

SYSTEM-LEVEL MODELING FOR GEOLOGICAL STORAGE OF CO₂

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ABSTRACT

One way to reduce the effects of anthropogenic greenhouse gases on climate is to inject carbon dioxide (CO₂) from industrial sources into deep geological formations such as brine formations or depleted oil or gas reservoirs. Research has and is being conducted to improve understanding of factors affecting particular aspects of geological CO₂ storage, such as performance, capacity, and health, safety and environmental (HSE) issues, as well as to lower the cost of CO₂ capture and related processes. However, there has been less emphasis to date on system-level analyses of geological CO₂ storage that consider geological, economic, and environmental issues by linking detailed representations of engineering components and associated economic models. The objective of this study is to develop a system-level model for geological CO₂ storage, including CO₂ capture and separation, compression, pipeline transportation to the storage site, and CO₂ injection. Within our system model we are incorporating detailed reservoir simulations of CO₂ injection and potential leakage with associated HSE effects. The platform of the system-level modeling is *GoldSim* [GoldSim, 2006]. The application of the system model is focused on evaluating the feasibility of carbon sequestration with enhanced gas recovery (CSEGR) in the Rio Vista region of California. The reservoir simulations are performed using a special module of the *TOUGH2* simulator, *EOS7C*, for multicomponent gas mixtures of methane and CO₂ or methane and nitrogen. Using this approach, the economic benefits of enhanced gas recovery can be directly weighed against the costs, risks, and benefits of CO₂ injection.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several hundred years, atmospheric CO₂ concentration has increased steadily and has already risen to over 370 ppm. Experts believe that in order to avoid significant disruption of the climate system and ecosystems, CO₂ concentrations must be stabilized within the next several decades [Benson, 2005]. One approach to address this challenge is CO₂ capture and storage (CCS), i.e., injecting CO₂ from industrial sources into deep geological formations such as brine formations or depleted oil or gas

reservoirs. The combination of CO₂ sequestration with enhanced gas recovery (CSEGR) makes carbon sequestration more economically feasible and attractive. CCS is a four step process including capture, compression, pipeline transport and underground injection [Benson, 2005]. Related technologies and engineering designs, including capture, transportation, and injection technologies, have been developed and are still being developed to make carbon sequestration both economically practical and environmentally safe [Thomas and Kerr, 2005]. Research has and is being conducted to improve understanding of factors affecting particular aspects of CCS, such as storage security and integrity, storage optimization, monitoring and verification, risk assessment and mitigation, and cost reduction. Because CO₂ injection has not yet been undertaken widely, thus limiting real field data, researchers rely on numerical simulation to understand CO₂ injection and migration. The numerical simulator *TOUGH2* has been widely used for this purpose [e.g., Doughty and Pruess, 2005; Oldenburg et al., 2001; Oldenburg and Unger, 2005; Oldenburg et al., 2004b; Xu et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2005].

Although system-level studies of CCS exist [Singh, 2004], the emphasis to date has not been on system-level analyses that consider geological, economic, and environmental issues by linking detailed process models to representations of engineering components and associated economic models. To improve the overall system performance and understanding, a system-level model is needed where relevant processes can be simulated simultaneously, and different components of the system can interplay with each other. The objective of this study is to develop such a system-level model to evaluate the economics, environmental impacts, and risks of geological CO₂ storage under uncertain conditions. We present an application of this integrated model to carbon sequestration with enhanced gas recovery (CSEGR) at the Rio Vista field in California. In this application, the environmental benefit from CO₂ storage is considered assuming the existence of carbon credits.

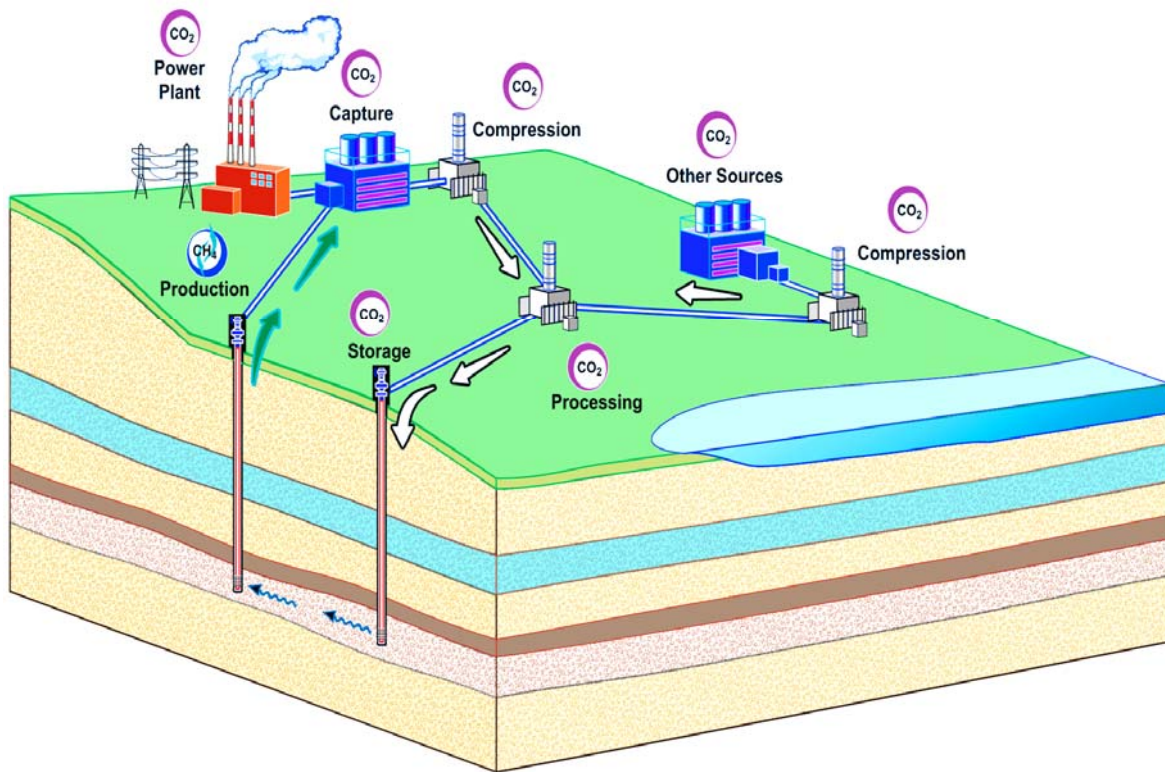


Figure 1. Schematic of a CO₂ capture and storage (CCS) system.

APPROACH

A schematic of the studied system is shown in Figure 1. In the system we consider the following components: CO₂ injection into a natural gas (methane, CH₄) reservoir, a natural gas power plant that burns CH₄, CO₂ capture and compression processes, and the transportation of captured CO₂ to the injection site. This system is complex and highly uncertain. Describing the various components of the system requires multidisciplinary expertise. A comprehensive feasibility study of such a system requires evaluations of economics and environmental risks. The economic feasibility of the system is affected by three uncertain factors: 1) economic factors including the capital costs and maintenance costs of the infrastructure, current and future prices for natural gas and electricity, interest rates, inflation rates, and CO₂ credits, etc., 2) uncertain decision factors, including the number of injection wells, monitoring wells, injection rates, etc., and 3) the so-called FEPs (Features, Events and Processes) [Wildenborg *et al.*, 2005]. Examples of FEPs are geological features (aquifer, existing leakage pathways, etc.), opening of abandoned wells due to corrosion, escape of CO₂ through faults or fractures caused by high injection pressure, and incidents (e.g., pipeline break). The failure of the CCS system insofar as health and safety are concerned is associated with the FEPs. One challenge of system

modeling is to assess and quantify the subsequent health, safety and environmental (HSE) impact.

The complexity and interdependent nature of the studied system requires an integrated tool that is capable of coupling processes in different disciplines. A system-level model is a powerful tool to address these issues. With system-level modeling, the relevant discrete and continuous processes can be simulated simultaneously, and the system responses to different FEPs can be modeled correspondingly. The subsystems can interact with each other, either continuously or triggered at the time of a specific incident. It is thus possible to account for the uncertain factors in the different subsystems and to assess risks and evaluate the impact on the entire system. Finally, we can better understand the trade-offs between the economic benefits and the costs and risks of a particular venture such as CSEGR.

In system modeling, a hierarchical model is built using a top-down method. First, for CSEGR subsystems are identified and they are connected in order to track CO₂ and CH₄ flows. Then, components are identified and grouped into subsystems. Finally, potential FEPs are identified and corresponding feedbacks are incorporated in the system. The level of detail increases at lower levels of the system hierarchy. The advantage of this top-down method

Our reservoir simulation model is based on CSEGR at the Rio Vista field in California [Oldenburg *et al.*, 2001a]. The methane gas reservoir, with a thickness of 50 m, is located at a depth of 1450 m to 1500 m below ground surface. The cap rock above the gas reservoir is about 20 m thick. We assume there is an aquifer at a depth of about 700 m. There are 25 injection wells and 25 production wells in the field. The system is modeled using a simplified 2D vertical slice. The model domain has a size of 800 m × 1 m × 1500 m, representing 1/25 of the field. The main rock properties used are listed in Table 1.

We model the following four FEPs in the system, three of which invoke feedbacks between the system model and the *TOUGH2* model:

(1) Potential creation of a fracture due to high injection pressure. Pressure at the injection point is obtained from the *TOUGH2* simulation and monitored in the system model. When this pressure is above the lithostatic pressure, we assume a fracture is created at that location; the resulting leakage of CO₂ is simulated by *TOUGH2*. The properties for this potential fracture are listed in Table 1;

(2) Potential leakage pathway through an abandoned well. We assume there is an abandoned well at x = 400 m. The CO₂ concentration at the interface of the abandoned well and the gas reservoir is calculated by *TOUGH2* and compared with a CO₂ concentration threshold value in the system model, above which we assume there will be CO₂ corrosion of well cement, resulting in the development of high-permeability channels (from cap rock to ground surface) and CO₂ leakage to the land surface, which is simulated by the *TOUGH2* model. The properties for the opened abandoned well are listed in Table 1;

(3) Potential pipeline break. In the CO₂ Pipeline subsystem, we assume the probability for a pipeline to break is a function of time and pipeline length. If a pipeline breaks in its lifetime, we simply assume CO₂ capture from the flue gas is halted. Whatever is in the pipeline will be emitted to the atmosphere, and the injection of CO₂ into the gas reservoir will be stopped;

(4) The CO₂ concentration in the aquifer above the gas reservoir at 750 m depth. If there is CO₂ leakage, it might contaminate this aquifer. The maximum CO₂ concentration is observed during the simulation.

For our case, the *GoldSim* model runs for 10 time steps to a total simulation time of 50 years, i.e., there is an output every five years. *GoldSim* calls *TOUGH2* every five years. Each time when *TOUGH2* finishes the previous 5-year simulation, it saves its results to a file SAVE, which will be copied as the initial condition file INCON for the next five-year calculation. Within the five years, *TOUGH2* controls its own time-step size.

BASE CASE SIMULATION

In our base-case simulation, the total CO₂ injection rate for 25 wells is 9 × 10⁶ MMT/yr, i.e., 1.7 × 10⁸ Mcf/yr. The economic parameters and prices (current value) used are listed in Table 2. Injected CO₂ is accounted for as credit. The lifetime of all the utilities considered in the study is assumed to be 50 years.

Table 2. Economic Base-Case Parameters

CO ₂ credit (\$/t CO ₂)	35
Electricity price (\$/kWh)	0.07
CH ₄ selling price (\$/MMBtu)	10
CH ₄ buying price (\$/MMBtu)	10
CO ₂ buying price (\$/t CO ₂)	20
Inflation rate	0.05
Inflation-free interest rate	0.10
Tax rate	0.3

In the base case, the purchasing and selling prices for methane are assumed to be the same. There is an option for them to be different due to seasonal price fluctuations.

To see the impact of pipeline break on the system, we set the probability for a pipeline longer than 1 km to break after 40 years to 0.8 in our simulation.

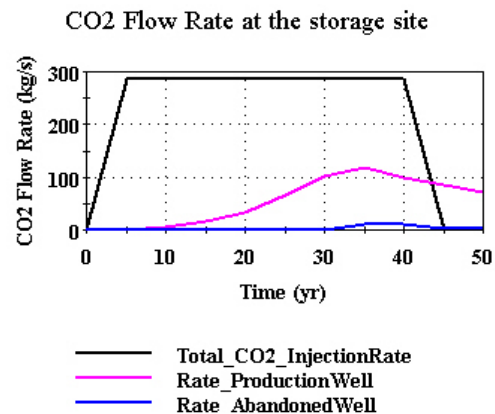


Figure 3. CO₂ flow rates in the gas reservoir.

Figure 3 shows the CO₂ flow rates at the storage site calculated by *GoldSim*. The black line shows the total injection rate for 25 wells. The pink line is the CO₂ breakthrough at the production well, which starts after about 10 years of injection. This early breakthrough is due to the high injection rate. The blue line shows the CO₂ leakage rate from the abandoned well. The CO₂ mass fraction in the gas phase at this abandoned well reaches 0.5 around year 30, a concentration at which it is assumed that corrosion and escape of CO₂ will occur. The CO₂

breakthrough rate gets smaller when CO₂ starts to leak from the abandoned well. The black line drops to zero at year 45 due to the pipeline break sometime between year 40-45, after which the CO₂ capture and injection are stopped.

During the 50-years simulation, the injection pressure never reaches levels sufficient to create a fracture. The maximum mass fraction of CO₂ in the liquid phase in the aquifer is 0.0074.

Figure 4 shows the CH₄ production rate at the production wells. During the first 20 years the production rate of CH₄ is relatively high, which accounts for a large amount of income for that period (the corresponding income in current value is shown on the right-hand axis). The production rate is reduced after CO₂ breakthrough. For the last 20 years the production is much lower due to the leakage from the abandoned well, and later after the injection was halted due to the pipeline break. Even if no abandoned well is present, CO₂ breakthrough will also reduce CH₄ production.

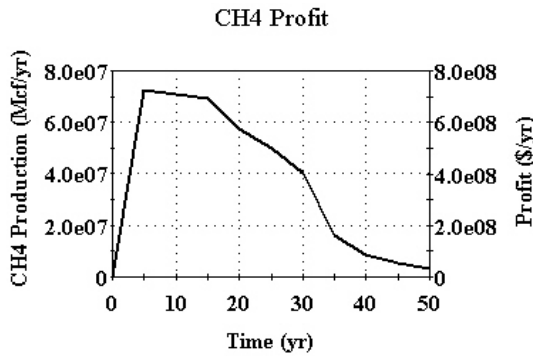


Figure 4. Methane production rate and profit.

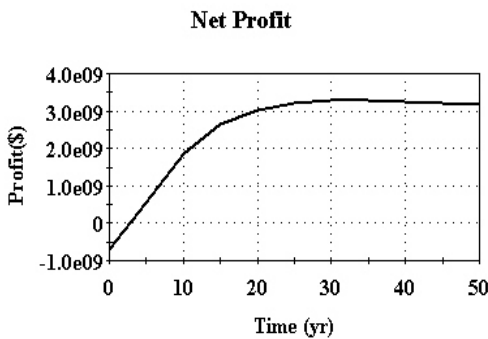


Figure 5. Net present value of the system.

The net present value (NPV) including CO₂ credit over time is shown in Figure 5. For the scenario considered, the CO₂ credit is able to keep the net profit positive. Income from sale of CH₄ is high at the beginning, but drops considerably when leakage and CO₂ breakthrough start. The main cost comes from purchasing additional CO₂, capturing CO₂ from flue gas, and separation of CH₄ and CO₂ at the production

site. The uncertainty of the net profit curve results mainly from the uncertainty in CH₄ and CO₂ prices relative to the CO₂ credit, the total injection rate, and inflation and interest rates.

Figure 6 shows CO₂ mole fraction in the gas phase at the end of 50 years. The abandoned well is located at X = 400 m. The large CO₂ concentration at that location indicates the leaked CO₂ escapes the reservoir through the abandoned well. The anomaly at 700 m depth is due to the high permeability of the aquifer.

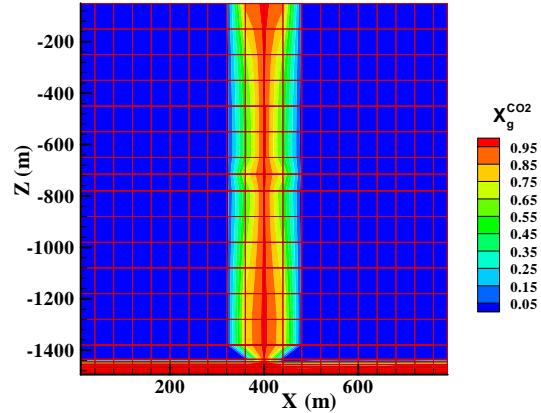


Figure 6. CO₂ mass fraction in the gas phase at the end of simulation.

OPTIMIZATION

The system model can also be used to maximize the profit of the system over 50 years. In this problem, we assume that in addition to the CO₂ produced from the natural gas power plant, there are two other sources CO₂ to supplement the total CO₂ injection rate. The first 5 MMt supplementary CO₂ comes from a power plant close by, with a CO₂ price at \$20/tonne. The extra amount needed comes from another source with a much higher price, \$50/tonne.

Obviously, there is a trade-off between net profit of the system and the total CO₂ injection rate. Although a higher injection rate means more profit from CO₂ credit, and CH₄ production at early stage, it may also cause early CO₂ breakthrough, which reduces CH₄ production and CO₂ credit (although in reality reduction in CO₂ caused by breakthrough may be ignored). A higher injection rate also means a much higher cost for supplementary CO₂ and pipeline cost.

The objective is to find an optimal injection rate to maximize the net profit of the system, assuming all the other settings are the same as in the base case. This is done using the optimization algorithm in *GoldSim*. The algorithm is based on box's complex method [GoldSim, 2006]. The method begins by developing an initial complex, which is a set of

solutions that meet all the requirements specified by the user. The algorithm searches the solution space iteratively until the solution converges or *GoldSim* determines optimal solution cannot be achieved.

The optimal solution is achieved when the CO₂ injection rate is 23.9 MMt/yr, 1/8 of which is captured from the flue gas of the natural gas power plant in the system. When the injection rate is above this threshold, the net profit drops quickly.

CONCLUSIONS

We have developed a system-level model for analyzing geological storage of CO₂. Within our system model we are incorporating detailed reservoir simulations of CO₂ injection and potential leakage with associated HSE effects. This is done through the system-level modeling tool *GoldSim*. The application of the system model is focused on evaluating the feasibility of carbon sequestration with enhanced gas recovery (CSEGR) in the Rio Vista region of California. The reservoir simulations are performed using a special module of the *TOUGH2* simulator, EOS7C, for multicomponent gas mixtures. Using this approach, the economic benefits of CO₂ sequestration and enhanced gas recovery can be directly weighed against the costs and risks of CO₂ injection. The current model is highly simplified, but nevertheless models key processes and interactions while simultaneously demonstrating the power and potential value of system-level modeling of CCS.

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