

Evaluation of CO₂ and CH₄ retrievals from MethaneSAT: A Simulation-based study

Gregory

McGarragh

Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere, Colorado State University

Christopher O'Dell, Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere, Colorado State University

David Crisp, Crisp Spectra LLC

Sean Crowell, LumenUs Scientific, LLC

Jonathan Franklin, Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University

Sebastien Roche, Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University

Peter Somkuti, Earth System Science Interdisciplinary Center, University of Maryland

Kang Sun, Department of Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering, University at Buffalo

Steven Wofsy, Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University

Poster

On March 4, 2024, the Environmental Defense Fund in partnership with the Harvard Center for Astrophysics launched MethaneSAT, the next U.S.-based greenhouse gas sensor. MethaneSAT is a wide-swath near-infrared sensor with an O₂ band at 1.27 μm and a CO₂+CH₄ band at 1.59-1.65 μm . It will fly in a polar sun-synchronous orbit and observe an average of thirty 200 km x 200 km land areas per day. Compared to OCO-2, it has about 3 times lower spectral resolution and higher per-pixel noise, but much greater native spatial resolution at roughly 130 m x 400 m. The operational CH₄ retrieval will be a proxy retrieval using only the CO₂+CH₄ band. This retrieval is largely insensitive to atmospheric scattering, but relies on the assumption that CO₂ can be used as a reference gas and that the CO₂ and CH₄ anomalies are uncorrelated over the scene of interest.

In this work, we present a full-physics retrieval that utilizes both the 1.27 μm and CO₂+CH₄ bands which allows simultaneous retrieval of CH₄ and CO₂ columns. In both current and future greenhouse gas missions O₂ information is usually obtained from the 0.76 μm O₂ A-band while use of the 1.27 μm O₂ band has largely been avoided due to the difficulty in modeling the intense airglow in the upper atmosphere at 1.27 μm . In this study we will simulate radiances accounting for airglow emission which will then be used to drive retrieval simulations. We will compare our full physics results to the proxy CH₄ approach as well as full physics results from a theoretical instrument that uses O₂ information at 0.76 μm instead. The latter allows us to compare the use of these two different O₂ bands, which is relevant for many current (e.g., OCO-2 and GOSAT) and future sensors (e.g. CO₂M and MicroCarb). We will also determine whether, when averaged to 2 x 2 km², the MethaneSAT CO₂ retrieval will have comparable error statistics to OCO-2, opening up a host of potential CO₂ studies from this exciting new instrument.

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