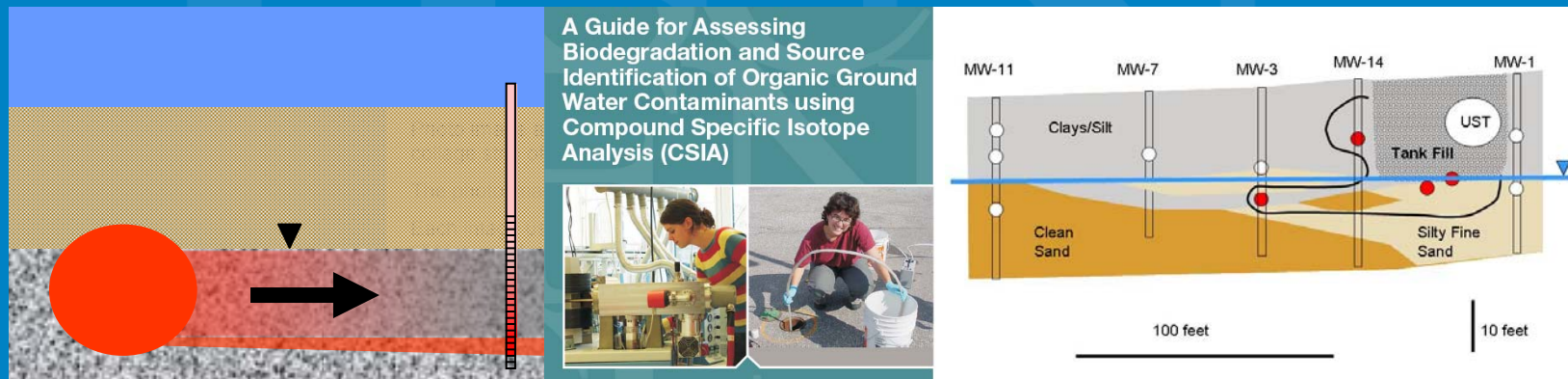


What's New in the Site Characterization Tool Box: Molecular Biological Tools to Identify Microorganisms that Degrade Contaminants and Contaminant-Specific Isotope Analysis to Identify Sources and Document Degradation

John T. Wilson and Ann Keeley, EPA/ORD/Ada



May 5, 2011

Biodegradation plays a Prominent Role in Fate and Transport of Contaminants

Although the potential for biodegradation has been well documented in the literature, there is a significant burden of proof and lag time associated with achieving the acceptance of natural and /or enhanced bioremediation by regulatory and public stakeholders.

Molecular Biological Tools (MBTs)

Tools that target “biomarkers”:

Specific nucleic acid sequences, peptides, proteins, or lipids

Outcome is to provide information about:

- Types of microorganisms present
- Processes relevant to the assessment and/or remediation of natural or engineered systems
- microbial activity *in situ*

Current State of Field Application of MBTs

Site Characterization Questions Prior to Selection

- **What is the potential for degradation based on the presence/absence of genes or microorganisms of interest?**
- **What is the link between the presence of target genes or microorganisms and the activity of interest?**
- **Is the spatial and temporal distribution of organisms appropriate to meet goals?**

General Description of Genomic & Molecular Tools

General Questions

**Are the key microbes present?
Are their genes being expressed?
What other groups of microbes present?
What is the microbial density?**

Tool Selection

**Use DNA & RNA Based Tools for fingerprinting
(Polymerase Chain Reaction [PCR])**

General Description of Genomic & Molecular Tools

General Questions

How active is the microbial community?

Tool Selection

**Use Protein Based Tools
(enzyme probes)**

General Description of Genomic & Molecular Tools

General Questions

**What groups of microbes are present?
What is the total biomass?**

Tool Selection

**Use Lipid Based Tools
(phospholipid fatty acids)**

General Description of Genomic & Molecular Tools

General Questions

Can the contaminants be biologically degraded at the site under conditions that pertain in the groundwater?

Tool Selection

**Use Stable Isotope Based Tools
(Stable Isotope Probing)**

General Description of Genomic & Molecular Tools

General Questions

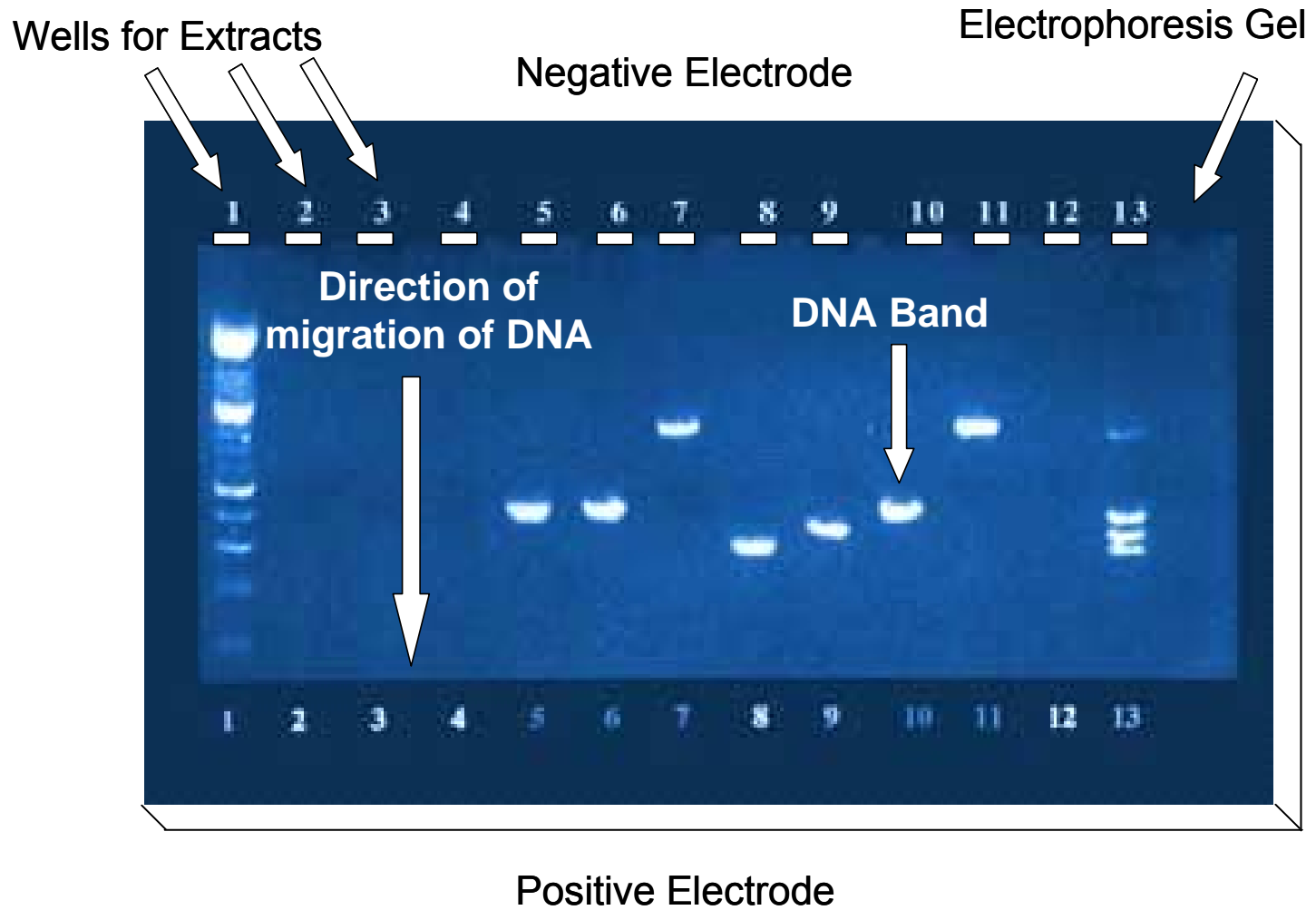
Are the contaminants actually being biodegraded?

Tool Selection

**Use Stable Isotope Based Tools
(Compound Specific Isotope Analysis)**

PCR uses the polymerase chain reaction to copy DNA in a sample that binds with a short DNA primer that contains base sequences of the DNA being amplified. The copied DNA is copied, then the copies are copied, and so on, until there is enough DNA to measure.

The most common application copies the DNA for a component of the ribosome, the 16s rRNA gene.



Quantitative or Real time PCR uses primers with a fluorescent tag. As the primers are incorporated into DNA, this is detected in each PCR cycle by an increase in the fluorescence of the solution.

The original density of the organisms is related to the number of PCR cycles necessary to reach a predetermined fluorescence.

Quantitative RTm PCR (qPCR) is the Most Widely Used Genomic MBT in the Field

Using DNA

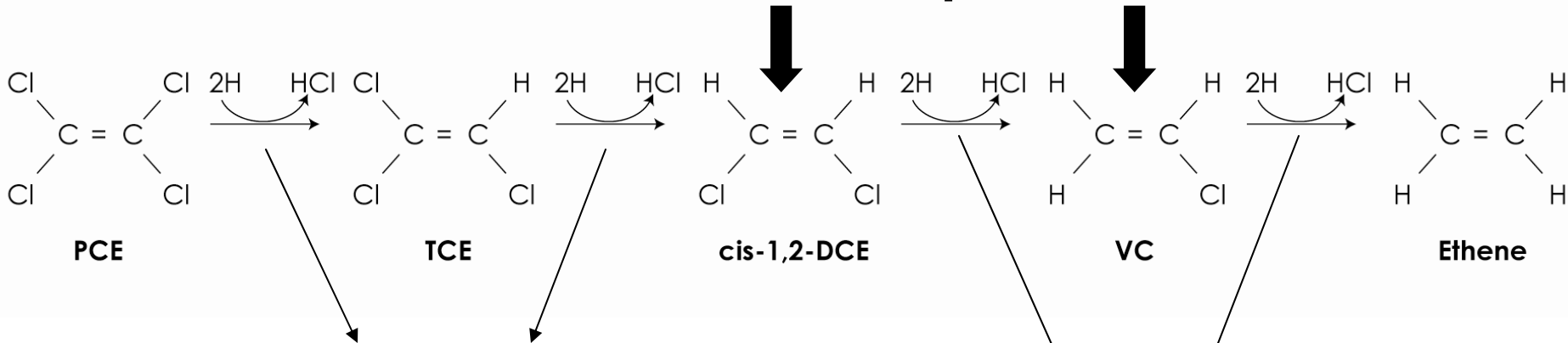
- qPCR enables both detection and quantification of a specific sequence in a DNA sample (16S rRNA gene)
- It is offered as a commercial service by multiple laboratories to detect and quantify key genes of interest, especially for *Dehalococcoides spp.* (i.e., detection of “functional genes” such as reductive dehalogenase [(RDase) genes].

Using RNA

- The potential exists to detect an actual “activity” by using mRNA and expressed proteins from environmental sample.

Microbiology of Reductive Dechlorination of Chloroethenes

**Can accumulate if requisite
bacteria are not present**



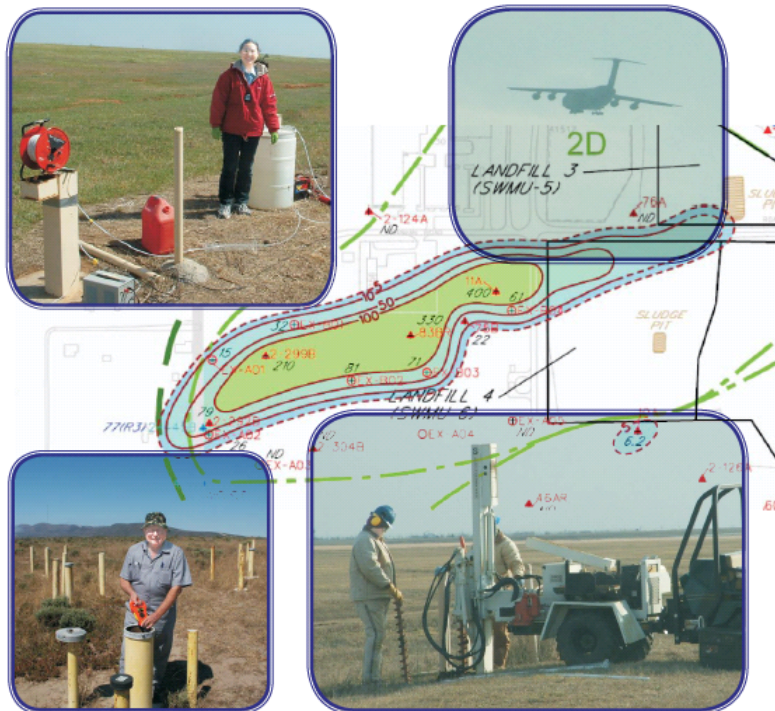
Dehalobacter
Dehalospirillum
Desulfitobacterium
Desulfuromonas
Dehalococcoides

some strains of
Dehalococcoides

qPCR: Key Organism Identification

- ***Dehalococcoides* is somewhat of an exception in bioremediation, where there is a strong link between the organism type (identification) and the activity (reductive dechlorination) because of the simple metabolic pathway.**

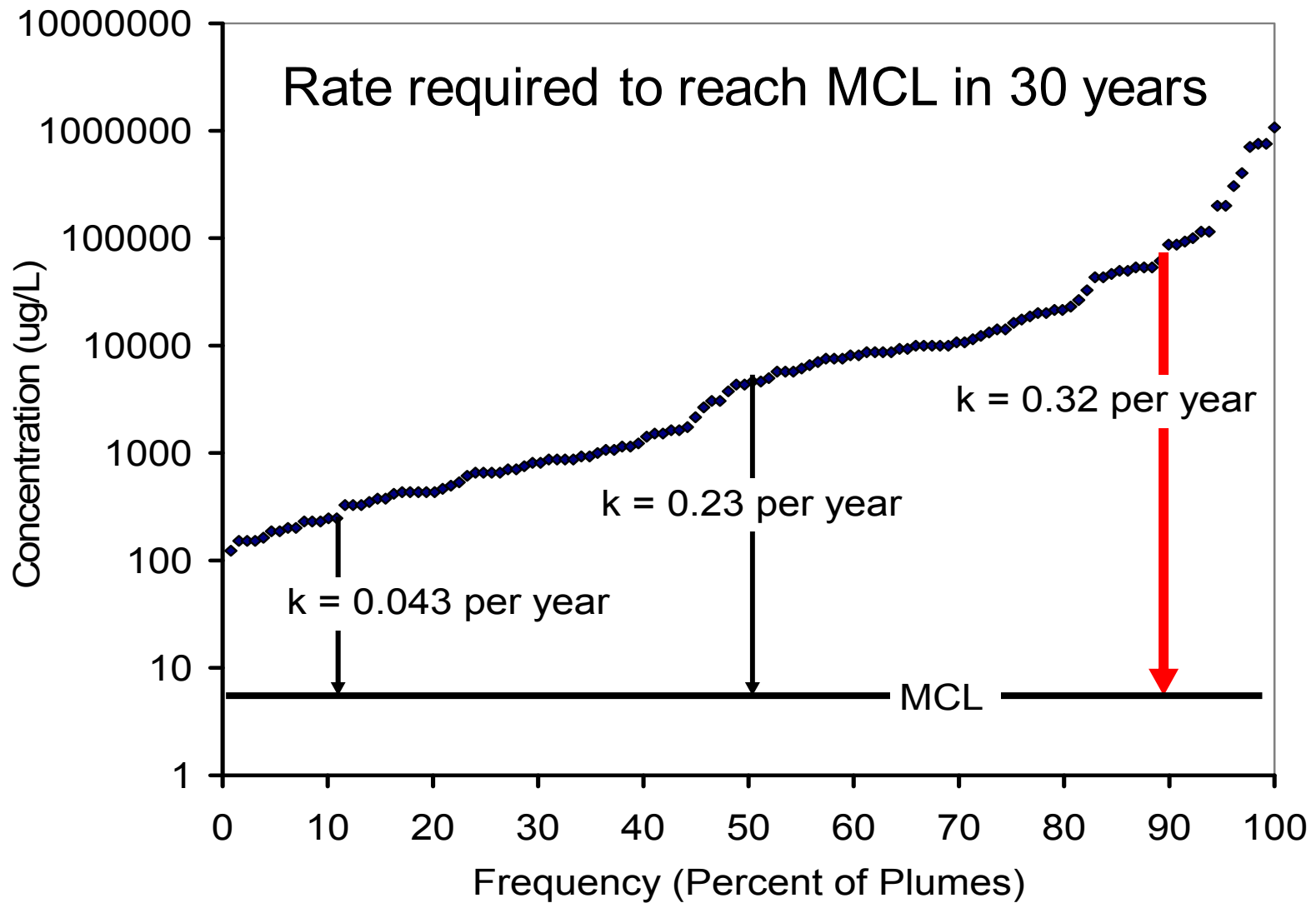
Evaluation of the Role of *Dehalococcoides* Organisms in the Natural Attenuation of Chlorinated Ethylenes in Ground Water



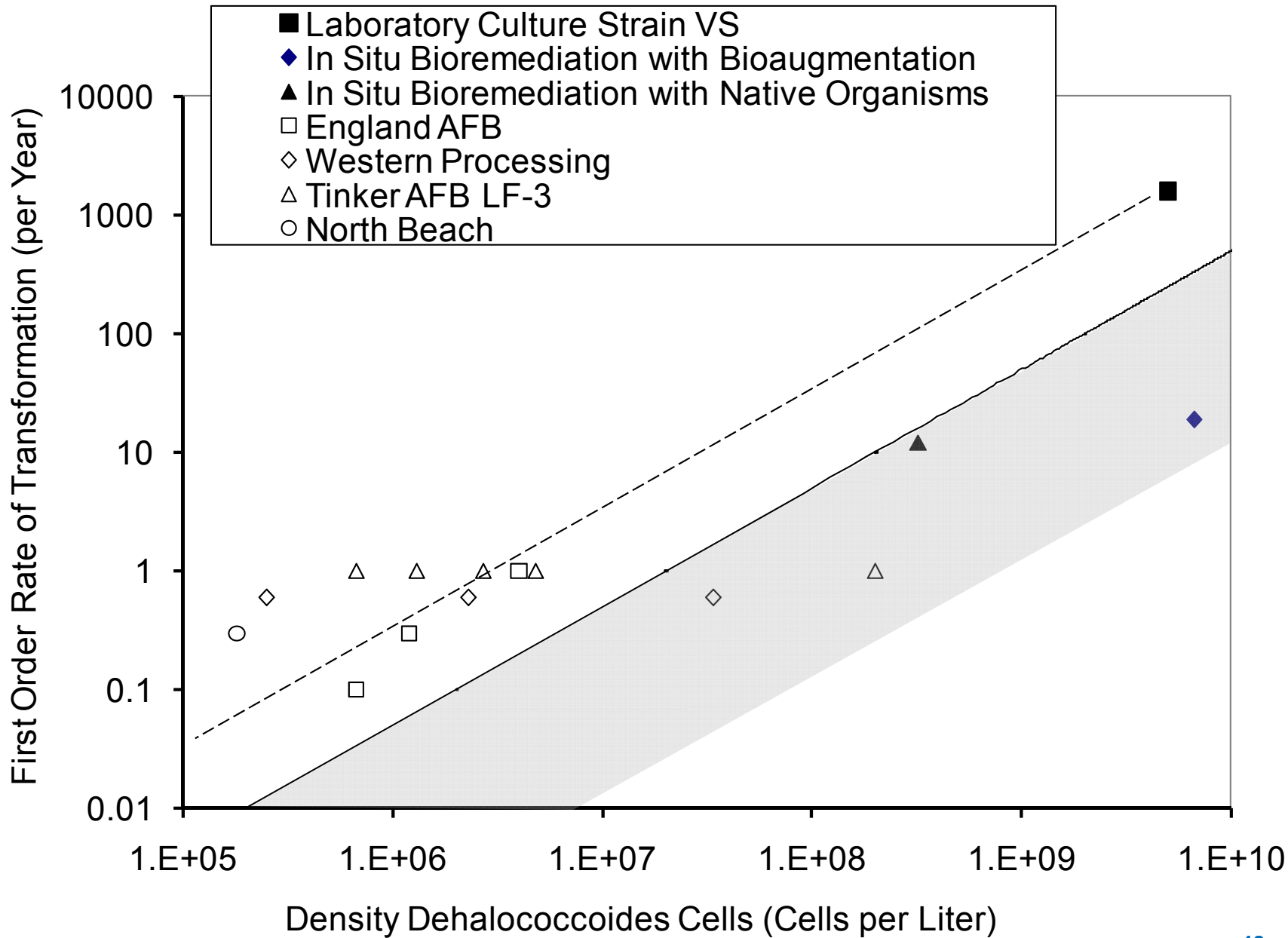
Evaluation of the Role of
Dehalococcoides Organisms in
the Natural Attenuation of
Chlorinated Ethylenes in Ground
Water. Xiaoxia Lu, Donald H.
Kampbell and John T. Wilson.
2006.EPA/600/R-06/029

Relationship between
Dehalococcoides DNA in Ground
Water and Rates of Reductive
Dechlorination at Field Scale.
Xiaoxia Lu, John T. Wilson, and
Donald H. Kampbell. 2006. *Water
Research* 40(2006):3131-3140

Compared the density of *Dehalococcoides* cells in monitoring wells as determined by Direct PCR to the density as determined by Quantitative PCR, and to the rate of reductive dechlorination achieved at field scale.



Evaluating chlorinated hydrocarbon plume behavior using historical case population analyses. *Bioremediation Journal* 4(4):311-335 (2000)



*A Guide for Assessing
Biodegradation and Source
Identification of Organic
Ground Water Contaminants
using Compound Specific
Isotope Analysis (CSIA)*

EPA 600/R-08/148 |
December 2008 |
www.epa.gov/ada

**A Guide for Assessing
Biodegradation and Source
Identification of Organic Ground
Water Contaminants using
Compound Specific Isotope
Analysis (CSIA)**



Element	Stable Isotopes	Relative Abundance
Hydrogen	^1H	0.99985
	^2H	0.00015
Carbon	^{12}C	0.9889
	^{13}C	0.0111
Chlorine	^{35}Cl	0.7577
	^{37}Cl	0.2423

Analysis of Stable Carbon Isotope Ratios

The ratio of stable isotopes is determined with an Isotope Ratio Mass Spectrometer (IRMS).

The IRMS compares the ratio of ^{13}C to ^{12}C in the sample against the ratio of ^{13}C to ^{12}C in a reference standard.

$$\delta^{13}\text{C}\text{‰}$$

Delta C thirteen is the conventional unit for the stable carbon isotope ratio in the sample. It is a measure of how much it varies from the standard.

Notice that delta C thirteen is expressed in parts per thousand.

You will see this expressed as ‰ or permil or per mill.

$$\delta^{13}\text{C} \text{ ‰} = \left[\frac{R}{R_s} - 1 \right] * 1000$$

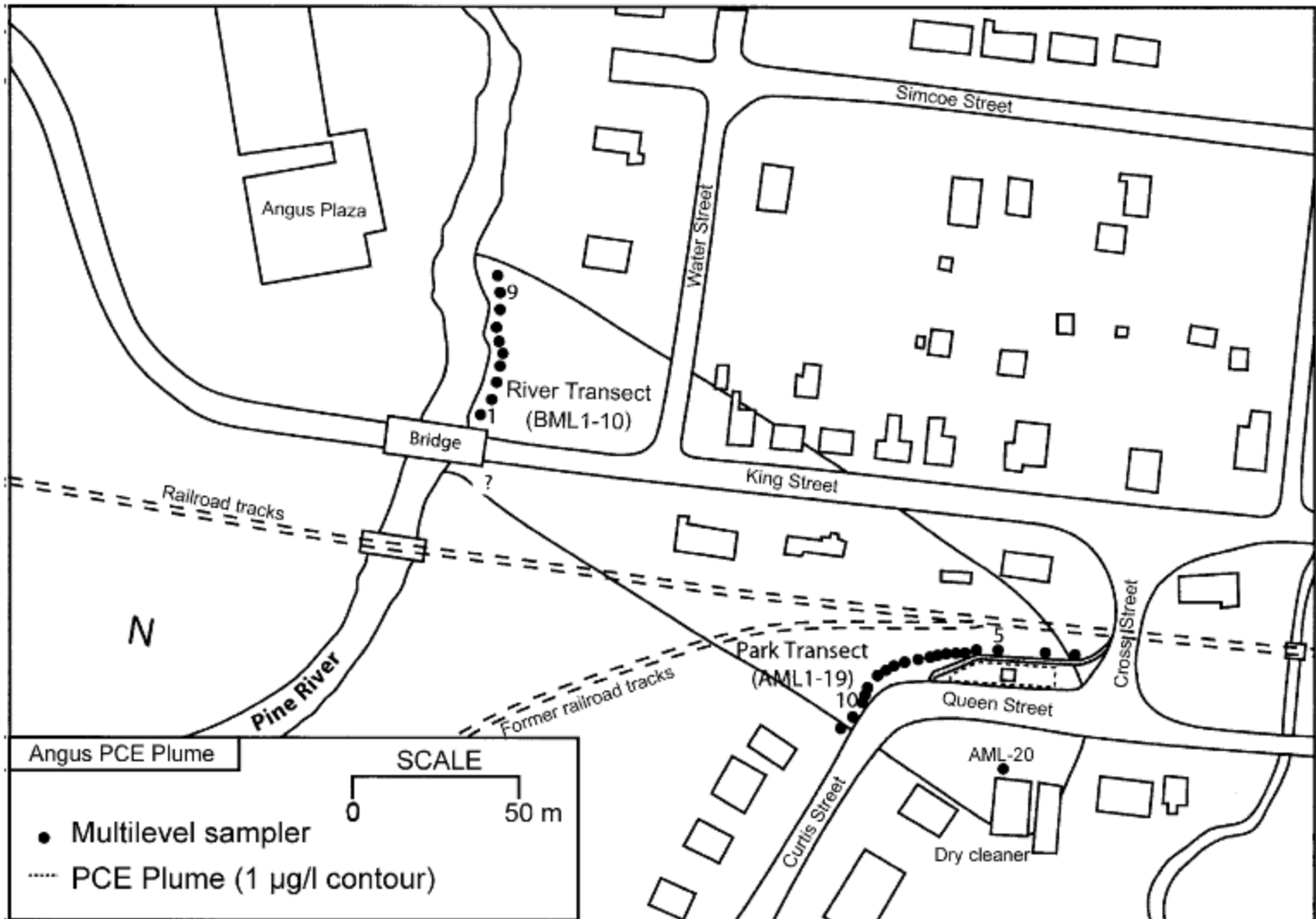
Where R is the ratio of ^{13}C to ^{12}C in the sample and R_s is the ratio in the standard.

Can clearly resolve samples from each other if their $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ differ by more than 2‰.

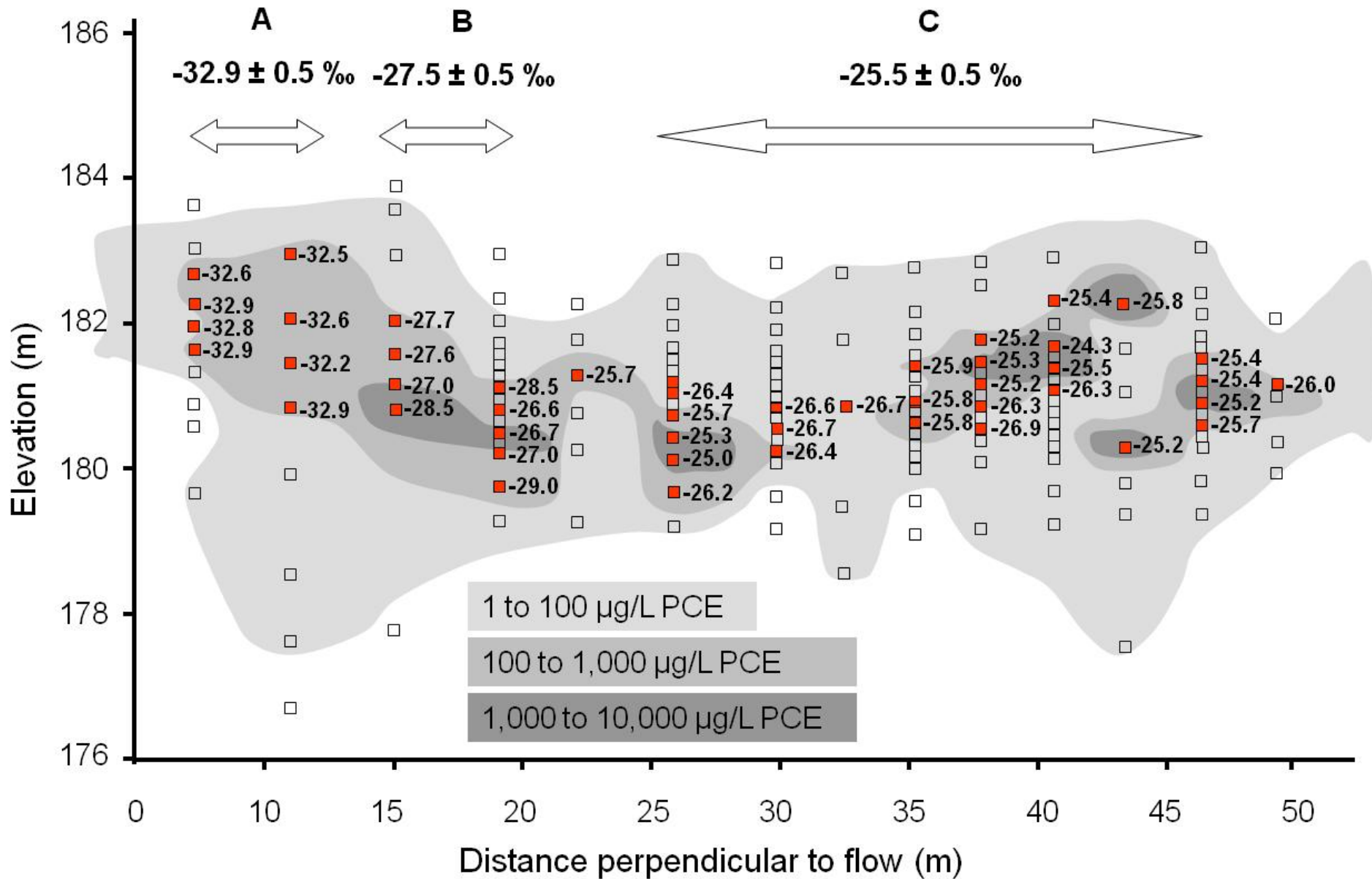
Can we use differences in isotopic ratios to track plumes, or to associate plumes with their sources?

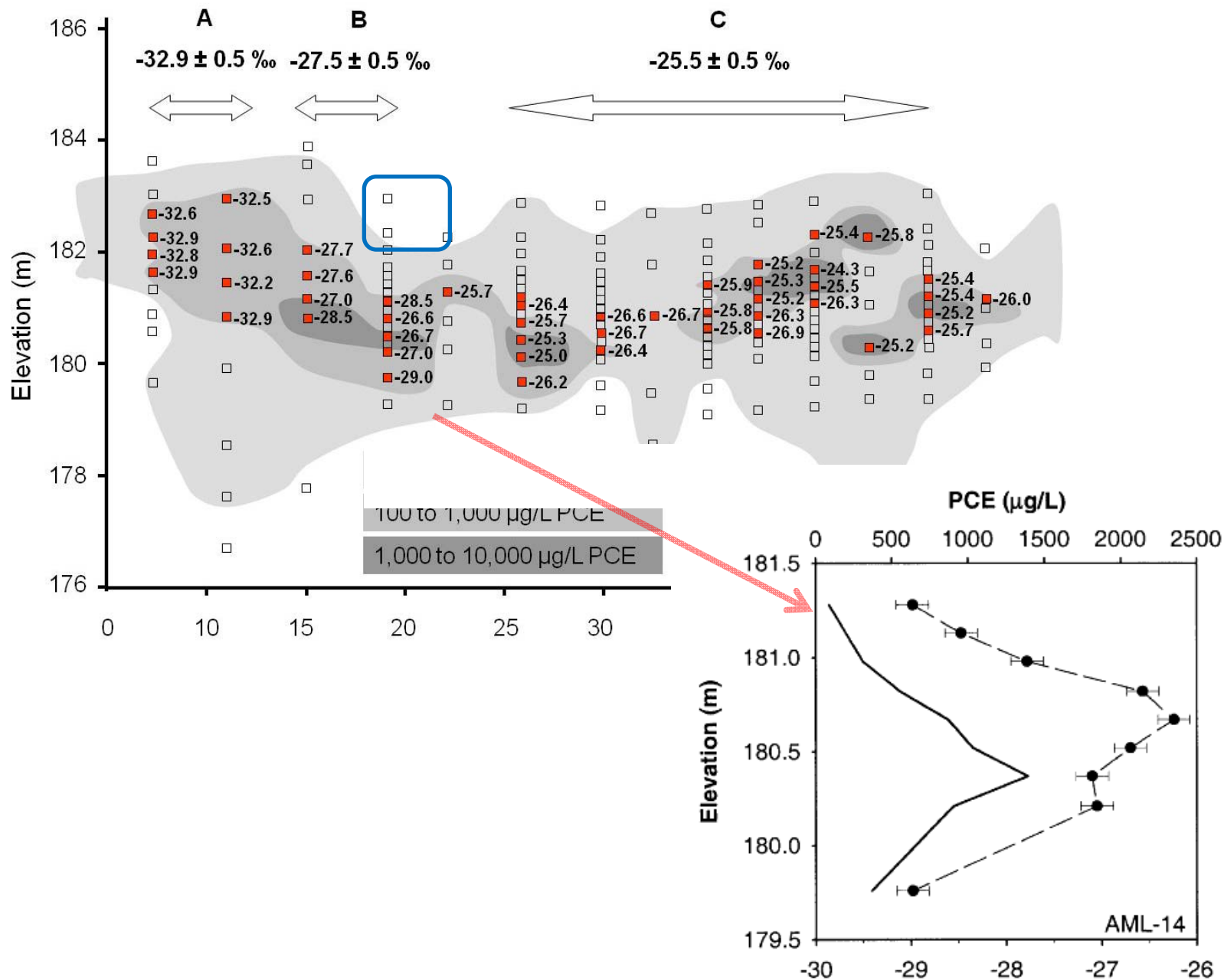
	PCE	TCE
Source	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (‰/PDB)	
Manufacturer A	-27.12 ± 0.03	-31.53 ± 0.01
Manufacturer B	-35.27 ± 0.12	-27.90 ± 0.08
Manufacturer C	-24.06 ± 0.08	-29.93 ± 0.18
Aldrich		-33.49 ± 0.08
Dow	-23.19 ± 0.10	-31.90 ± 0.05
ICI	-37.20 ± 0.03	-31.32 ± 0.03
PPG	-33.84 ± 0.03	-27.80 ± 0.01
Vulcan	-24.1 ± 0.04	
Range	-23.19 to -37.20	-27.80 to -33.49

Effect of source variability and transport processes on carbon isotope ratios of TCE and PCE in two sandy aquifers. *Journal of Contaminant Hydrology* 74: 265-282 (2004)

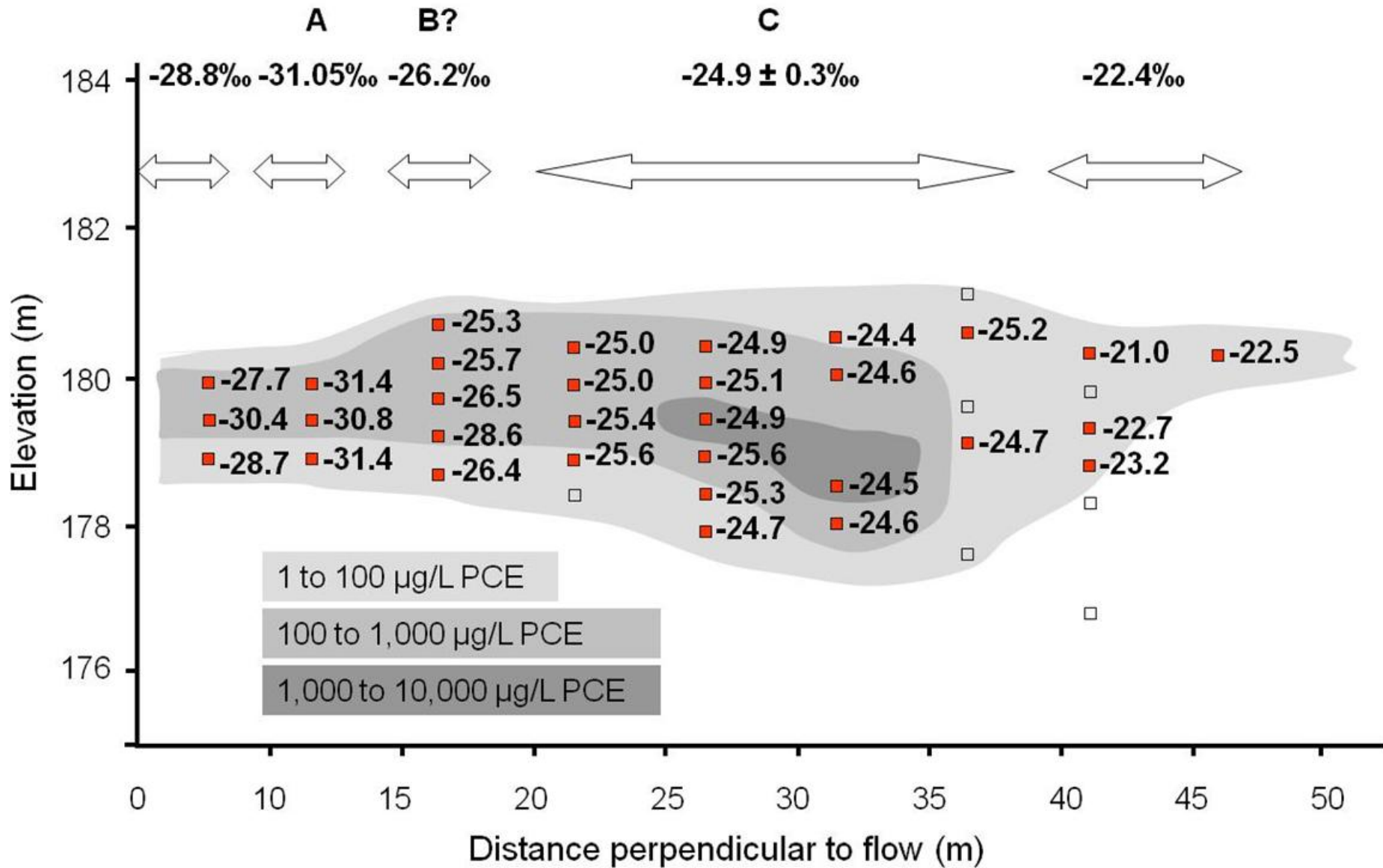


Transect 1: 40 to 50 m down gradient of source

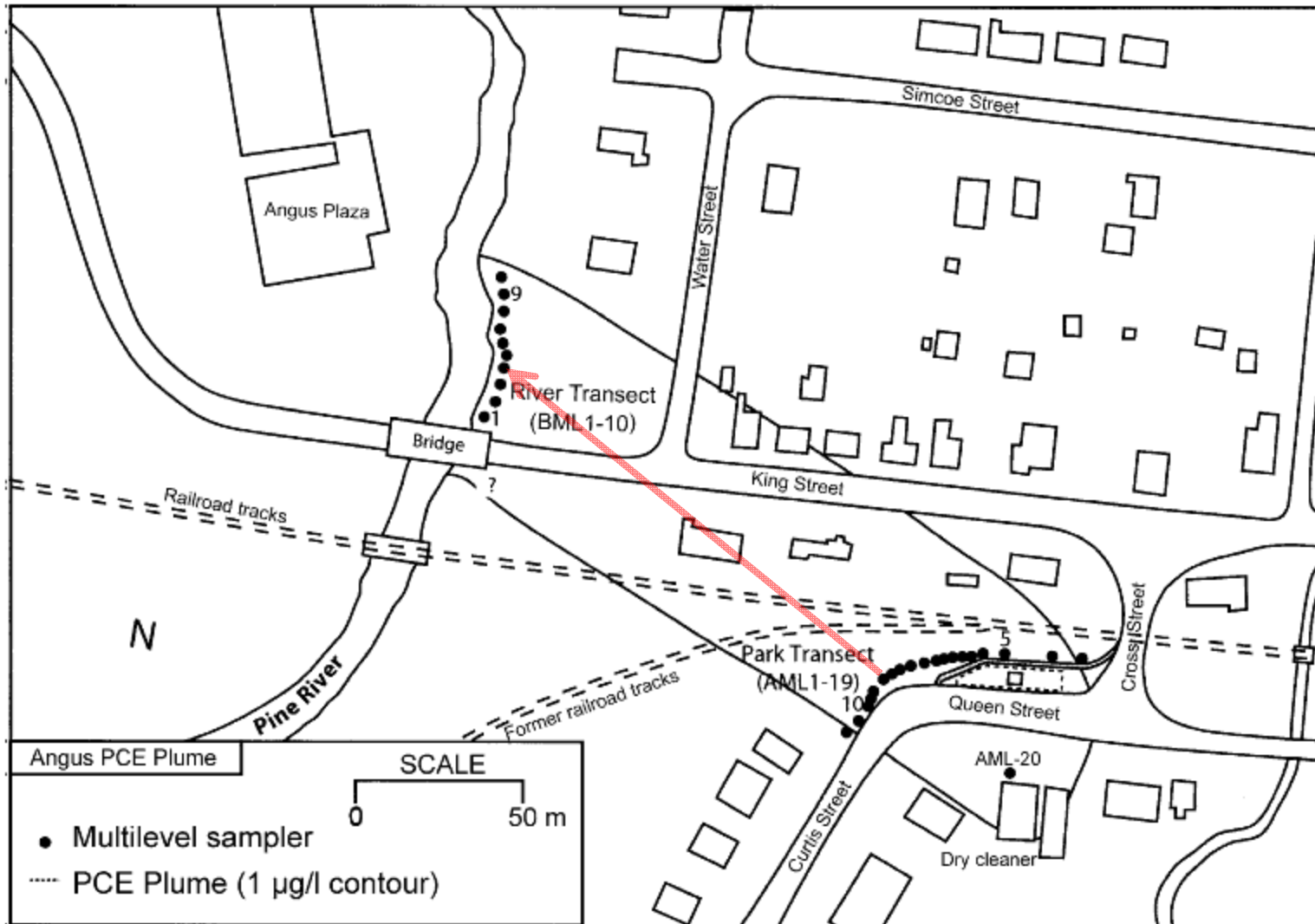


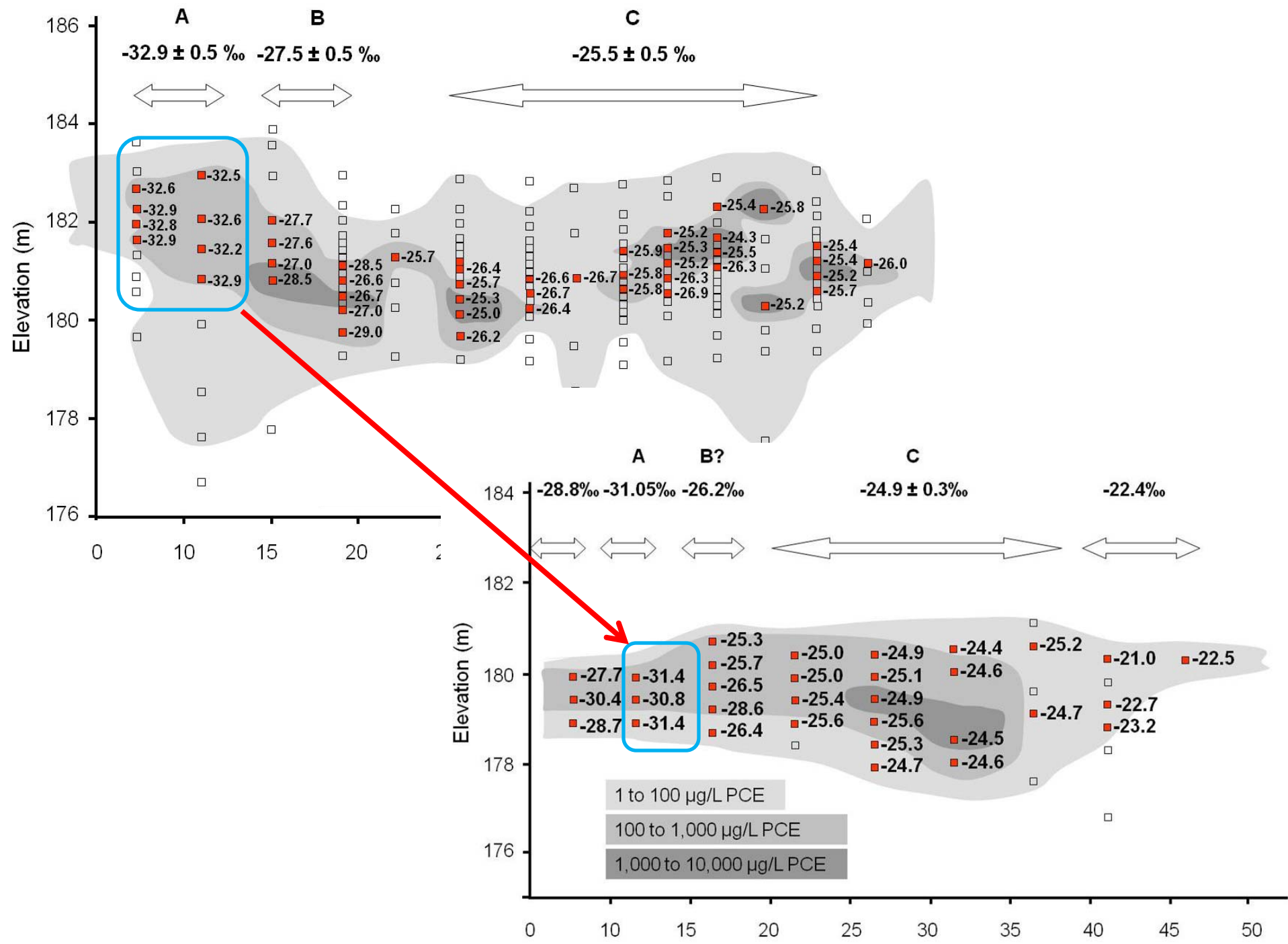


Transect 2: 220 m down gradient of source



Effect of source variability and transport processes on carbon isotope ratios of TCE and PCE in two sandy aquifers. *Journal of Contaminant Hydrology* 74: 265-282 (2004)



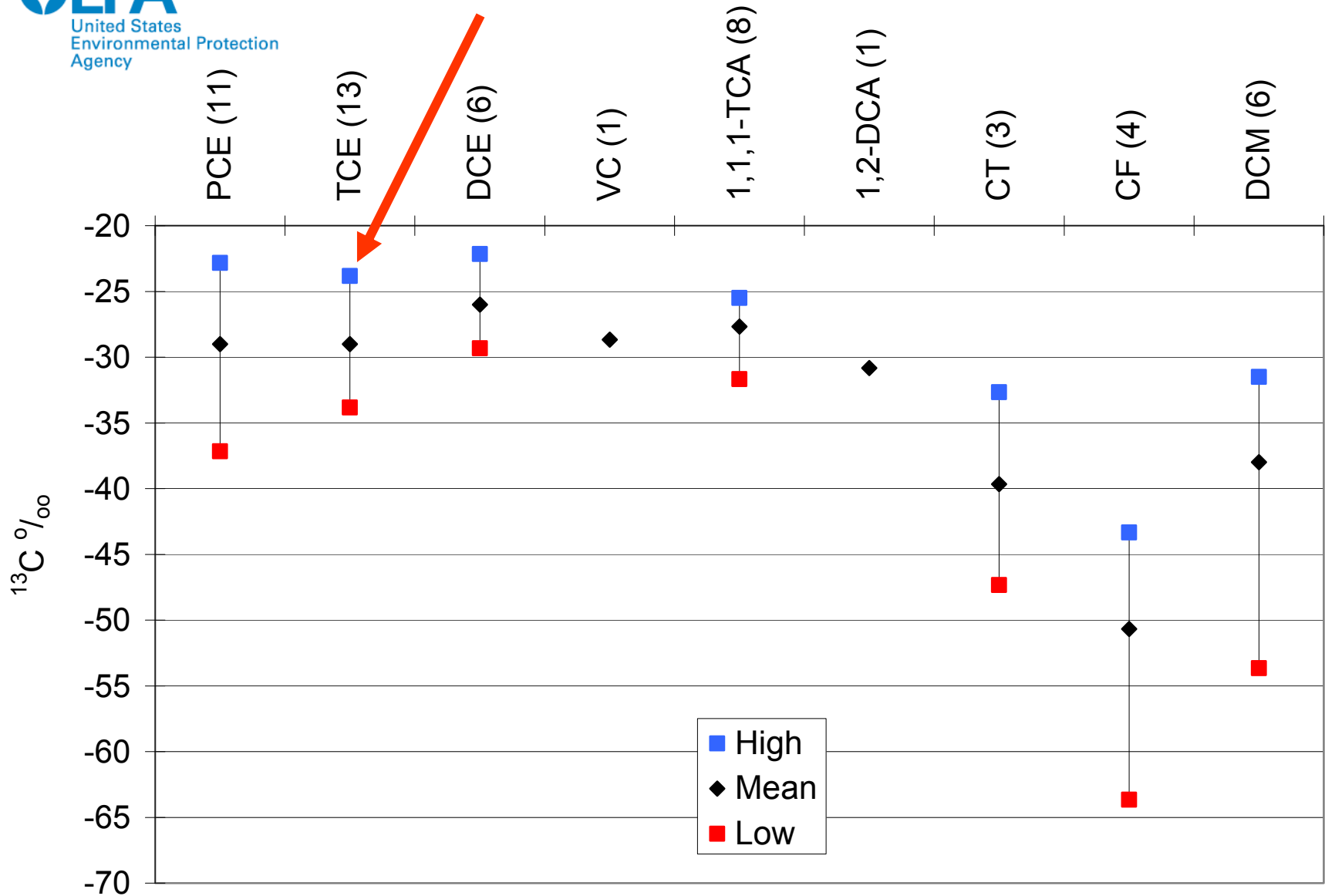


What does it take to make it work?

- 1) No appreciable biodegradation from source to impacted well.
- 2) An appreciable difference in $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ between plausible sources.
- 3) Samples from a transect perpendicular to ground water flow. Simple point to point comparisons may be misleading.

Application to a Superfund Site in Region 4. Can SCIR identify the source of a plume in fractured rock?

- 1) Sampled ground water in two impacted neighborhoods.
- 2) Compared the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in TCE to the range of $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in commerce.

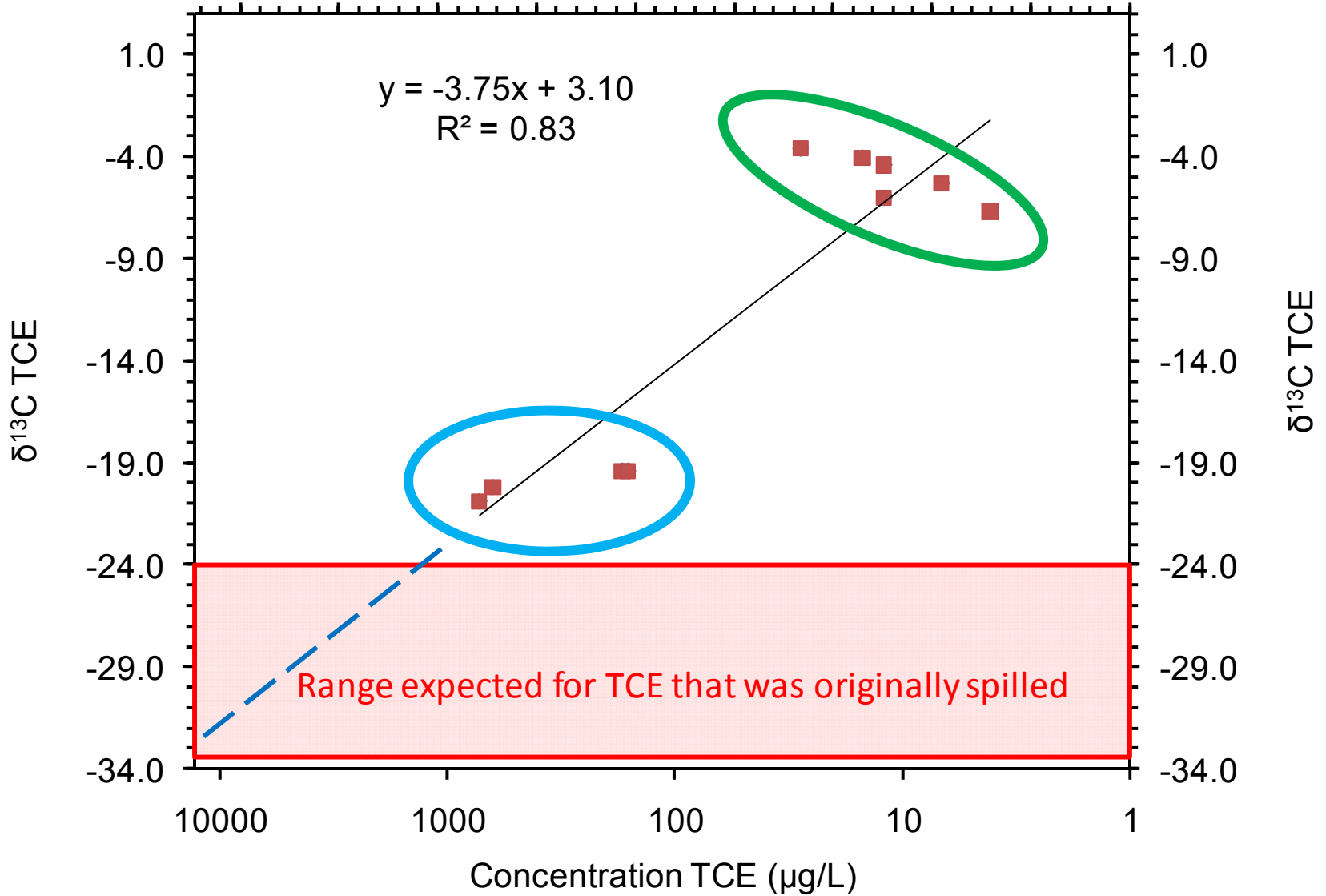


Range of $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ Reported for Un-fractionated Chlorinated Solvents 34

Figure 6.1 of EPA Guide

Natural Logarithm [Concentration TCE ($\mu\text{g/L}$)]

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0



Application to a Superfund Site in Region 4. Can SCIR identify the source of a plume in fractured rock?

- 1) Sampled ground water in two impacted neighborhoods.
- 2) Compared the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in TCE to the range of $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in commerce.
- 3) If there is more than about 1% degradation products, probably not going to work.

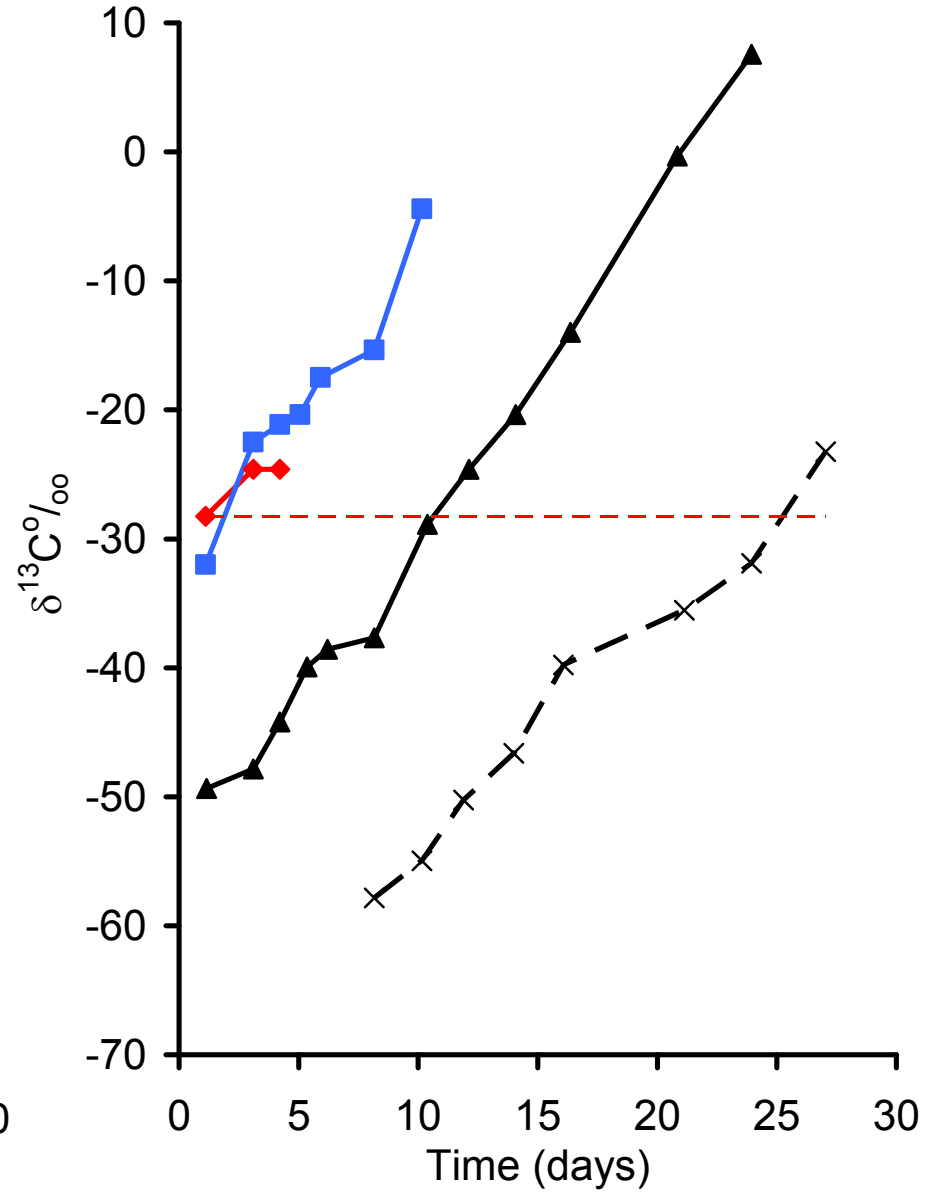
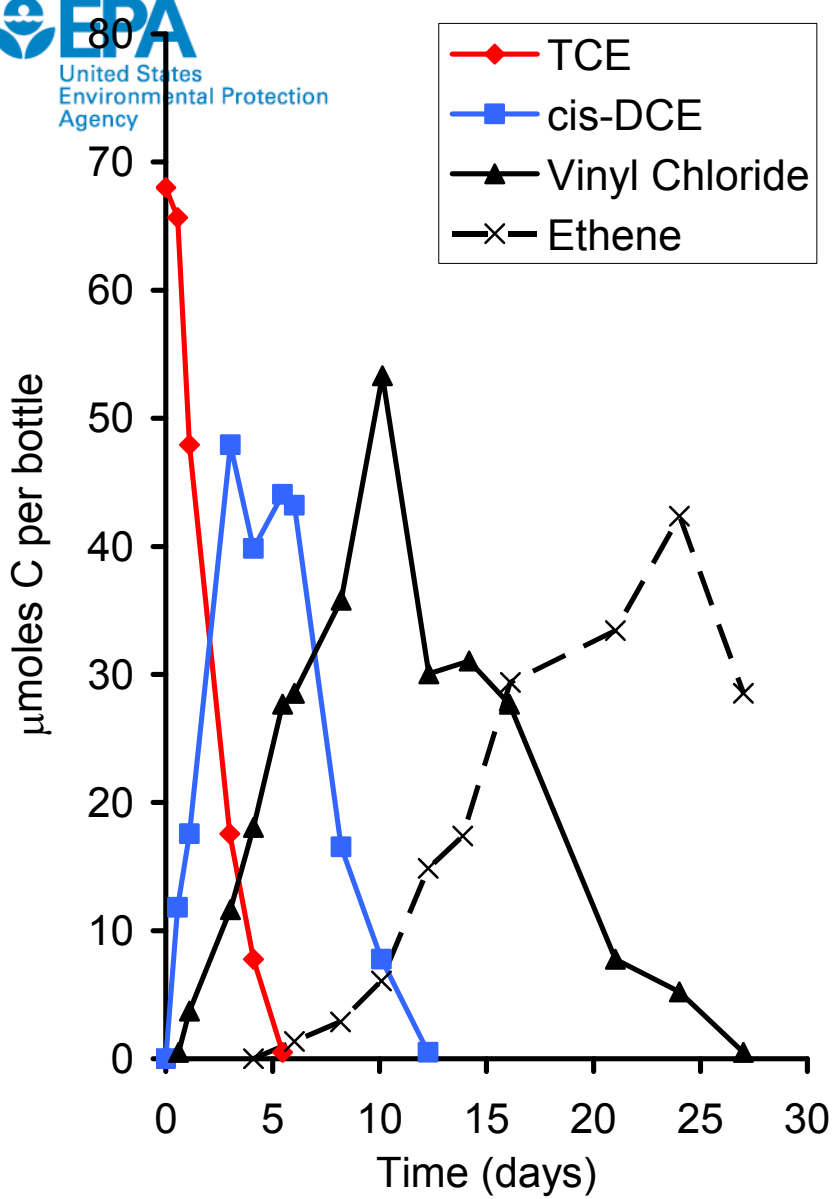
What happens to $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ during biodegradation?

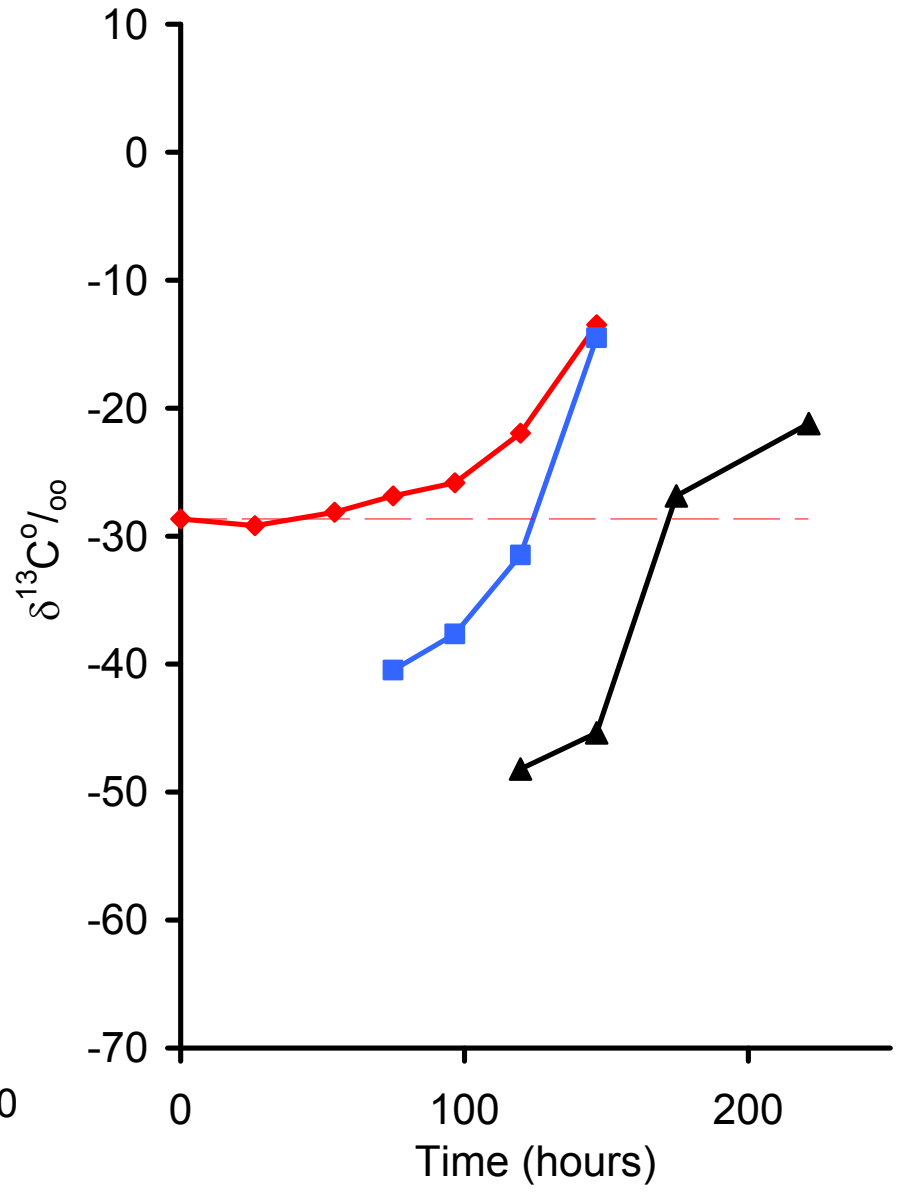
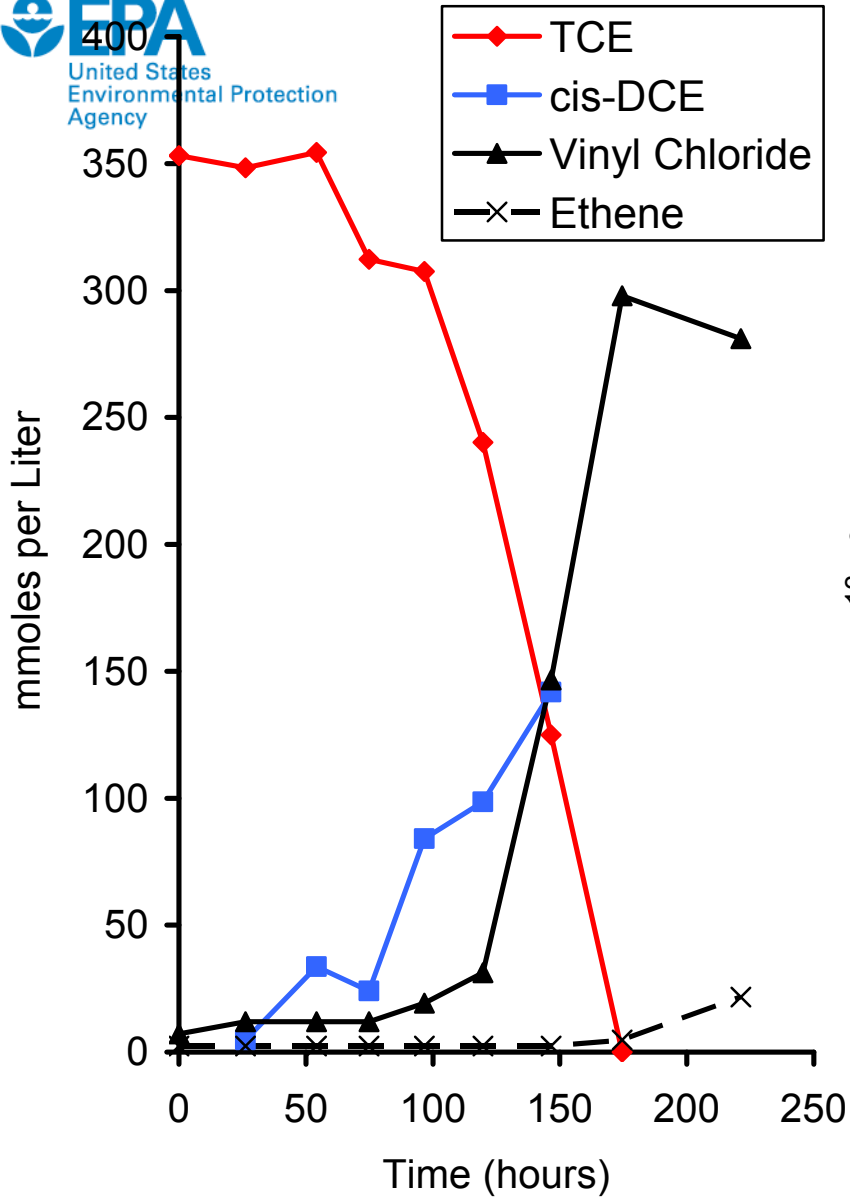
Can we use changes in $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ to understand biodegradation?

What happens to $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ during biodegradation?

Initially, the daughter product is lighter than the parent compound (the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ is more negative).

As the daughter product degrades, it becomes heavier (the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ becomes less negative).

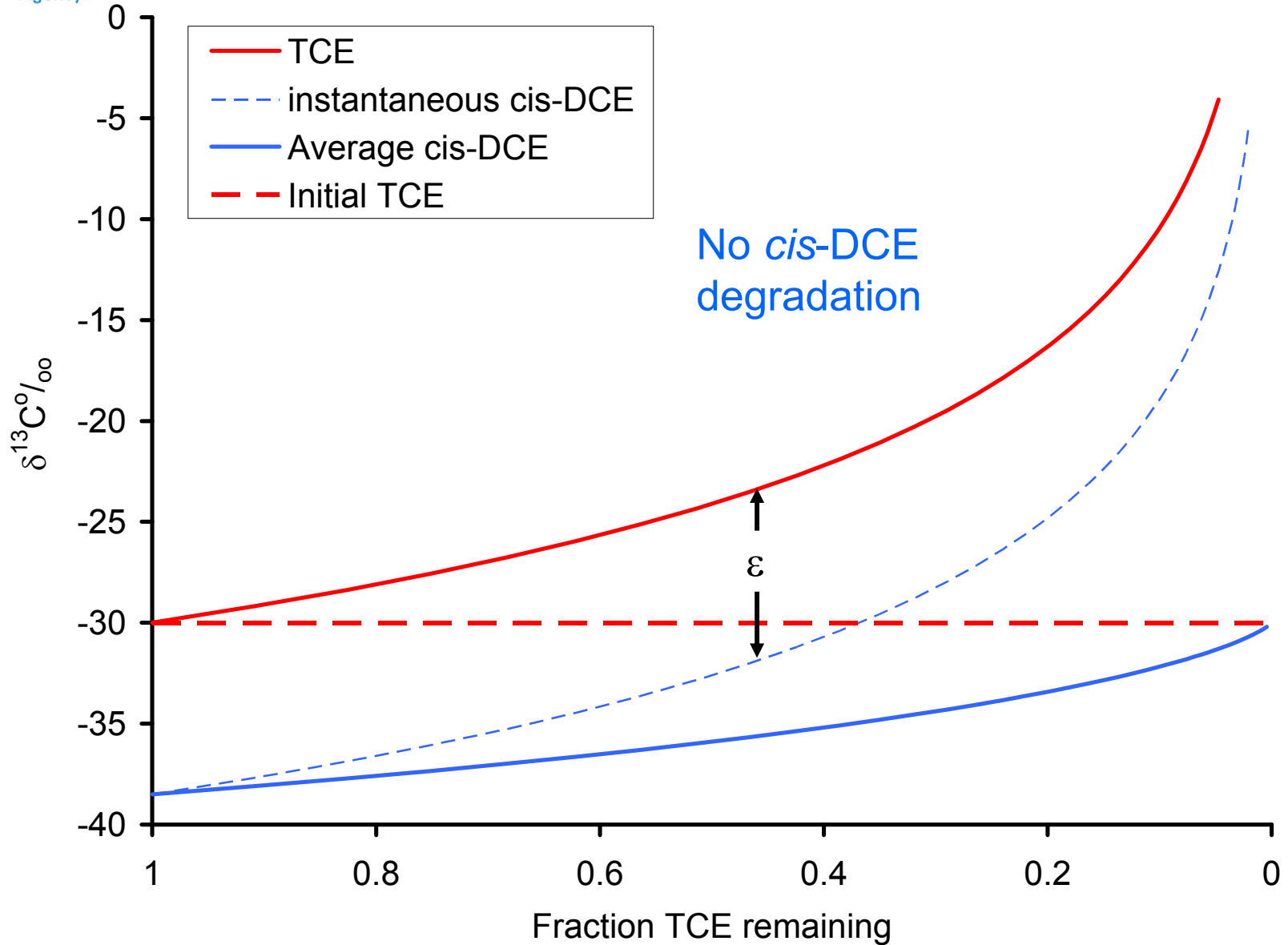


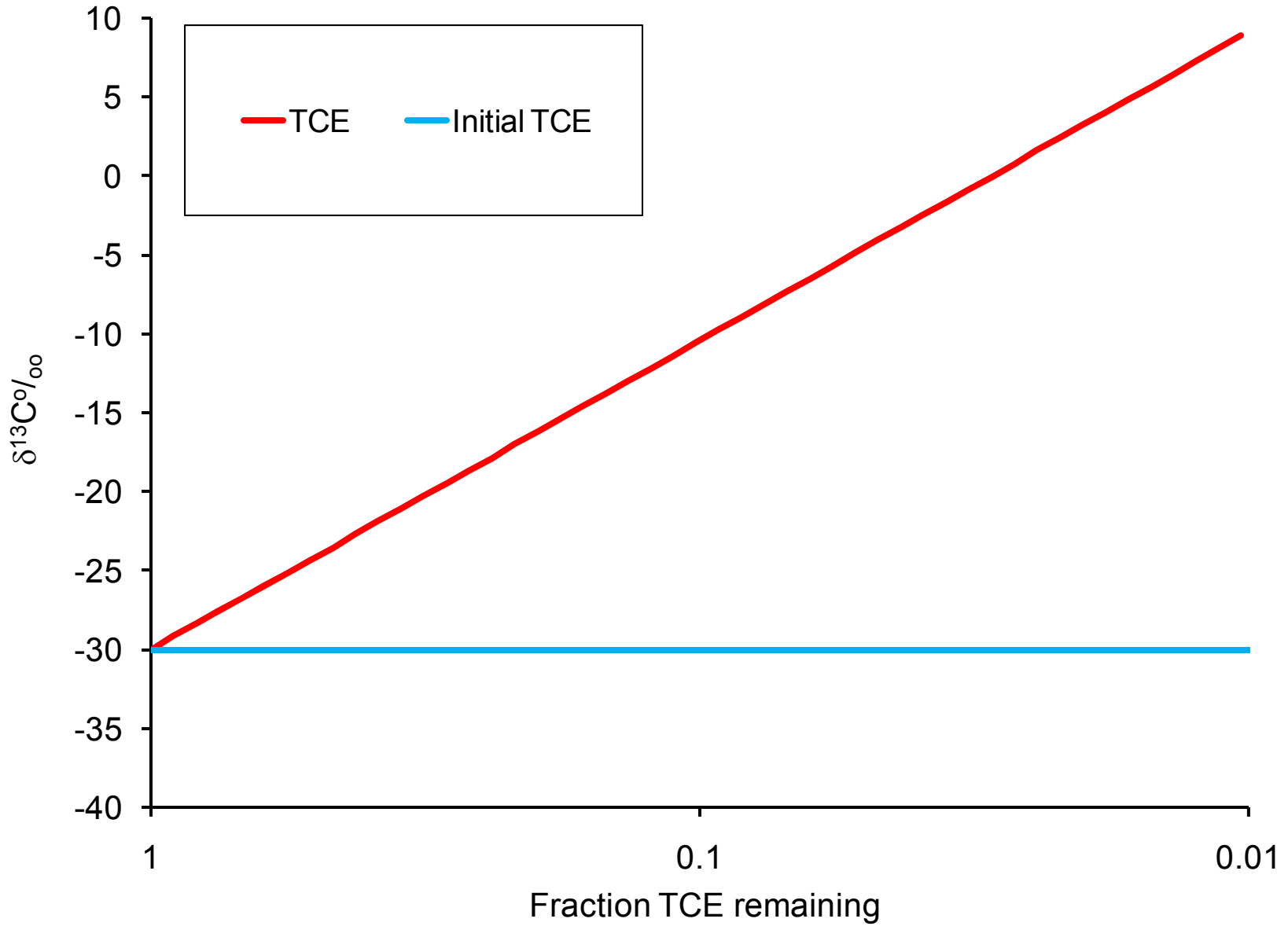


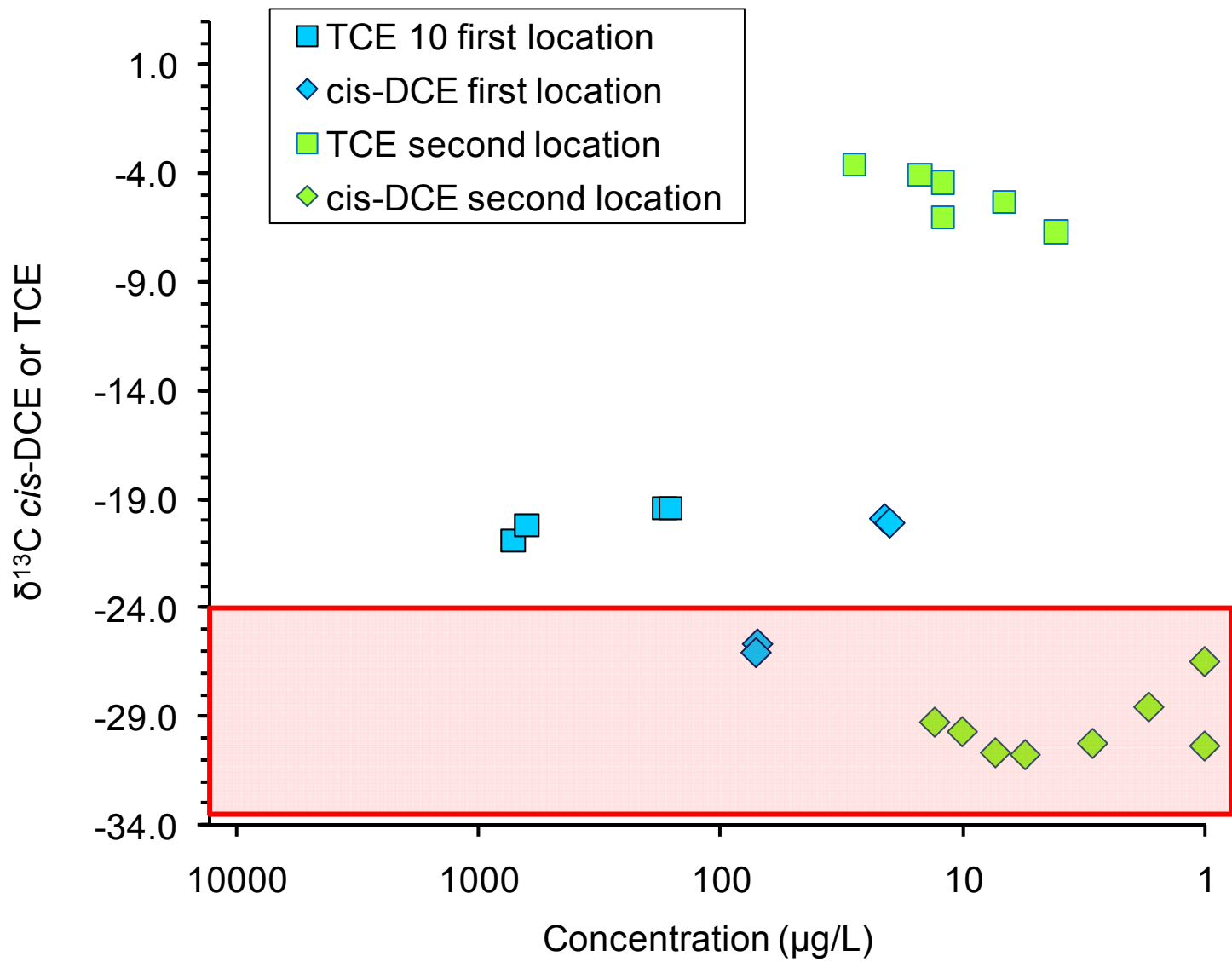
What happens to $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ during biodegradation?

If the daughter product is heavier (the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ is less negative) than the plausible range for the parent, that is substantial evidence that the daughter product has also been degraded.

Figure 7.1 of EPA Guide



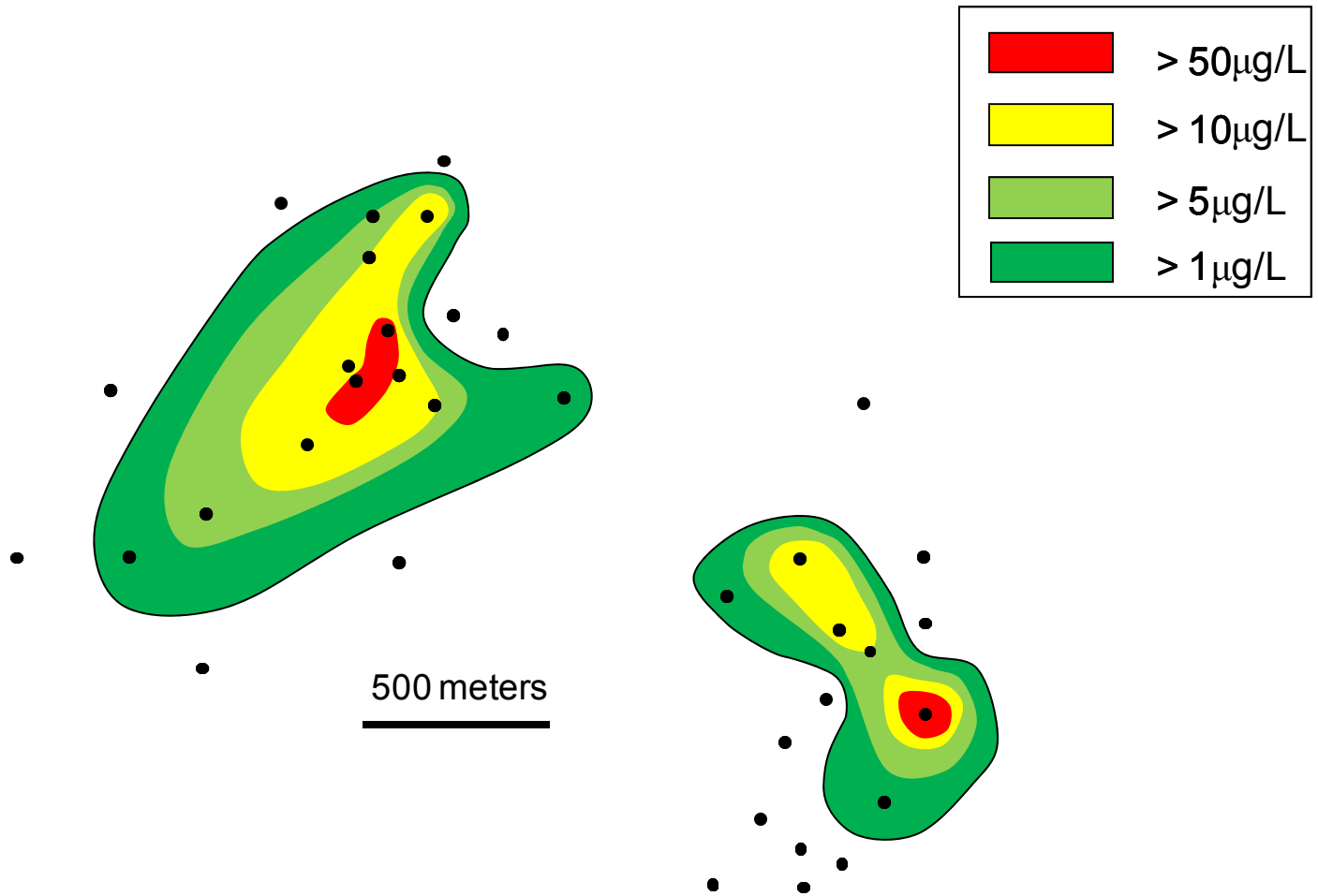




At locations along the flow path where the parent compound is entirely degraded, we can assume that the “original un-fractionated” $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ for the degradation product was the original un-fractionated $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ for the parent compound.

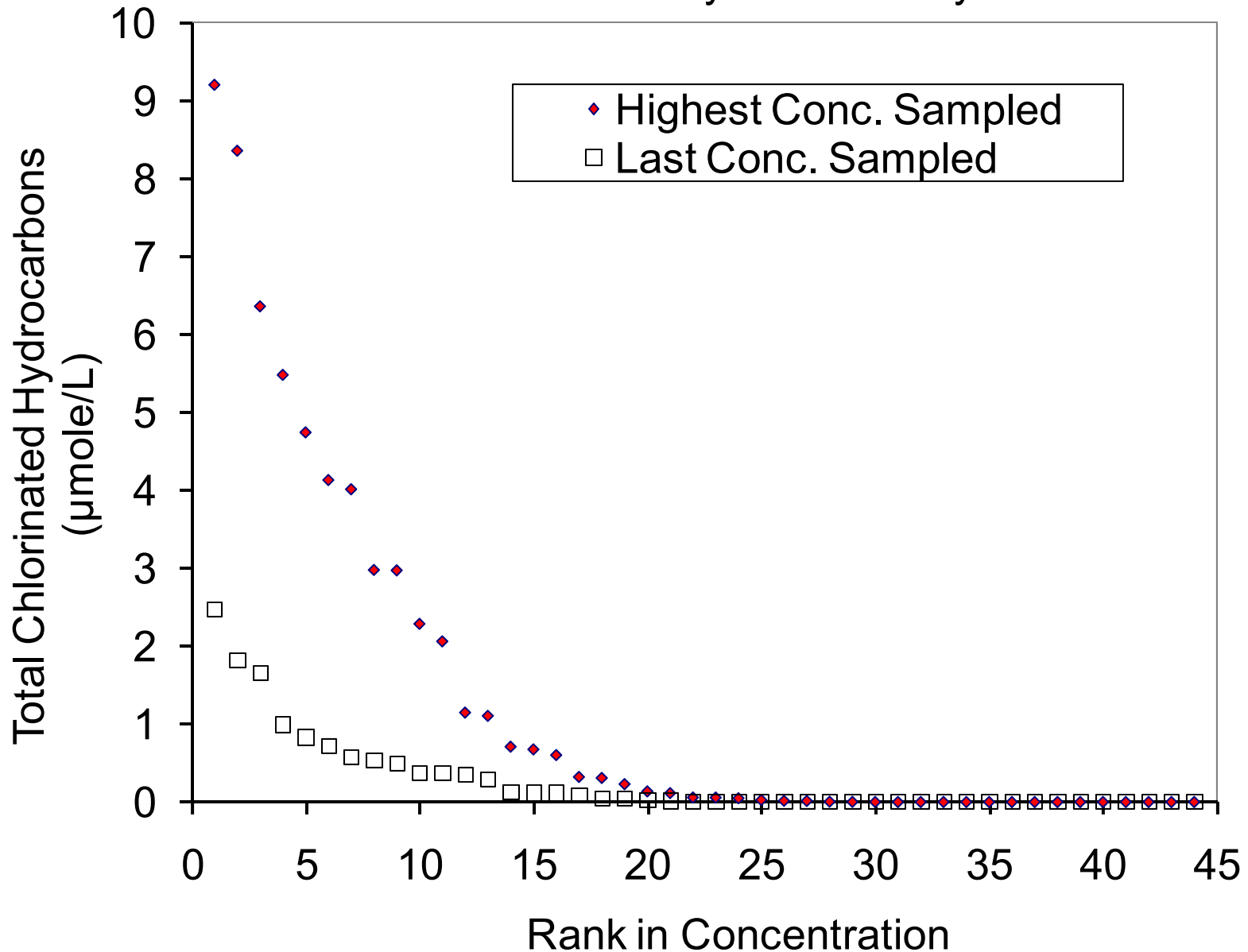
How can CSIA be used to determine whether a daughter product is degrading?

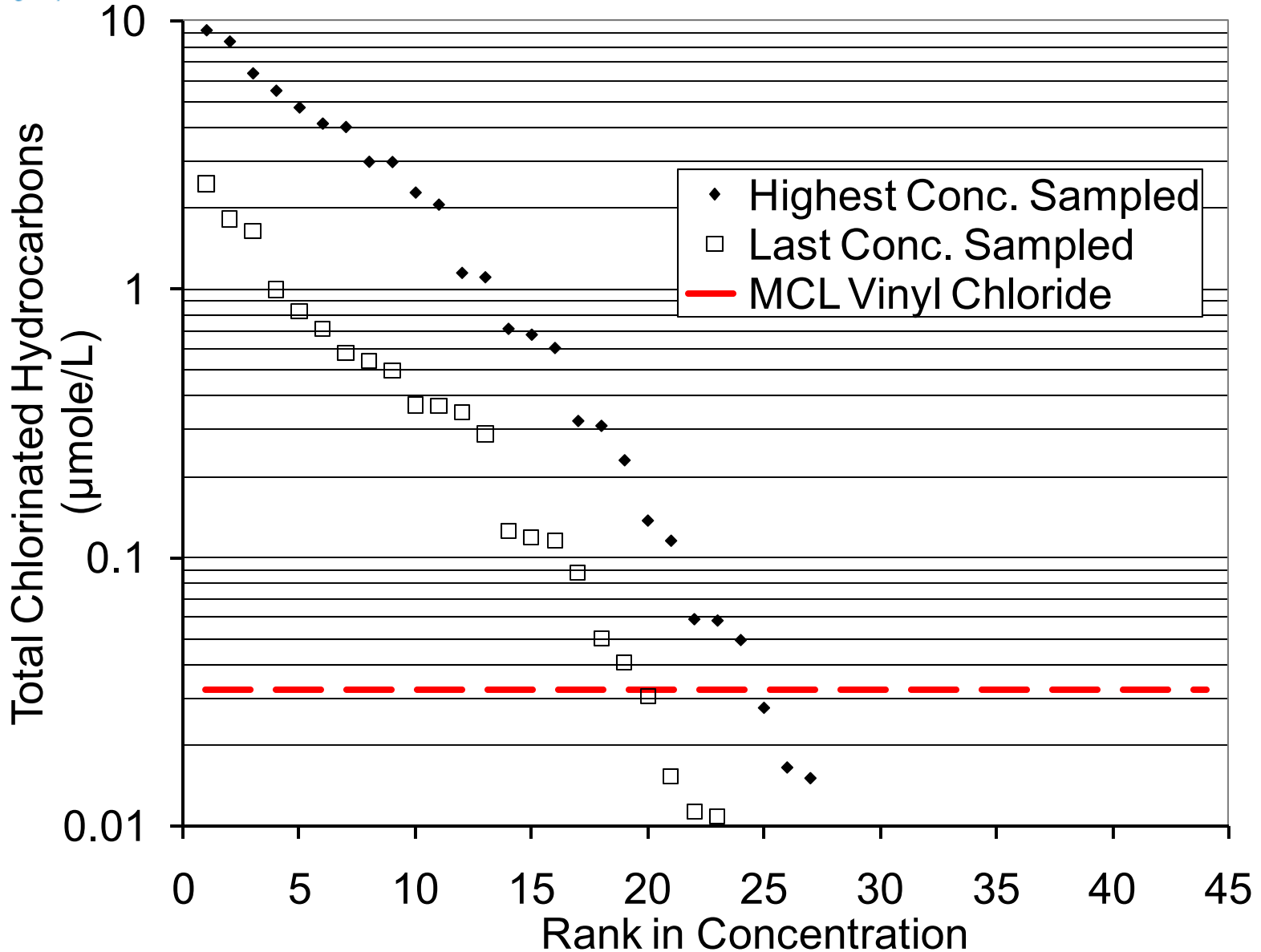
A site in Region 6. A “bull’s eye” plume. No predominant direction of ground water flow.

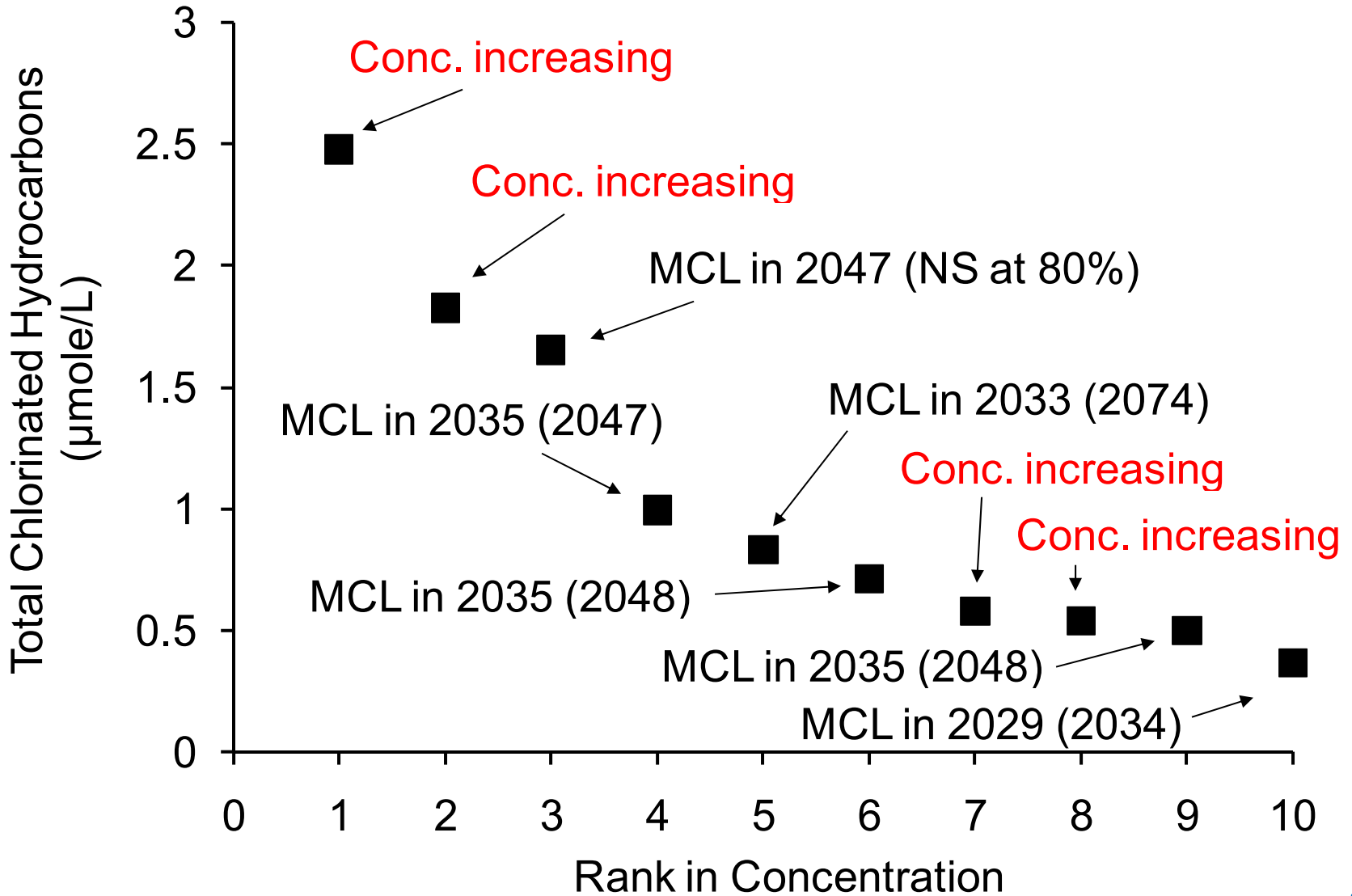


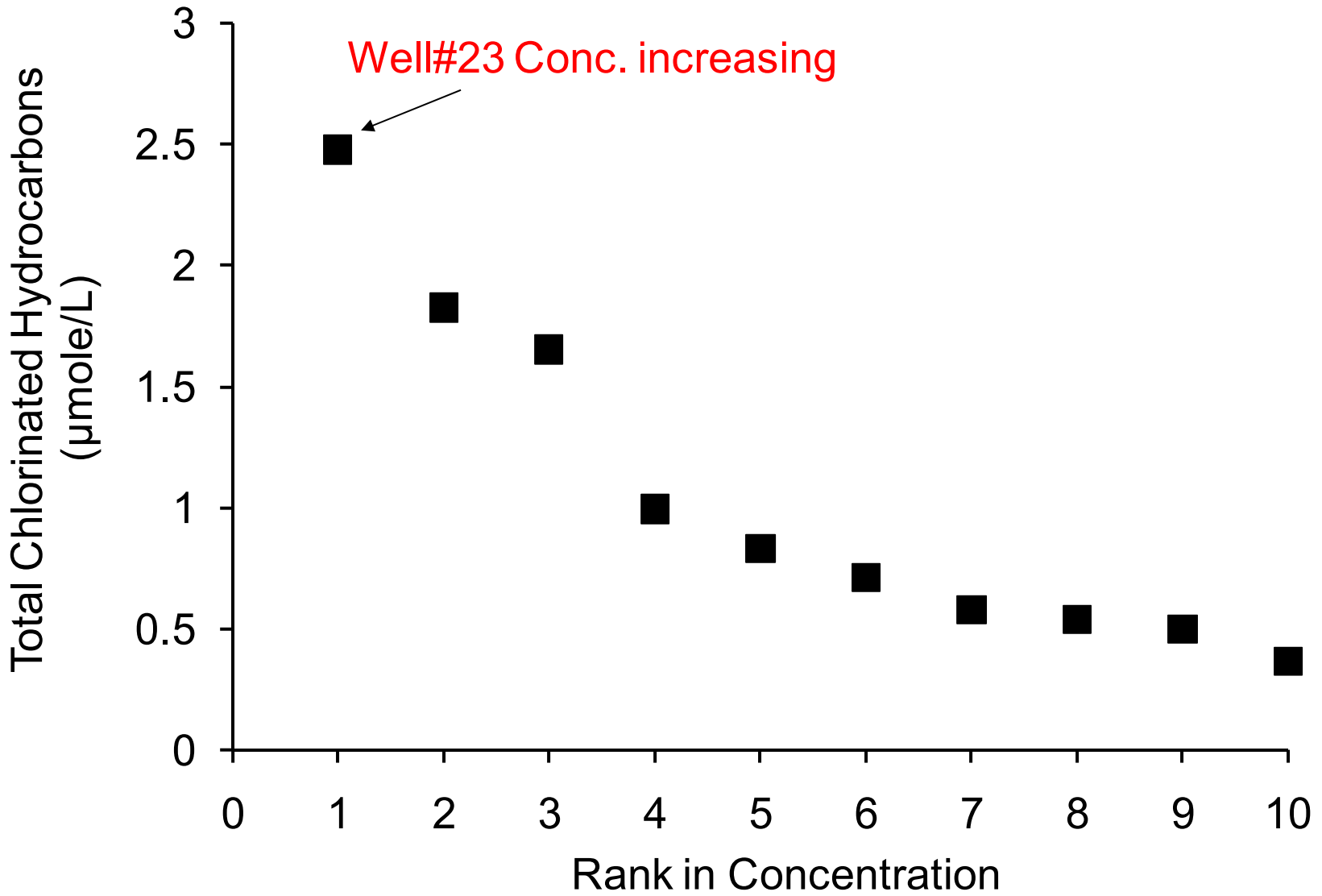
cis-DCE in the Intermediate
Ground –Water Zone

Distribution of concentrations of TCE and chlorinated degradation products at the end of the second five year review cycle.

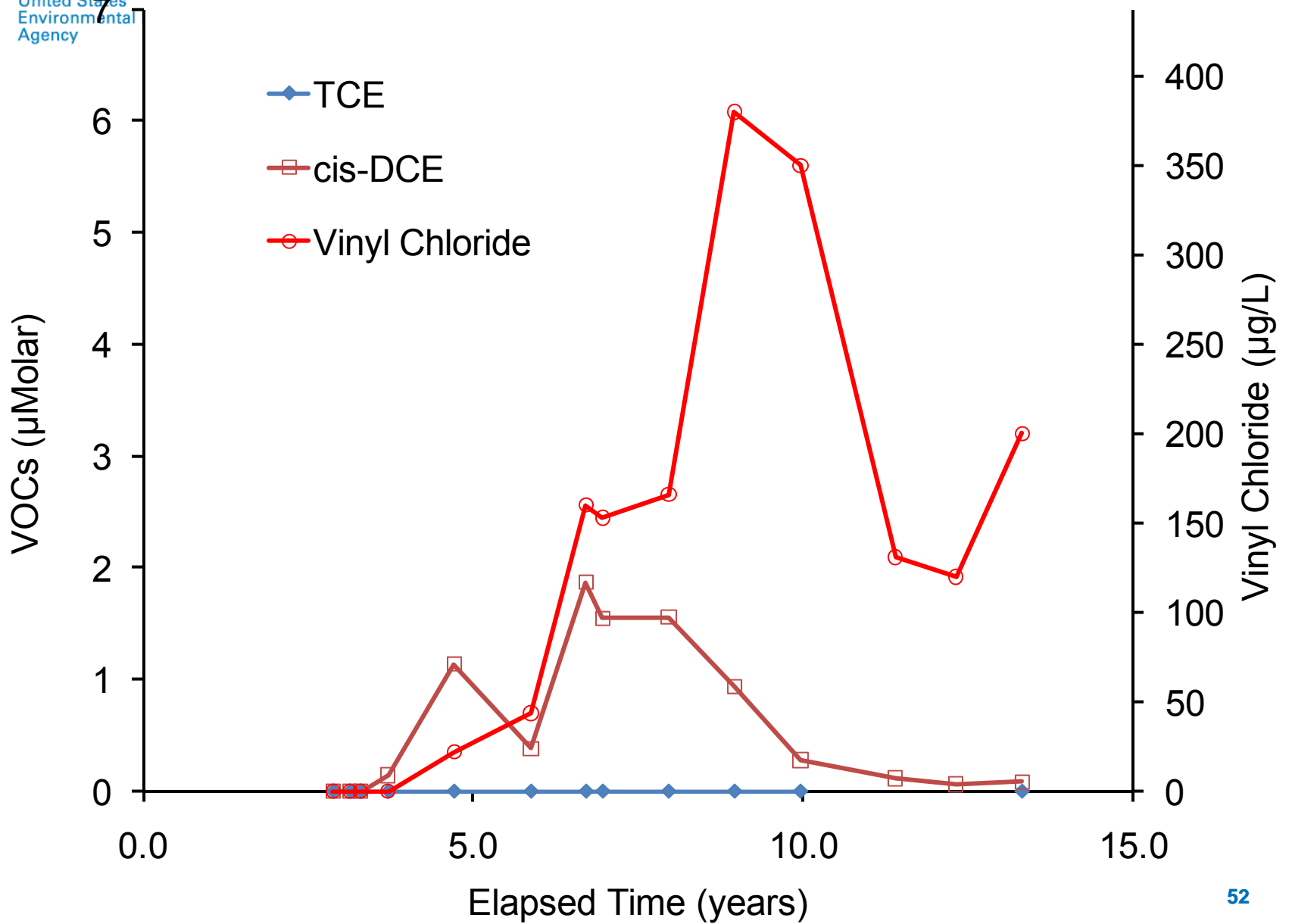


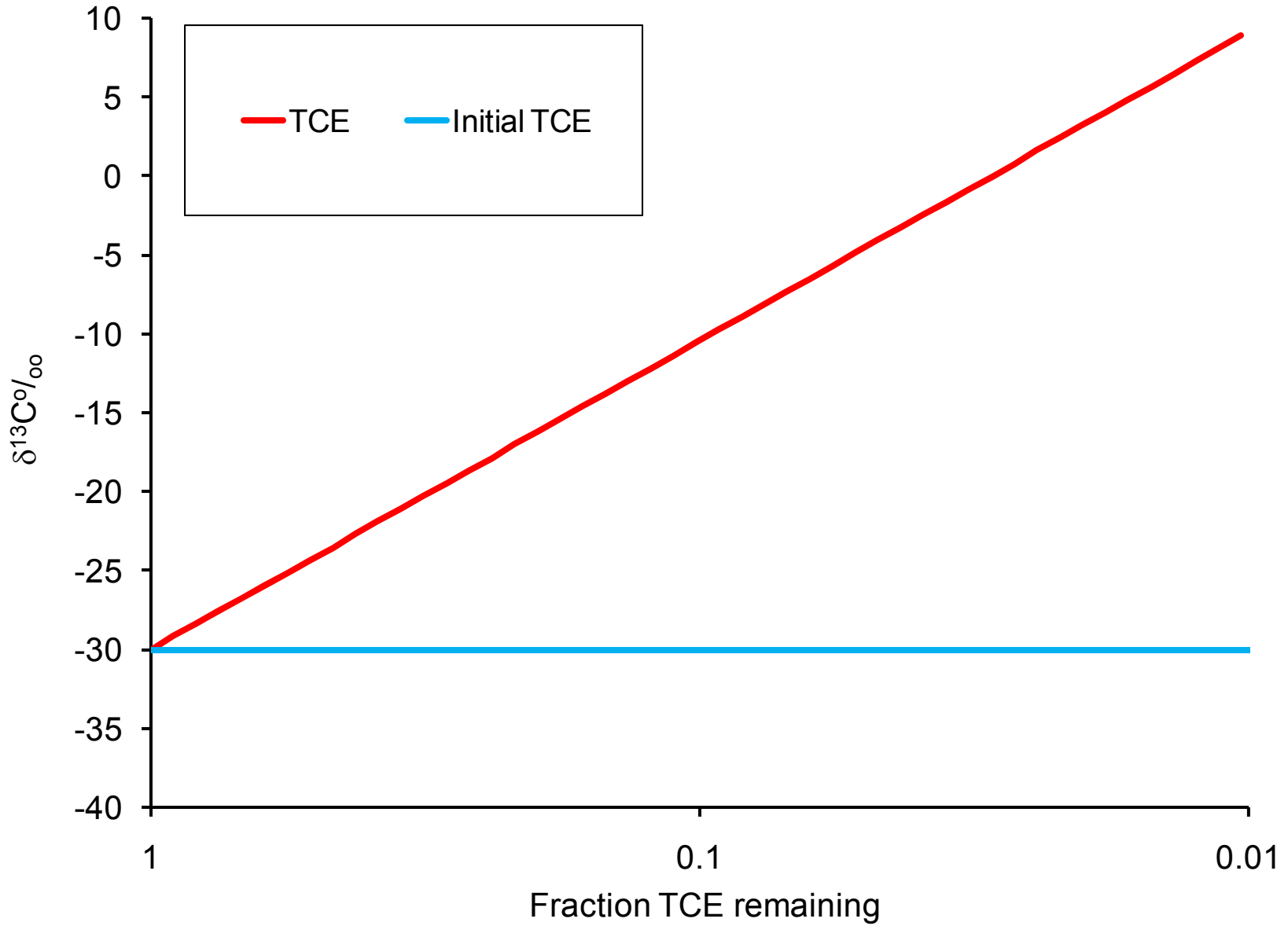






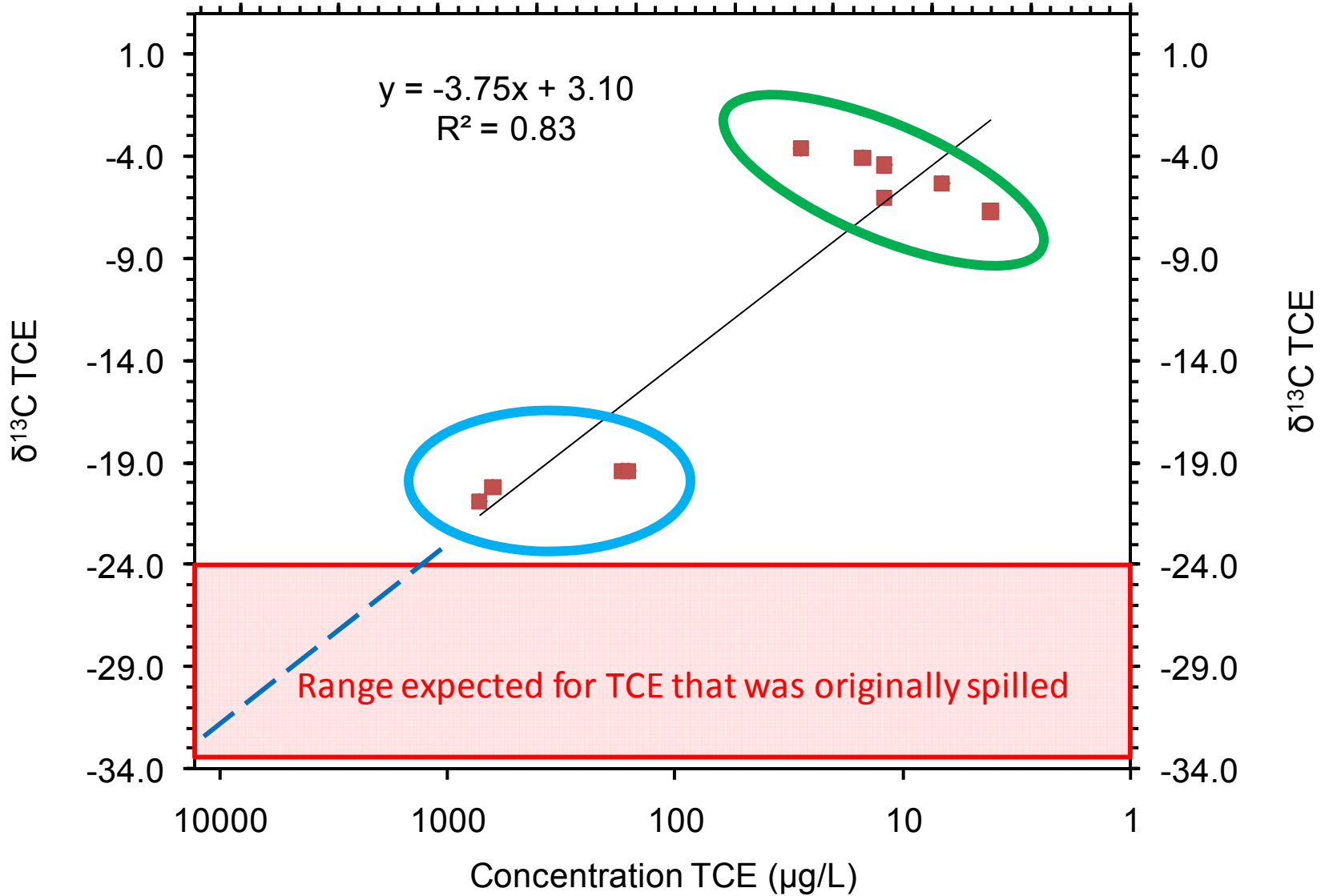
Well #23



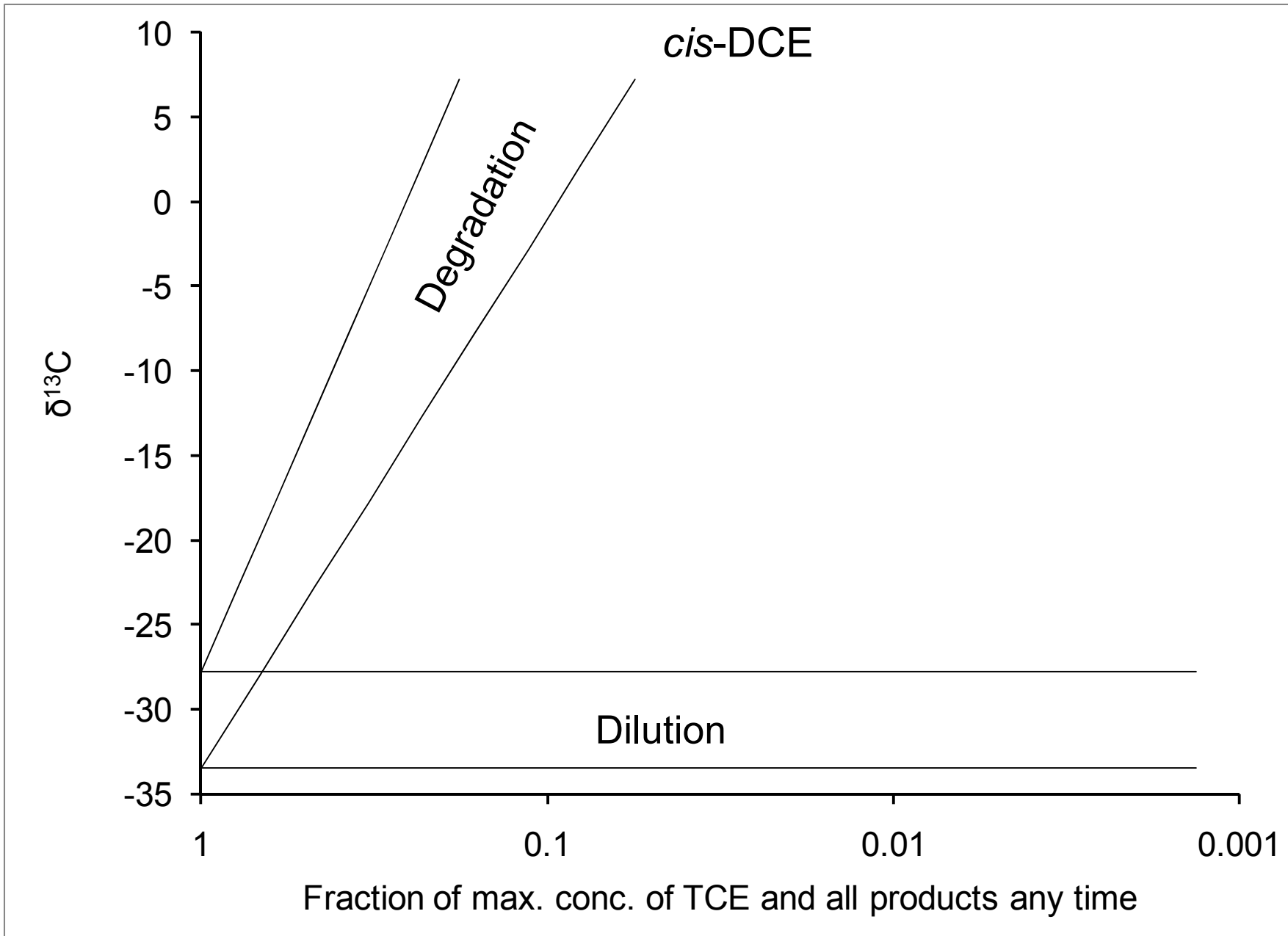


Natural Logarithm [Concentration TCE ($\mu\text{g/L}$)]

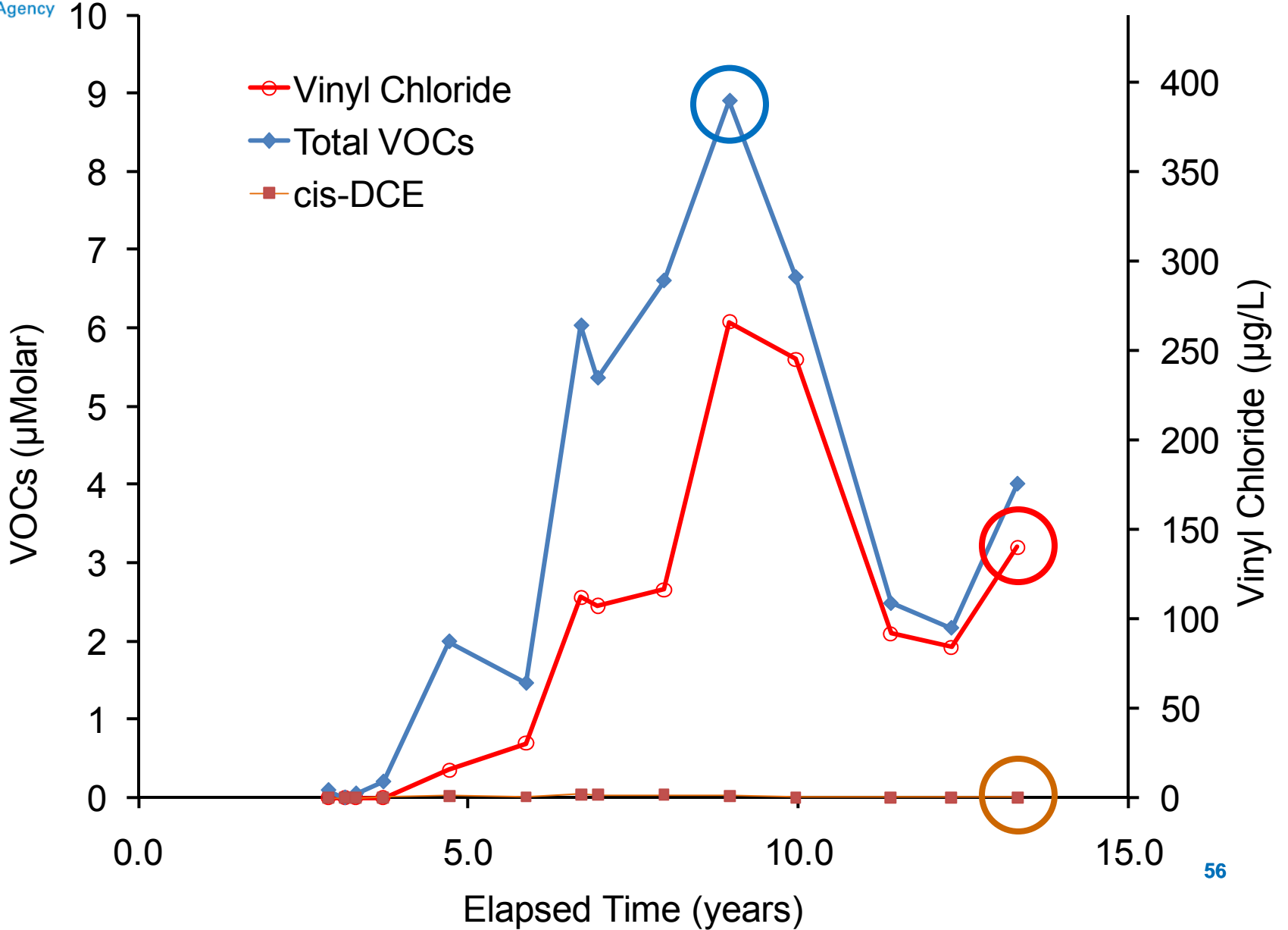
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

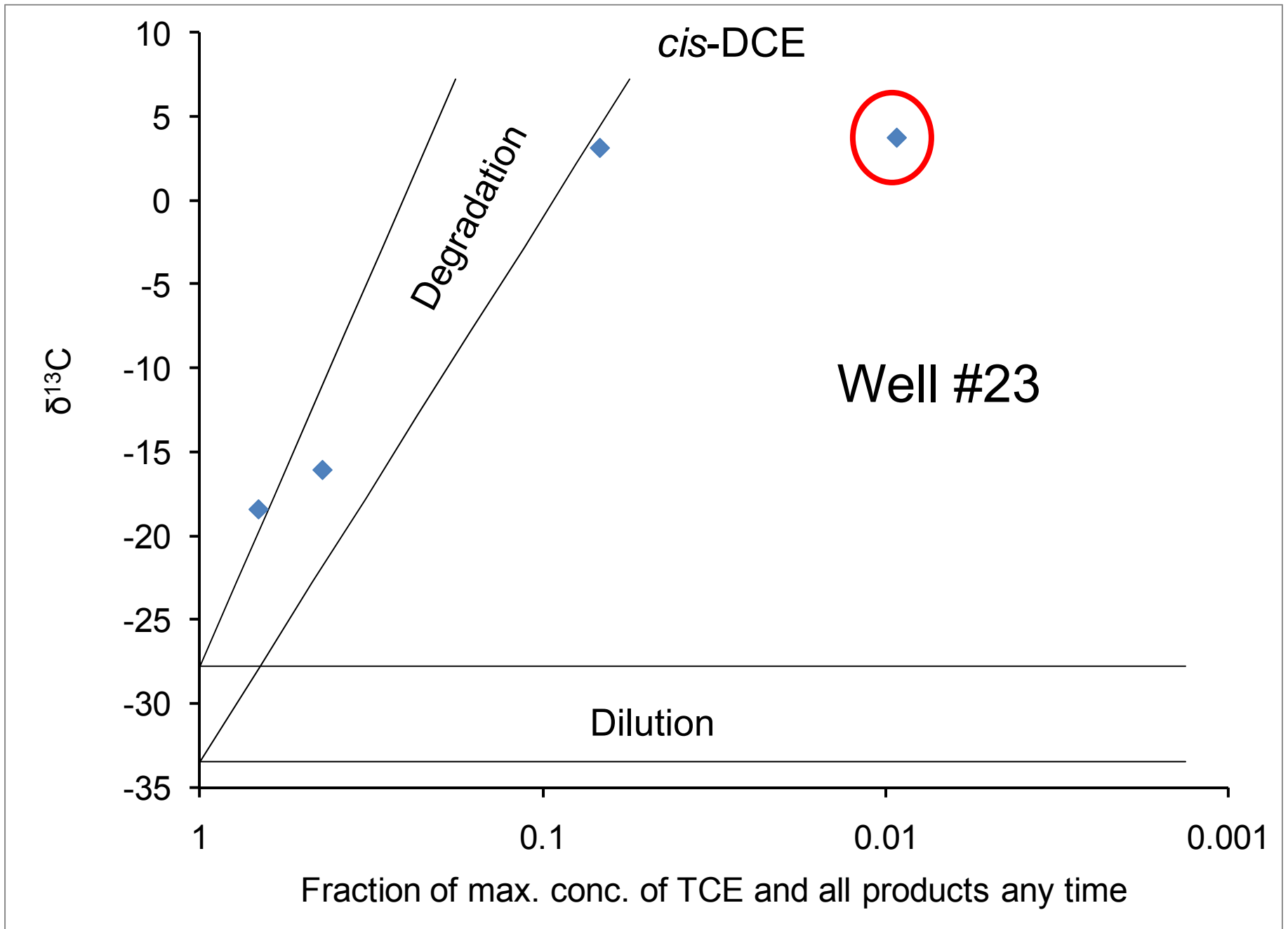


Range expected for TCE that was originally spilled



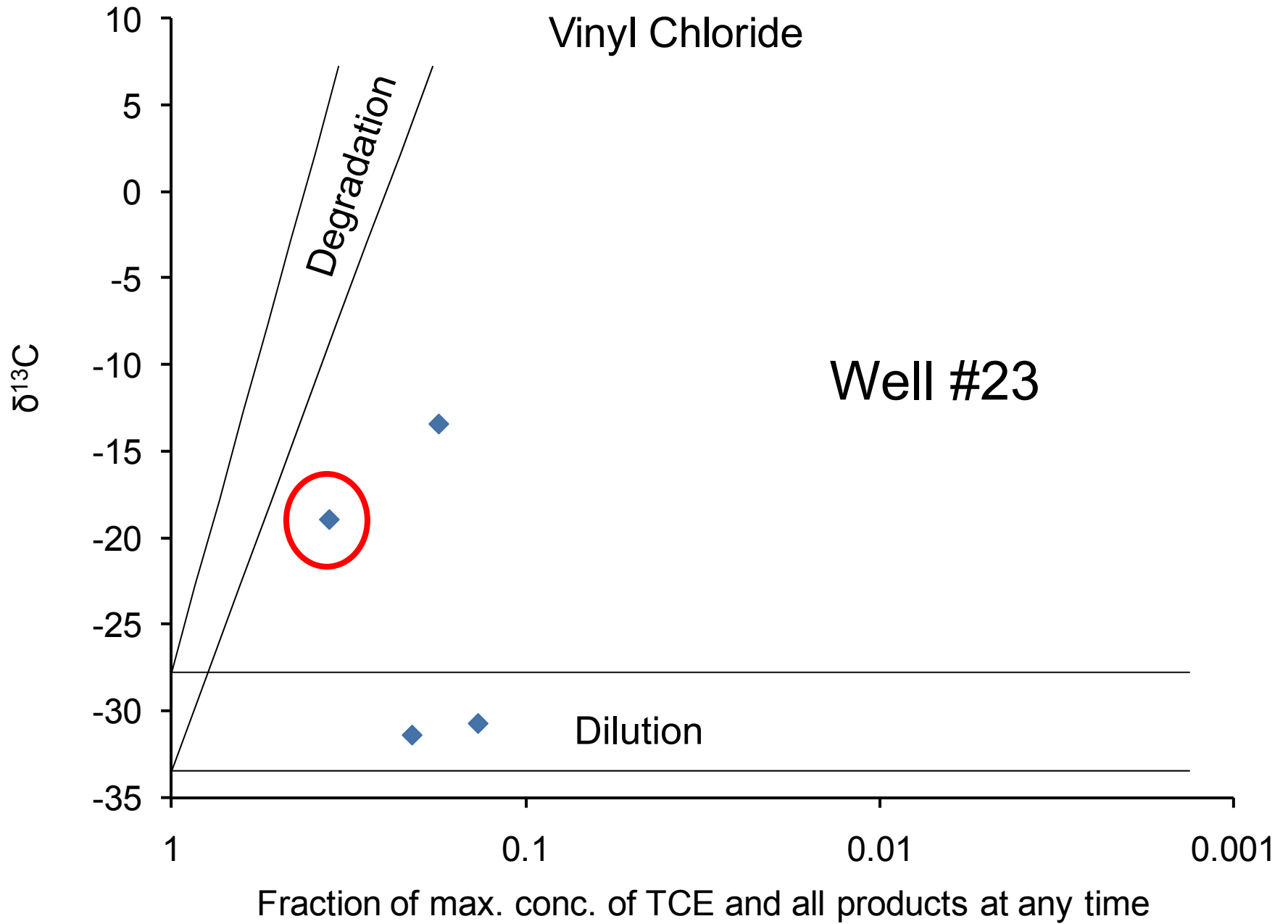
Well #23



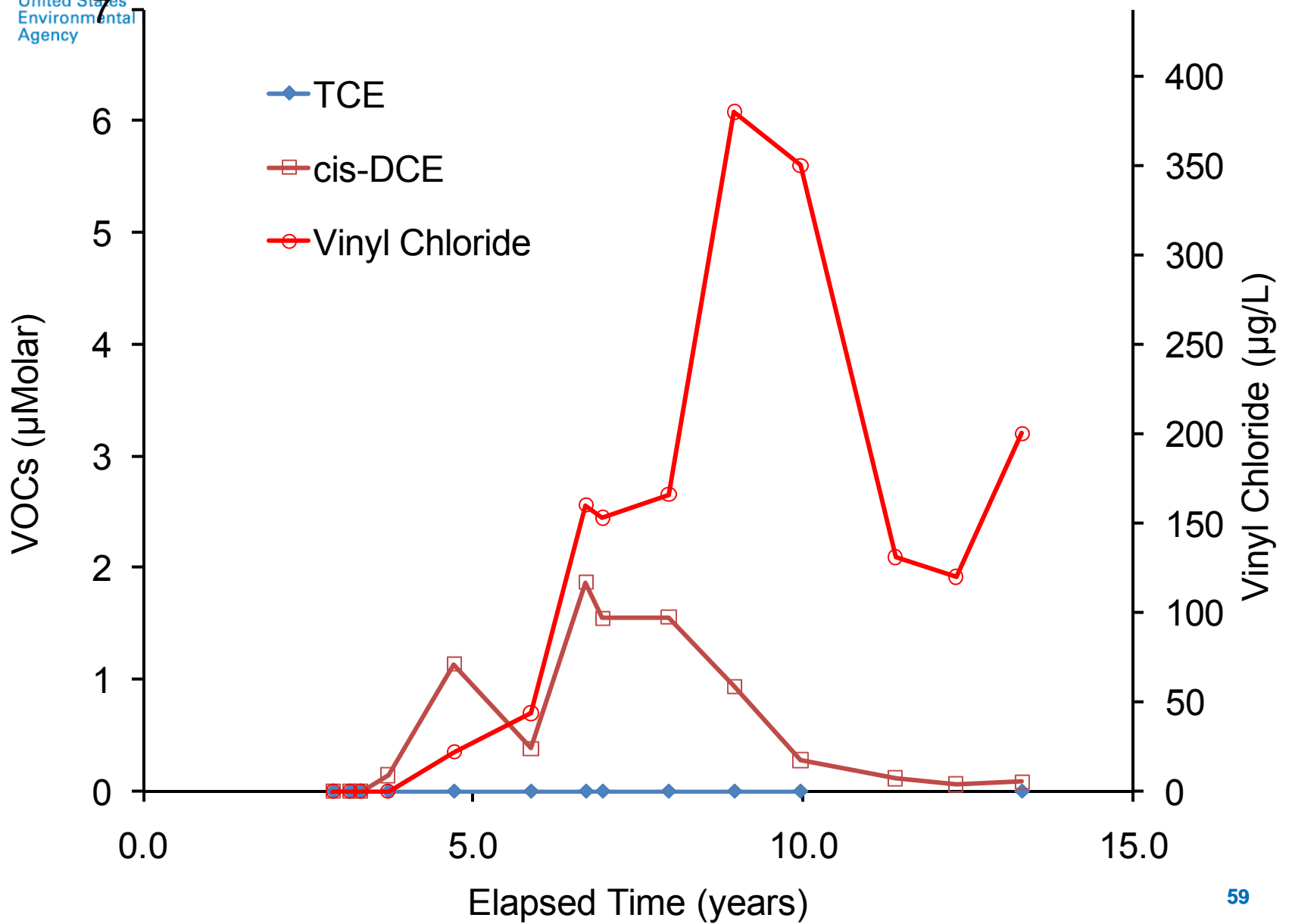


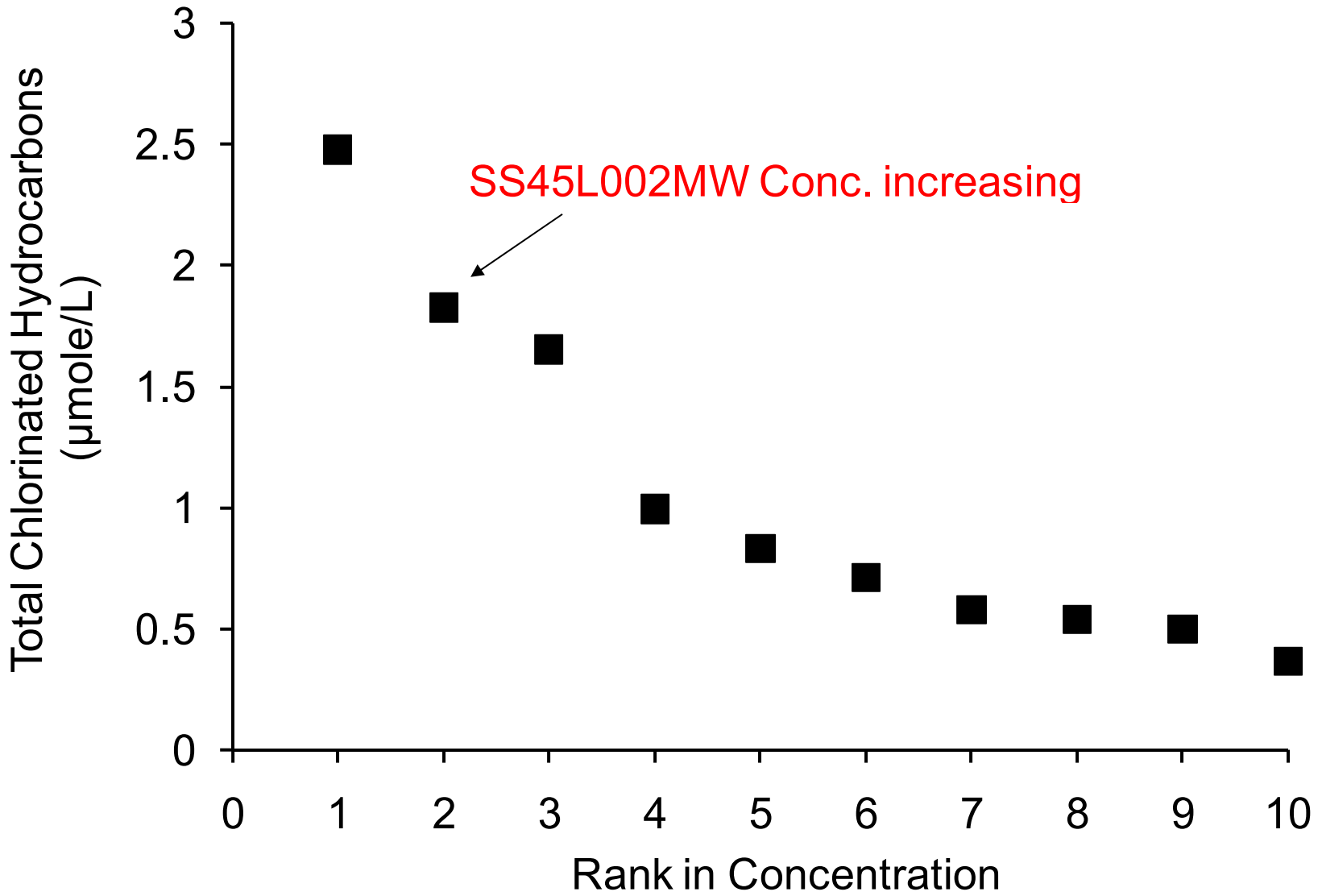
Vinyl Chloride

Well #23

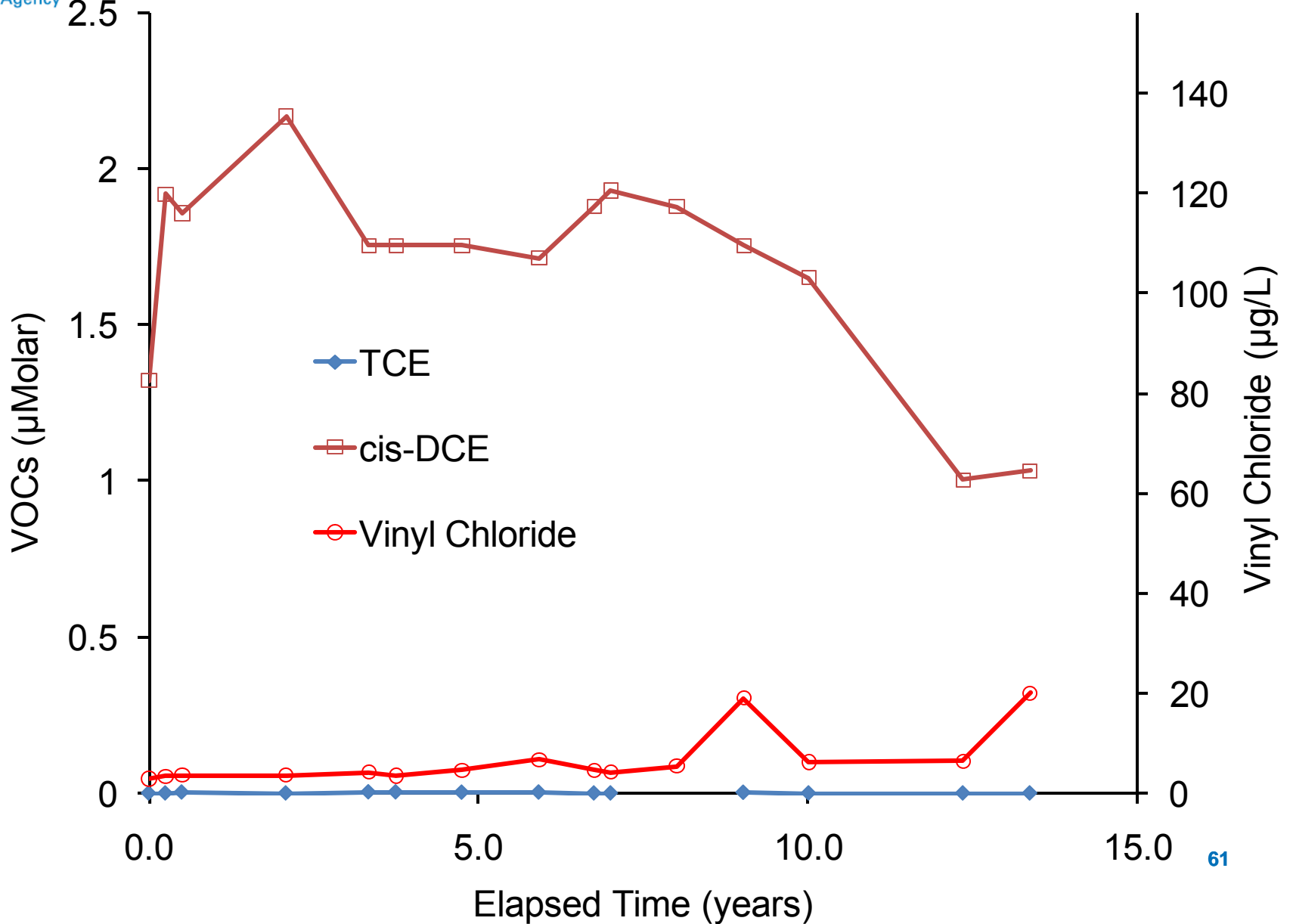


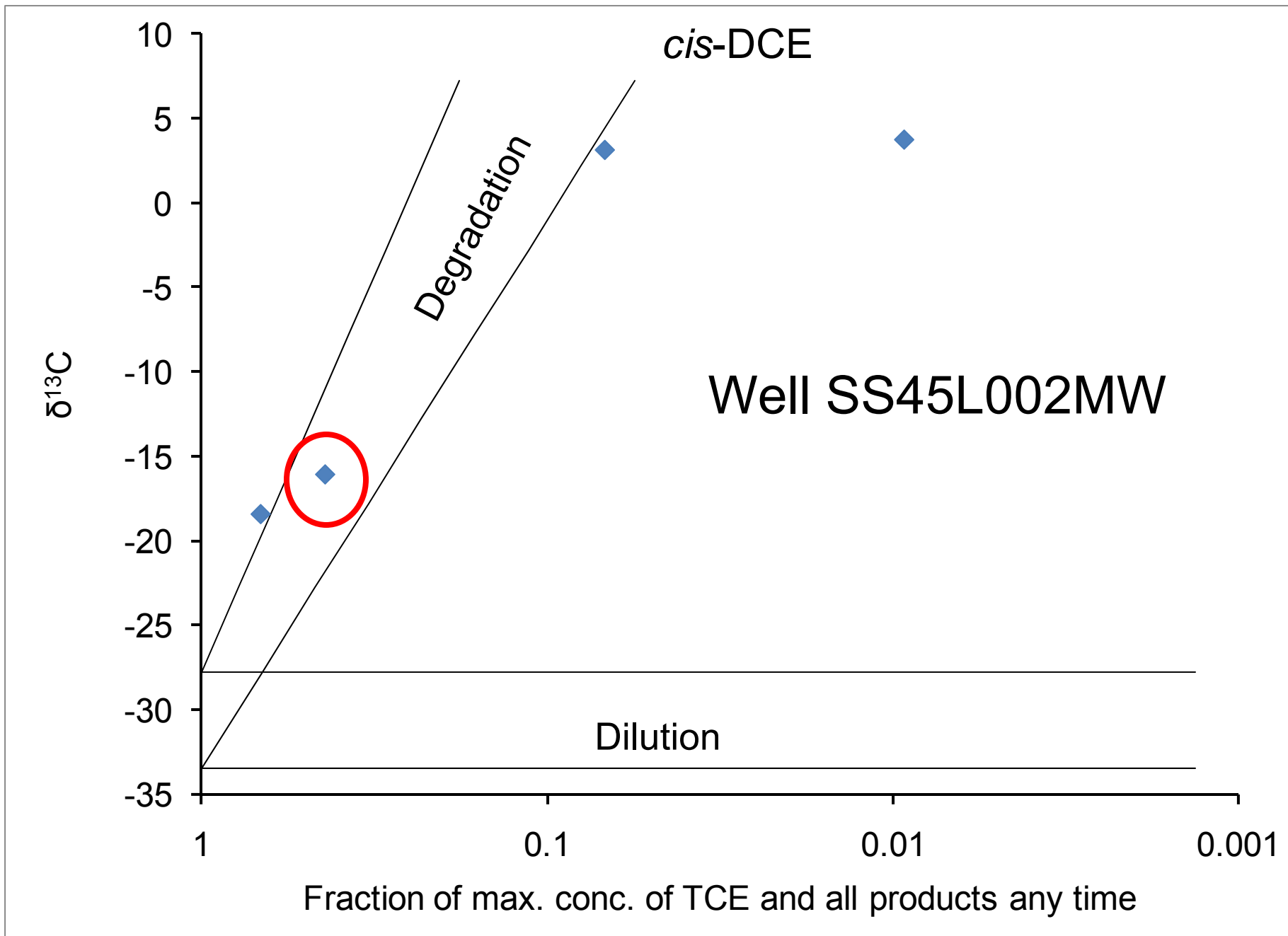
Well #23





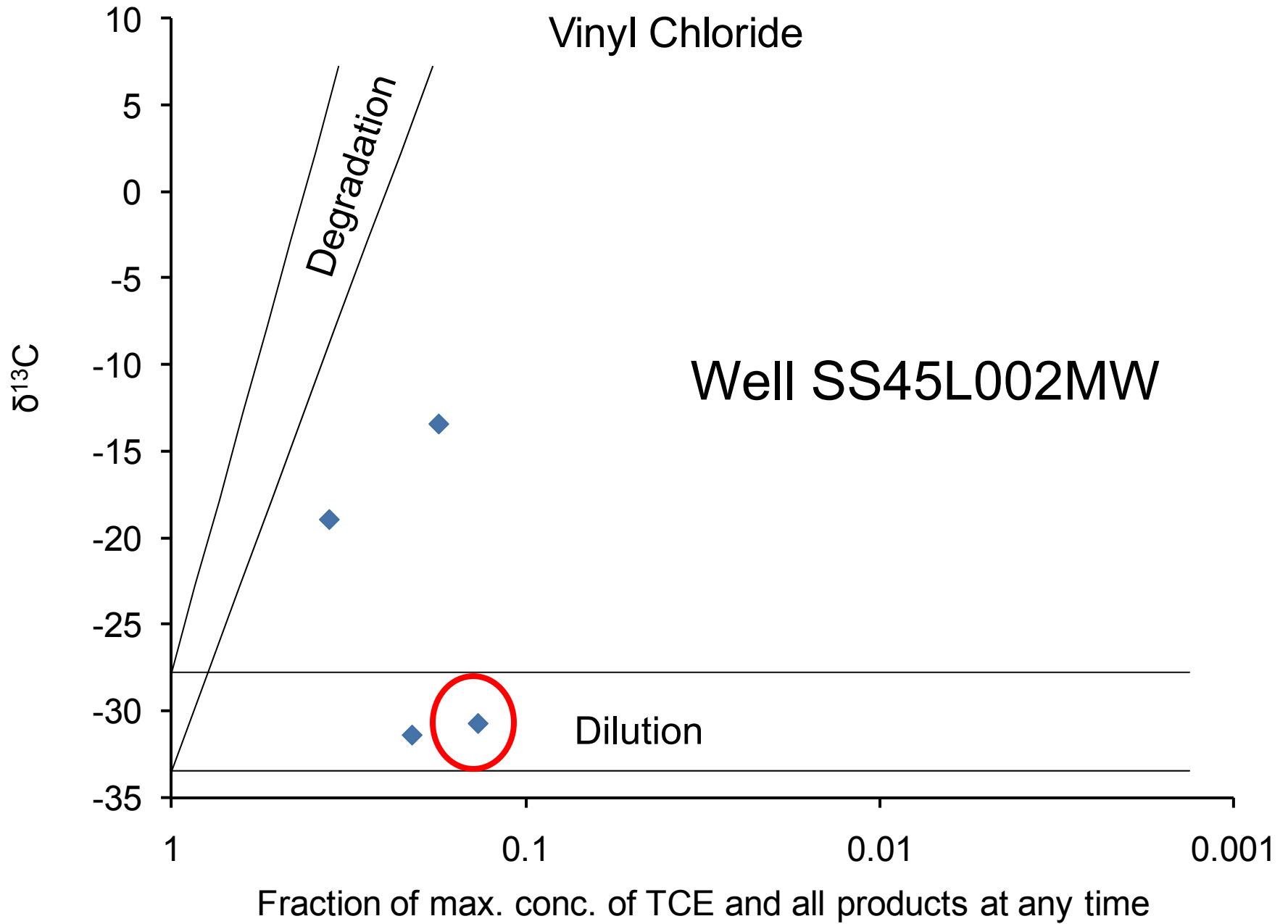
Well SS45L002MW



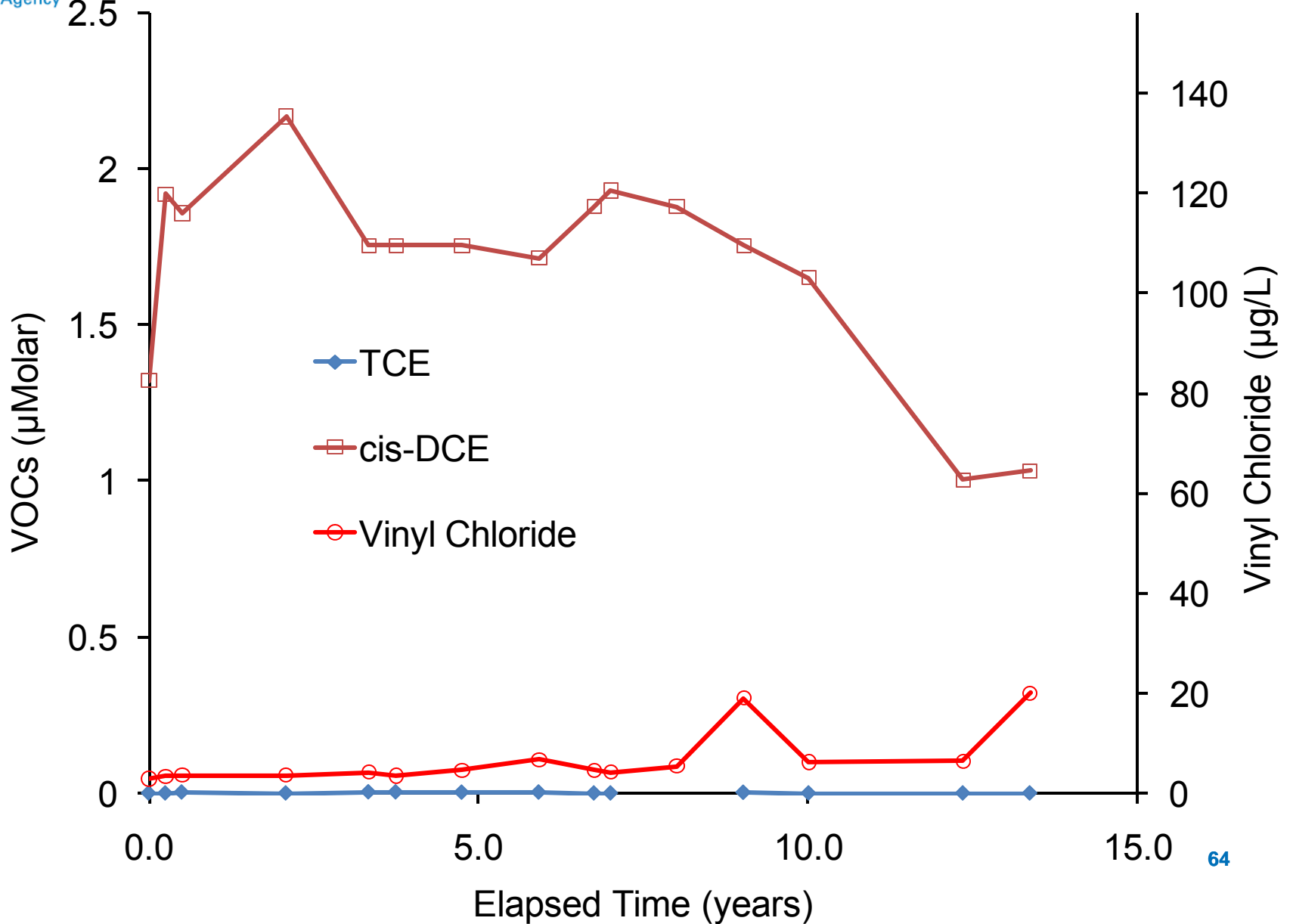


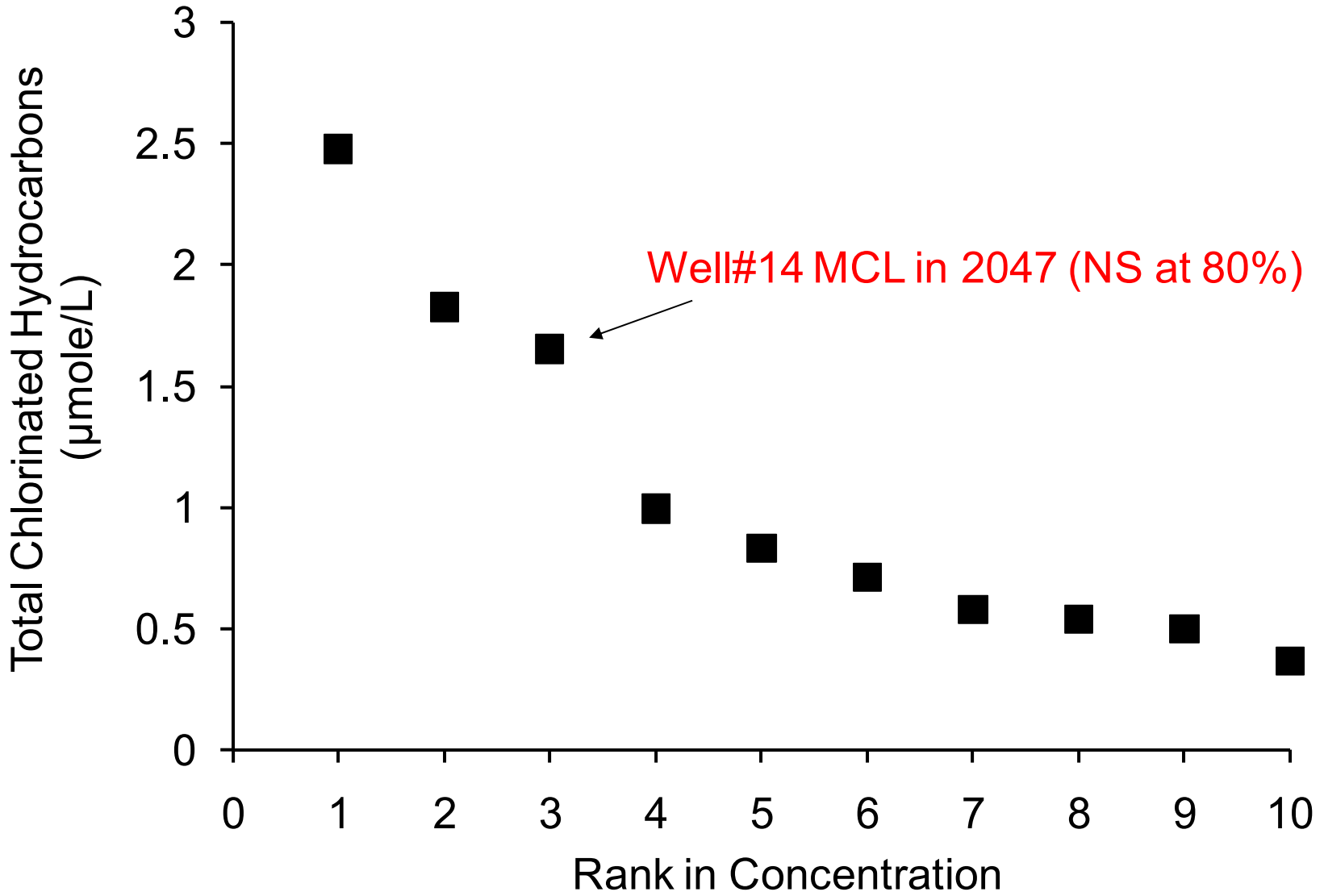
Vinyl Chloride

Well SS45L002MW

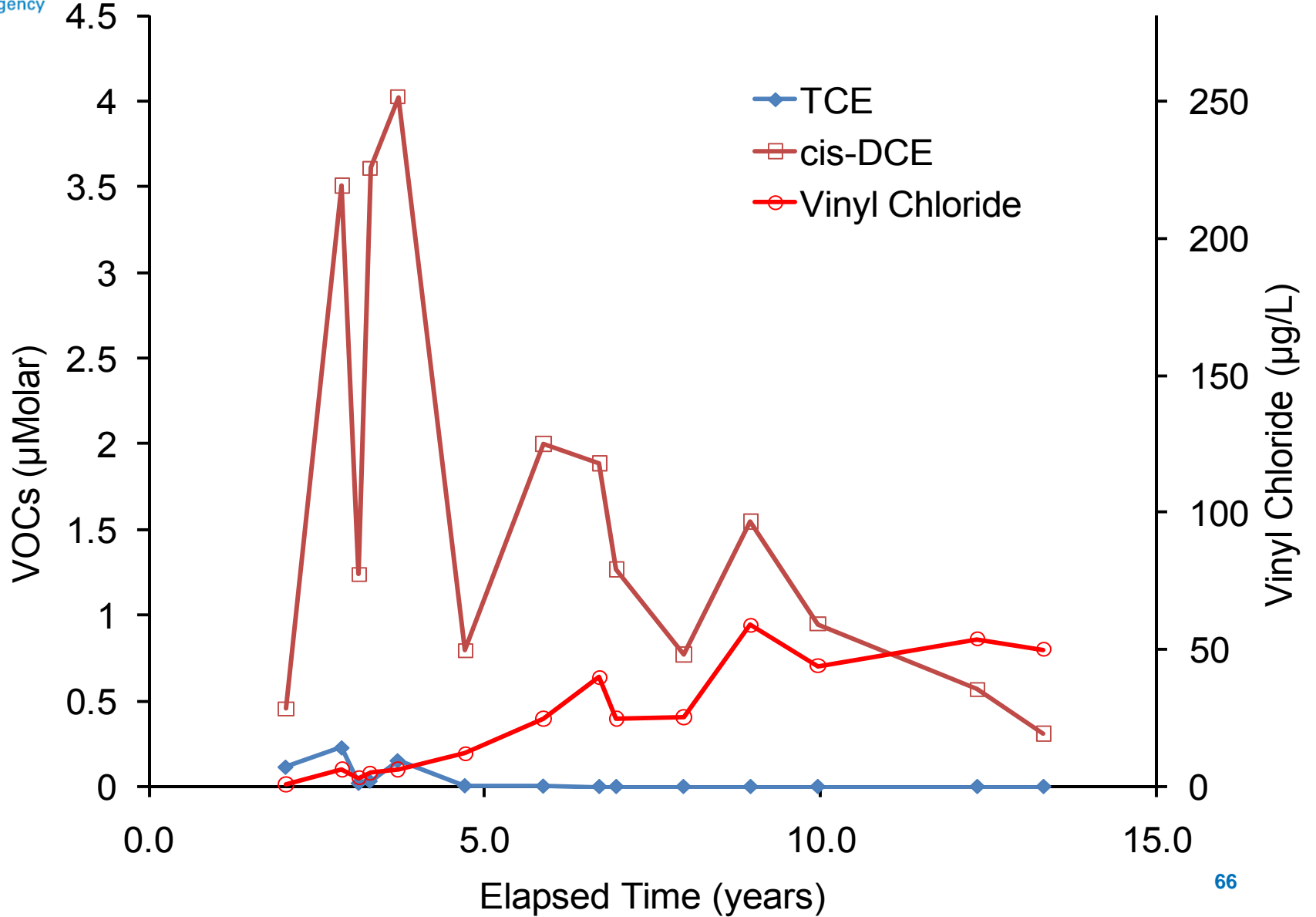


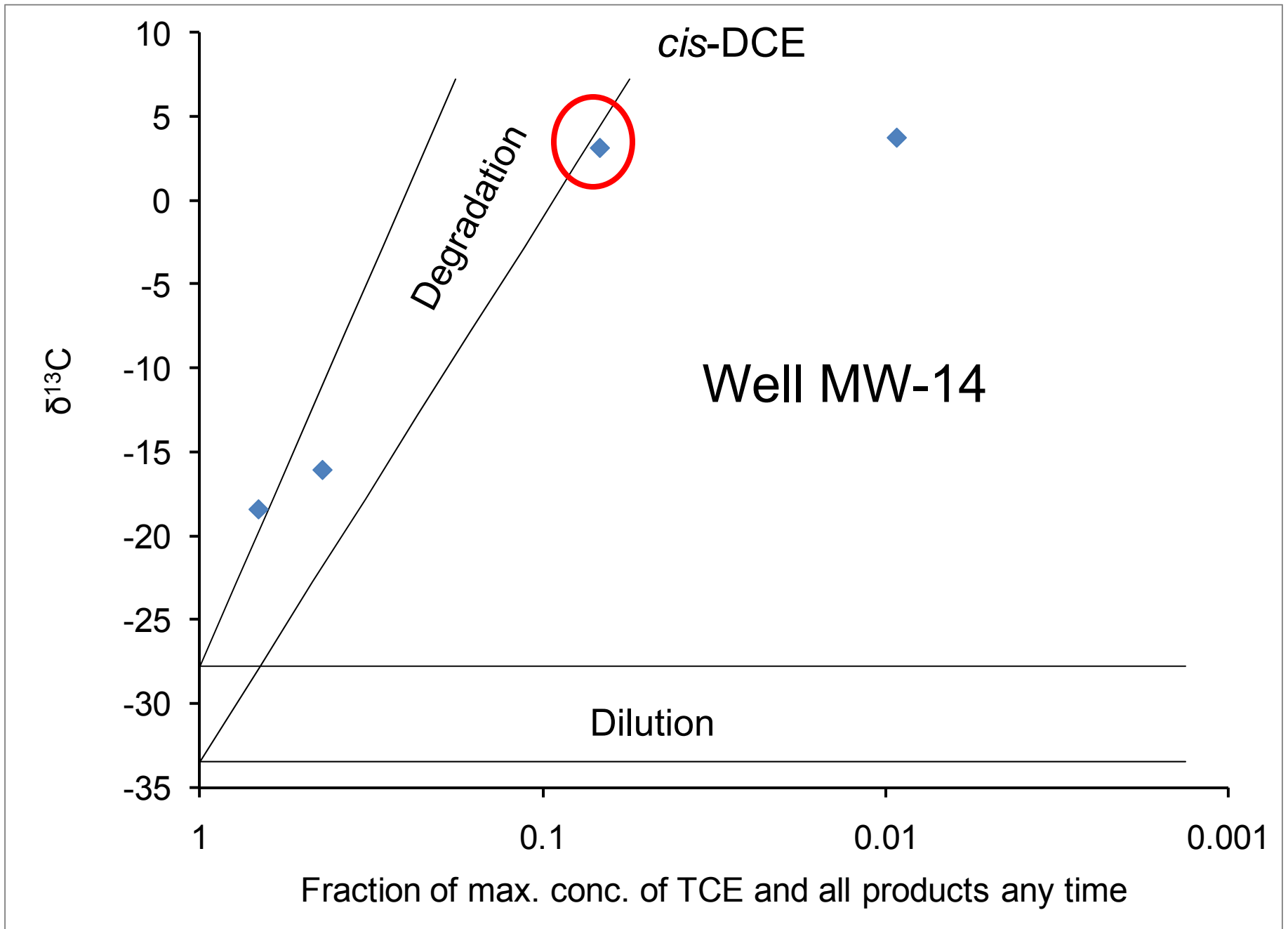
Well SS45L002MW



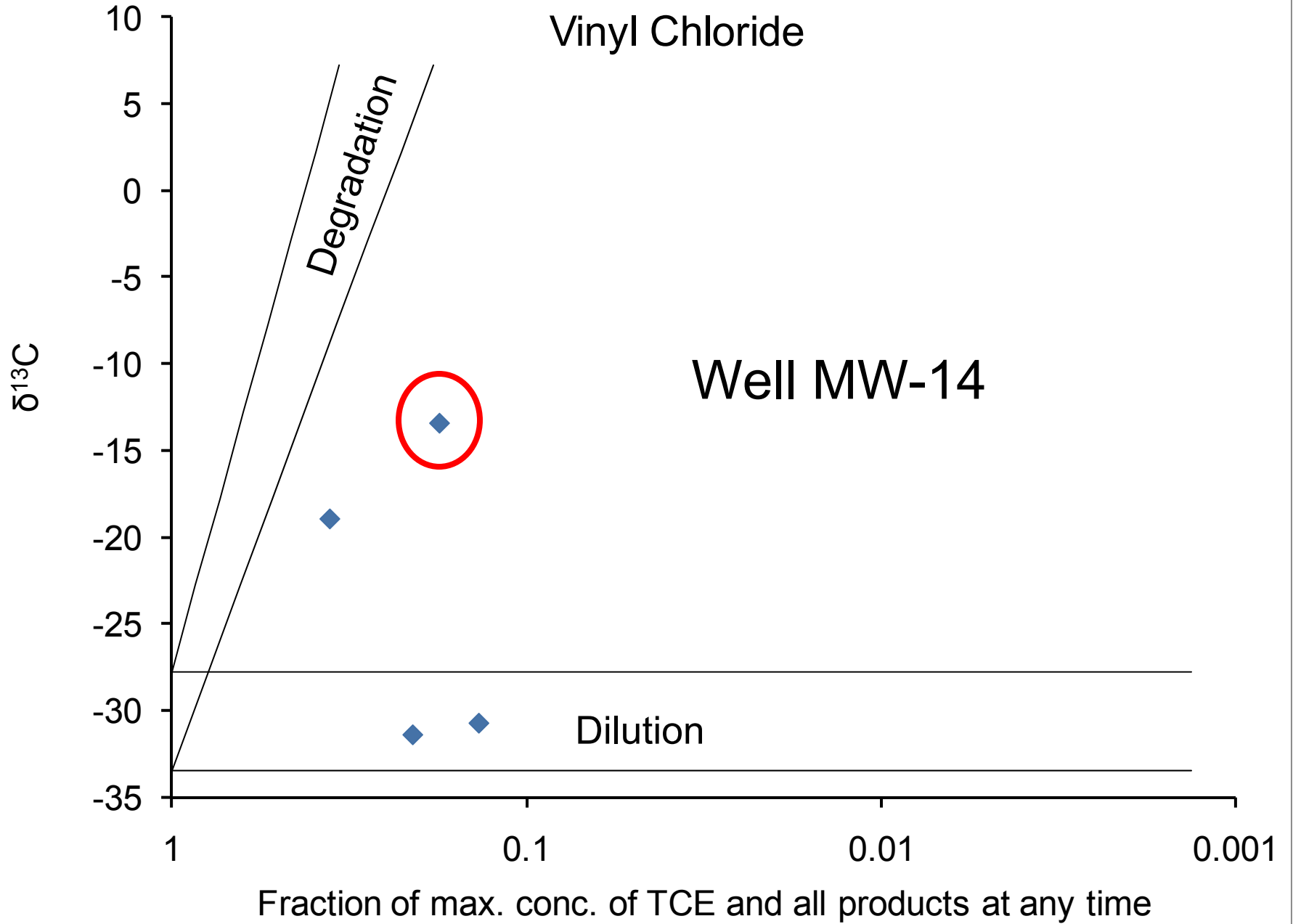


Well #14

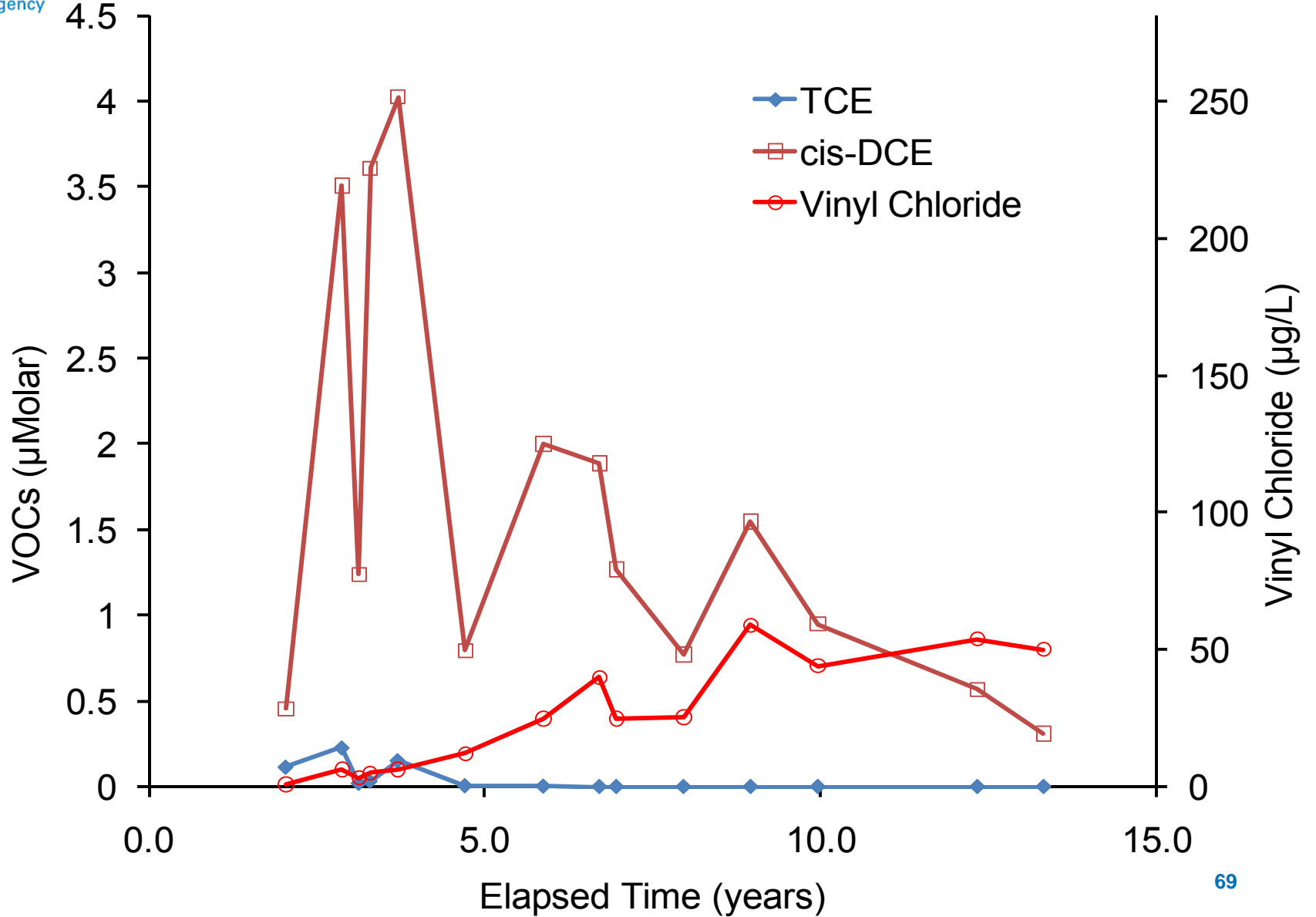


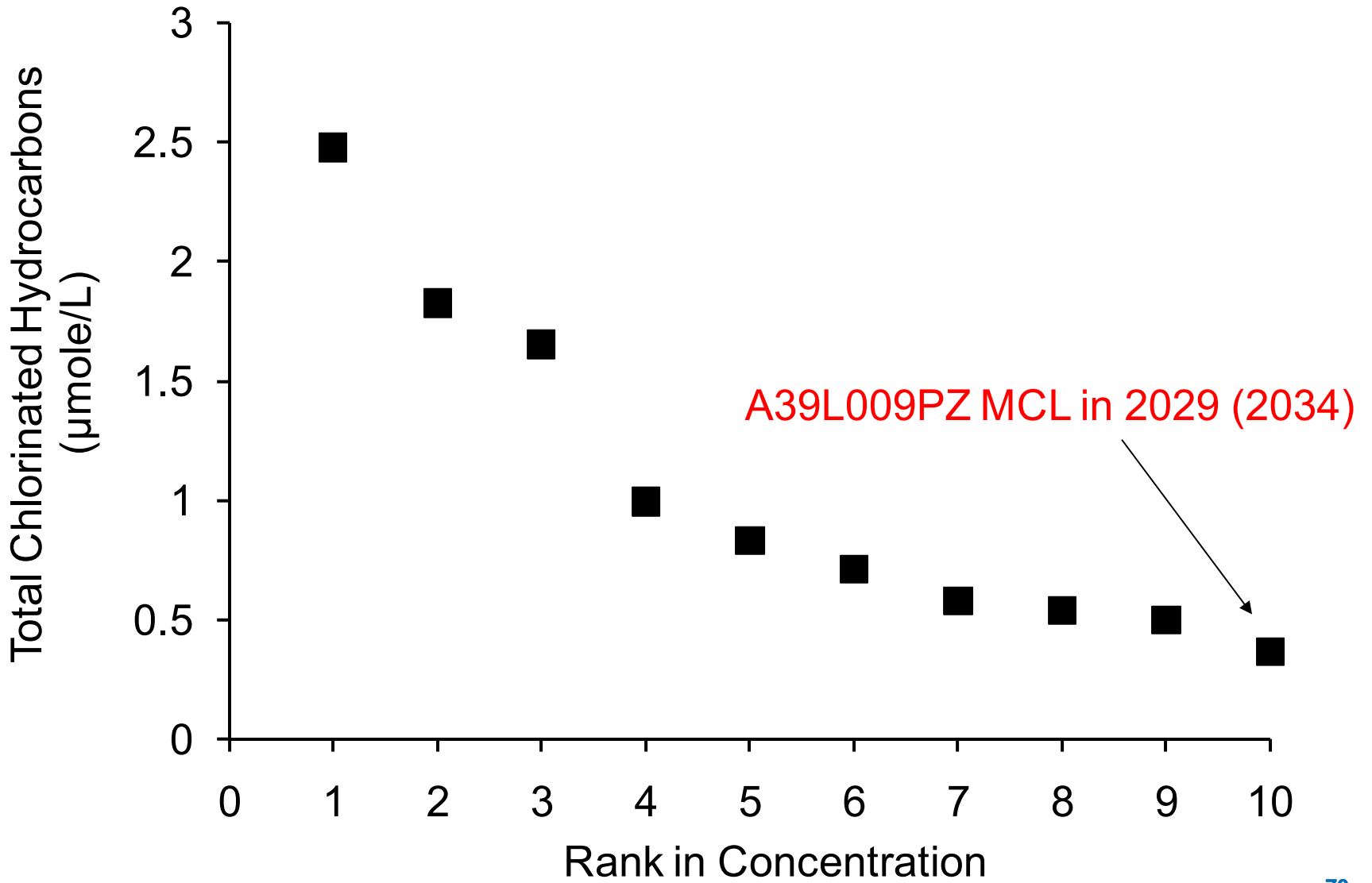


Vinyl Chloride

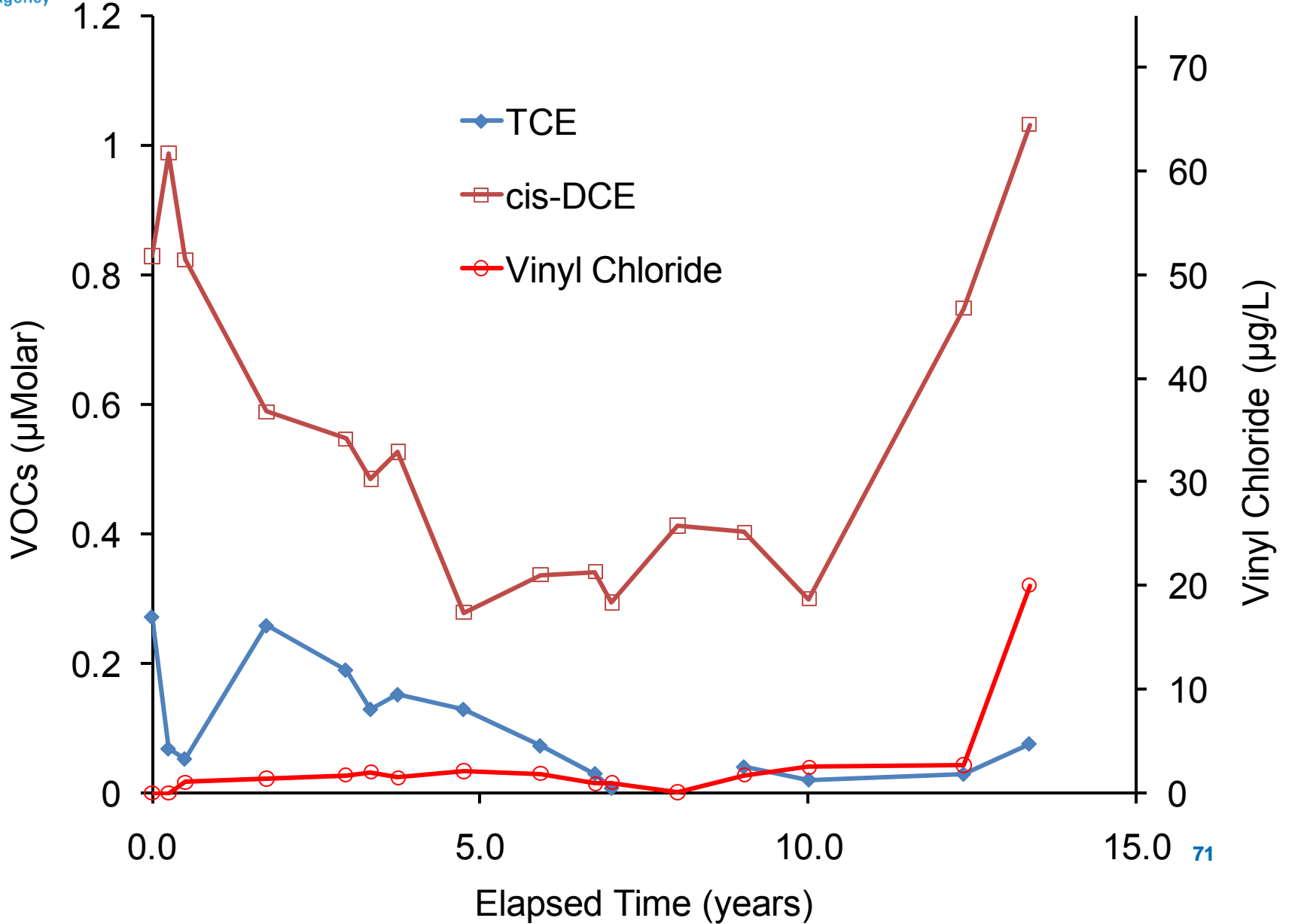


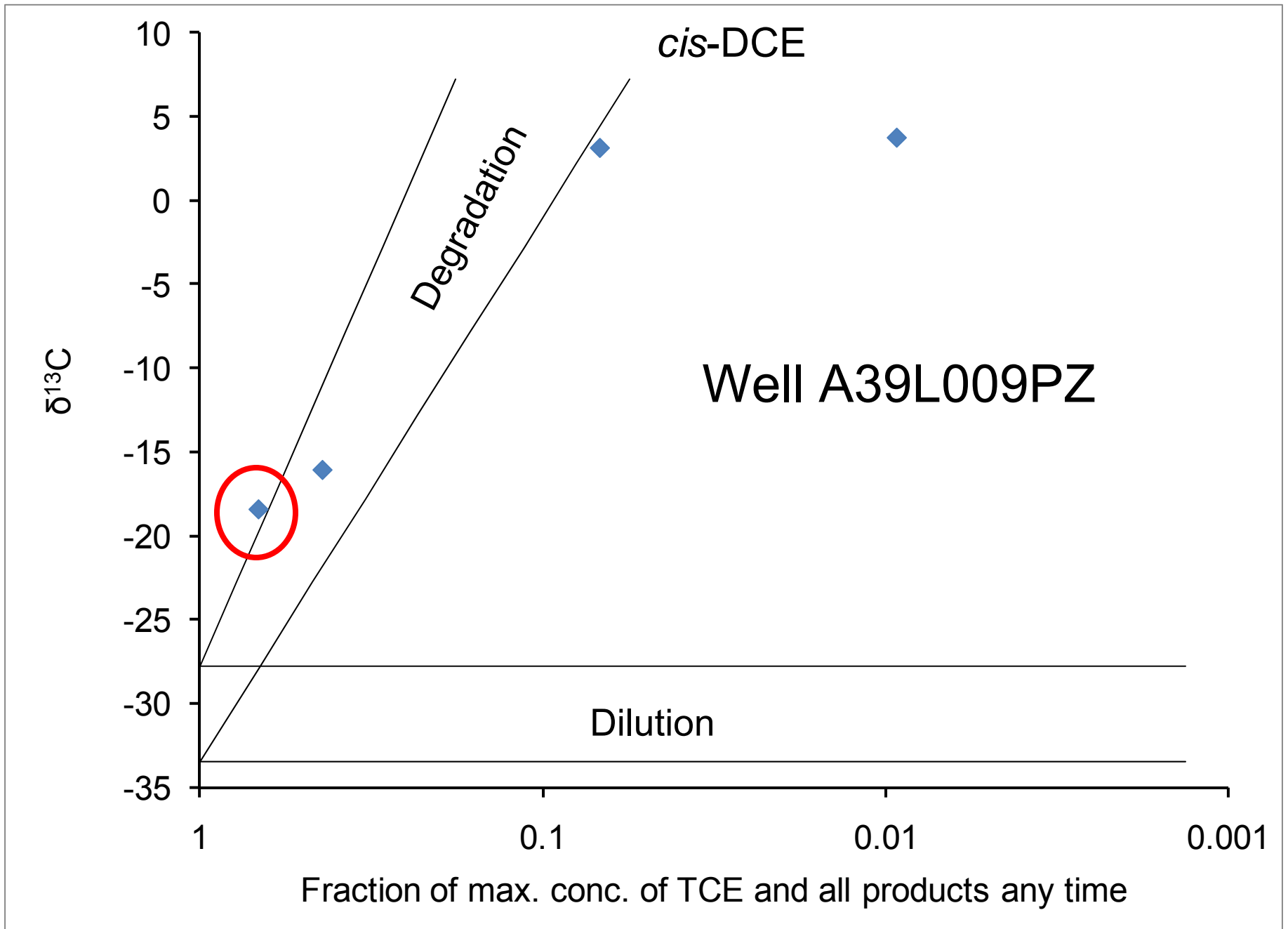
Well #14





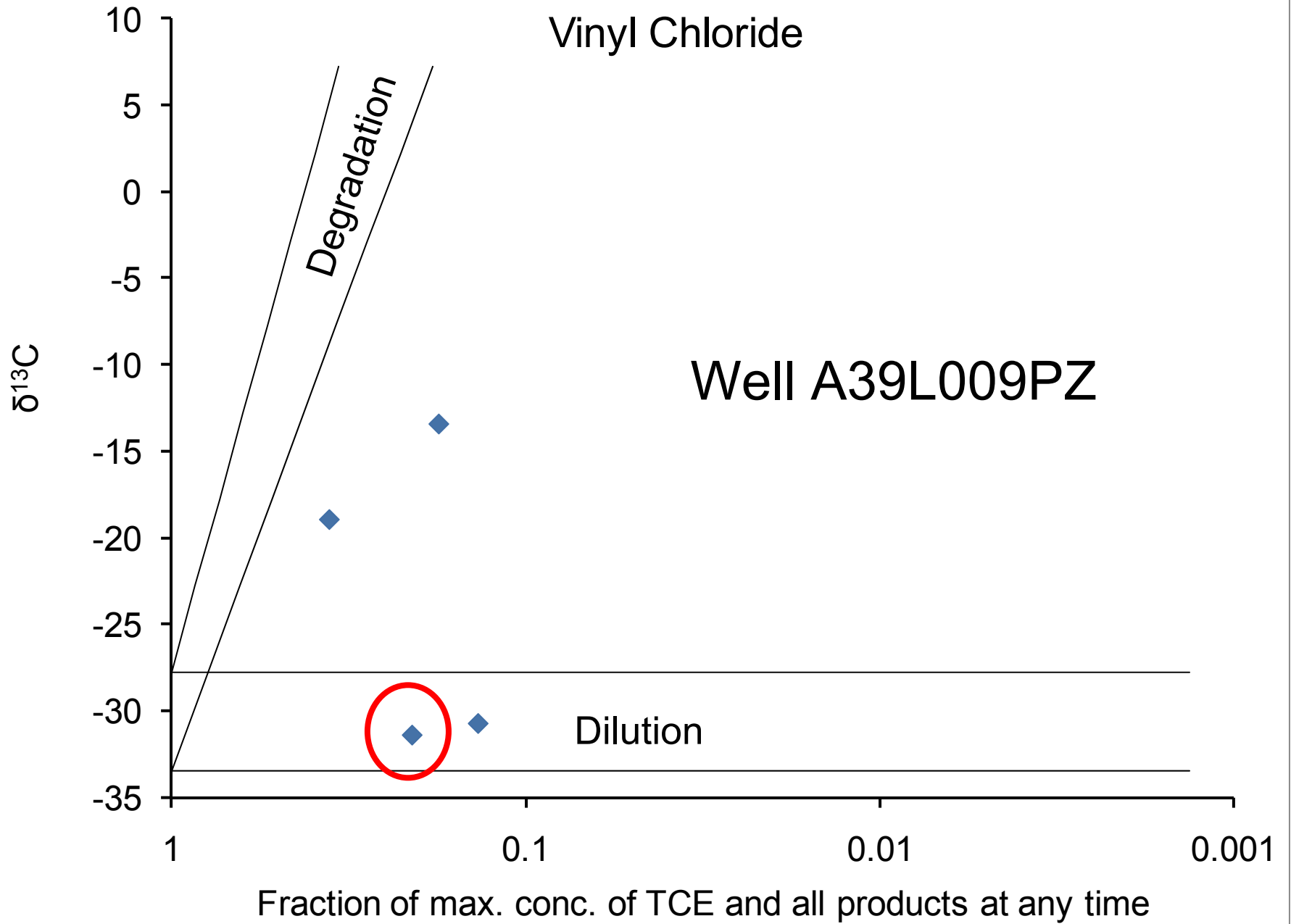
Well A39L009PZ



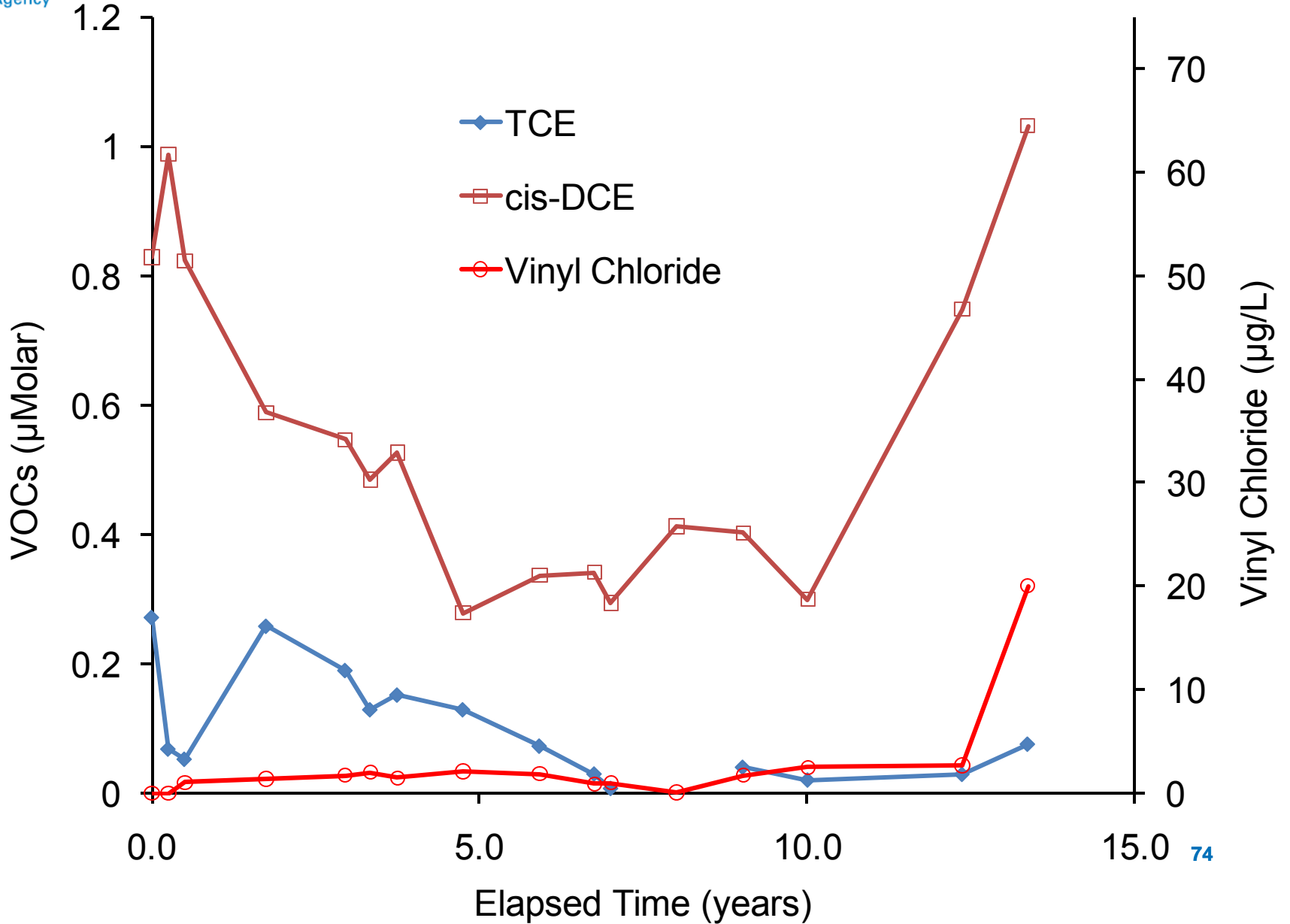


Vinyl Chloride

Well A39L009PZ



Well A39L009PZ



Commercial Source of Analytical Services

PCR

SiREM Labs

130 Research Lane, Suite 2

Guelph, Ontario

Canada, N1G 5G3

Phil Dennis

1-866-251-1747 ext. 238

pdennis@siremlab.com



Commercial Source of Analytical Services

PCR, PLFA, Stable Isotope Probes

Microbial Insights, Inc.
2340 Stock Creek Blvd.
Rockford, TN
37853
United States

Greg Davis
Tel: 865-573-8188,
Fax: 865-573-8133,
Email: gdavis@microbe.com



Commercial Source of Analytical Services

CSIA

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CSIA

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