lifetimes shown in parenthesis. The switching regulator was assumed to be 95% efficient.

The upper estimate in Table II provides an operation lifetime of 76 hours, or roughly 9.6 days, in terms of eight hour workdays. As this product would be a critical safety device, the worker could simply replace the battery at the start of each week and be assured that the helmet will be powered for that entire workweek. Additionally, instead of constantly replacing the battery, the helmet could be charged nightly, either at home or at the work site, to maintain a fresh battery. Both methods, replacement and charging, have their advantages, however, they both show that with limited modifications the battery issues related to the helmet prototype can be easily resolved.

C. Establishing Reliable Measurement

To validate the performance of the helmet, we need establish the ability of the helmet to warn workers of impending carbon monoxide poisoning. The main obstacle to reliable monitoring is the interference of motion artifacts on the performance of the oximeter. However, the concern over motion artifacts is lessened by the knowledge that a worker will not be overcome immediately by carbon monoxide. Thus, the oximeter does not need to monitor the worker continuously, but only obtain a reliable measurement before the worker becomes impaired. This measurement can then be used to warn the worker or send out an alert.

For our study, we defined a motion artifact as an error that met one of the following conditions: (1) The presence of a warning flag indicating either out of track pulses, or the sensor is disconnected; (2) a "missing data" value reported for SpO_2 or heart rate; and (3) reported SpO_2 is <95%. Conditions (1) and (2) indicate normal functionality of the oximeter while (3) is a special case required due to ambient light contaminating the readings. It was found that during certain activities the helmet would report SpO_2 values but because of the noisy signal, its values were obviously incorrect. In most cases the reported SpO_2 would drop below 90% during heavy motion, which is not correct considering a user would be experiencing a serious health event at that level and no users were under strenuous exercise. A level of 95% approximates a typical oxygen saturation value.

More formally, a failure in monitoring can be expressed as a motion artifact that lasts longer than the time to impairment (T_i). In this situation, the oximeter would be unable to establish a reading before the worker becomes impaired. If the probability distribution of the motion artifact durations is known, then the probability that the duration of a motion artifact X is greater than the time to impairment T_i can be expressed by (3).

$$P(X \geq T_i) \tag{3}$$

This formulation of the duration of motion artifacts allows us to treat this as a *repairable system*, which is common in reliability analysis [25]. The repairable system model characterizes the state of a device as either working properly or not working. The time during which the device is working properly is called *uptime*, and when the system fails, it immediately begins *repair time* and upon completing repairs is restored to *uptime*. For our prototype helmet, the times at which the helmet is giving proper readings will be considered uptime. When a motion artifact begins, the sensor will fail to provide a valid measurement and the helmet will be considered to be in repair time until a new valid measurement is received. The transition between these states is known because the oximeter provides error indicators to identify the quality of the measurement.

It has been shown that the lognormal distribution is a good model for repairable processes and as such will be used to describe the distribution of motion artifacts [26]. Thus P can be replaced with the lognormal cumulative distribution function, F, giving (4).

$$P(X \geq T_i) = 1 - F(T_i|\mu, \sigma) \tag{4}$$

The parameters μ and σ are the shape parameters for the lognormal where μ is the lognormal mean, and σ is the standard deviation. These parameters can be found empirically by observing the occurrence of motion artifacts over a typical set of activities. This was accomplished by performing a user study involving typical construction tasks as described in Section IV-E. As each user performed the activities, the results were recorded and examined to determine the distribution of motion artifacts. Thus for a particular set of activities, it is possible to obtain an empirical estimate of artifact distributions, and find the probability of protecting the wearer. Given this model for the distribution of the duration of motion artifacts,

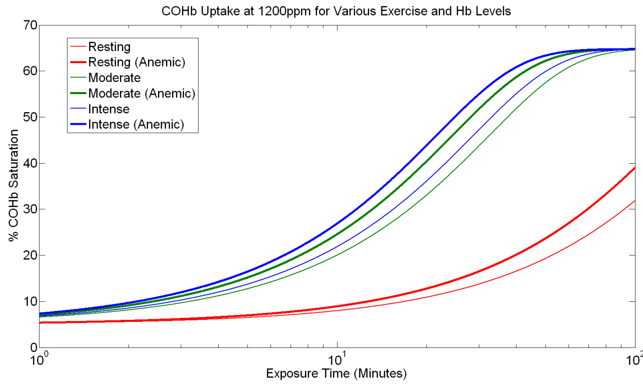


Fig. 3. Estimation of Carbon Monoxide Uptake at 1200ppm

we must next determine a conservative bound on the time to impairment.

D. Time to Impairment

To establish a bound on how long a motion artifact can last while still providing warnings before a worker is overcome by CO poisoning, we must estimate the impairment time T_i for someone exposed to carbon monoxide. It is this limit which the distribution of artifacts is compared against to determine whether the helmet will be able to acquire a reading of the wearer before he/she becomes impaired. A worst-case estimate is desirable because it establishes a lower bound on the time for T_i, providing assurance that if the most at-risk workers are protected, then healthy workers are safe as well.

This worst-case estimate can be found by deriving physiological profiles of typical and at-risk workers and simulating their uptake of carbon monoxide under various levels of activity. The simulations of carbon monoxide uptake were performed using the CFK equation [27], which has been verified in several studies and gives an accurate assessment of CO uptake for various exposure levels, body sizes, and activity levels.

Figure 3 shows the simulated % carboxyhemoglobin (COHb) saturation for typical and at-risk workers at resting, moderate, and intense levels of activity in an environment with a CO concentration of 1200 ppm, which has been established by the U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health as the level "Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health" [3] [28]. A person typically is considered to be impaired at 30% COHb saturation [29]. From Figure 3, the shortest time to reach 30% COHb saturation is 11.6 minutes, corresponding to an at-risk worker with an intense activity level. Further details including a full derivation of the worker profiles and estimation methods are in [26].

E. User Study

A user study was conducted to validate the helmet prototype design. The study featured ten students performing six construction related tasks intended to mimic typical motions and actions of construction workers. The study was conducted in Torgersen Hall on the campus of Virginia Tech and was approved by the Virginia Tech Internal Review Board (IRB # 09-768).

(a) Walking (b) Stairs (c) Sweeping (d) Boxes (e) Hammering

Fig. 4. User Study Activities

As this is the first study to attempt to monitor workers in real-time, simple tasks and novice users were selected to assess the feasibility of the prototype. While a full deployment of the helmet on an actual construction site would lend greater credibility to the reliability of the helmet, basic tests must first be performed to assure those advanced tests would be worthwhile. If the helmet cannot pass the basic tests and activities described below, then more involved testing is not necessary.

Task selection: Six individual tasks were selected for the user study: walking, ascending/descending stairs, sweeping, moving boxes and hammering paint cans. Each task sought to mimic the activities and motions of a construction worker without necessarily the impact or stress that performing the actual activity would cause. No standardized set of safety activities or motions was found. However, the selected activities are sufficient for judging the feasibility of the design. Simple tasks were specifically selected as this is a feasibility study and if the helmet cannot pass the simple tasks presented here, then it will not pass more rigorous ones later.

Participant selection: Study participants were fellow graduate and undergraduate students. Experienced workers in construction are not required because only the motions of tasks need to be approximated, not necessarily the task itself. A person does not need to be an expert hammerer to approximate the required hammering motion. Likewise, for the simple tasks selected, moving boxes, walking, or sweeping the inherent motions are assumed to be equivalent between experienced and non-experienced users.

Protocol: After placing the helmet on the user, the user was instructed to tighten the helmet to a comfortable fit. The fit of the helmet was adjusted manually if the user tighten or loosen too much, such that a good signal could be found. After fitting the helmet each user was instructed to walk around the third floor of building three times. This task is a baseline measurement of helmet performance; if the motion of walking is too great, then more advanced tasks are not feasible. After completing the walking circuit, the users were asked to walk down the stairs to the first floor twice and then return. Figures 4a and 4b show the third floor of the building where these two tasks occurred.

A more involved motion was desired to ascertain the effects of upper body movement on the helmet. To approximate this

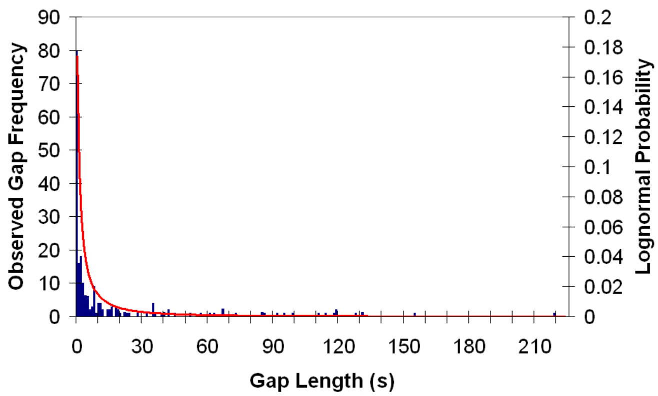


Fig. 5. Histogram Fitted with Lognormal Distribution

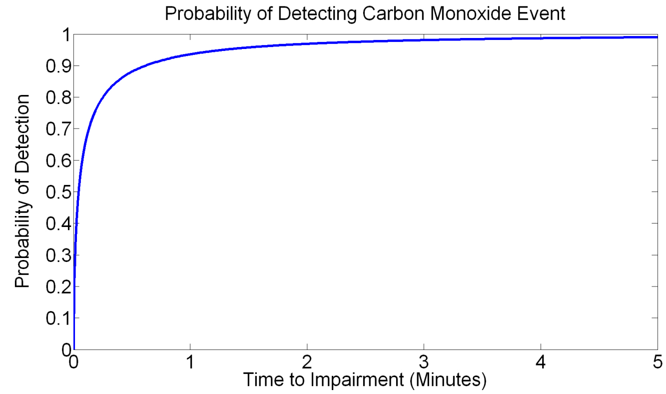


Fig. 6. Probability of Detecting Carbon Monoxide Event

motion, many pieces of paper were dumped on the floor and the user was asked to sweep up these items, this task was repeated three times. The user was not idle while performing this task and had to move around and sweep to complete the activity.

The final tasks were to have the users hammer on several paint cans and move boxes around a laboratory. These acts simulate the effects of hand tools on head motion and also the bending and lifting motions of carrying. Hammering was conducted with the cans both on the floor and on a saw horse. For the boxes task, each box was individually labeled and the users were asked to move them across a room and stack them in proper order. This task involved multiple motions of moving, bending, and lifting to accomplish.

V. Results

A. Verifying Helmet Reliability

As described in Section IV-C, the distribution of motion artifacts is critical to understanding the reliability of the helmet. The observed distribution of artifacts from the user study and the fitted lognormal distribution curve are shown in Figure 5. The x-axis is the artifact duration in seconds, the left y-axis is the observed frequency of each artifact occurring, and the right y-axis is the probability of events associated with the lognormal distribution. The red line indicates the fitted lognormal distribution with parameters $\mu = 1.02$ and $\sigma = 2.03$, which closely fits the observed distribution of artifacts.

A χ^2 goodness of fit test for the observed artifacts against the lognormal distribution provides a p-value of 0.1785, indicating that at 5% significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) the lognormal distribution is the proper model.

Figure 6 shows the probability of detecting a carbon monoxide event as it varies with time to impairment (T_i), from equation (4). The probability of a measurement artifact occurring that is longer than T_i = 11.6 minutes is $p = 0.34\%$. This result shows how likely the prototype is to fail while monitoring a worker. Conversely, the probability the helmet will notify the worker is 1-p, or 99.66%.

While these are excellent results, given the way our objectives are constructed, it is possible a single measurement could occur near time zero and then the remaining time to T_i could be covered by an artifact. This situation would still be considered valid monitoring time, as the artifact would not be the full length of T_i. However, depending on how early the singular measurement occurs, it may not contain any useful information as internal carbon monoxide levels may not have risen to the level of concern.

To counter this possibility, we can conservatively divide T_i in half to create two new measurement intervals against which we will test the probability of measurement artifacts. While measurements from time 0 to $T_i/2$ may not reveal any carbon monoxide presence, at $T_i/2$ the internal COHb levels for our worst-case worker will be 17.5%, significantly above normal levels. Thus any measurement in [$T_i/2$ - T_i] will warn of the presence of CO. Replacing T_i with $T_i/2$ in equation (4), we find the the probability of a artifact covering the new $T_i/2$ intervals (5.8 minutes) is $p = 0.0091$ or 0.91%. Conversely, this indicates the helmet will provide protect the worker with probability 99.09% in these more conservative intervals, giving a strong indication that the helmet will find a valid reading upon which to accurately warn the worker. Even if the time to impairment were reduced to 2 minutes, probability that the helmet will notify the worker would be greater than 96%.

B. Helmet Performance Factors

Figure 7 shows the aggregate duration of motion artifacts for each user and activity performed. From the figure it is clear that there is a range of performance in terms of how well the helmet monitored each participant.

Exploring the artifact duration results further, we would like to understand which factors, the users or the activities selected, influenced the overall results. Simply, are there activities that the helmet cannot monitor well, or are there certain users where the helmet does not work properly? If we organize total artifact information from Figure 7 into a matrix of Users by Activities, we can use Friedman's Test [30] to determine if the activities (columns) have equal or non-equal effects on the total artifact duration.

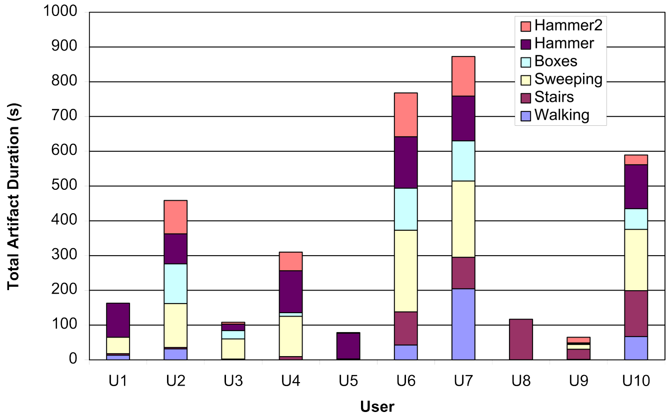


Fig. 7. Individual Activity Contribution to Total Artifact Duration

If the activity effects are equal, then we can conclude that user effects have a greater impact on the total artifact duration. Assuming a null hypothesis H_0 that the activity effects are equal, Friedman's test gives a p-value of $p = 0.0586$ which at 5% significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) indicates we cannot reject H_0. This result confirms that the effects of all the activities are statistically equal and the differences in total duration are a function of the users. From this we isolate two items that could explain the differences, the tightness of the helmet and conditions of the measurement site on the user's body.

The tightness of the helmet is a prime factor in how well the sensor performs. As Dresher found, there is an optimal sensor pressure at which a good pulse can be detected [4]. In our study, users were instructed to wear the helmet at their comfort level. Depending on their personal feel, they may have tightened the helmet too much or too little, moving away from an optimal pressure and degrading the result. Conditions of the measurement site may cause poor readings if there is not sufficient perfusion in the tissues to allow a reading. In particular, User 7 indicated that he had a scar on his forehead near the site where the sensor would normally sit. The scar may have damaged the vascular bed and restricted blood flow to the site. If true, this could be the cause for User 7 having the largest duration overall. The implications of poor measurement site conditions indicate that future designs may need multiple sensors inside the helmet or some method to permit sensors to move around.

VI. Conclusion and Future Work

We have integrated a pulse oximeter into a typical construction helmet to assess the feasibility of monitoring for exposure to carbon monoxide. Ten participants took part in a user study to characterize the performance of the helmet using simulated construction tasks. For a time to impairment of 11 minutes, the helmet was found to be capable of warning the user before becoming impaired in 99.66% of cases. For further assurance, the time to impairment could be halved, with the helmet still providing a reading in 99.03% cases.

The promising results indicate a high reliability in monitoring, however, no protective system is perfect. We do not assert that the helmet is 99% reliable for all activities; in fact we believe there will be activities where no measurement is even possible, such as operating a jackhammer. However, with these basic but reasonable tasks, we have shown that it is feasible to conduct monitoring during typical construction tasks. Further work in isolating the sensor from helmet motion, and longer, more complex tasks will allow a greater understanding of the true abilities of the prototype. But as a proof-of-concept, the helmet verifies the idea of an integrated pulse oximeter for construction activities.

Finally, this helmet is only the first step toward our long term vision of having a network of wearable and environmental sensors and intelligent personal protective gear on construction sites that will improve safety for workers. While this helmet targets carbon monoxide poisoning, we believe there are compelling opportunities for wearable computing in reducing injuries and fatalities due to falls, electrocution, particulate inhalation, and workers on foot being struck by vehicles. Because a worker in an accident may be unable to self-rescue, the use of only a personal alert is not adequate. Thus we envision a multi-modal, site-wide alert system that warns co-workers and supervisors of a person in danger. This system would transmit to summon distant help, or provide visual and audible cues to the location of the worker. Such a system must fit into the social expectations, existing daily routines, and physical constraints of a wide range of construction activities, sites, and environmental conditions. An intelligent construction site safety system would also improve existing capabilities for collecting data on accidents and near-accidents, which would in turn lead to improved analysis for preventing accidents.

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