

Interactive comment on “Assessment of bias-adjusted PM_{2.5} air quality forecasts over the continental United States during 2007” by D. Kang et al.

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Received and published: 2 April 2010

General Comments: This is a research paper that presents an application and evaluation of Kalman-filter based bias adjustment to the CMAQ-predicted PM_{2.5} forecasts. The paper is concise and well-written. Overall, the paper demonstrates a very useful technique to adjust CMAQ-based PM_{2.5} air quality forecasts in near real-time. This is very important given the challenges currently faced in modeling PM_{2.5} concentrations in real-time. The paper provides a detailed evaluation of the adjusted forecasts, demonstrating an improvement in the model predictions at nearly all regions and seasons. While this approach has been used for adjusting ozone forecasts, I believe this

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is one of the first attempts to present an evaluation of this approach for PM_{2.5} predictions for a year-long period over the continental United States (US). I had a few minor comments as detailed below. Consequently, I recommend that the paper be accepted pending minor revisions.

RESPONSE: We thank the reviewer for the overall positive assessment of this contribution and for the constructive suggestions.

“Specific Comments: Page 1378, line 11: “: : predictor (hereafter referred to as KF bias-adjustment or simple KF): : :”

RESPONSE: The editorial error has now been corrected.

Page 1379, line 21: “: : .12-km horizontal grid spacing on : : :”

RESPONSE: The typographical error has now been corrected.

Page 1380, line 19: “: : :the beginning of one hour to the next.”

RESPONSE: The typographical error has now been corrected.

Page 1381, line 14: How sensitive is the adjustment to the training period of “2 days”?

RESPONSE: We feel the reviewer may have misinterpreted the statement. The KF formulation, as detailed previously in Kang et al. (2008) requires information for two prior days, which essentially establish the “initialization” for the method for the 3rd (or the current forecast day of interest); this method is then repeated as already outlined in the manuscript

Page 1381, line 10: The authors use a fixed error ratio of 0.06 based on their previous work in adjusting ozone forecasts. I agree that the authors presented a comprehensive sensitivity analysis of the error ratio in their 2008 paper (Kang et al., 2008, J. Geophys. Res., 113, D23308) while applying the Kalman filter for adjusting ozone predictions. However, I am uncertain if that value can be directly applied for PM_{2.5} for the following reasons: 1) PM_{2.5} is a composite parameter composed of different chemical species

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that have different spatial and temporal variability; 2) Elevated PM_{2.5} concentrations occur throughout the year, and exceedances may occur during summer and winter seasons; 3) The PM_{2.5} components responsible for the elevated concentration are different during summer and winter, and varies for different regions. To my knowledge, all studies so far have examined this approach only for ozone, and for the summer season only. Given that this is one of first manuscripts that deal with an evaluation of this approach for PM_{2.5}, I would be interested in seeing at least a preliminary analysis of the sensitivity of the adjustment procedure to the choice of the error ratio value. I realize that a detailed sensitivity analysis of this parameter for PM_{2.5} may warrant a separate manuscript due to the different variables involved (species, season, region etc). Thus, it may be appropriate to present a sensitivity of the adjustment to the error ratio for a few different values set uniformly for the entire US. I am not requiring that the current analysis be redone; but rather just adding a section that shows the effect of adjustments for other error ratio values, and modifying the summary section appropriately.

RESPONSE: We agree with the reviewer's concern regarding the use of the same error ratio value derived for O₃ bias-adjustment also for PM_{2.5} forecast bias-adjustment. Following the reviewer's suggestion we tested different error ratio values for PM_{2.5} forecasts. The results are shown in Figure 2. As seen in Figure 2, when error ratio value was set at 0.01, the performance was indeed slightly degraded with relatively large RMSE values, however, when the error ratio was set in the range of 0.04 to 0.10, the impact on the forecast performance was negligible. We arrived at similar conclusions from testing site-specific and varying error ratios previously for O₃ bias-adjustment. Together these suggest that similar error ratios could be applied both for O₃ and PM_{2.5} bias-adjustments as well as the reasonableness in using a fixed error ratio of 0.06 across all sites.

Page 1382, line 4: “: : components, Normalized Mean Error (NME), : : :”

RESPONSE: The editorial error has now been corrected.

Page 1383, lines 9-11: Suggesting that the sentence be rephrased as follows: “: : :PBL mixing scheme for CMAQ on 17 September, as mentioned previously.”

RESPONSE: We have now revised the sentence as the reviewer suggested.

Page 1385, line 26: I believe that the reference Mathur et al. (2008) deals with an evaluation of the winter-time performance. Hence, it seems that the reference is misplaced. It would be appropriate to move this reference to line 19 or so, where the winter over-predictions are discussed.

RESPONSE: Even though the reference Mathur et al. (2008) mainly deals with the evaluation of the winter-time performance, the study also analyzed the bias characteristics in PM_{2.5} forecasts over an entire annual cycle. Therefore, it should be appropriate to cite the paper in the place where it currently is.

Page 1386, line 1, “Figure 6” (also applies to other box plots): What distribution does the data in these box plots represent? In other words, is this a distribution of RMSE across the different sites within each region for each month (i.e., calculate RMSE at each site for the whole month, and then represent the RMSE across all the sites within a region as a box plot)? Or is it something else? Please clarify as to what these plots represent.

RESPONSE: Thank you. The clarification has now been incorporated into the manuscript following the first mention of box plots (Figure 2).

Page 1386, line 24: Just to verify the terminology “absolute bias” – Is this supposed to be “absolute error”?

RESPONSE: Here the “absolute bias” should be “absolute value of mean bias”. We have now made the correction.

Page 1387, lines 12-14: “The decomposition of the RMSE displays different error characteristics for PM_{2.5} relative to those noted previously for O₃: : :” This statement reinforces the fact that the behavior of PM_{2.5} is different from that of O₃ and supports

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the earlier comment that the sensitivity of the adjustment to the choice of the error ratio must be examined.

RESPONSE: As stated before, we have now adopted the reviewer's suggestion and examined the sensitivity of the adjustment to the choice of the error ratio.

Page 1388, lines7-9: I am not sure if this sentence can be stated with certainty. The improvement for the concentration bin $< 5 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ appears to be negligible. There may be a very slight decrease in the median RMSE and bias, but the 25th percentile is virtually the same as, or higher than, the unadjusted values. I am being picky here, as these concentrations may fall within the current uncertainty of the models. But the point is that no marked improvement is seen for that concentration bin to make that statement.

RESPONSE: As shown in the figure, even for the concentration bin $< 5 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, the distributions of both RMSE and MB for the KF forecasts are much condensed than those for the raw model forecasts. Especially, the improvement is very apparent when comparing the upper percentiles. Even though the improvement at $< 5 \text{ } \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ concentration bin is not as big as those at higher concentration bins, it is still justifiable that the KF forecasts performed better than the raw model forecasts across all the concentration bins.

Page 1402, Figure 7: The figures need to be labeled as (a), (b) and so on.

RESPONSE: We have now labeled the figures. In addition, we have also redrawn the figures with new color schemes for easy identification of the locations of over- or under-estimations.

Page 1403, Figure 8: It may be better to reverse the order of the box plots to be consistent with the other figures. Instead of showing MOD and then KF, it would be better if it is rearranged to show KF, followed by MOD. An alternative approach would be to change the other figures to show MOD followed by KF. I personally prefer the

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2nd approach where we show the raw first and then the adjusted. But I leave it to the authors on how they want to arrange those, as long as they are consistent on all plots.

RESPONSE: We have now re-made the plots to show KF followed by MOD as the reviewer suggested.

Figure 8, caption: I would suggest rephrasing it to state “: : for all subregions: : :”

RESPONSE:

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