1 **Determination of sub-ppb epichlorohydrin levels in water by on-line solid phase extraction-**

2 **liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry**

3 Cristina Ripollés, José M. Marín, Francisco J. López, Juan V. Sancho and Félix Hernández *

4 *Research Institute for Pesticides and Water, University Jaume I, Avda. Sos Baynat, E-12071*

5 *Castellón, Spain. Tel.: 964 387366. Fax: 964 387368.*

6 * Author for correspondence. E-mail: felix.hernandez@qfa.uji.es

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8   **ABSTRACT**

9   A new sensitive and selective method based on on-line solid-phase extraction (SPE) coupled

10   to LC(ESI)MS/MS using a triple quadrupole analyzer has been developed for the determination of

11   epichlorohydrin (ECH) in different types of water samples. The great difficulties for ECH direct

12   determination resulting from its low molecular size, high polarity and non-easily ionizable molecule

13   make necessary a previous derivatization step. This previous reaction was optimized employing 3,5-

14   difluorobenzylamine as derivative agent adding Fe(III) to catalyze the derivatization process. In

15   order to achieve accurate quantification and for correction of matrix effects, losses in the

16   derivatization process and instrumental deviations, ECH isotope labelled (ECH-d_5) was added as

17   internal standard (IS) to water samples. The method was validated based on European SANCO

18   guidelines using drinking and other types of treated water spiked at two concentration levels (0.1

19   and 1.0 µg/L), the lowest having been established as the limit of quantification (LOQ) objective of

20   the method. Satisfactory accuracy (recoveries between 70 and 103 %), precision (RSD < 20 %) and

21   linearity (from 0.05 to 50 µg/L, r > 0.99) were obtained. The limit of detection (LOD) was set-up at

22   0.03 µg/L. The method was applied to different water samples (drinking water and water samples

23   collected from a municipal treatment water plant). In order to enhance confidence, five SRM

24   transitions were acquired obtaining in this way a simultaneous reliable quantification and

25   identification of ECH in water, even at sub-ppb levels.

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27

28   **Keywords**

29   Epichlorohydrin, liquid chromatography, tandem mass spectrometry, water, confirmation.

30

INTRODUCTION

Epichlorohydrin (1-chloro-2,3epoxy-propane, ECH) is an aliphatic epoxide commonly employed as starting material in the production of synthetic glycerol, plastics, polymers and epoxy resins. ECH residues can enter in drinking-water supplies through different ways, as it is widely employed in the fabrication of drinking-water pipes as well as in the synthesis of cationic polyelectrolytes, which are used in surface and wastewater clarification, and in several flocculating agents[1].

ECH is toxic by inhalation, dermal and oral absorption, and it is defined as probably carcinogenic to humans (group 2A) by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)[2]. Due to its toxicity, ECH has been listed among compounds dangerous to the water environment by both EU and USA[3,4]. According to European Council Directive 98/83/EC on the quality of waters intended for human consumption, the acceptable limit for ECH in drinking water is 0.1 µg/L[3]. Stricter is the maximum level contaminant (MLC) goal established by US Environmental Protection Agency, which has been set at zero[4]. Therefore, it is necessary the development of highly sensitive analytical methodology able to determine ECH at sub-ppb levels in water.

Nowadays, no practical routine and confident analytical methods are available to determine ECH at such low concentrations. Chemical characteristics of ECH, like high solubility in water, volatility and polar character make very difficult its analysis. Furthermore, the hydrolytic behavior of this substance has to be taken into account since its presents a half life in water at pH 7 and 20 ºC of only 6.2 days[5], which is lower at other pH values. Moreover, ECH hydrolysis increases 7-fold when the temperature exceeds 40 ºC[1].

ECH similarly to other volatile organic compounds has been determined in water by gas chromatography (GC), which requires multi-stage and time-consuming procedures previous to the chromatographic analysis. Methods described are most often based on isolation and/or enrichment techniques as dynamic headspace purge and trap[6,7], static headspace[7,8], LLE[8], SPE[5,8], or SPME[8-10].

56 GC determination has been carried out by using detection systems as ECD[5,7,9,12], FID[9,10,12] and

57 MS[10-13].

58 In general, the sensitivity of the reported methods is insufficient for regulatory purposes and

59 in most of cases, the reliable identification of ECH is not ensured (e.g. when using ECD, FID).

60 Lucentini et al.[7] reported a purge and trap method for drinking water, which was validated at 0.1

61 µg/L, although the detection was based on GC/ECD.

62 Gaca and Wejnerowska[12] compared different GC methods for ECH determination in water.

63 Direct aqueous injection and different extraction methods (headspace, striping with adsorption on

64 solid phase, LLE, SPE and SPME) and detectors (FID, ECD, MS) were compared regarding

65 sensitivity, using aqueous standards. They concluded that SPME followed by GC/ECD led to the

66 lowest LODs. The calibration was plotted at the range of concentrations from 4.8 to 400 µg/L.

67 Khan et al.[13] have performed a detailed study of the potential of aqueous-phase aminolysis

68 for the determination of epoxides, considering also the identification performance when using GC

69 with quadrupole mass selective detector. A method was proposed for the determination of ECH in

70 water based on a previous aminolysis reaction with 3,5-difluorobenzylamine (DFBA), solid phase

71 extraction of the DFBA-derivatized samples, followed by silylation of the extract before GC/MS

72 analysis in mode selected ion monitoring (SIM). This was a laborious procedure that required the

73 use of a surrogate standard in order to obtain a reliable method. For this purpose, a chemical

74 analogous compound as epifluorhydrin was selected allowing to reach a LOD of 10 ng/L.

75 Recently, ECH has been determined by GC-MS in food contact surface of epoxy-coated

76 cans by Sung et al[14], after previous extraction with dioxane and derivatization with cyclopentanone

77 and borontrifluorodiethyletherate.

78 Considering the high solubility in water and polar character of ECH, it seems more

79 advisable the use of liquid chromatography (LC) instead of GC for its determination in water. Thus,

80 Sarzanini et al.[15] performed a derivatization reaction with sulfur (IV) (added as anhydrous sodium

81 sulfite) to obtain a product with a terminal sulfonate group, which was suitable to be retained in

82   suppressed anion-exchange chromatography. Despite the previous SPE pre-concentration step using

83   polystyrene-divinylbenzene cartridges, the use of a low selective and sensitive detection technique

84   such as conductivity, did not allow to reach a satisfactory sensitivity, and detection limit was

85   established at 0.6 µg/L. Later, the method selectivity was improved by applying the same reaction,

86   but pre-concentrating with C_{18} SPE cartridges and using ion chromatography with MS detection[16].

87   Five different reaction products were identified, and the LOD was estimated to be 2 µg/L for the

88   most stable specie, due to the presence of interferences.

89   Tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS) coupled to LC has became the most appropriate and

90   sensitive technique to analyse many medium-high polar organic pollutants in water, leading to

91   satisfactory results from both quantification and confirmation purposes[17,18]. The high sensitivity and

92   selectivity of LC/MS/MS can even allow direct injection of water samples, reaching low LODs for

93   many compounds[19,20]. However, a pre-concentration step, normally by solid-phase extraction (SPE),

94   is usually required for the satisfactory determination of sub-ppb levels in multi-residue analysis

95   where a variety of water pollutants like pharmaceuticals[21-24], drugs[24-26] and pesticides[17,23,24,27] have

96   to be determined. The SPE preconcentration can be easily performed in on-line mode facilitating

97   automation in SPE/LC/MS/MS methods[17].

98   In spite of analytical advantages offered by LC/MS/MS, there are still several highly polar

99   compounds, whose determination requires special effort. Thus, large volume injection together with

100   a detailed ionization process optimization was required to quantify and confirm acrylamide residues

101   in water at sub-ppb levels[28]. In other cases, ion-pairing reagents have been required to favour

102   retention in reverse-phase chromatography, thus allowing direct injection of sample and avoiding

103   laborious sample treatments[29]. Other polar compounds, like glyphosate and gluphosinate, required a

104   previous derivatization reaction for their determination in water[30].

105   The purpose of this paper was to develop a new selective and sensitive method based on on-

106   line SPE/LC/MS/MS for ECH determination in water at sub-ppb levels, previous derivatization by

107   an aqueous-phase aminolysis. The method was validated to ensure the accurate quantification and

108   identification of ECH at the low levels required by the EU drinking water legislation[3]. A special

109   emphasis was made to obtain reliable and safe analyte identification by acquiring several selected

110   reaction monitoring (SRM) transitions to reach an adequate number of identification points (IPs) [31].

111

EXPERIMENTAL

Reagents and Chemicals

ECH reference standard (99.5%) was purchased from Dr. Ehrenstorfer (Augsburg, Germany) through Scharlab (Barcelona, Spain) and ECH-d_5 ($\geq$98%) was supplied by Cambridge Isotope Laboratories, Inc. (Andover, MA, USA). Terbuthylamine (99.5%) (tBA), 3,5-difluorobenzylamine (96%) (DFBA) and ferric chloride hexahydrate (99%) ($FeCl_3 \cdot 6H_2O$) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). Acetic acid (>99%) (HAc), formic acid (>98%) (HCOOH), ammonium acetate (98%) (NH_4Ac), acetone for residue analysis, HPLC-grade acetonitrile (ACN) and methanol (MeOH) were purchased from Scharlab. HPLC-grade water was obtained by purifying demineralised water in a Milli-Q Gradient A10 (Millipore, Bedford, MA, USA).

Stock standard solutions of ECH and ECH-d_5 were prepared by dissolving the pure compound in acetone obtaining a final concentration of 10000 mg/L. Intermediate standard solutions at concentration down to 10 mg/L were prepared from stock solutions by dilution with acetone and stored in a freezer at < -18 ºC. Working solutions were prepared daily at various concentrations by diluting with HPLC-grade water the intermediate standard solutions.

Instrumentation

A Quattro Micro triple quadrupole mass spectrometer (Waters, Milford, MA, USA) was interfaced using an orthogonal Z-spray-electrospray ion source to an HPLC system based on a Waters Alliance 2695 (Waters) quaternary pump used for the chromatographic separation, a 233XL autosampler with a loop of 2.5 mL (Gilson, Villiers-le-Bel, France) and a Varian 9012 (Varian, Palo Alto, USA) binary pump used to condition and wash the SPE cartridge.

Nitrogen generated from a pressurized air in a high-purity nitrogen generator (NM30LA 230Vac Gas Station from Peak Scientific, Inchinnan, UK) was employed as drying and nebulising gas. The cone gas and the desolvation gas flows were set to approximately 60 L/h and 600 L/h,

138　respectively. For operation in MS/MS mode, collision gas was Argon 99.995% (Praxair, Valencia,

139　Spain) with a pressure of approximately 3×10^{-3} mbar in the collision cell. Electrospray needle

140　capillary voltage of 3.5 kV was selected in positive ionization mode. The desolvation temperature

141　was set to 350 ºC and the source temperature to 120 ºC. Infusion experiments were performed using

142　the built-in syringe pump directly connected to the ion source at a flow rate of 10 μL/min. Dwell

143　times of 200 ms and scan ranges between 50 and 300 m/z were chosen. A solvent delay of 9 min

144　was selected to give an additional clean-up using the built-in divert valve controlled by the

145　Masslynx NT v 4.0 software (Waters).

146　　　Cartridges used for off-line SPE experiments were Oasis HLB (0.2 g) from Waters. For on-

147　line experiments, C_{18} and polymeric phase Hamilton (PRP), both 10 x 2 mm, 10 μm (Teknokroma,

148　Barcelona, Spain), and Oasis HLB 20 x 2.1 mm, 25 μm (Waters) cartridges were tested.

149　　　LC columns tested for chromatographic separation were: Discovery 50 x 2.1 mm, 5 μm

150　(Sigma); Sunfire 50 x 2.1 mm, 3.5 μm and 5 μm (Waters); Sunfire 100 x 2.1 mm, 3.5 μm (Waters);

151　Atlantis 50 x 2.1 mm and 100 x 2.1 mm, both 5 μm (Waters).

152　　　Masslynx NT v 4.0 (Waters) software was used to process the quantitative data obtained

153　from calibration standards and from water samples.

154

155　**Recommended procedure**

156　　　The derivatization procedure was performed by adding 20 μL of DFBA, 20 μL of

157　$FeCl_3 \cdot 6H_2O$ aqueous solution (6 g/L) and 80 μL of ECH-d_5 (500 μg/L) to 20 mL of water sample,

158　in amber glass vials, leaving them overnight at room temperature. Then, the derivatized samples

159　were filtered through 0.45 μm nylon filters before chromatographic analysis to remove undesirable

160　water particles and iron traces. A 2.5 mL aliquot of derivatized sample was directly injected into the

161　SPE/LC(ESI)MS/MS system using a C_{18} cartridge, 10 x 2 mm, 10 μm (Teknokroma) for

162　preconcentration, and a Sunfire C_{18} column, 50 x 2.1 mm i.d., 5μm particle size (Waters) for

163　chromatographic separation.

164   On-line SPE/LC was performed as follows: firstly, the SPE cartridge was conditioned with

165   acetonitrile at a flow rate of 1 mL/min for 1 min, following by 1 min of water. An aliquot of 2.5 mL

166   of derivatized sample was pre-concentrated into the cartridge and it washed with water at 1 mL/min

167   for 3 min. Then, the sample was transferred in backflush mode to the analytical column, starting the

168   LC gradient. A binary water / methanol (both 0.1 mM NH_4Ac) gradient elution was applied

169   changing linearly the percentage of methanol as follows: 0 min, 5%; 2 min 5%; 5 min, 45%; 7 min,

170   90%; 8 min, 90%; 8.10 min, 5%. The flow rate was kept at 0.2 mL/min and the chromatographic

171   run time was 15 min.

172   Quantification was performed by using the internal standard (IS) procedure, and calibration

173   was carried out with standards prepared in water subjected to the same on-line preconcentration

174   applied to the samples. ECH-d_5 was used as IS added to the water samples before the derivatization

175   step. It was crucial to prepare all aqueous standard solutions daily due to the quickly degradation of

176   this analyte in water.

177

178   **Validation study**

179   Method validation was performed following European SANCO guidelines

180   recommendations[32]. Linearity was studied by injecting aqueous standards in triplicate at eight

181   different concentrations, in the range from 0.05 to 50 µg/L. Satisfactory linearity was assumed

182   when the correlation coefficient (r) was higher than 0.99, based on analyte peak areas measurement,

183   and the residuals lower than 30 %.

184   Accuracy (expressed as recovery, in %) and precision (expressed as relative standard

185   deviation, in %) were estimated by analyzing three types of water samples (drinking water

186   treatment plant, DWTP; distribution system water, DSW; drinking water, DW) spiked at two

187   concentration levels each: 0.1 µg/L and 1.0 µg/L. All recovery experiments were performed in

188   triplicate for each type of water samples. Quantification was performed by internal calibration with

189   standards in the range 0.05 – 2.5 µg/L for the low level and 0.05 - 10 µg/L for the high level. The

190   limit of quantification (LOQ) objective was established as the lowest concentration level that was

191   validated with satisfactory results. The limit of detection (LOD) was estimated as the lowest

192   concentration that the analytical procedure can reliably differentiate from background levels, and it

193   was calculated for a signal-to-noise ratio of three from the chromatograms of samples spiked at the

194   lowest analyte concentration tested.

195   The safe identification of ECH was carried out by quantification of the analyte using the

196   quantification (m/z 236 > 92) and confirmation transitions (m/z 236 > 127, 236 > 218, 238 > 127,

197   238 > 94) and calculating the ratio between all calculated concentrations. Detection was considered

198   as positive when these ratios fall in the range 0.8 to 1.2 (i.e. maximum concentration ratio deviation

199   of ± 20%).

200

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In our first experiments, it was considered the use of two primary amines (tBA and DFBA) as aminolysis derivatizing agents for the determination of ECH in water samples. The epoxides ring opening is usually carried out by aminolysis at high temperatures or at room/low temperatures in the presence of a catalyst. Preliminary experiments indicated that tBA led to an unstable derivatization product, which was thermally degraded at room temperatures and even when the derivative was kept in the fridge. When DFBA was used as derivatizing agent, results were more satisfactory. In consequence, DFBA was selected and aqueous-phase aminolysis was carried out in presence of Fe^{3+} according to Khan *et al*[13]. **Figure 1** shows the aminolysis of ECH with DFBA and Fe^{3+} as catalyst.

MS and MS/MS optimization

The positive electrospray spectrum of a DFBA-derivatized ECH reference standard of 2.5 µg/mL in ACN:water (50:50 v/v) is shown in **Figure 2a**. Only the *m/z* range around the protonated derivatized molecule is depicted; otherwise the excess of derivatizing agent would dominate the mass spectrum. Two relevant peaks, at *m/z* 236 and *m/z* 238, which corresponded to the $[M+H]^+$ ions with ^{35}Cl and ^{37}Cl respectively, were obtained, both optimized at a cone voltage 25 V. When *m/z* 236 was used as precursor, three product ions were observed in the MS/MS spectrum. The most abundant fragment (*m/z* 127) was optimized at 20 eV collision energy (**Figure 2b**) and corresponded to difluorobenzyl ion. Two less abundant fragments were optimized at 15 eV and corresponded to *m/z* 218 and *m/z* 92 (**Figure 2c**). The proposed fragmentation pathway is shown in **Figure 3**, which is in agreement with the fragments observed in the MS/MS spectra. Taking advantage of the one chlorine atom presence in the ECH molecule, *m/z* 238 was also used as precursor ion obtaining the three product ions expected according to the fragmentation pathway proposed (*m/z* 127, 220 and 94). In this way, more SRM transitions could be monitored increasing the reliability in the identification process. Full-acquisition and MS/MS spectra for ECH-d$_5$ were

227 consistent with the fragmentation pathway proposed in this work, because losses observed for ECH-

228 d_5 (precursor ion *m/z* 241) confirmed the presence of the five deuterium atoms in the less abundant

229 fragments (*m/z* 223 and 97), whereas no deuterium was present in the *m/z* 127 fragment.

230 The experimental MS conditions and relative abundances of the product ions are

231 summarized in **Table 1**. In spite of its lower abundance, the transition *m/z* 236>92 was selected for

232 quantification instead of *m/z* 236>127 due to the greater background noise of the later (**Figure 4**).

233 The notable difference in the transitions chemical noise (see relative S/N ratios in **Table 1**) seems to

234 be a consequence of the higher specificity of the *m/z* 92 fragment in comparison to *m/z* 127, which

235 was originated from the derivatizing agent used.

236

237 **Derivatization optimization**

238 The derivatization procedure applied was based on Khan *et al*[13]. Initially, a sample volume

239 of 20 mL of water and 20 µL of DFBA were fixed. Then, variables as content of catalyst, reaction

240 time and reaction temperature were optimized using an aqueous reference standard of 1.0 µg/L.

241 Fe^{3+}, added as $FeCl_3 \cdot 6H_2O$, was used to catalyze the ECH aminolysis. Different catalyst amounts

242 were tested, selecting a final concentration of 0.02 mM (20 µL of 6 g/L $FeCl_3 \cdot 6H_2O$ added to 20

243 mL of water sample). Reaction time and temperature influence were studied carrying out

244 experiments (n=7) for ECH at 1.0 µg/L (kept in dark for 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 hours and overnight, and at

245 room temperature, 35 and 45 ºC). The best results in terms of sensitivity corresponded to

246 derivatization at room temperature overnight, at 35 ºC for 6 hours, and at 45 ºC for 3 hours.

247 However, repeatability was worse when heating at 35 ºC and 45 ºC (RSD>30%), possibly due to the

248 faster degradation of the derivatization product. Therefore, the optimum conditions chosen for

249 derivatization reaction were overnight and room temperature. Despite the better precision reached

250 in this case (RSD always below 10%), the addition of ECH-d_5 as IS was necessary for more

251 satisfactory and reproducible results.

252

LC optimization

Different mobile phases (mixtures of water with MeOH or ACN as organic modifiers) adding different amounts of additives (NH_4Ac and HCOOH) were tested using four analytical columns with different retention mechanisms and/or particle size (Atlantis 5 µm, Discovery 5 µm, SunFire 5 µm and 3.5 µm). ECH-DFBA, similarly to other compounds determined in positive ionization mode, presented better ionization yield when methanol was used as organic modifier due to its protic character. Besides, more intense and narrow peaks were obtained using MeOH instead of ACN. Regarding additives, small amounts of NH_4Ac (0.1 mM) added, to both water and MeOH, resulted in better peak shape and ionization efficiency. Better peak shapes were observed for Sunfire columns, although the use of small particle size (3.5 µm) was discarded due to the pressure enhancements and worse peak shape after a few injections. Therefore, Sunfire column with a particle size of 5 µm (50 x 2.1 mm) was selected to carry out chromatographic separation.

In order to increase the sensitivity of the method, direct large volume injection (LVI) using different volume sample injection loops (250, 500 and 750 µL) was tested employing larger chromatographic columns (Atlantis 5 µm and Sunfire 3.5 µm, both 100 x 2.1 mm). No satisfactory results were obtained regarding peak shape and sensitivity objective (0.1 µ/L).

Then, on-line SPE pre-concentration was considered in order to reach the appropriate sensitivity. Three different stationary phases were tested for cartridges (PRP, C_{18} and Oasis HLB), using 50 x 2.1 mm, 5 µm Sunfire as analytical column. Better results were obtained when using C_{18} cartridges. Different sample loops were tested (500, 750 and 2500 µL) for sample loading. Adequate sensitivity to determine and confirm the presence of ECH at the LOQ objective (0.1 µg/L) was only possible when 2500 µL were injected.

It was required to filter all samples and standards prior to the SPE/LC/MS/MS analysis to preserve Fe (III) traces and other particles that could negatively affect columns filling. For this purpose, different particle-size nylon filters were tested (0.45 µm from Sigma and Scharlab, and 0.2

278   μm from Scharlab and Albet). Sigma 0.45 μm filters were chosen due to compound losses observed

279   with the other filters employed.

280

281   **Validation study**

282   Linearity of the SPE/LC/MS/MS method was satisfactory in the range 0.05 - 50 μg/L, with

283   correlation coefficients higher than 0.999 and residuals lower than 30%. Precision (repeatability)

284   and accuracy (expressed as recovery) were estimated by analyzing (n=3) different blank samples

285   spiked at two concentration levels each (0.1 and 1.0 μg/L): two DWTP, two DSW and one DW.

286   Results obtained are reported in **Table 2**. The method was found to have satisfactory precision and

287   accuracy with RSD < 20 % and recoveries between 70 and 103 % for all samples at the two spiking

288   levels. The method was also highly specific as no relevant signals were observed in the blanks at the

289   analyte's retention times. LOD of 0.03 μg/L was estimated from chromatograms at the 0.1 μg/L

290   level.

291   Considering absolute responses (without internal standard), we could evaluate matrix effects

292   in the different water samples tested, with a general trend to signal enhancement being observed in

293   some samples. Thus, a slight signal enhancement was observed in DWTP2 at 1.0 μg/L (recovery

294   130 %). In the sample DSW2, a matrix enhancement was also found leading to recoveries of 140

295   and 180 % for 0.1 and 1.0 μg/L fortification levels, respectively. In these samples the use of IS

296   calibration was mandatory for a correct quantification. In general, precision was also improved

297   when ECH-d_5 is used (see **Table 2**).

298   **Figure 5** shows the SRM chromatograms for the quantification (Q) and confirmation (q_1)

299   transitions of a HPLC-grade water blank, a reference standard and the DWTP1 sample spiked both

300   at 0.1 μg/L. It can be seen the robustness of the analyte and IS retention times as well as the good

301   sensitivity at LOQ level that allow to quantify and confirm ECH in water samples at sub-ppb levels.

302

303

Confirmation

An advantage associated with the use of tandem mass spectrometry is the possibility to acquire different SRM transitions to confirm the presence of analytes in the sample. Following EU guidelines recommendation, in order to assure analyte identification in samples analyzed, a minimum of 3 IPs are necessary[31]. This number of IPs can be obtained in a LC-MS/MS method with the acquisition of, at least, two SRM transitions. The method developed in this paper allows acquiring up to five transitions for ECH safe identification in a single run. However, due to the great differences between transitions intensity, confirmation at low levels ($\leq$ 0.1 µg/L) could be only carried out with two out of five transitions, concretely *m/z* 236>92 for quantification and *m/z* 236>127 for confirmation, although reaching sufficient number of IPs. Anyway, these two transitions are enough to obtain the required IPs. Nevertheless, for ECH concentrations around and higher than 0.5 µg/L, confirmation of positive samples can be carried out making use of all the five transitions acquired.

The method was applied to ten water samples (three drinking water treatment plant, four distribution system water and three drinking water) from the Castellón province, but no ECH was detected. Quality control samples prepared from drinking water spiked at the two levels (0.1 and 1.0 µg/L) were included in each sample batch. Satisfactory recoveries (between 70-110%) were obtained, ensuring in this way the reliability of the method. In absence of positive samples, **Figure 6** shows SRM chromatograms for all transitions corresponding to a 1.0 µg/L standard and to the sample DSW1 fortified at the same concentration**.** Concentration ratios, calculated from the ECH concentrations obtained for every confirmation transition and from that calculated for the quantification transition, are also shown for the DSW sample (**Figure 6b**). All Q/q ratios were in the range 0.85 - 1.09. So, maximum deviations were $\leq$ 15 %, which allows a reliable and safe confirmation of ECH in samples[31].

CONCLUSIONS

Determination of epichlorohydrin in water at sub-ppb levels is rather problematic due to its highly polar character and low molecular size. This forces to apply a derivatization step when using both liquid and gas chromatography, although GC-based methods typically require more sample manipulation to make compatible the analyte with the chromatographic requirements and to reach the sensitivity required.

In this paper, we have developed sensitive, selective and accurate methodology based on a rapid on-line SPE/LC coupled to MS/MS (ESI) preceded by a simple derivatization step with DFBA, able to determine ECH in water at low concentrations. The optimized method was validated at 0.1 and 1 µg/L levels in different types of water samples, reaching limits of detection of 0.03 µg/L. The use of isotope-labelled ECH-d_5 as internal standard leads to a reliable quantification, minimizing potential analytical errors along the derivatization process, as well as instrumental deviations, also allowing compensating matrix effects that may negatively affect to quantification in LC/MS/MS-based methods.

The acquisition of up to five specific MS/MS SRM transitions together with the evaluation of their intensity ratios, gives a high degree of reliability to the identification of ECH in water samples, minimizing the risk of reporting false positives.

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404

405　　**Table 1.** MS/MS optimized conditions for the determination of epichlorohydrin.

406

Compound	Precursor ion (m/z)	Cone voltage (V)	Product ion (m/z)	Collision energy (eV)	Relative abundance	Relative S/N ratios
ECH-DFBA	236	25	92 (Q)	15	3	100
			127 (q_1)	20	100	23
			218 (q_2)	15	5	13
	238		94 (q_3)	15	1	25
			127 (q_4)	20	30	20
ECH-d$_5$-DFBA	241	25	97 (Q)	15	3	75
			127 (q)	20	100	100

407
408　　(Q) - Quantification transition, (q) – confirmation transition.
409

410 **Table 2.** Average recoveries and relative standard deviations for the SPE/LC/MS/MS method

411 applied to five different water samples spiked with ECH at two levels (n=3).

412

Sample	0.1 µg/L		1.0 µg/L	
	Recovery (%)	RSD (%)	Recovery (%)	RSD (%)
DWTP1	70	12	95	6
DWTP2	77	9	94	5
DSW 1	86	7	98	5
DSW2	80	20	102	2
DW	103	14	102	5

413

414 DWTP, drinking water treatment plant; DSW, distribution system water; DW, drinking water.

415

416   **FIGURE CAPTIONS**

417

418   **Figure 1.** Aminolysis of epichlorohydrin with DFBA and Fe(III) acting as a catalyst.

419

420   **Figure 2.** (a) Positive ESI mass spectrum of derivatized ECH-DFBA, cone voltage 25 V (b)

421   Product ion spectrum for *m/z* 236 at 20 eV and (c) at 15 eV.

422

423   **Figure 3.** Fragmentation pathway proposed for the $[M+H]^+$ ion of ECH–DFBA.

424

425   **Figure 4.** Background noise in SRM chromatograms for a 2500 μL injection of 0.05 μg/L

426   derivatized ECH reference standard. (q_1): 236>127; (Q): 236>92.

427

428   **Figure 5**. LC/MS/MS SRM chromatograms for derivatized ECH and ECH-d_5 (a) HPLC-grade

429   water blank (b) Spiked DWTP1 sample at 0.1 μg/L (c) Reference standard in water at 0.1 μg/L.

430   Top: ECH-d_5 chromatograms. Bottom: ECH chromatograms.

431

432   **Figure 6.** SRM chromatograms for all the selected transitions of (a) ECH reference standard and (b)
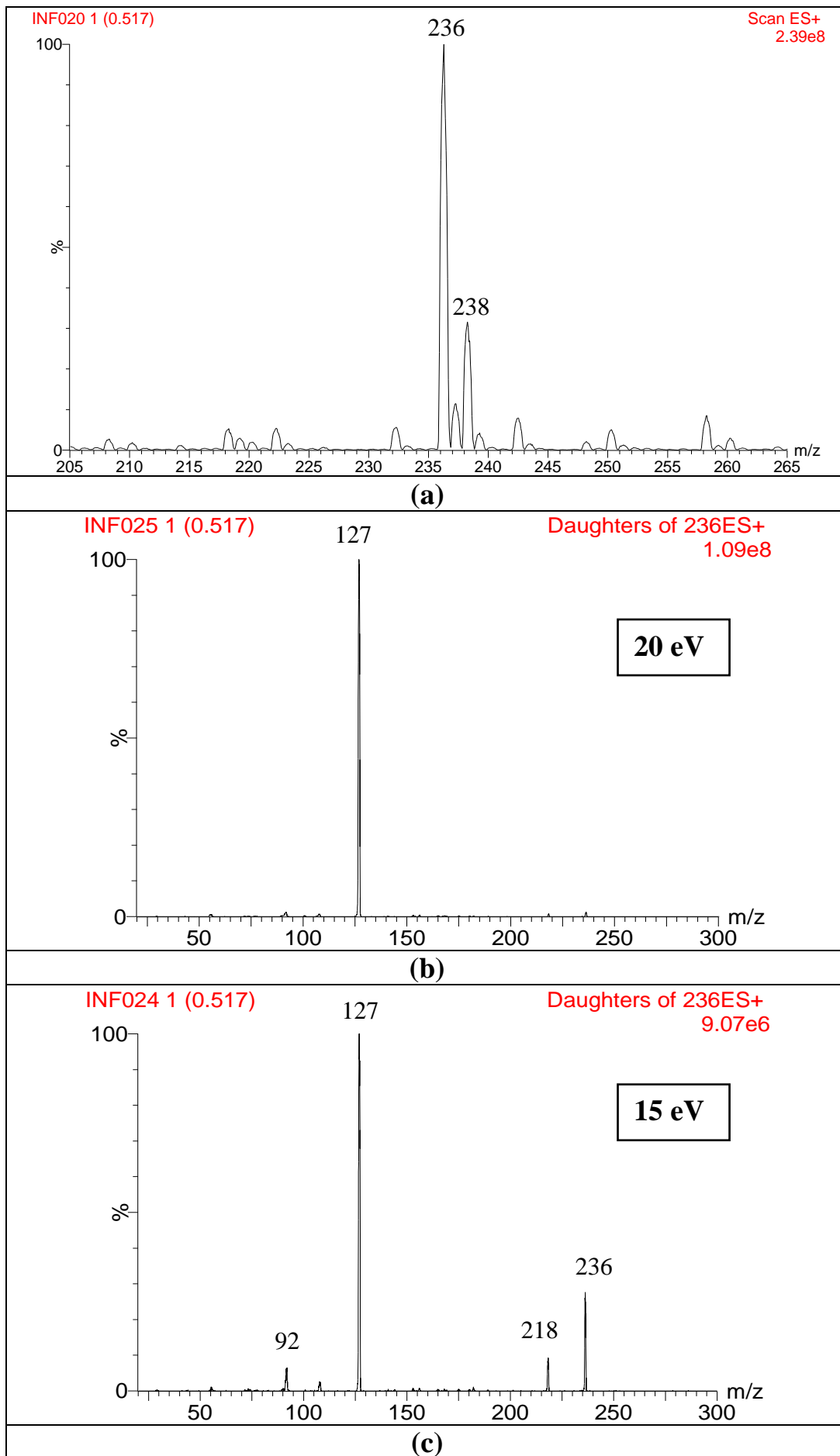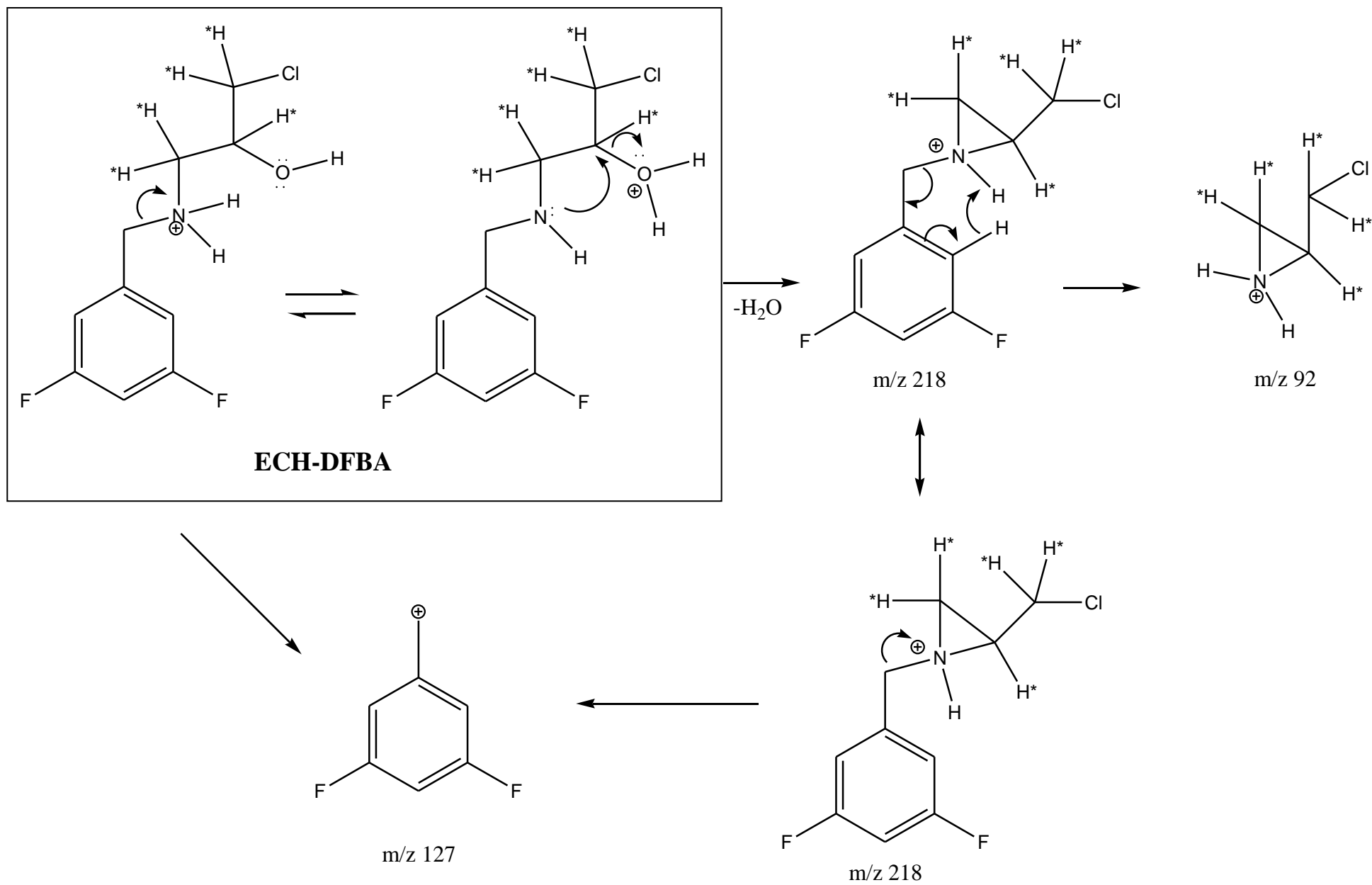
433   spiked DSW1 sample, both at 1.0 μg/L.

434

Epichlorohydrin   DFBA   ECH-DFBA

Figure 1

Figure 2

438

439

ECH-DFBA

m/z 218

m/z 92

m/z 127

m/z 218
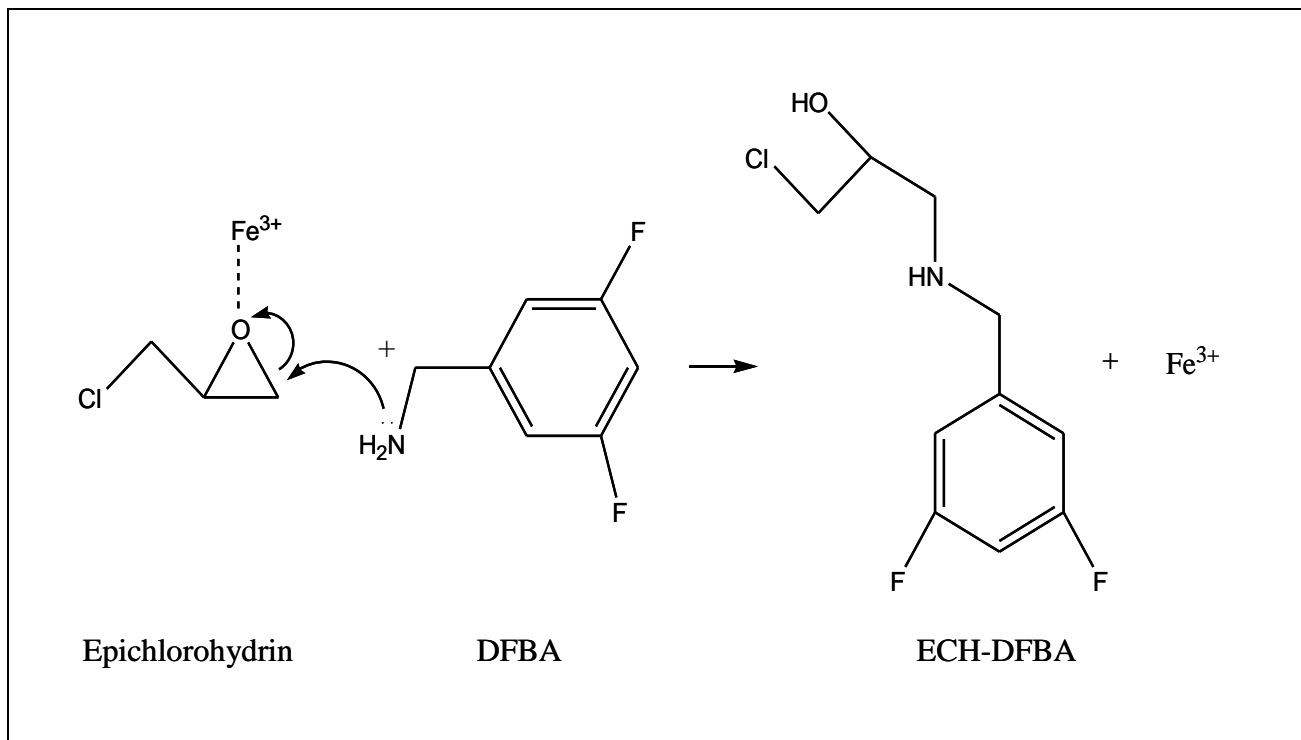
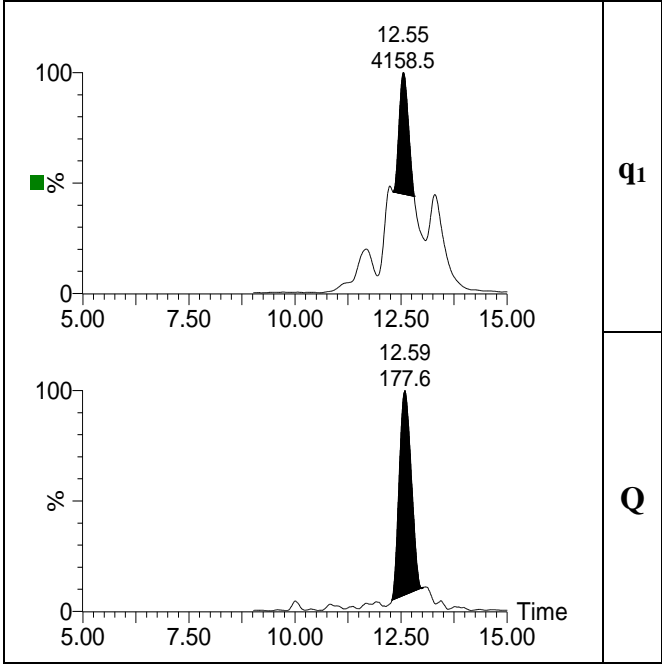H*: ^1H in ECH-DFBA molecule; ^2H in ECH-d$_5$-DFBA molecule.
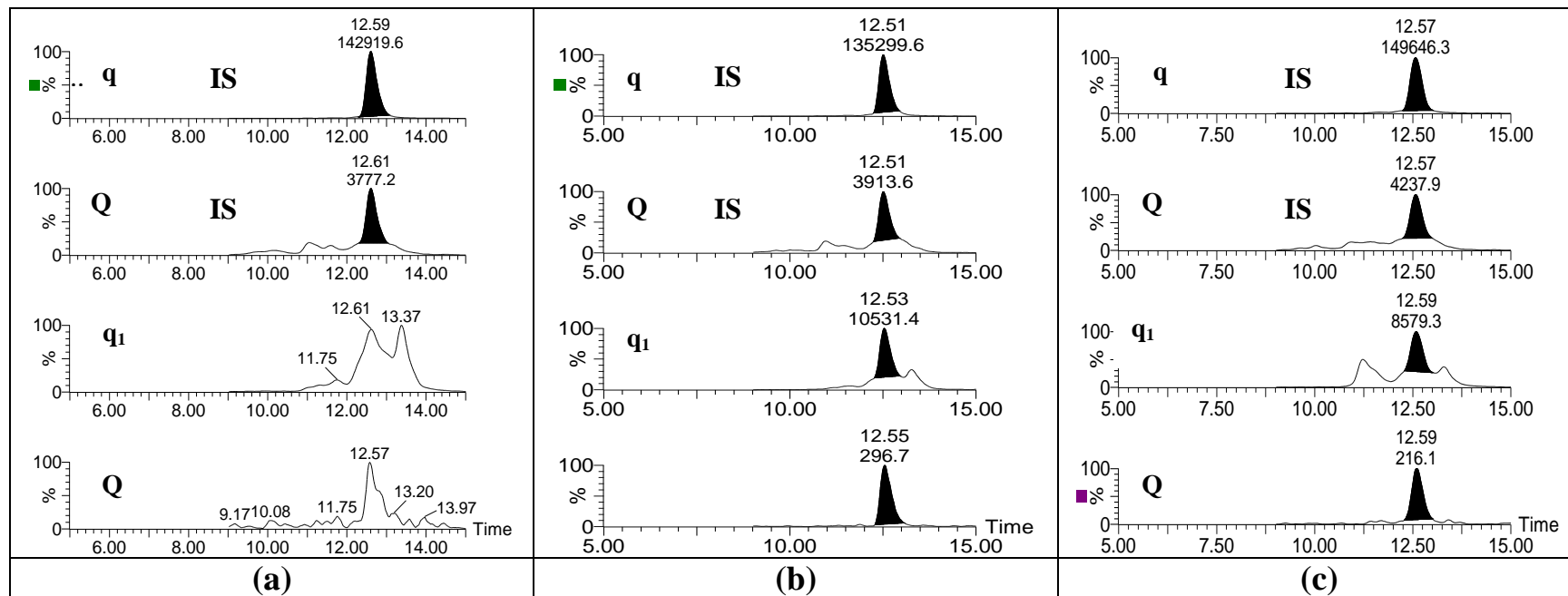
Figure 3

25

443

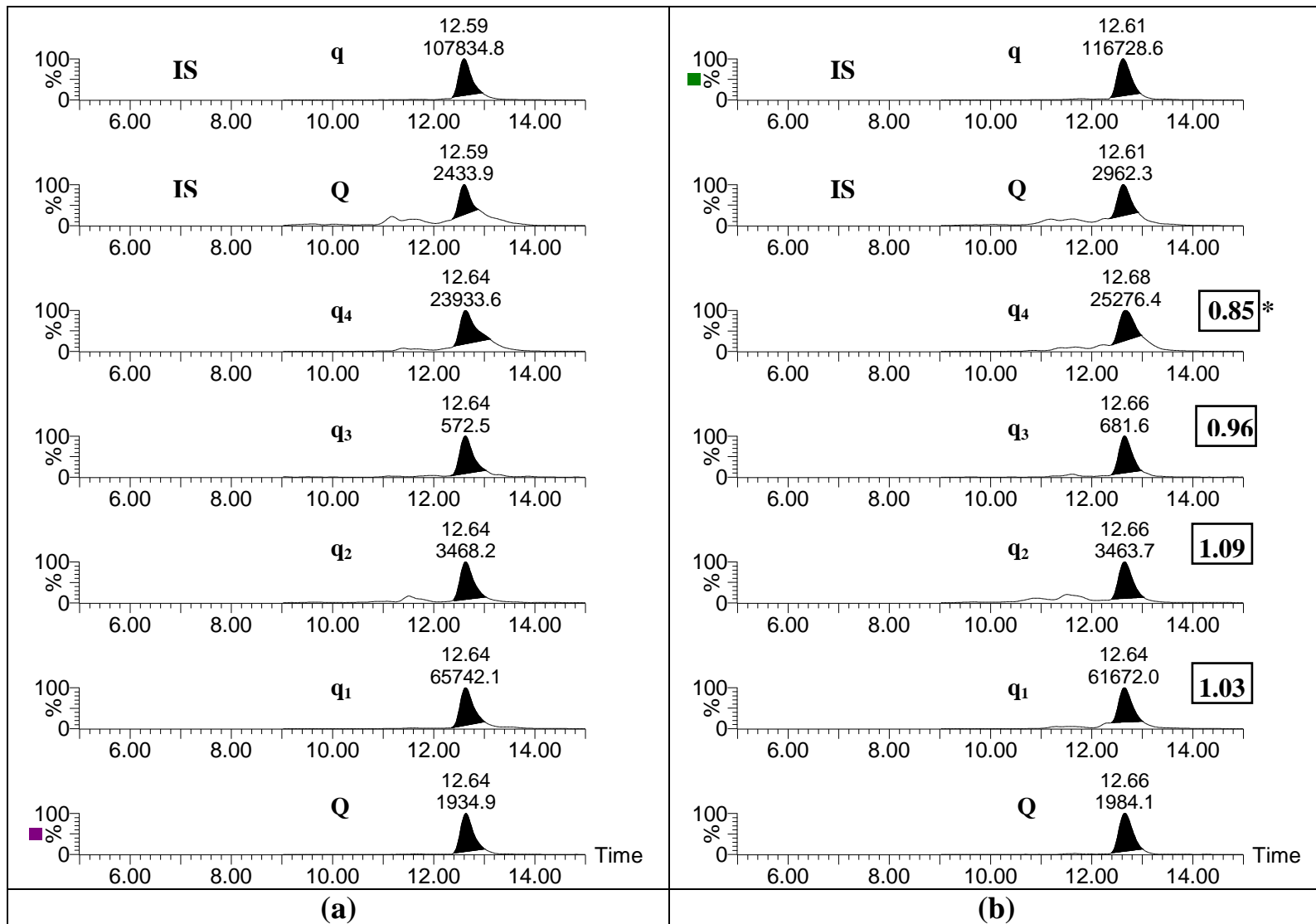444

Figure 4

(Q) - Quantification transition, (q) – confirmation transition.

Figure 5

450

451   * Q/q Concentration ratios.

452   (Q) - Quantification transition, (q) – confirmation transition.

453

454   **Figure 6**