

1 UFP-, BC-, and PM_{2.5}- measurements and effect of dispersion 2 conditions on concentration levels in a residential area affected by 3 wood-smoke pollution from domestic heating during the winter 4 months

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9 **Abstract.** The monitoring of ultrafine particle concentrations in ambient air is gaining relevance within the revision of the EU
10 Ambient Air Quality Directive. A prominent source of ultrafine particles (UFP) are combustion processes (e.g. within the
11 scope of wood-fired domestic heating) where the particle emission is typically led unfiltered into the environment contributing
12 significantly to local air pollution. In this study, ultrafine particle concentrations were measured in a residential area affected
13 by wood-smoke pollution during the winter months (Nov. 20, 2024 – Mar. 30, 2025) using a diffusion charge based UFP-
14 monitor (AQ Guard Smart 2000 from Palas®). The measurements show a diurnal trend, where concentrations are significantly
15 increased (e.g. $> 10\,000\text{ cm}^{-3}$) above the background level (approx. $5\,000\text{ cm}^{-3}$) during the morning (approx. 08:00) and evening
16 hours (approx. 19:00 – 22:00), whereby the source is wood-smoke from the surrounding neighbourhood. The dispersion
17 conditions significantly affect the measured concentrations, as only in case of low (or zero) wind speeds, increased UFP
18 concentrations are obtained demonstrating the relevance of local sources (wood-stove operation) on air quality. In the context
19 of “good practice statements” offered by the World Health Organization’s Air Quality guidelines, the maximum daily 1-hour
20 mean concentration of $20\,000\text{ cm}^{-3}$ is exceeded on approx. 33.6% of days during the measurement period. This significant
21 peak exposure on smaller timescales requires monitoring on a high temporal resolution, as longer averaging periods (e.g. daily
22 or annual mean concentrations) do not reflect temporal peak concentrations that can be especially dangerous for high-risk
23 groups. There is no direct link between legally relevant particulate matter (e.g. PM_{2.5}) and ultrafine particle concentrations, as
24 the size distribution of the wood-smoke emission is in the nanometer region and does not significantly contribute to mass-
25 based particulate matter concentrations.

26

27 **1 Introduction**

28 While there has been significant progress to improve air quality and implement air quality monitoring across the globe, air
29 pollution is still a major factor for health issues and premature deaths (WHO, 2021). Especially in developing countries, smog
30 in cities and traffic hotspots is a regular occurrence significantly impacting the life of the corresponding population (Amin et
31 al., 2024; Le Huong et al., 2024; Mohan et al., 2024; Moreno et al., 2025). When it comes to the European Union, measures
32 to improve air quality have shown a positive effect over the last decades, however there is still room for improvement and
33 recommendations regarding particulate matter concentrations proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2021 are
34 not necessarily met universally across the European Union. Only recently, the Ambient Air Quality Directive has been revised
35 in order to approach past recommendations set by the World Health Organization in 2005 (European Union, 2024; WHO,
36 2005). In the context of particulate pollutants, the limits for PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} mean annual concentrations, as well as maximum
37 mean daily concentrations and the number of exceedance days are lowered towards the year 2030 according to Table 1.
38 Furthermore, a new focus is set on “pollutants of emerging concern”, which are only rarely monitored by government official
39 monitoring stations, such as ultrafine particles (UFP) and black carbon (BC). Ultrafine particles are suspected to be especially
40 hazardous due to their ability to penetrate deep into the human body, yet the direct evidence of many studies remains
41 inconclusive (Ohlwein et al., 2019). These pollutants (among others e.g. size distribution of UFP, oxidative potential, etc.)
42 now have to be monitored by so called “supersites” to gather more data and better evaluate health effects. While monitoring
43 of UFP and BC is becoming mandatory, there are no specified limits for these pollutants in the directive.
44 A universal limit for UFP would be difficult to implement, as there is no wide-spread measurement (yet) and the natural
45 formation of UFP due to atmosphere chemistry can vary for different locations and result in different background levels and
46 temporal behavior (e.g. particle growth; new particle formation) that would have to be considered in the context of quantitative
47 UFP-limits [e.g. (Bianchi et al., 2016; Dunne et al., 2016; Marten et al., 2022; Pierce and Adams, 2007; Shrivastava et al.,
48 2024). Nonetheless, the World Health Organization does offer some “good practice statements” when it comes to ultrafine
49 particle concentrations (Table 1). It can be assumed, that the specified concentrations relate to hazardous substances (e.g. such
50 as black-carbon) due to the possibility of non-hazardous high “background” concentrations due to the specified atmospheric
51 processes.

Table 1 – Limits and recommendations for particulate pollutants by the WHO (2021) and the European Union (2024)

Pollutant	Type of Limit	Revised Ambient Air Quality Directive <i>Dec. 11, 2026 / Jan. 1, 2030</i>	WHO Air Quality Guidelines (2021)
PM _{2.5}	Annual mean	25 µg m⁻³ 10 µg m ⁻³	5 µg m ⁻³
	Daily mean	<i>Not considered</i> 25 µg m ⁻³ (18 exceedence days/year)	15 µg m ⁻³ (approx. 3-4 exceedence days/year)
PM ₁₀	Annual mean	40 µg m⁻³ 20 µg m ⁻³	15 µg m ⁻³
	Daily mean	50 µg m⁻³ (35 exceedence days/year) 45 µg m ⁻³ (18 exceedence days/year)	45 µg m ⁻³ (approx. 3-4 exceedence days/year)
UFP	Annual mean	No limit considered (Monitoring obligation)	Not considered
	Daily mean	No limit considered (Monitoring obligation)	Distinction between high and low concentration low: C _n < 1000 cm ⁻³ high: C _n > 10 000 cm ⁻³
	Hourly mean	No limit considered (Monitoring obligation)	20 000 cm ⁻³

Good practice statement

53

54 Two different 24-hour mean concentration levels are specified, whereby concentrations up to 1 000 cm⁻³ are considered “low”
 55 and concentration levels exceeding 10 000 cm⁻³ are considered “high” and should therefore be avoided to prevent long-term
 56 health effects. In addition to these daily means, a 1-hour maximum mean concentration of 20 000 cm⁻³ is specified in the good
 57 practice statements that reflects short-term exposure to UFP. This averaging period (1-hour) is rather unconventional for
 58 particulate pollutants where the shortest averaging period (PM_x fine-dust limit) is 24 hours. For short averaging periods
 59 concentration spikes that occur within limited timeframes are much more significant and require measurement technologies
 60 and data evaluation with sufficient temporal resolution (Thieringer et al., 2022). This is especially relevant due to the
 61 fluctuating nature of ultrafine particles, that are easily carried by wind and can occur due to secondary organic aerosol
 62 formation and coagulation.

63 In general (though unique regulation e.g. for small member states may apply), each member state has to provide 1 supersite at
 64 an urban / urban background location for each 1 000 000 inhabitants of the country and 1 supersite at a rural background
 65 location for each 100 000 km² area. The spatial resolution of these measurements is therefore limited and only several important
 66 sources of ultrafine particles and black carbon on ambient air quality (e.g. traffic, industry, etc.) may be covered by the
 67 supersites. A supersite should be located downwind the main wind direction of a relevant pollution source. There are many
 68 prominent anthropogenic sources for ultrafine particles that are considerably more harmful compared to the natural formation
 69 of UFP due to atmosphere chemistry. In literature, many studies focus on air pollution with UFPs in urban environments and
 70 traffic (e.g. Dall’Osto et al., 2013; Garcia-Marlès et al., 2024a; Garcia-Marlès et al., 2024b; Kumar et al., 2023; Samad et al.,
 71 2022; Trechera et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2002).

72 One major source are combustion processes, where solid or liquid fuels can cause the release of large amounts of soot, ash and
 73 other toxic substances (e.g. secondary organic aerosols) into the atmosphere (Nyarku et al., 2021). Indoor sources linked to

74 human activity are commonly studied in exposure assessments (Jeong et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2024). The penetration of
75 particles from outdoor into indoor spaces can dictate the indoor background level and have a major impact on long-term
76 exposure to pollutants (Matson, 2005). In many industrial sites (e.g. during metalworking processes) worker protection from
77 UFP is an important aspect (Elihn et al., 2009; Brouwer et al., 2004). In the automotive and industrial sector, waste gas cleaning
78 [e.g. (fabric) filters, electrostatic precipitators, diesel and gasoline particle filters] can be applied to significantly lower the
79 particle emission of these processes so that they do not contribute to air pollution as significantly (Bächler et al., 2024b;
80 Hammer et al., 2024). Due to the efficiency of waste-gas cleaning technologies and the introduction of EURO norms for
81 vehicles, the impact of traffic-related exhaust emissions on ambient air quality has decreased (Garcia-Marlès et al., 2024b;
82 Leopoldina, 2019). As a consequence, non-exhaust emissions like brake and tire wear are gaining relevance in the automotive
83 sector (Beddows et al., 2023). Air traffic and airports are additional prominent sources / hotspots for ultrafine particles typically
84 featured in literature, whereby the transport of the pollutants plays a major role (Chen et al., 2010; Dröge et al., 2024; Ridolfo
85 et al., 2024; Stacey, 2019; Trebs et al., 2023; Tremper et al., 2022). The role of aerosol transport has also been demonstrated
86 by Junkermann et al. (2022) during aerial measurements where plumes emitted from industrial firing plants at large heights
87 were transported over long distances.

88 Areas that are comparably rarely featured in official measurements are residential areas in rural or suburban background
89 locations (Dada et al., 2025). The role of wood-fired domestic heating on ambient air quality was shown in a past study for the
90 heating period 2022 / 2023 in a German town (Bächler et al., 2024a). Bari et al. (2009) investigated the relevance of wood-
91 smoke pollution for PM₁₀ in a residential area and Thieringer et al. (2022) highlighted the relevance of short-term concentration
92 peaks in the context of wood-smoke pollution from domestic heating. Especially during the evening hours, wood stoves are
93 used for heating in individual homes and the resulting exhaust negatively impacts ambient air quality. The exposure relevance
94 of residential areas is especially high, since high risk groups (e.g. children, elderly) are often staying in close proximity to their
95 homes and wood-stove operation and the corresponding pollution falls into the evening hours where people are spending time
96 at home. Furthermore, ultrafine particles / aerosols from domestic heating are suspected to have a higher toxicity compared to
97 e.g. traffic sources (Uttinger et al., 2025), though this of course depends on the exact origin of the particles (e.g. exhaust vs.
98 non-exhaust emissions of cars). As an example, Brake wear can cause the emission of and exposure to heavy metals
99 (Neukirchen et al., 2025) that are very harmful to human health. In any case, the exposure to wood-smoke can show damaging
100 health effects due to a large variety of potential gaseous and solid organic substances (Dilger et al., 2023).

101 The significance of domestic heating on air quality is also addressed in the revision of the EU ambient air quality directive, as
102 e.g. if certain fine-dust limits cannot be reached within the specified deadline by 2030 without replacing significant fractions
103 of existing (wood-fired / fossil fuel related) domestic heating systems – it is possible to postpone the deadline until compliance
104 with the new limits becomes mandatory. While this procedure is reasonable since the replacement of heating systems can be
105 a large financial investment for individual people, the impact of domestic heating on air quality is still an important issue and
106 studies are not featured as visibly compared to more prominent pollution sources (e.g. traffic or air traffic). Gravimetric fine-
107 dust limits (compare Table 1) are known to not properly reflect air pollution with ultrafine particles which are predominantly

108 emitted by wood fires and the corresponding wood-stoves (Trojanowski and Fthenakis, 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Thus, there
109 is a dissonance of the particle emission (as well as particle emission limits for wood stoves that also relate to gravimetric
110 concentrations) and particle size of the air pollutants. For smaller firing plants, e.g. for domestic heating, waste gas cleaning is
111 not mandatory and the exhaust aerosol is let unfiltered into the environment, as the cost of gas-cleaning technologies (here:
112 primarily electrostatic precipitators) and the lack of regulation is not promoting wide-spread application. The “Blauer Engel /
113 blue angle – the german ecolabel” proclaims “clean” wood stoves and sets voluntary limits for mass (15 mg/m³) and number
114 based (3 000 000 #/cm³) particle emissions (Blauer Engel, 2025). Within German regulation, such number based limits are not
115 considered and only gravimetric concentrations are relevant, whereby the concentrations are higher compared to the ecolabel
116 (e.g. 40 mg/m³ for many different types of wood stoves or 20 mg/m³ respectively 30 mg/m³ for pellet stoves with and without
117 water compartments; values for installations past the year 2014) (Bundesministerium für Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz,
118 2010).

119 While the step towards number-based concentrations as limits for the emissions of combustion processes is addressing the
120 dissonance between the emission limit and the actual emitted size distribution, the number concentration limit to be awarded
121 the “Blauer Engel” is still high considering the mitigation potential that would be achievable with sophisticated waste-gas
122 cleaning technology such as proper filtration systems (Mylläri et al., 2025; Bächler et al., 2024b; Schiller & Schmid, 2015;
123 Matthes et al., 2016). Efficiencies of electrostatic precipitators are comparably low considering the high-particle number
124 concentrations from the combustion process. Cornette et al., (2024) reported number based collection efficiencies of an
125 electrostatic precipitator for wood-stoves of 83 – 92 %. Mukherjee et al., (2024) reported mass based removal efficiencies of
126 approx. 70% that were linked to an increase in ultrafine particle emissions. Bürger and Riebel (2022) reported separation
127 efficiencies of electrostatic precipitators in similar ranges for high temperature processes.

128 As such the effect on ambient air quality from wood-smoke emissions can be significant and is subject to many external factors
129 such as the dispersion conditions (e.g. wind speed and direction) as well as the geometry of the surrounding buildings in the
130 residential area (Blocken et al., 2011, Teutscher et al., 2025). Norra et al. (2023) highlighted the relevance of indicative (local)
131 air quality measurements in an urban environment that was, despite the prevalence of official measurements, heavily influenced
132 by local sources. A similar situation exists in residential areas, where many temporal local sources (in case of this study: wood-
133 smoke) can contribute to air pollution.

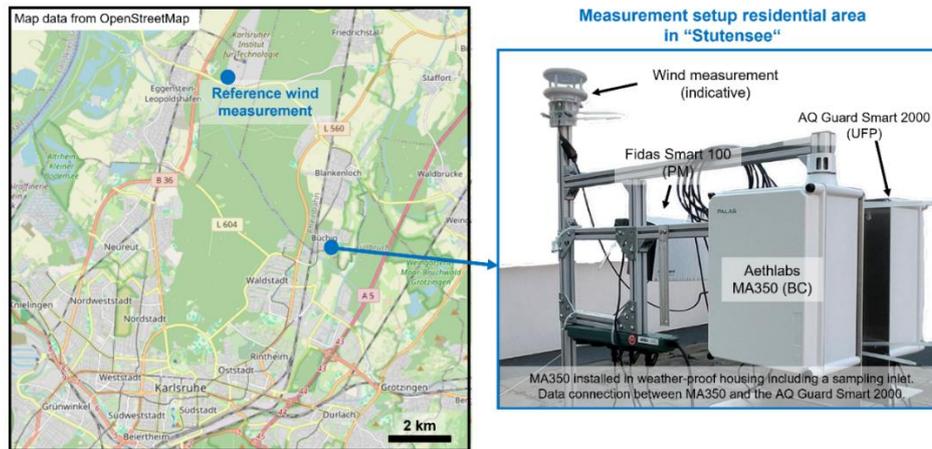
134 This publication presents measurements of the concentration of ultrafine particles in a residential area for a large fraction of
135 the heating period of the years 2024 / 2025, where wood-smoke from domestic heating significantly affects ambient air quality.
136 A diffusion-charge based measurement device is used that have shown great potential for indicative stationary and mobile
137 measurements (Asbach et al., 2024). The data is evaluated with high temporal resolution and discussed in the context of the
138 good practice statements offered by the World Health Organization. In addition to UFP concentration measurements, the effect
139 of pollutant dispersion on the measured particle concentration is characterized.

140

141 2 Materials and Methods

142 2.1 Description of residential area and measurement setup

143 The measurements were performed in the rural German town “Stutensee” (approx. 25 000 inhabitants split among several
144 districts; 45.68 km² area) close to the city of Karlsruhe. Figure 1 gives an overview of the residential area as well as the
145 measurement setup, which was expanded (e.g. addition of BC and wind measurement) compared to a previous publication
146 featuring exploratory measurements for the heating period of 2022 / 2023 (Bächler et al., 2024a). The measurement devices
147 were installed on the 1st floor balcony on a garage of one of the buildings in a height of approx. 4 m. There was some obstruction
148 (e.g. wall on the east side) that could influence the wind measurement to some degree, however no explicit wind-shielding was
149 employed and there was no significant surrounding vegetation.



150

151 **Figure 1: Measurement location in a residential area in “Stutensee” close to the German city of Karlsruhe, reference wind**
152 **measurement at KIT Campus North and picture of the measurement setup including the aerosol measurement technology.**
153 **© OpenStreetMap contributors 2025. Distributed under the Open Data Commons Open Database License (ODbL) v1.0.**

154 The measurement devices shown in Figure 1 are the AQ Guard Smart 2000 (diffusion charge based UFP monitor;
155 manufacturer: Palas® – compare subsection 2.2), a Fidas Smart 100 (aerosol spectrometer; manufacturer: Palas®) and an
156 MA350 (BC measurement; manufacturer: Aethlabs). The wind measurement serves only as an indication on the local wind
157 speed and wind direction and is not necessarily representative of the meteorological wind situation for the entire area. In the
158 map in Figure 1, the position of KITmast, a 200 m high tower for accurate meteorological wind measurements is shown that
159 serves as a reference to the locally measured wind speed and direction (compare chapter 2.3). This publication focuses on UFP
160 measurements in the context of pollutant dispersion during the majority of the heating season of 2024 / 2025 (data from Nov.
161 20, 2024 up to Mar. 30, 2025). Explorative Black carbon measurements (MA350) will be presented in sect. 3.1 to offer further
162 context regarding source apportionment. A follow-up publication for further analysis of the temporal behavior and the
163 correlation between UFP, PM_x and BC will analyze the MA350 data in detail. Further data on relative humidity, ambient
164 temperature and pressure from the Fidas Smart 100 can be found in the supplementary information.

165 **2.2 Description of diffusion-charge based UFP-monitor**

166 The UFP particle number concentration was measured using an AQ Guard Smart 2000 from the manufacturer Palas®. The
167 specifications of the measurement device are summarized in Table 2.

168 **Table 2 – Specifications of AQ Guard Smart 2000 according to the manufacturer (Palas, 2025)**

Measurement principle	Diffusion charging
Measurements	Particle number concentration, Median particle diameter, Lung deposited surface area, pressure, temperature, relative humidity
Particle number concentration range	1 000 – 10 ⁸ cm ⁻³
Lower particle size detection limit	10 nm
Temperature range	-20°C - +40 °C
Dimensions	530 mm · 270 mm · 208 mm
Weight	Approx. 6 kg
Miscellaneous information	Heated inlet, cloud data storage on “MyAtmosphere” platform

169

170 The working principle is based on unipolar diffusion charging of the sample aerosol. At the inlet the sample aerosol is heated
171 to avoid any humidity or condensation effects. Ionized sheath air (filtered by HEPA and activated carbon filters) is generated
172 through unipolar corona discharge. The ambient aerosol is mixed with the ionized sheath air in an ejector / dilutor system at a
173 fixed ratio. Thus, the aerosol is charged by coagulation and excess ions are removed in an ion trap before the charged aerosol
174 (known charge distribution) passes a faraday cup electrometer and the generated current is measured. A mobility analyzer with
175 varying voltage serves as a classifier and generates information on particle size.

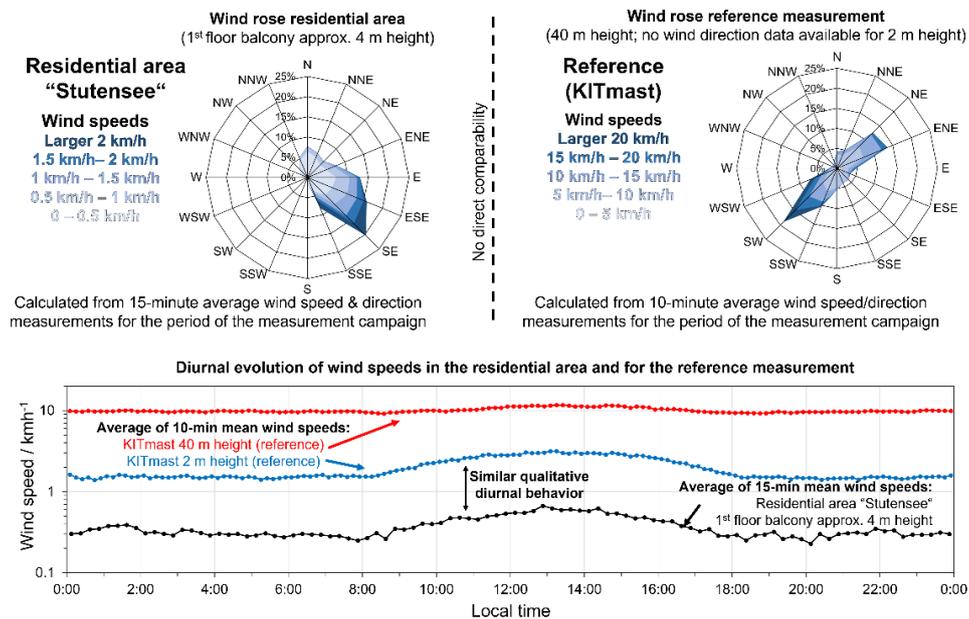
176 The data is collected on the cloud database “MyAtmosphere” (my-atmosphere.net) provided by the manufacturer and can be
177 accessed in varying temporal resolutions (1-minute; 15-minute; 1-hour; 24-hours). The wind measurement was linked to the
178 cloud as well enabling a direct allocation of UFP concentration, wind speed and wind direction with high temporal resolution.
179 The data was post-processed regarding incorrect concentration measurements (e.g. unplausibly high or negative concentration
180 readings). This affected only a negligible fraction of the data. The (raw-)dataset is freely available and published under an
181 open-access license according to data availability statement at the end of the article (Bächler et al., 2025).

182

183 **2.3 Characterization of the dispersion conditions**

184 Since the wind measurement was located together with the aerosol measurement devices on the 1st floor balcony of a garage
 185 of one of the buildings in the residential area, the corresponding wind data is influenced by the building geometry of the
 186 surrounding neighborhood, as e.g. the flow of wind may be obstructed by the buildings. Nonetheless, the measurement serves
 187 as an indicator for pollutant dispersion, where high wind speeds reflect a high degree of pollutant dispersion / dilution and low
 188 (or non-measurable) wind speeds are an indication for a low degree of pollutant dispersion.

189 In addition to this local wind measurement, data from a meteorological measurement station (compare Figure 1) was provided
 190 (Kohler et al., 2018). Figure 2 shows a wind-rose comparing the local wind speed and direction at the measurement setup in
 191 “Stutensee” with the meteorological reference measurement (compare figure 1) from KITmast (40 m height) as well as the
 192 average diurnal wind behavior that was calculated for the entire measurement period. Here, in case of the reference
 193 measurement from KITmast, data from 40 m height and 2 m height is evaluated, whereby wind direction is only measured at
 194 40 m height. The measurement at 40 m height is unobstructed by the vegetation zone of the nearby forest and offers
 195 representative data “close” to the ground, while the 2 m measurement is located on a clearing where vegetation has a
 196 comparably low impact but still influences the corresponding measurements. Both datasets are presented to offer a holistic
 197 comparison to the wind measurement in the residential area. For the data obtained at the residential area, only wind direction
 198 data with wind speeds > 0 km/h are evaluated, as the device reports 0° wind direction for wind speeds of zero. The wind rose
 199 shows the probability / fraction of the dataset of different wind speeds (above zero) coming from a corresponding wind
 200 direction in %.



201 **Figure 2: Wind rose and the average average daily behavior of the wind speed for the residential area and the reference**
 202 **measurement (KITmast) at 2 m and 40 m height (Kohler et al., 2018)**
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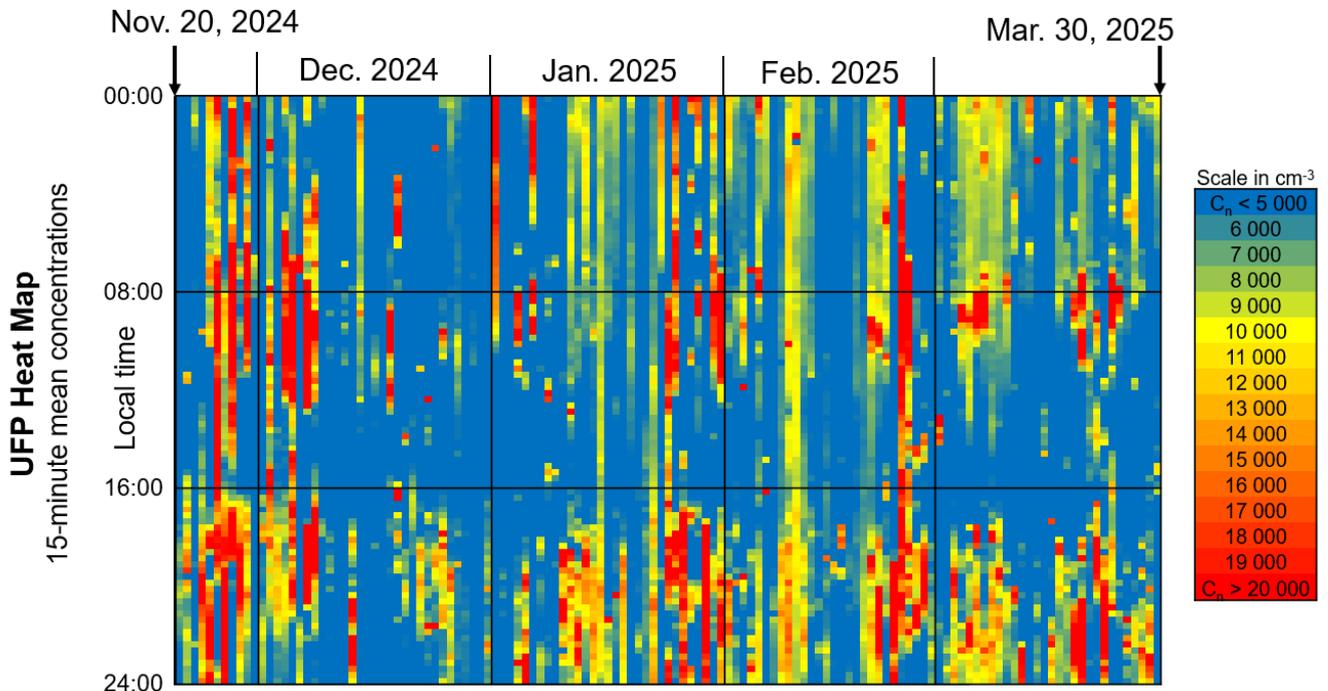
204 Main wind directions for the reference (NE, ENE and SW) are different from the residential area (SE). Note that the building
205 geometry in the residential area can have a significant impact on the measured wind speed and direction. Thus, the absolute
206 wind speeds obtained at the residential area and from the reference at 2 m height are differing significantly. At an increased
207 height of 40 m where there is no impact of the vegetation zone, the measured wind speeds are significantly higher as is
208 expected. Considering the qualitative behavior of the wind speed, all measurement positions show a similar trend, where
209 average wind speeds are relatively stable ranging from 18:00 in the evening up to approx. 09:00 in the morning. In between
210 09:00 and 18:00 there is a temporal increase in wind speed (e.g. from 0.25 km/h up to 0.6 km/h for the residential area). This
211 diurnal behavior has to be considered in the context of aerosol measurements. A similar profile was reported by Kuhlbusch et
212 al. (2001) for another location in Germany. Due to the same trend between the reference and the wind measurement in the
213 residential area, the locally obtained wind speeds are a valid indication for the corresponding pollutant dispersion conditions.
214 Therefore, only the wind speeds at the measurement position in the residential area will be considered for further evaluation.
215 A Heat Map showing 15-minute average wind speeds for the entire measurement period is provided in the supplementary
216 information.

217

219 **3.1 Temporal evolution of daily UFP concentration for the entire measurement period**

220 Wood-stoves are commonly operated during the evening hours within the heating period, causing a characteristic diurnal
 221 pattern whereby increased concentrations above the background level are only detected during periods of source activity.
 222 Figure 3 shows a Heat-Map of 15-minute average UFP concentrations for the entire measurement period ranging from Nov.
 223 20, 2024 up to Mar. 30, 2025, resulting in 131 days of complete measurement with 24 hour data availability. Concentrations
 224 below the background level of $5\,000\text{ cm}^{-3}$ are in blue color. The “low” concentration level according to the WHO good practice
 225 statement is not considered to better indicate increased concentrations above the “natural” threshold concentration. Yellow
 226 color represents the “high” concentration level of $10\,000\text{ cm}^{-3}$ according to the WHO good practice statements for exposure
 227 within a 24 hour mean concentration and in red color are values exceeding a concentration of $20\,000\text{ cm}^{-3}$ what is classified as
 228 a daily maximum hourly mean UFP concentration according to the WHO good-practice statements.

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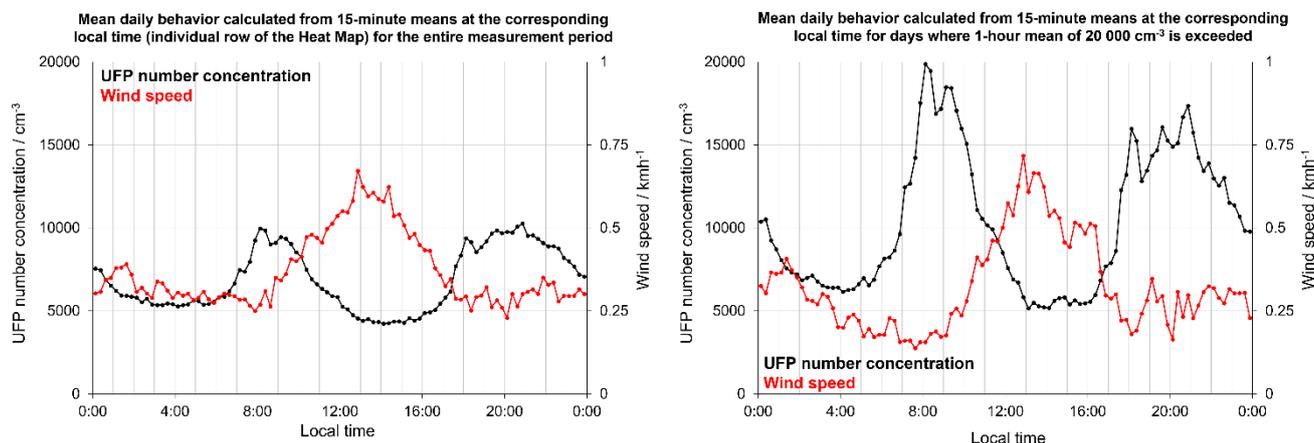
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231 **Figure 3 – Heat Map of 15-minute mean UFP-concentration for the entire duration of the measurements**

232 The Heat Map illustrates, that a significant fraction of the measurement period is subject to air pollution in the morning and
 233 evening hours what is linked to human activity.

234 Further evaluating the data shown in the heatmap in Figure 3, an “average” diurnal particle concentration dynamic was
 235 calculated in Figure 4 and set into the context of the diurnal wind pattern (Figure 2). Here, the overall average 15-minute mean
 236 concentration in a fixed time interval e.g. from 09:00 to 09:15 is calculated for either the entire measurement period (left) or

237 only the days where the 1-hour average concentration of 20,000 cm³ was exceeded (right). E.g. for Fig. 4 left: the average
 238 concentration for an entire row of the Heat Map is calculated for each time interval to gain a “mean” diurnal pattern for the
 239 entire measurement period. The black curve represents the average 15-minute mean UFP-concentration for the entire
 240 measurement duration. Here, days with and without increased UFP concentrations during the evening hours are taken into
 241 account. Despite days with low concentrations impacting the calculated mean concentrations, the determined concentration
 242 profile shows a pronounced trend, where particle concentrations above the background level around (or even above) 10 000
 243 cm⁻³ are measured during the morning hours (approx. 8:00 – 10:00) as well as the evening hours (approx. 18:00 – 22:00).



244

245 **Figure 4 –Diurnal UFP and wind pattern calculated from 15- minute mean concentrations at the corresponding local time for the**
 246 **entire measurement period and measurement days where 1-hour mean concentration of 20 000 cm is exceeded (compare Figure 9)**

247 During daytime, slightly increased wind speeds are measured (compare Figure 2) causing a larger degree of pollutant
 248 dispersion. So not only are the major sources likely not active during the lunch hours, pollutant dispersion has positive impacts
 249 on the particle concentration level. Identifying pollutant sources is not possible based on concentration data alone, however
 250 section 3.1 offers some insights regarding the corresponding source apportionment for the conclusions drawn from Fig. 3 and
 251 Fig. 4. Considering only measurement days with significant concentration spikes, where 1-hour mean concentrations of 20
 252 000 cm⁻³ were exceeded (compare Figure 9 and sect. 3.4), the diurnal pattern is even more pronounced. The wind speed during
 253 these days with increased air pollution was in a similar region compared to the entire measurement period and also showed the
 254 typical diurnal pattern with no significant deviation regarding the higher wind speeds during the daytime. A similar diurnal
 255 pattern with corresponding concentration increases was reported by Dada et al., (2025) in rural Switzerland, where especially
 256 during winter and autumn increased concentrations were measured during morning (approx. 8 000 cm⁻³) and evening hours (6
 257 000 cm⁻³) compared to the background level (4 000 cm⁻³). The source was identified as domestic heating and aerosol transport
 258 from rush-hours based off intercomparisons of various different measurements (e.g. SMPS, CPC, Catalytic Stripper, NAIS,
 259 Trace-gas analysis, Aethalometer, etc.). Another similar diurnal pattern for moderately traffic influenced urban and regional
 260 background sites regarding black carbon and aerosol particles in the range of 30 – 200 nm was reported by Sun et al. (2019)
 261 where peak concentrations occurred in the morning and evening hours that were allocated to traffic, cooking and heating.

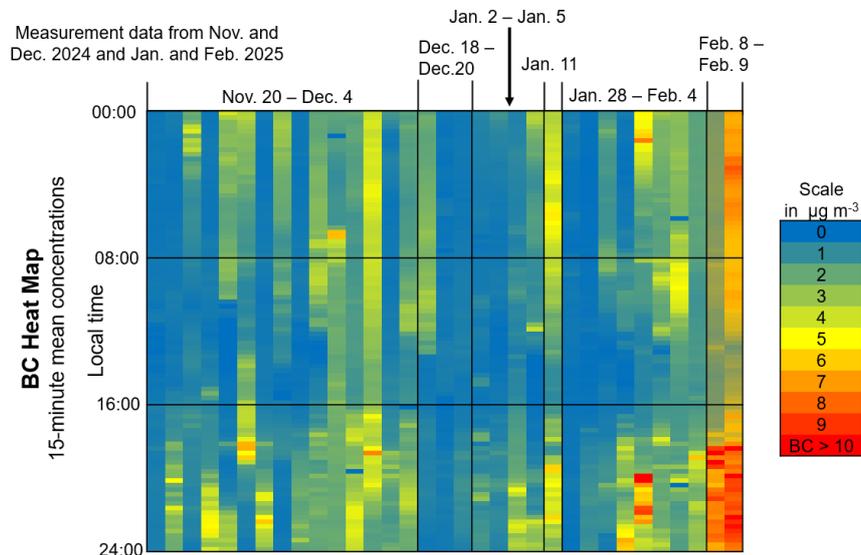
262 Kuhlbusch et al. (2001) also showed a similar diurnal pattern linked to traffic emissions in terms of PM-concentrations.
263 Summarizing, daily UFP concentration evolution is strongly influenced by local sources (wood-stoves) and pollutant
264 dispersion is a significant factor affecting the local concentration level and the measurements.

265 3.1 Source apportionment in the context of the dispersion conditions

266

267 Many different natural (e.g. atmosphere chemistry) and anthropogenic (e.g. wood-smoke, abrasion, etc.) sources can contribute
268 to increased UFP concentrations. Previous investigations proposed wood-stoves as the main source for increased UFP
269 concentration levels in this residential area. Of course elevated UFP concentrations alone are not sufficient to verify wood-
270 smoke from domestic heating as the source – however there is sufficient evidence to unambiguously identify the wood-smoke
271 pollution in the residential area:

- 272 - Smell and visual identification of plumes from chimneys of the surrounding neighborhood show the emission of
273 wood-stove exhaust and are direct evidence, even though this is no quantifiable data.
- 274 - Additional black carbon measurements also show qualitatively similar concentration spikes in the evening so that the
275 ultrafine particles likely contain soot from (incomplete) combustion. Unfortunately, the data availability for these
276 measurements only covers several days of the measurement period. The focus of this article remains UFP-
277 concentrations and the Black-Carbon data and the link between PM, UFP and BC on a temporal basis will be analyzed
278 in detail in a follow-up publication. Figure 5 shows the Black-Carbon concentration obtained from the MA350 device
279 for days with 24 hour data availability to serve as further indicative proof regarding the source of increased UFP and
280 BC-concentration levels. Especially during the evening hours, Black-Carbon concentrations of approx. $5 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ are
281 reached. For the inversion period including Feb. 8 and Feb. 9 (compare sect. 3.2.2.) concentrations up to
282 $10 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ were measured regarding 15-minute average concentrations (potentially higher concentration spikes –
283 maximum 15-minute average concentration of approx. $17 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$).



284

285 **Figure 5 – Heat Map of 15-minute mean BC-concentration for several exemplary days (24-hour data availability) during the**
286 **measurement period**

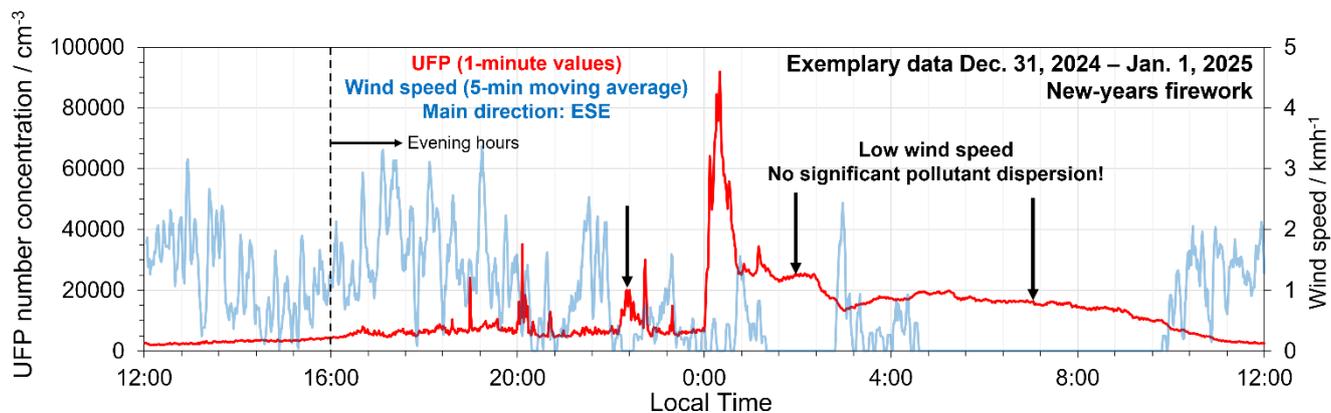
- 287 - The increased concentrations in the evening are occurring offside typical rush hours and often reach their peak after
- 288 18:00. While there indeed is a highway (A5 in Figure 1) located in the main wind direction (according to the indicative
- 289 wind measurement which may be influenced by building geometry) that could be a potential source of ultrafine
- 290 particles from traffic – increased concentrations only occur for low wind speeds close to or below the detection limit
- 291 of the wind measurement. As such, the transport of pollutants from the highway to the residential area can be ruled
- 292 out or is at least unlikely to cause concentration spikes in that order of magnitude. As a consequence, increased
- 293 concentrations in the residential area have to originate from local sources.
- 294 - New-particle formation events would have to coincide with other sources and do not occur in larger numbers. Such
- 295 events should also be mostly independent of wind-speed. Song et al. (2024) did not report significant occurrence of
- 296 new-particle formation events at another location at the outskirts of Karlsruhe within reasonable proximity to the
- 297 measurement site. However these investigations were performed during the summer months and are not comparable.
- 298 - Other prominent UFP sources (e.g. air traffic) can be ruled out.

299 3.2 Effect of pollutant dispersion on short timeframes for several exemplary measurement periods

300 To further demonstrate the impact of pollutant dispersion on ultrafine particle concentrations, several exemplary days or
 301 periods are discussed in this section. Correlations for other ambient temperature and pressure can be found in the supplementary
 302 information – though the impact of these parameters shows no distinctive trend compared to wind speed / pollutant dispersion.

303 3.2.1. New-years fireworks

304 A prominent example during the heating period where air pollution is prevalent is the New-Year’s celebration, where fireworks
 305 are launched in large amounts at midnight (00:00). The explosion of fireworks contributes to air pollution and, while only
 306 being a temporal occurrence once a year, can demonstrate the dynamic behavior of UFP concentrations. Other authors also
 307 featured the impact of firework celebrations on air pollution (Joshi et al., 2019). Figure 6 shows the UFP concentration in the
 308 context of wind speed / dispersion conditions for the residential area featured in this publication for the year 2024/2025.



309
 310 **Figure 6 – UFP number concentration and dispersion conditions during New-Year’s fireworks.**

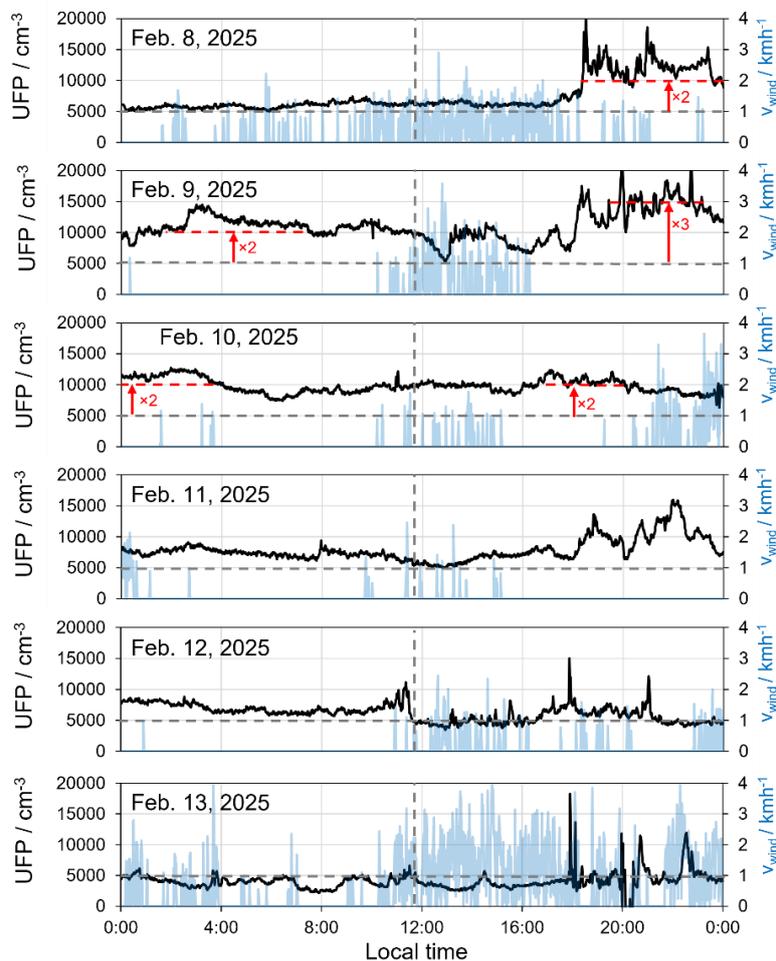
311 Over midday and up to the late afternoon at 4 PM, UFP concentrations were around a typical background level and the wind
 312 speed was comparably high at the measurement position (compare Figure 2). In the evening hours from approx. 17:00 until

313 midnight, concentrations were fluctuating between 5 000 and (mostly) 10 000 cm^{-3} , whereby several short-term peaks reached
314 concentrations exceeding 20 000 cm^{-3} . This noise in the data is an indication for source activity, even though average
315 concentrations are not noticeably high. Reaching 00:00 and the start of the fireworks, concentrations quickly increase, where
316 a peak concentration of 90 000 cm^{-3} is reached at 00:30. The peak concentration disperses rather quickly until approx. 1:30
317 during a period, where elevated wind speeds were measured. Results from (Drewnick et al., 2006) showed larger peak
318 concentrations (up to 150 000 cm^{-3} – 5 minute average concentration) for a German city, however the measurement position
319 was situated close to the center of firework activity. Drutschke et al. (2011) also report higher peak concentration for firework
320 festivities up to 1 600 000 cm^{-3} . After the decay of the main concentration peak, the concentration level remains relatively
321 constant at approx. 21 000 cm^{-3} . From 2:30 up to approx. 5:00, concentrations fluctuate during a period of pollution dispersion.
322 Finally, from 5:00 up to the morning hours of 10:00, no wind speed is detected and the natural dispersion of the pollutants is
323 comparably slow so that concentrations decrease from 20 000 down to 10 000 cm^{-3} over a longer period of time before
324 increased wind speeds during lunch bring the UFP concentration to the background level.

325

327 3.2.2. Stationary temperature inversions / High-pressure-area

328 An example for a period of the measurement campaign, where the dispersion conditions for UFP and other air pollutants was
 329 significantly impaired was during the prevalence of the high-pressure-area “Elvira” in February 2025. The high-pressure-area
 330 / stationary temperature inversion prevented air exchange what enabled the accumulation of air pollutants. This can have a
 331 significant impact on air quality, especially for cities located in basins with unfavourable dispersion conditions (Zhang et al.,
 332 2024). This effect on air pollution can also be observed on a temporally resolved basis in the residential area regarding UFP
 333 concentrations (Figure 7) and was prominently featured across different news platforms in Germany. It is also clearly visible
 334 within the PM_{2.5} Heat Map shown in the supplementary information.



335

336

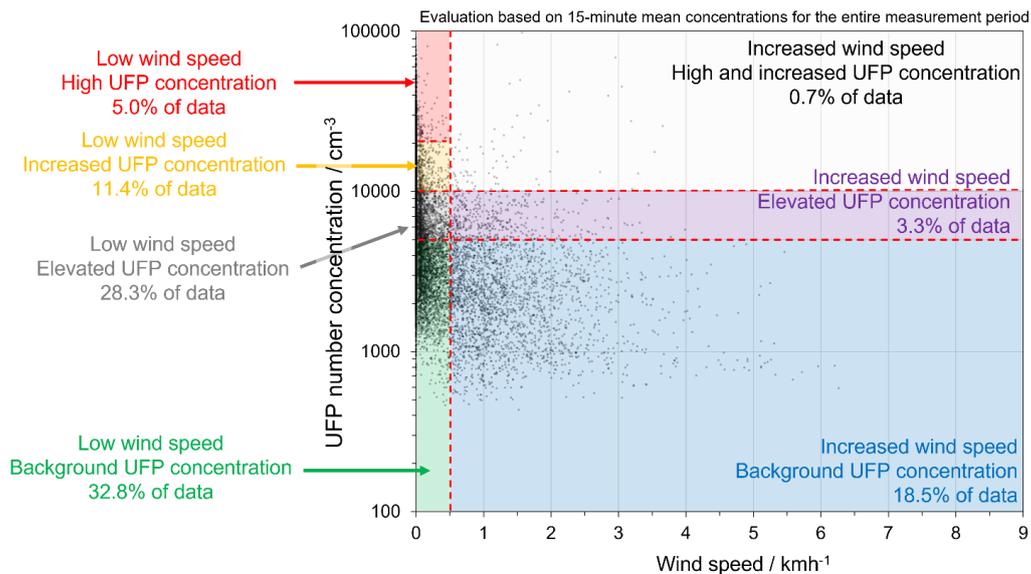
337

Figure 7 – UFP number concentration and dispersion conditions during prevalence of a high pressure area / stationary temperature inversions in February 2025

338 Increased wood-stove operation led to an increase in UFP concentration during the evening hours of Feb. 8. Due to poor
 339 pollutant dispersion and the beginning of the impact of the high-pressure-area, this level remained constant up to the lunch
 340 hours of the next day. In the evening of Feb. 9, concentrations again increased up to three times the background concentration
 341 and remained at a level of $10\ 000\ \text{cm}^{-3}$ (high concentration according to WHO good practice statement) for the entirety of Feb.
 342 10. On Feb. 11, the concentration slowly decreased to the background level up to the evening hours, where wood-stove
 343 operation again contributed to air pollution. Towards the end of the effective duration of the high-pressure-area on Feb. 12 and
 344 13, the concentration decreased and, especially on Feb. 13, the concentration was at or below the background level and
 345 significant wind speeds were measured for the majority of the day. Noise in the data of Feb. 13 is again an indication for source
 346 activity and simultaneous dispersion / dilution.
 347

348 3.3 UFP concentration levels in the context of pollutant dispersion during the entire measurement period

349 To give a direct correlation between ultrafine particles and wind speed, a scatterplot is drawn for the 15-minute average UFP
 350 concentrations and the corresponding average wind speed in Figure 8. Correlations for different ambient conditions can be
 351 found in the supplementary information – although no clear trends could be derived from this evaluation. In Figure 8, different
 352 sectors can be identified that illustrate the main conclusions drawn from the previously discussed measurements of UFP in the
 353 context of wind speeds / pollutant dispersion.



354

355 **Figure 8 – Scatterplot of 15- minute mean UFP-concentrations and wind speeds for the entire measurement period**

356 The highest UFP concentrations occur under conditions where pollutant dispersion is very low (red and yellow sector). The
 357 threshold wind speed was selected at $0.5\ \text{km/h}$ as almost no concentrations above $10\ 000\ \text{cm}^{-3}$ were measured at higher wind

358 speeds. Data above the background level at low wind speeds amounts to 44.7% of the total data and was likely caused by
359 source activity and wood-smoke pollution.

360 For wind speeds above 0.5 km/h and concentrations above 5 000 cm⁻³ only a very limited amount of data can be found (4 %
361 total) by comparison. With increasing pollutant dispersion, even under conditions with high source activity the effect on air
362 quality is not as significant.

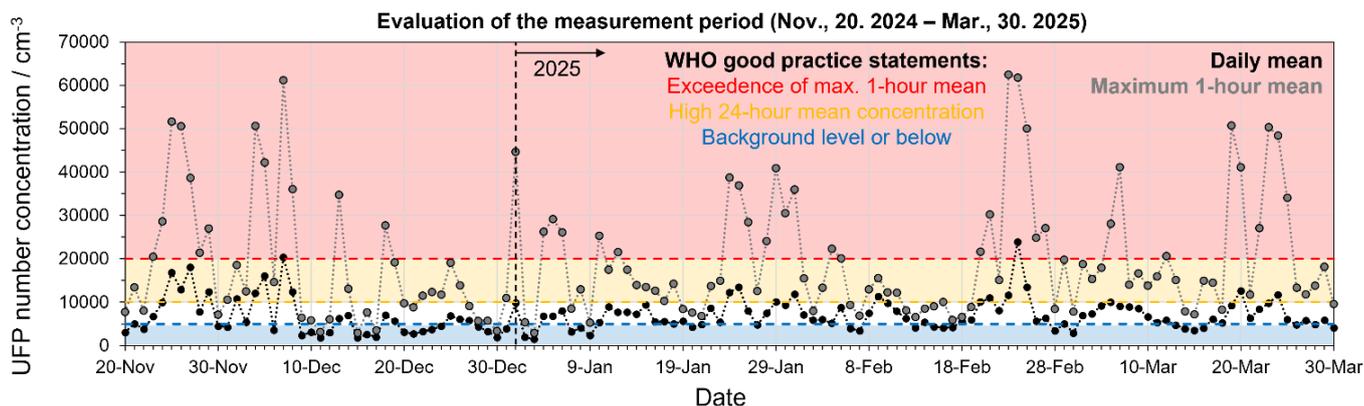
363 In the sector including wind speeds above 0.5 km/h and concentrations below 5 000 cm⁻³ a total of 18.5 % of the measurement
364 data can be found. Pollutant dispersion dominates the overall particle concentration level so that even in case of source activity,
365 the effect on ambient air quality is not measurable, impeding the generation of emission inventories (e.g. climate-damaging
366 black carbon from incomplete combustion from wood-stoves). This data is predominantly obtained during the lunch hours
367 with increased wind speeds.

368 Only for data below the background concentration and at low wind speeds source activity can be ruled out with high certainty.
369 The amount of data in this quadrant amounts to 32.8%.

370 Summarizing, the dispersion conditions have a major impact on the measured air quality in the residential area. In case of low
371 pollutant dispersion, increased concentration levels can persevere across multiple days. For higher wind speeds, pollutant
372 dispersion can dominate the ambient air quality and low concentration can be measured, despite the possibility of wood-smoke
373 emissions.

374 **3.4 Evaluation of average UFP and particulate matter concentrations regarding ambient air quality limits and WHO** 375 **recommendations**

376 In the previous sections, the measured UFP concentrations were already discussed in the context of particle concentration
377 levels introduced by the World Health Organizations' "good practice statements". Particle concentrations above 10 000 cm⁻³
378 (24-hour mean) are considered a high concentration. Furthermore, a daily maximum 1-hour mean concentration of
379 20 000 cm⁻³ should also not be exceeded. In Figure 9, the daily mean UFP concentration as well as the maximum 1-hour mean
380 concentration for the entire measurement period ranging from Nov. 20, 2024 up to Mar. 30, 2025 are calculated and set into
381 the context of the WHO "good practice statements".
382



383

384

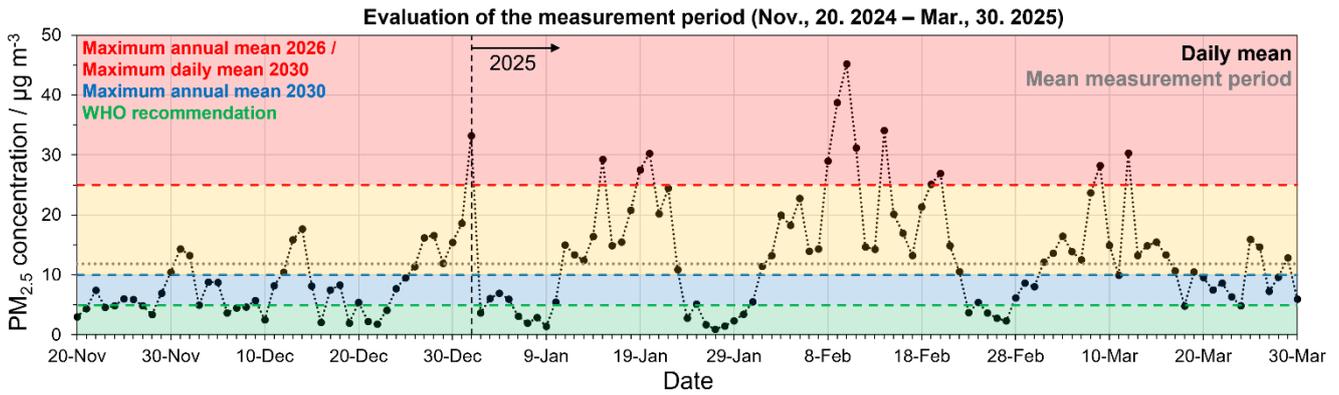
Figure 9 – Mean daily and maximum 1-hour UFP number concentration for the entire measurement period

385 Considering the 24-hour mean concentrations, only a total of 16 % of measurement days (21 / 131 days) exceed the 24-hour
 386 mean UFP concentration of 10 000 cm⁻³ (black data-points within yellow area). This is mainly caused by the diurnal pattern,
 387 where increased concentrations are only detected during the morning and evening hours so that these concentration spikes are
 388 not as significant in the context of 24-hour mean concentrations.

389 However, considering increased short-term exposure to high concentrations above 20 000 cm⁻³, a total of 33.6 % of
 390 measurement days (44 / 131 days) exceed the daily maximum 1-hour mean concentration at least once during the day.
 391 Considering a total of 24 hours for each measurement day, the number of hours exceeding the 20 000 cm⁻³ threshold is
 392 154 / 3144 what amounts to 4.9% of hours during the measurement period. These increased concentration levels are very likely
 393 hazardous due to their origin from wood combustion and can contribute to long-term health effects and endanger high risk
 394 groups such as children and the elderly regarding short-term health effects.

395 3.5 UFP concentrations in the context of PM_{2.5} measurements

396 To add further context to the increased UFP peak concentrations (Figure 9), the mean daily PM_{2.5} concentrations obtained from
 397 scattered-light based measurements using the Fidas Smart 100 (compare Figure 1) are displayed in Figure 10. These
 398 measurements were indicative measurements and not government-official. For further information on the temporally resolved
 399 PM_{2.5} behavior, a Heat Map similar to Figure 4 can be accessed in the supplementary information.

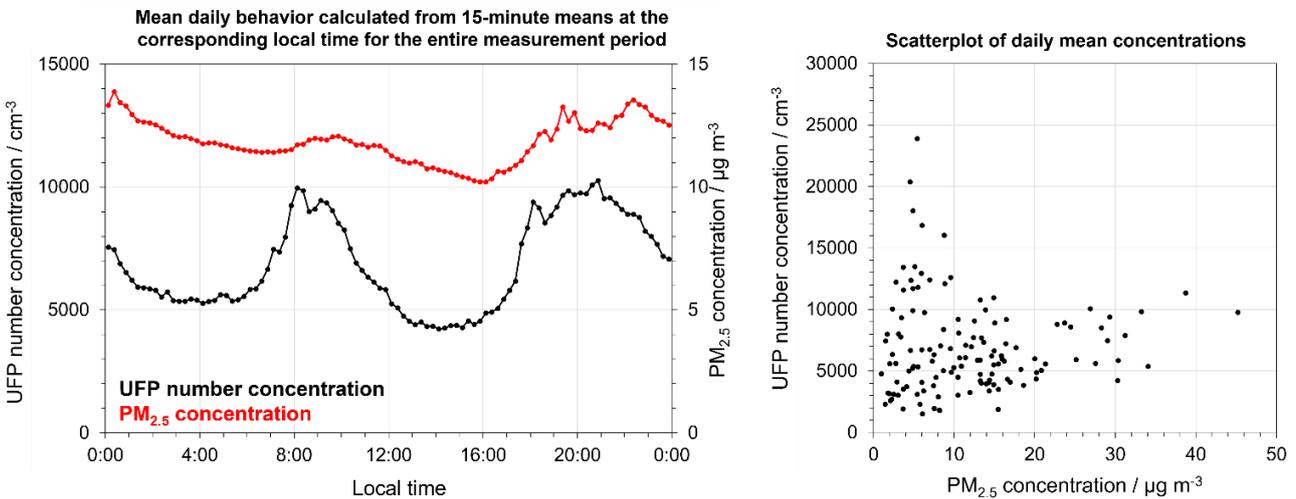


400

401 **Figure 10 – Mean daily PM_{2.5} concentration for the entire measurement period within the limits specified in the**
 402 **revised Ambient Air Quality Directive (indicative measurement – no government-official data)**

403 The average PM_{2.5} concentration of the measurement period (11.9 µg/m³) is close to the future annular mean concentration for
 404 the year 2030. Therefore, the current mean annular concentration limit of 25 µg/m³ is easily kept. As the measurement period
 405 was performed during the heating season, where higher PM concentrations are expected, there will likely be no (or no
 406 significant) exceedance of the future 10 µg/m³ limit in case of the year 2025. When it comes to the future number of 18
 407 exceedance days of a concentration of 25 µg/m³, which will be relevant starting in 2030, there were a total of 13 exceedance
 408 days during the measurement period (all of which occurred in 2025). Several of these exceedance days were obtained during
 409 the impact of the high-pressure-area discussed in sect. 3.2.2. so that the concentration itself is not directly linked to the emission
 410 of pollutants but rather the dispersion conditions that may dictate whether or not the number of exceedance days can be
 411 complied with.

412



413

414 **Figure 11 – 15- minute mean diurnal UFP (compare Figure 4 regarding UFP concentrations) and PM_{2.5} pattern for the entire**
 415 **measurement period and scatterplot of UFP and PM_{2.5} concentrations (compare Figure 9 and Figure 10)**

416 In this case, the actual pollution with hazardous nanoparticles from wood combustion is not properly represented by
417 “conventional” air quality monitoring (Figure 11). There is no direct correlation between the PM_{2.5} and UFP measurements,
418 as UFP are below the detectable size range of the Fidas Smart 100 device and remain undetected (additionally, their
419 contribution to mass concentrations is very small – see also scatterplot of 15-minute average UFP and PM_{2.5} concentration in
420 the supplementary information). While there is also a slight diurnal pattern considering average PM_{2.5} concentrations –
421 compared to the large differences during peak exposure times in the morning and evening hours for UFP concentrations (e.g.
422 factor of 2 compared to background level), the absolute difference in PM is comparably low (factor 1.3 – 1.4). The (also mass
423 based but non-size-resolved) BC-concentrations often increased from a close to zero-background level up to 5 µg m⁻³ during
424 the evening hours by comparison (Figure 5).

425 Short-term exposures (e.g. covered by good practice statement for UFP in the form of 1-hour maximum concentration) are not
426 considered in the limits of the Ambient Air Quality Directive due to the daily and annular averaging periods of particle
427 concentrations.

428 These results demonstrate that UFP monitoring is especially relevant for regions where domestic heating using wood as
429 combustion resource is used. While significant UFP-concentrations were measured in the residential area, the PM
430 concentrations (mostly) comply with (or do not show a significant exceedance of) current and future PM-concentration limits.
431 Nonetheless, since the future air quality limits are only addressing these mass-based PM-concentrations, areas where
432 measurement stations do show an exceedance of PM-concentration limits due to the emissions from wood-combustion for
433 domestic heating are by association significantly polluted with especially hazardous (black-carbon) nanoparticles.

434 **4 Summary and Outlook**

435 Measurements of ultrafine particle concentrations applying a diffusion charge based UFP-monitor were performed in a
436 residential area in a small German town during a large fraction of the heating period of 2024 / 2025. The major source for air
437 pollution in the residential area during this time was wood-stove exhaust for domestic heating. Especially during the morning
438 and evening hours, significant UFP concentration spikes were measured, causing a characteristic diurnal pattern. Here, average
439 concentrations of approx. 10 000 cm⁻³ (corresponds to twice the typical background level) were measured averaging the entire
440 measurement period. The dispersion conditions have a large impact on the measured concentrations, as during daytime
441 increased wind speeds occur and were measured at a reference wind measurement site and in the residential area. Higher wind
442 speeds are linked to lower / decreasing UFP concentrations and only for low (or non-detectable) wind speeds large UFP-
443 concentrations (e.g. exceeding 10 000 cm⁻³ were measured. On approx. 33.6% of days during the measurement period a
444 maximum daily 1-hour mean concentration of 20 000 cm⁻³ was exceeded according to the WHO “good practice statements”
445 on ultrafine particles. During these periods with increased wood-smoke pollution (morning and evening hours) people are
446 more likely to spend time at their homes (indoors). Depending on ventilation / air exchange between interior and exterior, they
447 may or may not be exposed to this outdoor air pollution. How much individual homes are affected can thus vary significantly.

448 Due to the small particle size, these UFP from wood-smoke are not contributing significantly to legally-relevant PM-
449 concentrations, where a less pronounced diurnal pattern was shown with a scattered-light based Fidas Smart 100. This research
450 highlights the dissonance between the size distribution of wood-smoke particle emissions from domestic heating (nanometer
451 region) and conventional air quality measurements (mass based PM-concentrations). A follow-up publication will further
452 discuss explorative (temporally resolved) Black-Carbon measurements and the link to UFP and PM concentration dynamics
453 during this measurement period. Further research will aim to expand the setup to perform further characterization of the air
454 pollutants measured in the residential area.

455 **Data availability**

456 The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the KITOpen Repository under the
457 doi:10.35097/2aab6yjdyfg4nr69.

458 **Author contribution**

459 **Peter Bächler:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review &
460 Editing

461 **Frederik Weis:** Conceptualization, Validation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing – Review & Editing

462 **Sebastian Kohler:** Validation, Data Curation, Writing – Review & Editing

463 **Achim Dittler:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Resources, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing.

464 **Competing interests**

465 The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing
466 interests: Frederik Weis and Sebastian Kohler are currently employed by Palas GmbH and worked on the development of the
467 measurement device.

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