

The Use of Acoustic Effects for the Prevention and Elimination of Fires as an Element of Modern Environmental Technologies

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Abstract – The paper studies the current state of the art in the use of acoustic effects in the prevention and elimination of fires. For this purpose, the literature review method was applied. The well-known approaches to fire extinguishing and their impact on the environment are considered. Multifaceted studies by a wide range of scientists on the possibilities of the acoustic effect in fire extinguishing are noted. The analysis of literary sources showed the negative impact of both the fires themselves and the majority of fire extinguishing agents on the environment. Variants of the use of the acoustic effect for the prevention and elimination of fires of various combustible substances are considered. The influence of the frequency of acoustic waves, scanning speed, power, and other acoustic parameters on flame extinguishing is noted. The possibilities of using a deep neural network for flame detection have been studied. The limitations and advantages of acoustic technology and further prospects for its development as an element of environmental technologies are shown.

Keywords – Acoustics; deep neural network; environmental technology; fire; pollution

Nomenclature

AM	Amplitude Modulation	–
SoM	System on Module	–
R-CNN	Region-based Convolutional Neural Networks	–
VSAT	Very Small Aperture Terminal	–

1. INTRODUCTION

Computer modeling and modern technologies play a key role in understanding phenomena in many fields of science [1]–[4]. In practice, acoustic waves have many applications [5], [6],

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one of which is the use of acoustic waves to extinguish flames. However, this is a novel solution that is in the testing phase [7]–[9]. Currently, appropriately selected chemicals are still applied to extinguish flames [10]–[12]. Therefore, researchers have been working on the comparative evaluation of the firefighting properties of fire protection agents and their composition [13]–[16], biodegradation of petroleum hydrocarbons or technological risk [17], [18].

A novel acoustic technology is of great interest to people involved in fire protection. In this field, the works of researchers from Europe, Asia and America, but in this article, due to the limited volume, it is focused on the works of European researchers. Through the analysis of the literature review, it becomes possible to review the knowledge in this field, including solutions for extinguishing flames with the usage of acoustic waves, which appeared in scientific works. They can constitute the state of the current knowledge of the analysed subject. In addition, the literature review method allows one to show the trends and prospects for the potential application of acoustic technology in the future for extinguishing flames in open and closed spaces (e.g., preliminary research for extinguishing fires of oil and oil products), considering the limitations of this technology. The projected aim is primarily to extinguish flames in a closed space where the amount of oxygen is limited compared to an open space.

2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Due to the review nature of the paper, several research methods were used in this paper. The application of each of them was analysed by evaluating its usefulness in achieving specific research objectives. Elements of system analysis were used to develop a conceptual approach (including determining the structure of the issue under study). To present the possibility of using acoustic effects for the prevention and elimination of fires as an element of modern environmental technologies, in addition to the literature review method, the method of individual cases and the comparative method were used, which proved to be useful in the analysis of innovative solutions.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Research on the Use of Acoustic Waves to Extinguish Flames

Since many academic and research institutions around the world are conducting research into the use of acoustic waves for flame suppression, this indicates the hopes placed in this technology. The results of the conducted research are included in some articles and patent applications on the possibility of using acoustic waves for flame extinguishing. In 2020, multiple media took interest in this topic [19]–[24]. This method appears to be safer (due to its non-invasive nature) and less expensive than currently known flame suppression techniques. One prototype of the acoustic extinguisher is shown in Fig. 1. Its technical properties are described in [25].

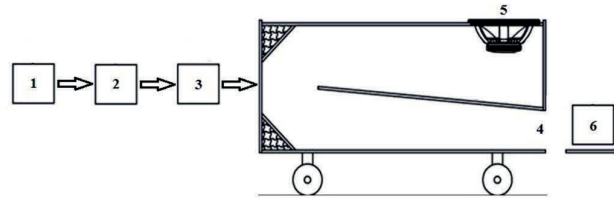


Fig. 1. Elements of the high-power acoustic extinguisher: 1 – generator; 2 – modulator; 3 – power amplifier; 4 – output; 5 – sound source; 6 – flame source.

Information on the identification of a technogenic emergency in the acoustic radiation of a hazard zone [26] and the development of a model of the burning substance in the burning seat [27], as well as acoustic methods was presented in the works of Ukrainian scientists [28]–[30]. The effectiveness of acoustic waves depends on the level of pressure turbulence to disrupt the flame front, extend it, and extinguish it [25], [31]–[33]. This is the result of the cumulative acoustic effect of mean flow and oscillatory perturbations [32]. In practice, flame extension affects its aerodynamic distortion [34]. The deviation of one of the ambient parameters acts to change the direction of propagation of the flame front. Consequently, this affects the increase of heat emission up to the flammability limit [31], [35]–[37]. The sound pressure, depending on the power delivered to the sound source, increases linearly up to a certain point, which allows the regression function model to be used within a certain range, as shown, *inter alia*, in [38]–[40]. In fact, the lower the frequency, the easier it is to extinguish flames [32]. As the frequency decreases, a decrease in the power that must be delivered to the sound source to extinguish the flames is observed. Similarly, decreasing the distance between the device output and the flame source results in a decrease in the power that must be delivered to the speaker to extinguish the flames [37], [41]. The value of the average flow effect varies with the level of sound pressure (it does not depend on the excitation frequency) [42]. The flame breaks into pieces when the level of the critical sound pressure value is exceeded. When using a screen, for short distances between the screen and the probe, a pressure increase can be observed throughout the entire measurement range [43].

Since 2008, the acoustic flame extinguishing technique has been of interest to the DARPA Agency (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) [44]. This research used liquid fuel and loudspeakers located on both sides of the tank. The generation of acoustic waves allowed the flames to be suppressed and completely extinguished.

Information on extinguishing the combustion process using acoustic waves is given in [6]. Radomiak *et al.* determined the limiting value of the acoustic pressure, below which no flame extinction was observed [35]. In practice, when using low-power waves (20–30 W), the operating range of this technology is very limited – a few cm [35]. Only the use of acoustic waves with high and very high acoustic power allows significantly increase the operating range of the technology [45]. The paper [45] describes an acoustic extinguisher that is capable of extinguishing flames at a distance of less than 2 meters from the sound wave output. The authors analyzed the effects of acoustic wave parameters, distance from device output, and frequency on flame extinguishment.

Moreover, experimental results on the possibility of extinguishing flames using low-frequency sinusoidal acoustic waves (below 21 Hz) are given in the paper [9]. In this paper, in addition to the characteristics of sound pressure as a function of the power delivered to the extinguisher, the characteristics of sound pressure as a function of distance from the extinguisher output and the characteristics of sound pressure and electrical power delivered

to the extinguisher as a function of frequency were included. This article also contains results showing the possibilities of extinguishing flames with the use of the frequency sweep technique. The novelty is the extinguishing tests using the frequency sweep technique – analysis of selected cases (the frequency was changed in a certain time interval from a fixed initial value to the final one). These experiments determined, among other things, the power required to be delivered to the loudspeaker to extinguish the flames, depending on the parameters set (frequency range and tuning time). Wilk-Jakubowski showed that flames can be extinguished using variable frequency acoustic waves, which may have practical applications in extinguishing flames originating from different materials [9].

It should be noted that acoustic fire extinguishers were also the subject of some inventions, several of which appeared after 2010. Their advantage is that they extinguish flames in both closed and open spaces. Some of them allow for improved flame extinguishing performance when the phases of the acoustic waves emitted at the output by the front and back surfaces of the sound source membrane are different [46]. The solution [47] uses flame extinguishing in addition to the acoustic power of the waves emitted by the surfaces of the sound source membranes for extinguishing. In turn, a chamber in the form of a tube is attached to the device housing [48], which serves as a waveguide and collimator of acoustic waves. In practice, low-frequency, modulated and focused acoustic waves with high acoustic power can be successfully used to extinguish small fires [9].

As indicated in [49], the inconvenience of currently known solutions is the need to use acoustic panels connected together with an acoustic baffle attached to them. In turn, the use of materials that strongly absorb acoustic waves allows us to eliminate the negative impact of destructive interference on the fire extinguishing process and has a positive effect on the operation of the device by reducing unwanted vibrations. The proposed solution, through the proper placement of acoustic wave-absorbing materials, makes it possible to suppress only the unfavorable part of the energy emitted by the back surface of the loudspeaker diaphragm, which was not used to extinguish the flames.

Alternatively, for the purpose of extinguishing the flame, the solutions described in [50]–[52] seem to be useful. The first invention relates to the generation of vortex rings, whose visualization is achieved by means of smoke, condensed steam, gases, macroscopic particles, and special light sources. The remotely ignited wick extinguisher described in [51] uses air movement to extinguish the flame of a lit wick. A receiver acts on the circuit. Due to the generation of a pulse of appropriate amplitude and duration, the transmitter diaphragm is displaced, so that a volume of air is displaced, which translates into extinguishing the flame of the lit wick. In this way, the user can extinguish the flame of a lit wick lamp at a distance.

As in the patent application for methods and systems to perturb phenomena with waves presented in [53], the solution [52] concerns the process of extinguishing, expanding, and controlling flames using an acoustic apparatus. The amplitude, frequency, and standing wave mode are indicated as factors that determine the intensity of the flames. The creation of an acoustic current is the result of the application of an appropriately selected amplitude and frequency. This current contributes to the intensity of the flame through turbulent combustion. The interference phenomenon is the result of the association of sources, which, along with the acoustic current, increases the efficiency of reagent mixing, resulting in an acoustic barrier against the flame.

Moreover, the results presented in several publications show that modulated waveforms can be used to extinguish flames. In the paper [54], Wilk-Jakubowski *et al.* reported the necessary power delivered to the sound source and the influence of sound pressure on the extinguishing flames, depending on the distance from the extinguisher output, in the range of 50 cm to 130 cm (the step was equal to 10 cm). Sinusoidal waves modulated by a triangular waveform

and triangular waves were used for this purpose [54]. In turn, in the paper [55] they present results on flame extinguishing capabilities using sinusoidal waves and *AM*-modulated waves (sinusoidal waves modulated by a rectangular waveform) for several selected frequencies. An inversely proportional relationship has been experimentally shown between the decrease in sound pressure with increasing distance from the device output. These articles emphasize that it is possible to build a system consisting of multiple acoustic extinguishers and to use mechanisms that are indispensable for the propagation of acoustic waves. The solutions used may include properly placed interference screens, baffles, and acoustic panels that can improve the performance of the acoustic extinguisher due to constructive interference [54]. It is crucial that the sound waves are directed toward the flame source.

Numerous articles can be found in the literature on the response of a mixed laminar flame to low-amplitude acoustic forcing [56], harmonic disturbances in laminar immiscible flames [57], thermoacoustic oscillations in a ducted flame [58], hydrogen combustion in a transverse acoustic field [59], application of acoustic waves to combustion inhibition and turbulent combustion analysis [60], [61], effect of curvature on diffusion flame extinction [62] and acoustic wave interaction with flames considering physical properties [63], [64]. Based on the research on combustion presented above, it is possible to conclude that acoustic waves can be used to extinguish flames, while combustion can occur in a discontinuous way [34], [45], [62]–[65].

The combustion rate depends on the frequency of the acoustic waves [66]. Furthermore, using an intelligent module, the fire extinguisher may be automatically activated when flames are detected [25], [55]. Information on this topic will be presented in the next section of this paper.

3.2. The Use of a Deep Neural Network for Flame Detection

An innovative approach to extinguishing flames is, in addition to the use of acoustic waves, to apply a deep neural network to determine if a fire has occurred. Such an intelligent module can be part of the acoustic extinguisher equipment. If flames are detected, the extinguisher may automatically be activated to extinguish them (at the current stage of acoustic technology development, research in this field is ongoing). Wireless links can be applied for communication [67], [68], including, e.g., inexpensive VSATs that provide communication from remote and hard-to-reach locations. This is important because increased emergency management expenditures are recorded year after year [69]. Robots find applications in crisis management [70], [71]. Such terminals have proven their worth during natural disasters, as exemplified by the case of Japan [72], [73]. When other systems fail and ground infrastructure is destroyed, satellite systems can be applied to communicate with evacuees, as well as to recover communications, and is then often the only way to provide communications, as evidenced in Japan [74]–[76]. When using satellite links, it is crucial to take into account the natural factors affecting the propagation of the radio signal [77]–[80].

It should be noted that the advantage of using artificial intelligence is the possibility of activating the system without human involvement, which is particularly important for the protection of human life and health. The benefits of applying neural networks include the relatively low cost of purchasing components and the high efficiency of flame detection [25]. In practice, several different properties are taken for flame detection. They are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. PROPERTIES FOR FIRE DETECTION TECHNIQUES

Properties
colour
dynamics
flickering properties
shape
texture
combined features, processing techniques

Artificial intelligence can be particularly helpful for flame detection wherever environmental factors, such as temperature or dust presence, would prevent the use of commonly known sensors [54], [55]. The deep neural networks section of the paper [55] describes a system that may operate as a standalone platform as well as interface with other modules (e.g., Arduino). It is equipped with a 16-bit processor and two 64-bit RISC-V processors. The fire extinguisher may be controlled discretely. The advantage is the speed of operation (the computation time is about 10 ms). The algorithm consists of the following several steps [55]: (1) System initialization and preparation of the peripherals of the AI HAT (Artificial Intelligence HAT) module for data exchange; (2) Reading images from cameras and feeding them to the inputs of the deep neural network; (3) Processing and classification of data for flame detection by the deep neural network; and (4) Signalling flame detection (if applicable), notifying relevant services of the location of the fire (including sending an image), and activating the acoustic system to extinguish the flames. In practice, when the deep neural network detects flames, the pixel coordinates will be returned. The program contours a rectangular frame around the flames, mapping the pixels on which the flames are detected.

In the paper [25], Wilk-Jakubowski *et al.* presented an example of a kit consisting of the SoM and a reference backplane, in which the experimental results of flame extinguishing using sinusoidal waves modulated by rectangular waveforms (AM modulation) are provided in the first part. In practice, a deep neural network can be integrated into a fire suppression system without the use of temperature and smoke sensors, although these sensors can also be connected to the system [25].

Similarly, Ivanov *et al.* provided an example of the use of deep neural networks for flame detection [81]. The *MobileNet* architecture was used for this purpose. Such networks can be learned from both static images and video streams [82]–[85]. Static images may be applied to learn neural networks, and then the networks can be tested based on the video stream captured from the cameras, which is particularly applicable when real fires occur [82], [85]. One can use, among other things, the Mask R-CNN [86]. The system consists of multiple components (including a computer module, a USB camera, and an image processing unit). Since the hardware is based on a Raspberry Pi board to which the camera is connected, there is support for multiple operating systems. Two relay modules (24 V control signals) may be used to control the fire extinguisher.

Examples of solutions are also given, among others, in [87], [88]. The flame detection robot is presented in Fig. 2. This picture shows, inter alia, the result of detection in an image with good contrast between the fire and the surrounding background. In practice, the detection accuracy is very good (exceeds 96 % when using the Mask R-CNN).

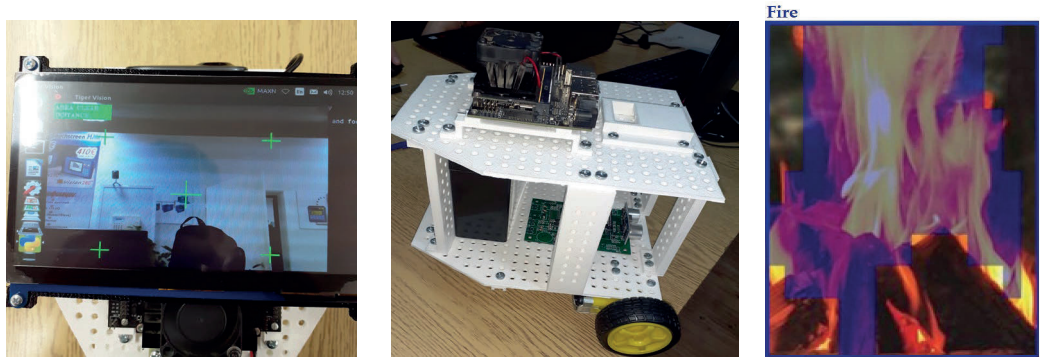


Fig. 2. A robot that detects flames using deep neural networks and an example of detection with good fire contrast to the surrounding background.

We can apply many libraries in the software. Exemplification may be as follows: OpenCV (for computer vision and machine learning), Matplotlib (separation library), TensorFlow (for machine learning), and NumPy (to provide support for multidimensional arrays). One example of the technology described here is also presented in the papers [54], [55].

4. DISCUSSION ON ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF USING ACOUSTIC TECHNOLOGY

Currently, acoustic technology is in the testing and development phase. Ultimately, it may become a permanent part of equipment, industrial halls and facilities, tanks for flammable liquids and burning gases, as well as equipment exposed to flames. In practice, acoustic waves pass through solids, liquids, and gases. The advantage of using acoustic waves is their non-invasive nature. The application of such systems allows one to partially replace the currently used means of fire protection. Additionally, acoustic extinguishers can be a complementary means of fire protection, for example, by permanently installing the system in places exposed to the outbreak of flames. Acoustic waves, unlike typical means of fire protection, do not remain dirt and do not emit gases harmful to human health. It is possible to use acoustic technology together with a low-cost intelligent sensor, so that the acoustic system can automatically activate when flames are detected. The disadvantage is that the size of the acoustic system capable of operating at low frequencies can be eliminated by building a stationary system (permanently placed in the industrial hall, building foundations, or structure of the facility). The use of acoustic screens and panels increases the possibilities of the technology. At this time, this technique could be a potential alternative to B- and C-class fire extinguishers (for extinguishing liquid and gas flames). In the case of solids, the use of this technology is limited by the fact that heat cannot be removed from inside the material, resulting in the reignition of the material.

It is worth mentioning that acoustic fire extinguishers are not subject to periodic tank testing, as is the case with classical fire extinguishers. Compared to traditional means of fire protection, this technology is characterized by an unlimited operating time (the extinguisher only needs to be powered by the mains or the battery). Ultimately, acoustic systems, although they cannot always be used, are therefore characterized by lower flame extinguishing and operating costs than in the case of typical fire protection means [9], [25], [45], [54], [55], [81], [89], [90]. In the case of using the technology, it is crucial to determine the limits of its

range of action, the possible impact on human health (assuming the presence of people during the firefighting action), and the influence of very low-frequency acoustic waves on building structures [54], [55], [68]. The impact of acoustic waves on human health is undesirable, especially in the situation where one is in the acoustic beam (especially long-term exposure). Low-frequency acoustic waves adversely affect the human body, with their impact depending on the sound intensity level and frequency (symptoms include headaches, fatigue, indigestion, decreased concentration, mood swings, drowsiness, and even vibration of internal organs) [91]. In practice, low-frequency sound waves can cause vibroacoustic disease (VD) if the sound pressure level is greater than 110 dB [92]. Prolonged exposure to a sound field may lead to neurological and even psychiatric disorders.

5. CONCLUSION

Scientists from European countries present many research works that confirm the effectiveness of using acoustic waves to extinguish flames. In order for this technology to be effective, the acoustic beam should be focused in the smallest possible area, as well as the operating frequency of the acoustic wave should be well adapted to the specific application. The geometry of the beam ought to be directed and modelled in such a way as to hit a flame source as accurately as possible. Wireless technologies may be applied for data transmission. Fire detection information could be sent from remote areas that are inaccessible using, among others, satellite networks. This is important in the case of installing a fire extinguishing system and sensors in difficult-to-reach locations, without adequate technical infrastructure, or in areas where cable investment would be economically unjustified.

Since flames are difficult to extinguish using low-power sound sources, by using high and very high acoustic power delivered to the sound source, it becomes possible to increase the distance between the output of the flame source and the extinguisher [9], [25], [35], [45], [54], [55], [81]. Due to the use of low-frequency acoustic waves, a high-power fire extinguisher has a sizable size. Therefore, to realize the potential of this technology, it is ultimately necessary to miniaturize the system components and use high-power sound sources while maintaining health-safe sound pressure levels. In addition, the use of low-frequency acoustic waves requires prior testing for material strength and the impact of acoustic waves on people's health in the facility.

It is expected that in the future the flame extinguishing acoustic technology can be applicable wherever the access to classical (chemical) means of fire protection is limited or the flames are difficult to extinguish with the use of currently known methods.

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