

Biogas, a renewable energy, is a hydrocarbon gas mixture generated from landfills, waste water treatment, animal manure, and other sources. It is estimated that there are 2,400+ biogas generation sites in the United States and over 10,000 sites within Europe. Biogas is considered environmentally friendly since it is a carbon neutral energy source. This application note will look at the analytical measurements used in biogas production and purification.

Overview

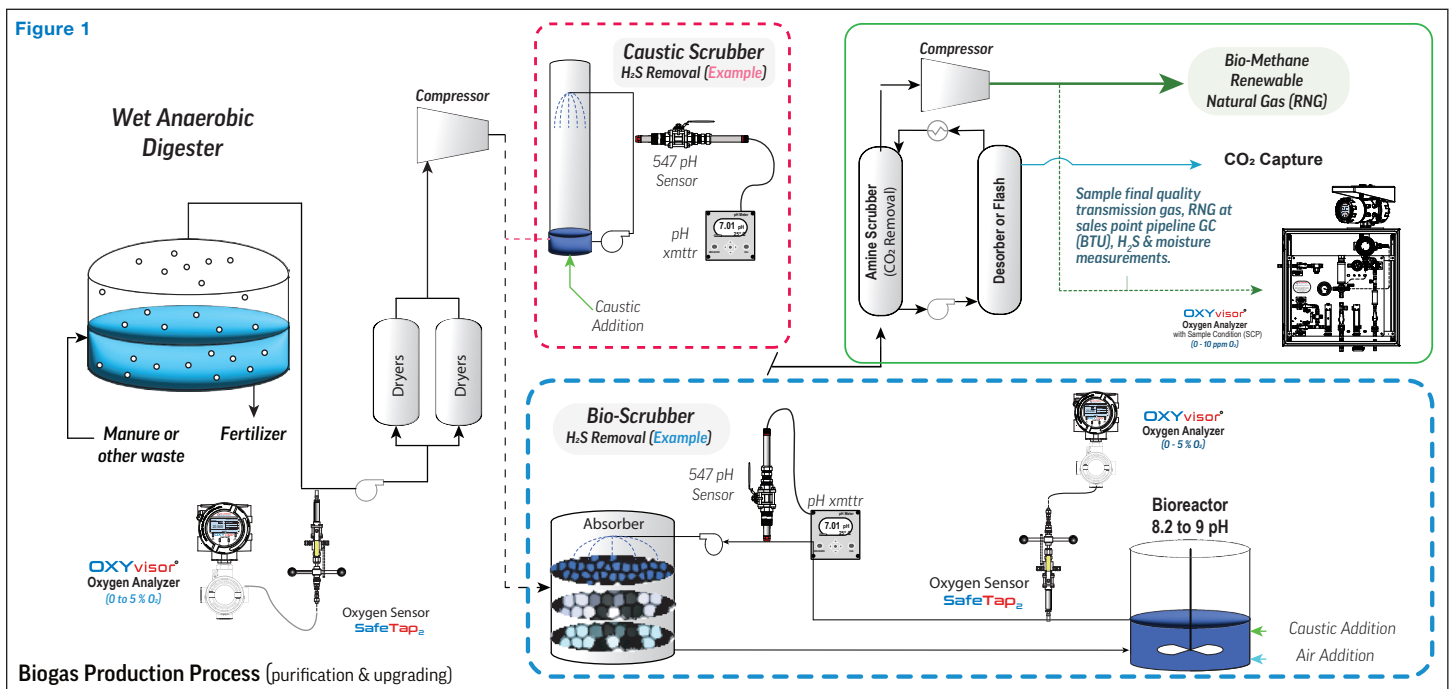
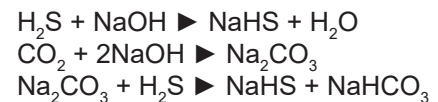
Biogas is a byproduct of the breakdown of organic matter. Anaerobic bacterial digestion produces a gas mixture roughly comprised of the following:

Percentage	Component
50-60%	Methane (CH ₄)
30-40%	Carbon Dioxide (CO ₂)
3 - 6%	Water (H ₂ O)
0 - 5%	Nitrogen (N ₂)
0 - 1%	Hydrogen Sulfide (H ₂ S)
< 2%	Oxygen (O ₂)
< 1%	Hydrogen (H ₂)
< 1%	Trace Gases (NH ₃ , Siloxane)

The composition of the biogas varies depending on the feedstock. For example, animal manure tends to have higher levels of H₂S and NH₃, than landfill gas. Temperature also plays an important role in gas composition and generation.

Production

Raw biogas, produced from an anaerobic digester, is not of suitable quality for common combustion processes or sales transmission lines. The biogas must go through upgrading techniques, via multi-stage purification steps, (Figure 1) to remove impurities, increasing methane content to a usable value (>95% CH₄) for power generation or as a final transmission product commonly referred to as renewable natural gas (RNG) or bio-methane. Gas at the exit of the digester is saturated with moisture. The moisture combined with H₂S and CO₂ may create acidic condensation. First stage gas clean-up requires moisture removal by passing the biogas through a dryer. Drying can be accomplished through a heat exchanger or through desiccant drying. After the dryer, second stage clean-up involves removing H₂S. There are several strategies for sulfide removal. Small biogas facilities use packed bed iron oxide (Fe₂O₃) absorbers to react with H₂S. This design is often referred to as an "iron sponge". Large scale biogas operations often choose liquid scrubber technology to clean up the impurities. Caustic water wash scrubbers can effectively remove both H₂S and CO₂ to produce sales grade RNG (bio-methane) in the following reactions:



Biogas Production Process (purification & upgrading)

Application Note

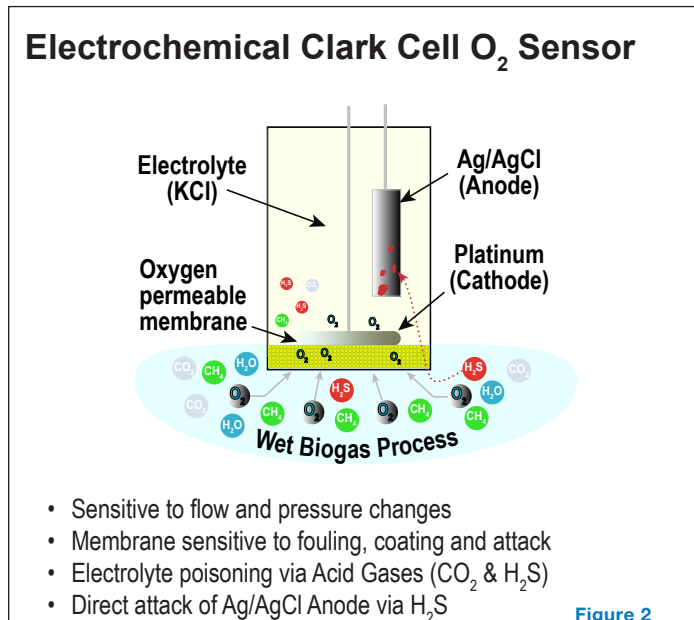
Biogas / RNG - pH & O₂

A second option is to use a bioscrubber. Bioscrubbers use chemotropic bacteria to consume both the H₂S and CO₂. With either strategy the purified methane must go through final drying for moisture removal before usage.

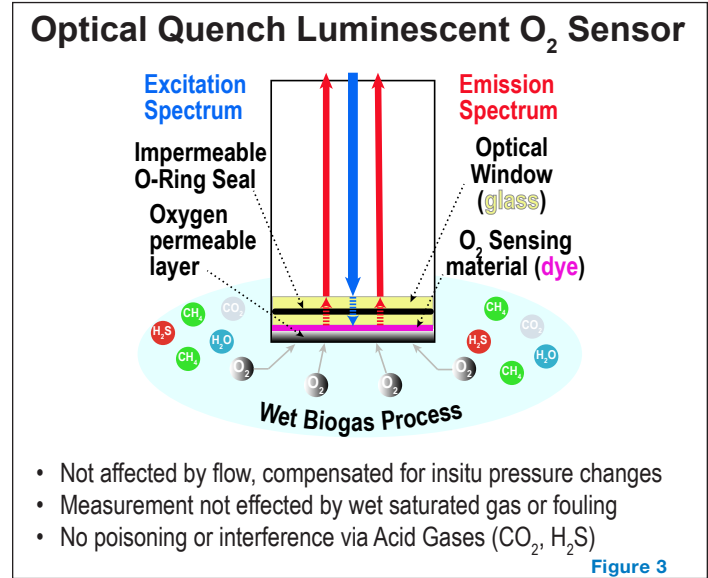
Measurement Challenges - Oxygen

Methanogenic bacteria used in the digester cannot survive in the presence of oxygen; thus monitoring O₂ levels is critical for the generating capacity of the biogas facility. An increase in oxygen indicates detrimental leaks in the digester structure as well as air ingress at compressor and pump seals. A secondary purpose for oxygen measurement is to provide a safety check to avoid exceeding low explosive limits (LEL) in the biogas. Most biogas operations try to keep oxygen measurements around 0.8 to 1.2% O₂.

Biogas oxygen is best measured at the digester outlet before or after the fan. For traditional electrochemical cells (Figure 2 - also known as Clark cells or galvanic cells) this can be a challenging application. The raw biogas is saturated with moisture and contains various trace level contaminant gases. High moisture creates measurement errors in traditional electrochemical cells due to condensation blocking oxygen diffusion through the hydrophobic membrane. Hydrogen sulfide in raw biogas will permeate the electrochemical cell membrane and poison the electrolyte. High levels of CO₂ may have a similar effect on the electrochemical cell causing the output of the sensor to be inaccurate. If these types of sensors are used, then a complex sample conditioning system may be required to drop out moisture and the other trace gases. A sample system is often maintenance intensive and adds to the response time of the critical oxygen measurement.



Barben Analytical's OXYvisor Optical Oxygen Analyzer provides a better method to handle biogas O₂ measurements. Fluorescence quenching technology provides trace PPM oxygen measurement with no risk of damaging the sensor in the application. An oxygen sensitive luminophore sensor provides the measurement technology for the OXYvisor. Blue light is used to excite the luminophore.

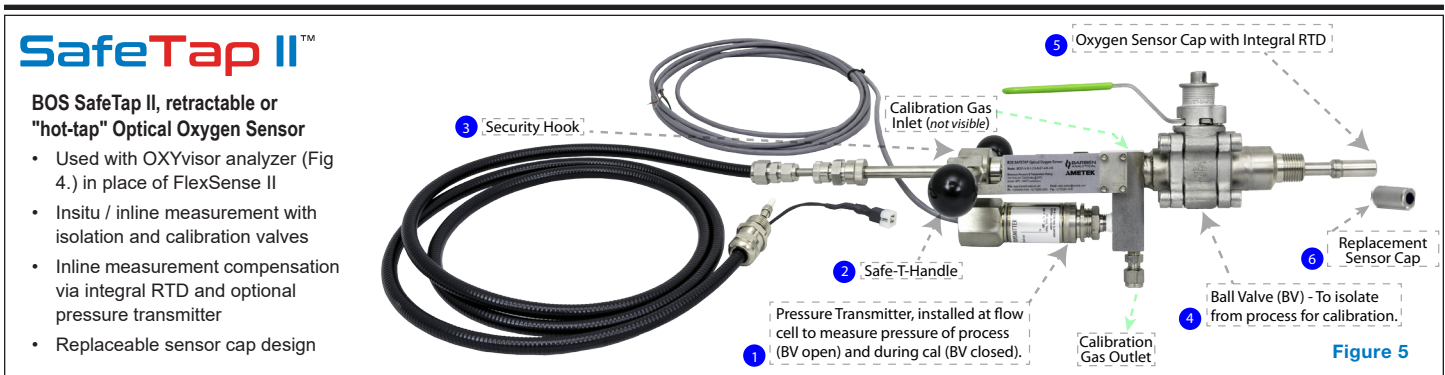


In return, the luminophore emits light back at a specific wavelength and intensity (Figure 3). When oxygen is present the emitted light undergoes a phase shift and reduced light intensity. The change in the luminophore output can be directly correlated to the partial pressure oxygen levels in both gas and liquid phases.



Application Note

Biogas / RNG - pH & O₂



Advantages of optical oxygen sensors in biogas production include no interference due to moisture, H₂S, CO₂, and other contaminant gases. The OXYvisor (Figure 4) simplifies the sample system design as the contaminant gases do not need to be scrubbed prior to the measurement. In many cases the end user is able to eliminate the highly problematic sample system by going in-situ with the BOSx SafeTap (Figure 5). The end result is increased reliability, better accuracy, and faster response in biogas applications.

Measurement Challenges - pH

pH levels in the biogas digester are maintained slightly above neutral (7.4 to 8.0pH) to provide the best environment for bacterial growth. This measurement is typically done with a portable analyzer or in the laboratory since the mass balance of the digester system rarely changes.

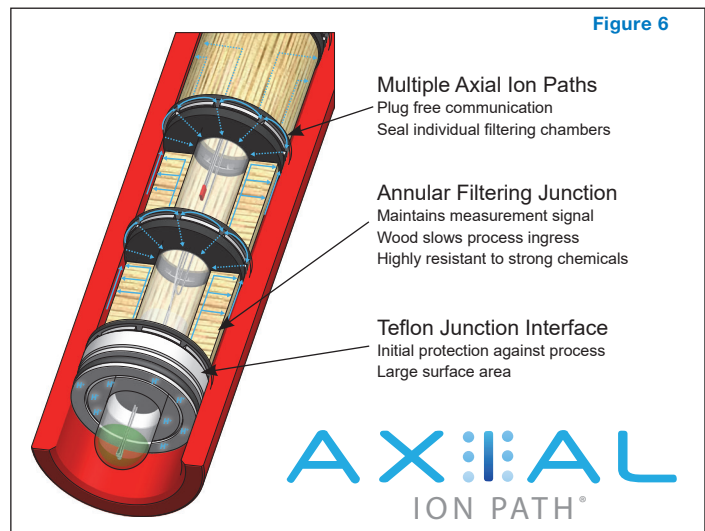
Online pH control does become a critical parameter in downstream liquid scrubbing applications. Caustic scrubbers rely on continuous pH measurements for proper dosing of chemicals. As H₂S and CO₂ are dissolved into the solution the pH drops as acids are formed. Hydrogen sulfide can poison pH sensors in the same way as described with electrochemical oxygen sensors. Sulfides will contaminate the KCl electrolyte used in the pH sensor and eventually attack the Ag/AgCl element causing instability of reading.

In bioscrubber applications H₂S is converted to solid sulfur by thiobacillus bacteria. The pH of bacteria liquid solution is maintained at 8.2 to 9.0 to provide optimum bacterial growth. Online pH is used to control dosing of nutrients and caustic to the bioreactor.

The bioreactor sits adjacent to the absorber and provides additional retention time for the bacteria to consume the H₂S. Residual H₂S poses a problem in bioscrubber applications as well, with poisoning of the sensor as the primary concern. The bacteria and elemental sulfur forms a liquid slurry, which can plug up the porous reference junction of conventional sensors causing sluggish response to changing pH levels.

Barben Performance Series pH sensors provide a unique solution for online pH measurement in scrubber applications. The Axial Ion Path® reference design (Figure 6) greatly slows the ingress of H₂S providing two to three times the lifespan when compared with traditional double junction pH sensor designs. A large Teflon junction used in the front of the Barben pH sensor provides a difficult to plug, large surface area, which is easy to clean in high build-up applications.

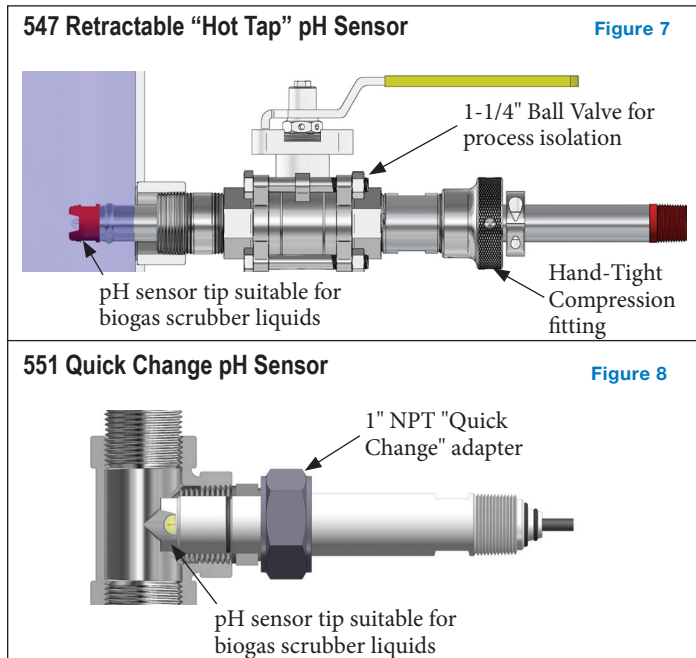
Barben pH sensors should be specified with "R" or "CR" high-temperature glass electrodes for these applications. Viton seals and Kynar (PVDF) should be specified as the sensor wetted material for best chemical compatibility and integrity at elevated temperatures.



For scrubber applications Barben pH sensors should be mounted directly into recirculation pipelines to provide quick response. A retractable "hot tap" sensor such as the 547 (Figure 7) is recommended for these installations. The flow rate past the sensor tip helps to keep the sensor free of any coating or build-up. If the sensor is mounted in a pre-existing sample line then the Barben 551 Quick Change sensor (Figure 8) with flow cell provides an easy way to install and remove the sensor.

Application Note

Biogas / RNG - pH & O₂



Barben pH sensors are simple combination sensors, and work with all manufacturers pH analyzers with analog input card/channel. Wiring diagrams for commonly available instruments can be found on [Barben Website - Wiring Diagrams](#) or via request to technical support.

Summary

Barben Analytical products provide many measurement advantages for biogas purification. The OXYvisor Optical Oxygen Analyzer solves the problems related to oxygen measurement in biogas production, purification and upgrading while simplifying installation and reducing maintenance.

Barben Performance Series pH sensors help solve problems related to gas purification if downstream liquid scrubbers are used. Advantages include the following:

- Less frequent cleaning and calibration intervals
- High pH / ORP measurement accuracy
- Increased pH / ORP sensor lifespan
- Simplified sensor specification

Maintenance expenses are decreased as spares inventory is reduced and fewer calibration hours are required to keep measurements accurate.

Hazardous Area Approvals

IEC Ex, ATEX, NA - Zone 1 & Zone 2 IIC
 cULus (NRTL) - Class I, Div 2, Groups A, B, C, D T4



Contact Us

Barben Analytical is a leading supplier of analytical measurement technology targeting the industrial marketplace. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ametek.

Ametek has nearly 21,000 colleagues at over 120 manufacturing locations around the world. Supporting those operations are more than 80 sales and service locations across the United States and in more than 35 other countries around the world.

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Relevant

- OXYvisor Data Sheet: [OXYvisor Analyzer Data Sheet](#)
- SafeTap DataSheet: [SafeTap II Web Page and Docs](#)
- pH Technical Note: [Advanced Installation Techniques](#)
- pH Technical Note: [Cleaning pH & ORP Electrodes](#)

Request a Quote for Oxygen Analyzer System:

[Option #1 - OXYvisor - Insitu SafeTap II \(biogas\) \(% O₂\)](#)

[Option #2 - OXYvisor - Extractive \(RNG\) \(PPM O₂\)](#)

[Option #3 - Application Questionnaire - Quoted Specific](#)

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