

Emberometer

Burgers Program and Combustion Institute Summer School on Fire Safety Science — Wildland/WUI Fire Behavior

College Park, MD

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Eric Link



Acknowledgement and thanks to: Nicolas Bouvet, Stephen Fink, Savannah Wessies

Ember – a glowing fragment from a fire; hot carbonaceous particle

Firebrand – specifically an airborne, lofted ember

Size: mm to cm+ scale

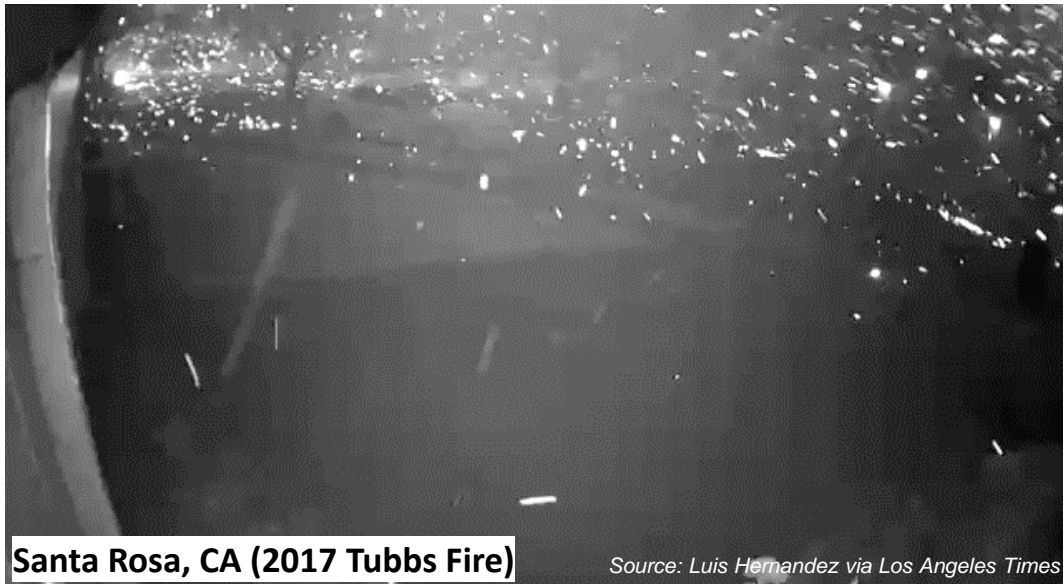
Energy: smoldering to flaming

Source: detached from vegetative or structural fuels

View Inside a Prescribed Fire



WUI Firebrands



Santa Rosa, CA (2017 Tubbs Fire)

Source: Luis Hernandez via Los Angeles Times



2018/11/08 09:08:52 GMT - 8

Paradise, CA (2018 Camp Fire)

Source: Paradise Police Department



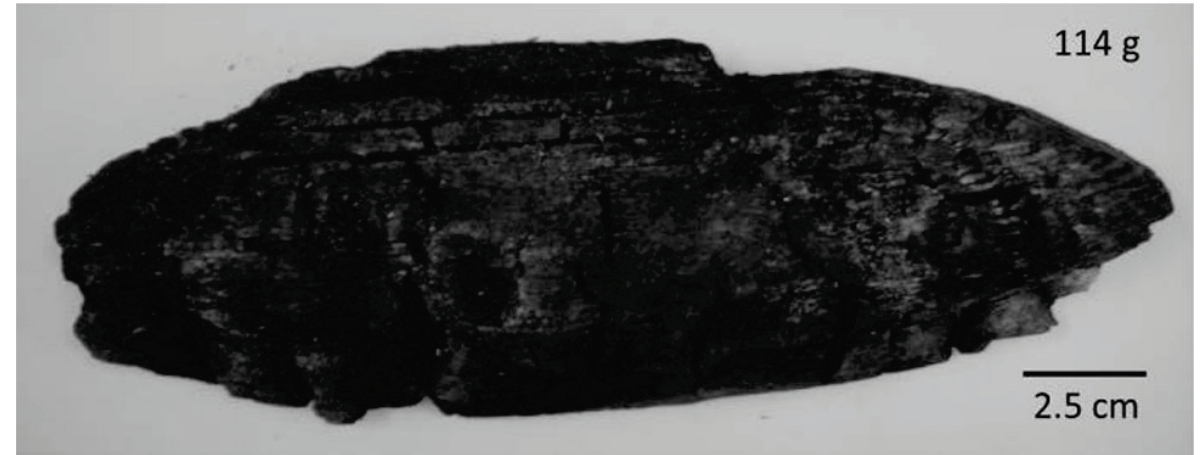
Paradise, CA (2018 Camp Fire)

Source: CAL FIRE

Firebrands and Embers



El Houssami M., et al. (2016) Experimental Procedures Characterising Firebrand Generation in Wildland Fires. *Fire Technology* 52(3):731-751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10694-015-0492-z>



Suzuki S., Manzello S.L. (2018) Characteristics of Firebrands Collected from Actual Urban Fires. *Fire Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10694-018-0751-x>



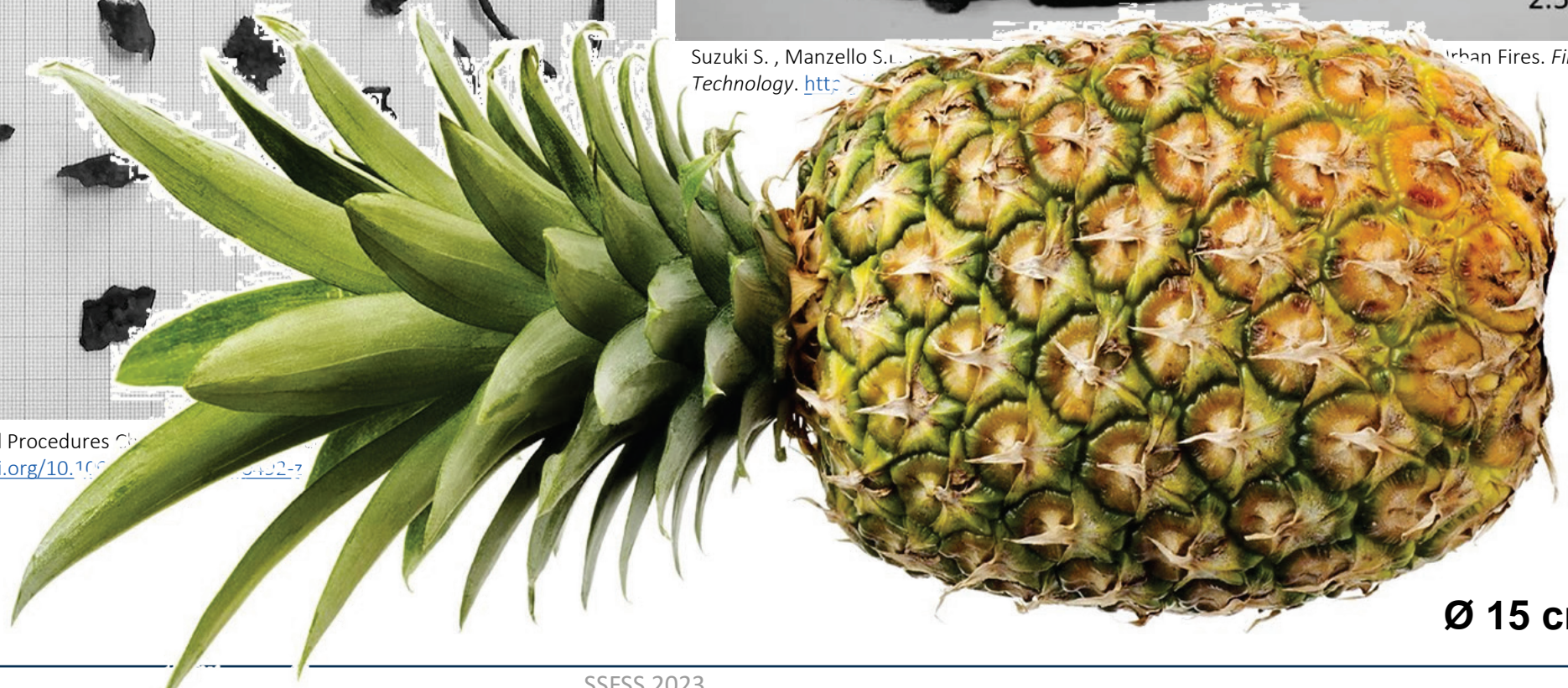
NIST Outdoor SSE Shed Burns

Firebrands and Embers



Suzuki S., Manzello S. Urban Fires. *Fire Technology*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12227-012-9122-7>

El Houssami M., et al. (2016) Experimental Procedures for Firebrands. *Fire Technology* 52(3):731-751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12227-016-9122-7>



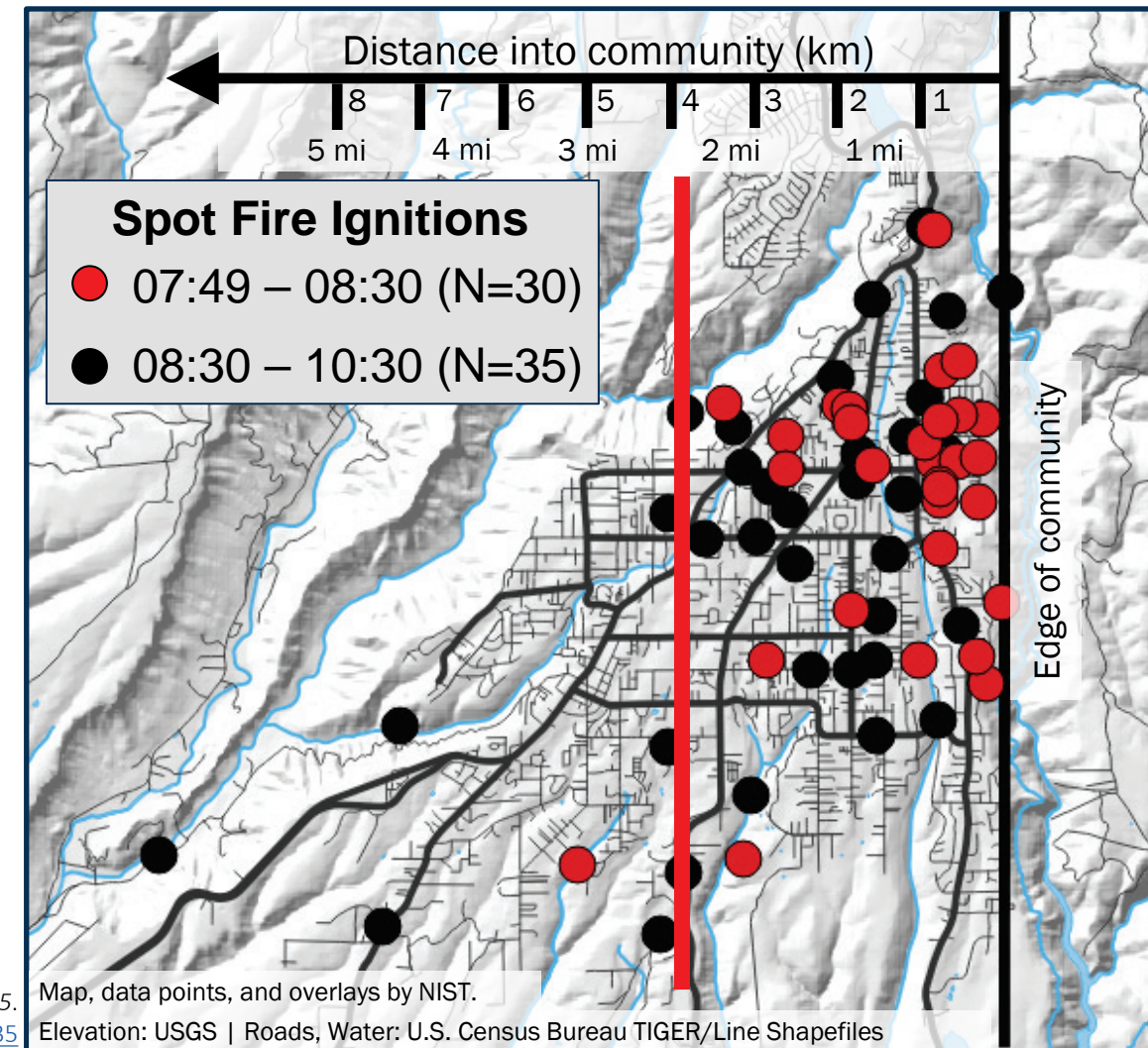
Ø 15 cm

Threats of Firebrand Ignitions

- Approx. 2/3 structure ignitions, 2007 Witch Fire
(Maranghides and Mell, NIST TN 1635; 2009)
- At least 50% of structure ignitions from embers only, 2003 ACT bushfires
(Blanchi and Leonard, CSIRO; 2005)
- Spot fire ignition and fire spread enhancement
(e.g., Maranghides, et al, NIST TN 2135; 2021)

Dependent on:
geometry, temperature, rate of deposition, fuel properties,
environmental conditions

Camp Fire; Paradise, CA 30 identified spot fires in first 40 minutes, reaching 4 km (2.5 mi) into community

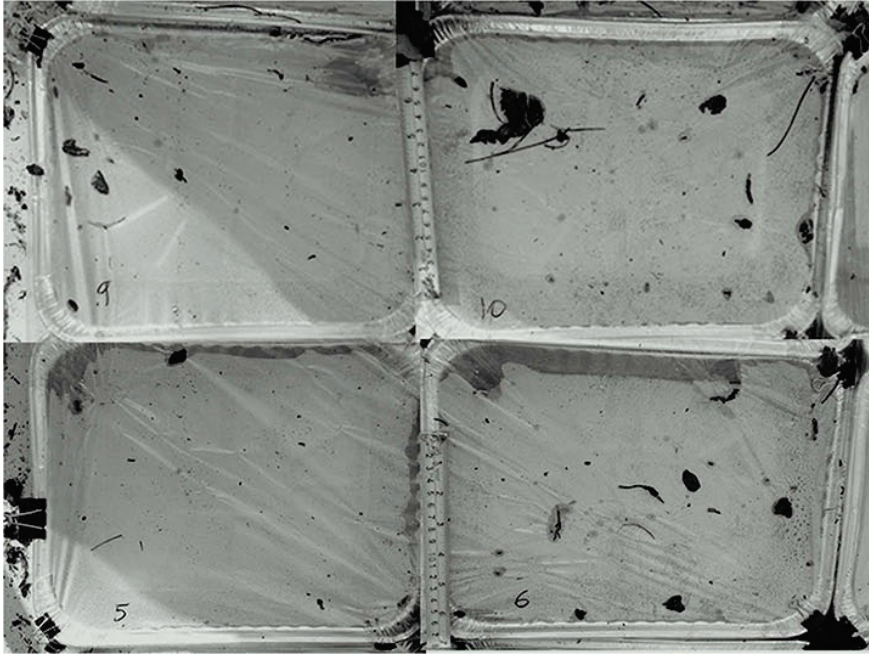


Maranghides A., et al. (2021) A Case Study of the Camp Fire — Fire Progression Timeline. *NIST Technical Note 2135*. National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. <https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.TN.2135>

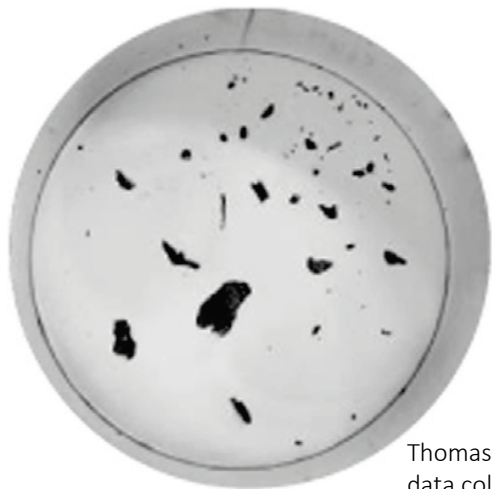
- Source/generation characteristics
- Aerodynamic characteristics
- Deposition characteristics
- Exposure/severity metrics

- Water pan collection
- Projected surface area
- Caliper measurements
- Cloth sheets
- Tarps

Water Pan Collection



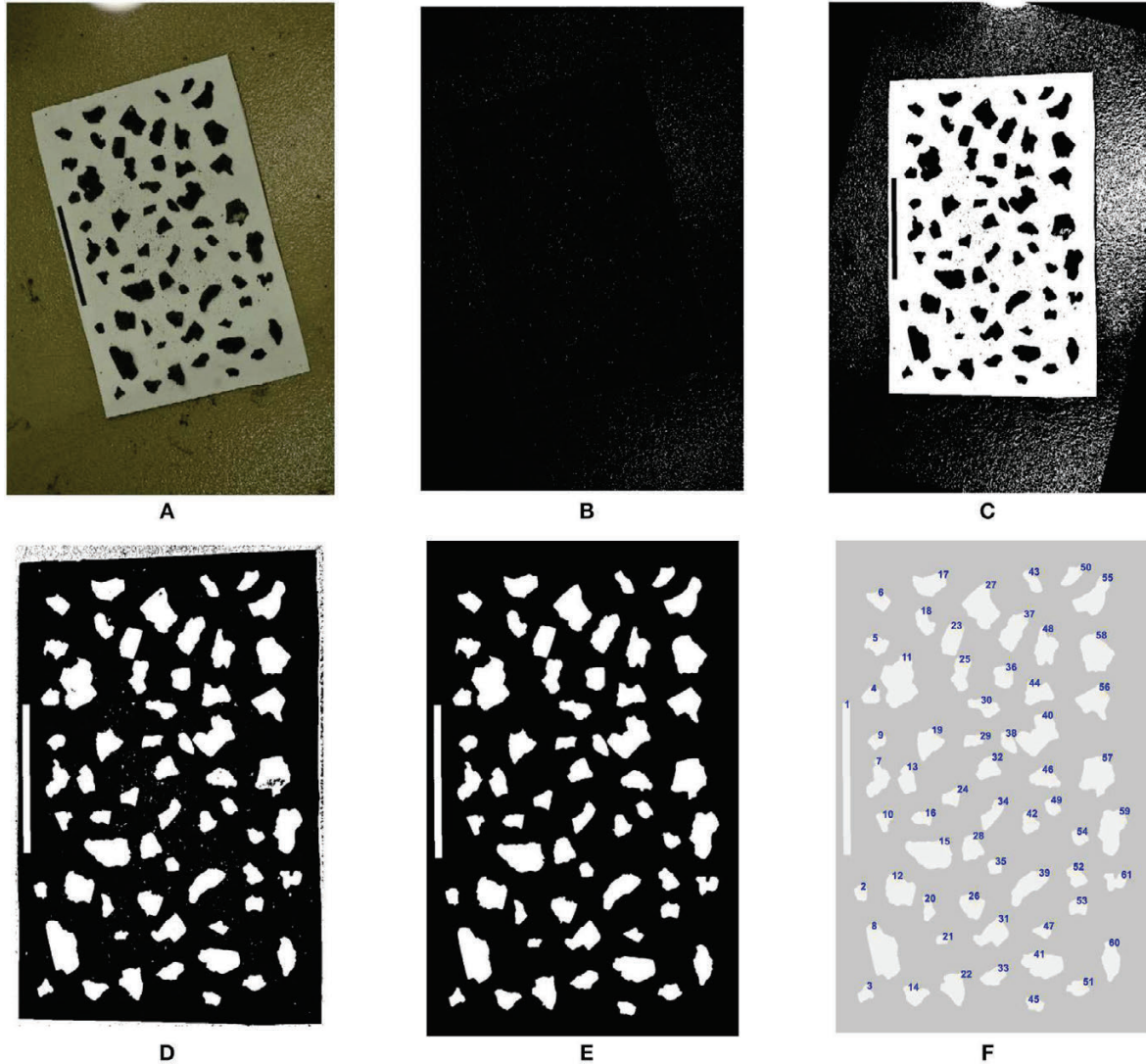
El Houssami M., *et al.* (2016) Experimental Procedures Characterising Firebrand Generation in Wildland Fires. *Fire Technology* 52(3):731-751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10694-015-0492-z>



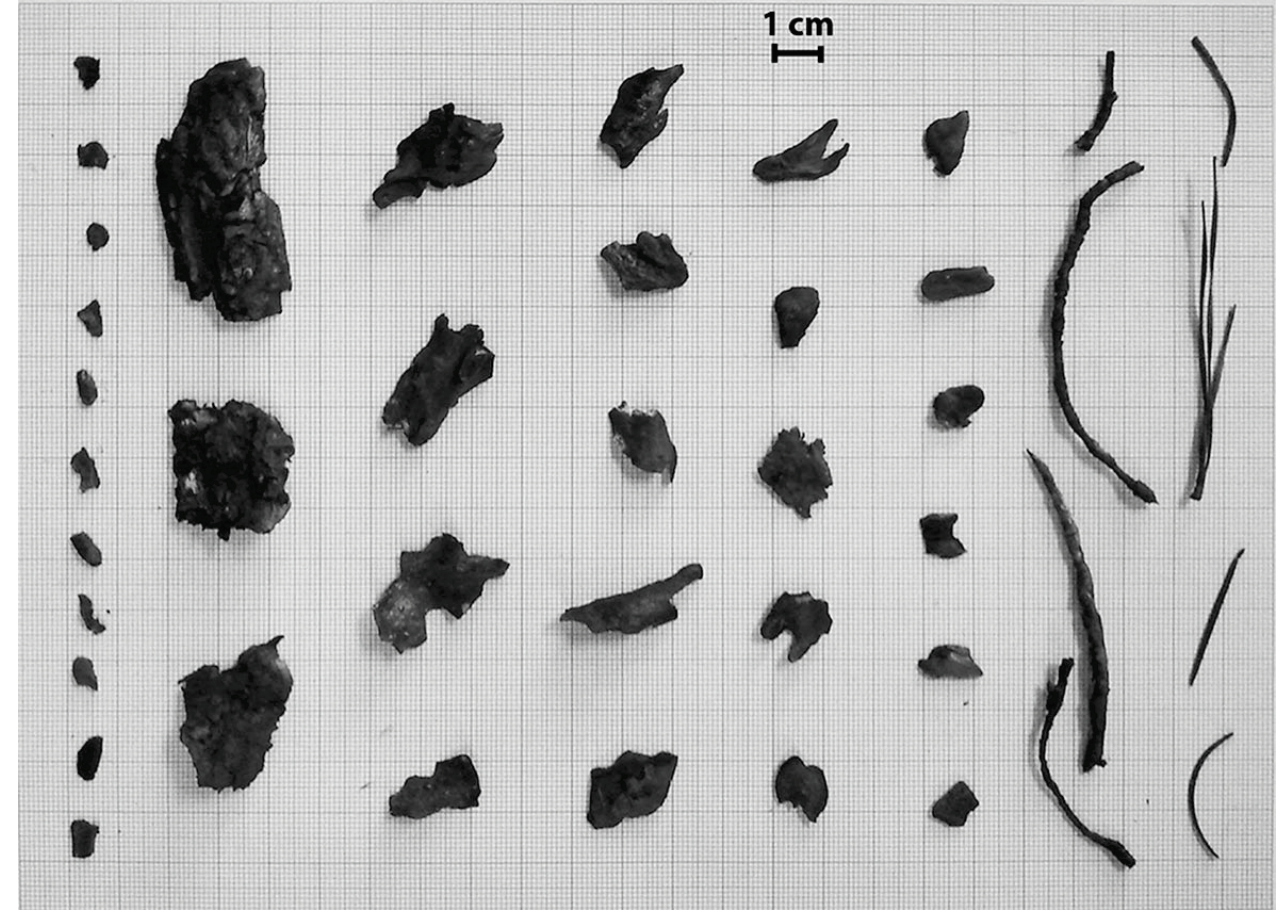
Thomas J.C., *et al.* (2017) Investigation of firebrand generation from an experimental fire: Development of a reliable data collection methodology. *Fire Safety Journal* 91:864-871. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.firesaf.2017.04.002>

Bouvet N., *et al.* (2019) On the use of time-resolved three-dimensional diagnostics to characterize firebrand showers in the WUI. *Advances in Forest Fire Research 2018*, ed Viegas DX (Coimbra University Press), pp 826-836. https://doi.org/10.14195/978-989-26-16-506_91

Projected Area Analysis

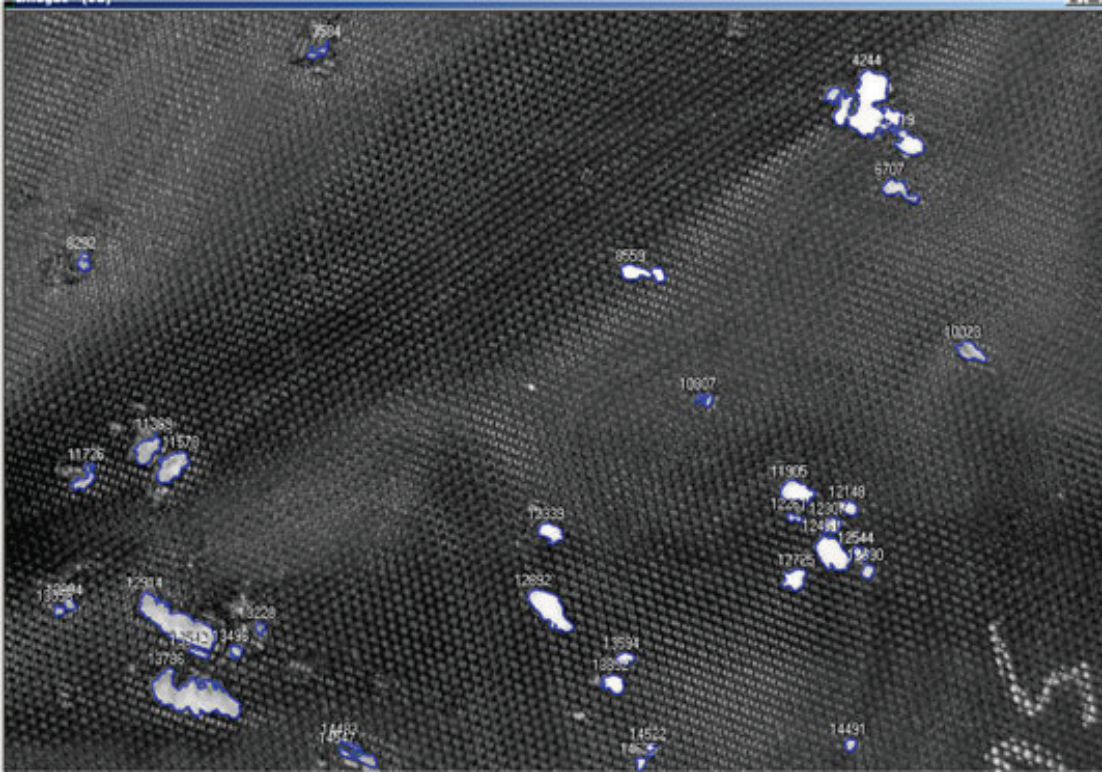
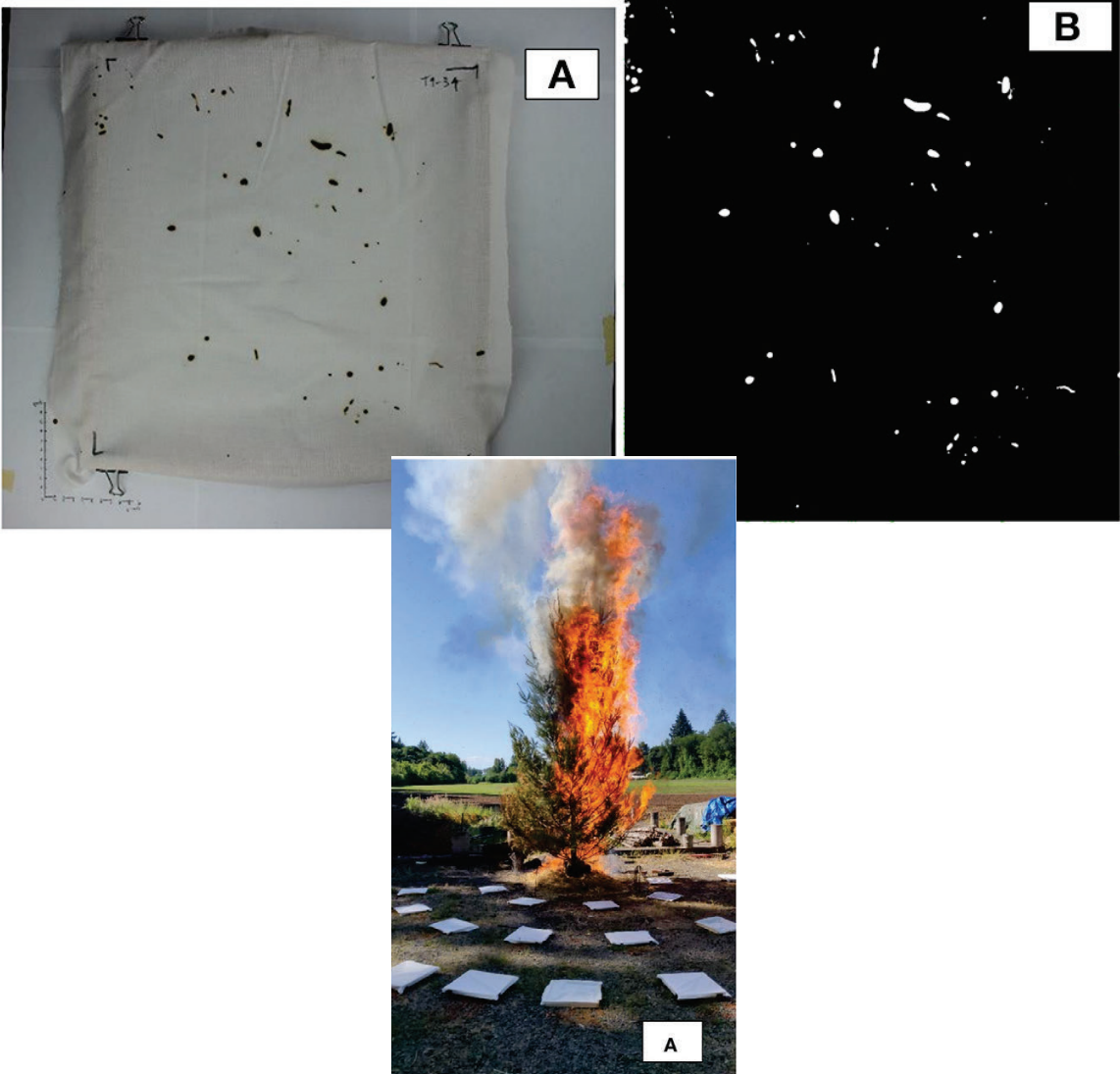


Hedayati F., et al. (2019) A Framework to Facilitate Firebrand Characterization. *Frontiers in Mechanical Engineering* 5:43. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmech.2019.00043>



El Houssami M., et al. (2016) Experimental Procedures Characterising Firebrand Generation in Wildland Fires. *Fire Technology* 52(3):731-751. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10694-015-0492-z>

Cloth/Trampoline Scorching



Manzello S.L., Foote E.I.D. (2014) Characterizing Firebrand Exposure from Wildland–Urban Interface (WUI) Fires: Results from the 2007 Anzora Fire. *Fire Technology* 50:105-124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10694-012-0295-4>

Adusumilli S., Chaplen J.E., Blunck D.L. (2021) Firebrand Generation Rates at the Source for Trees and a Shrub. *Frontiers in Mechanical Engineering* 7:655593. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmech.2021.655593>

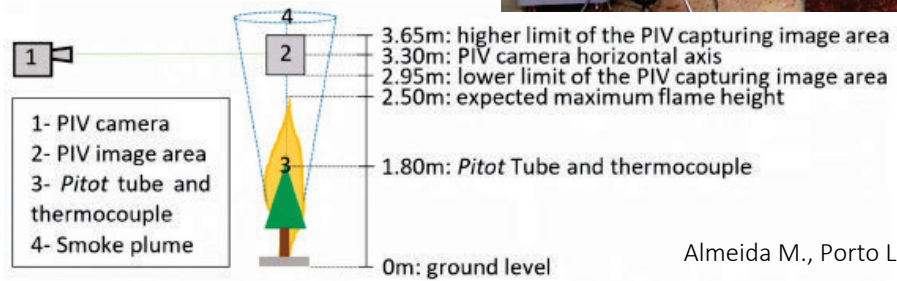
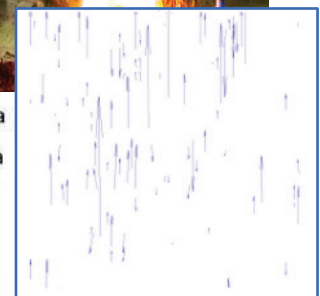
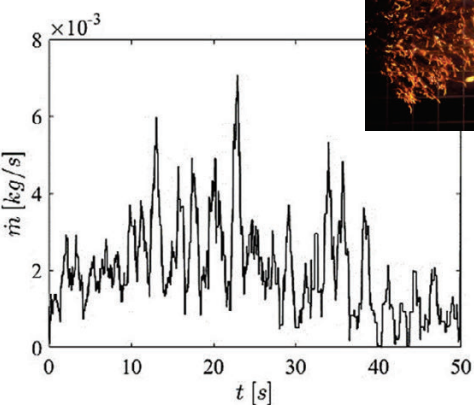
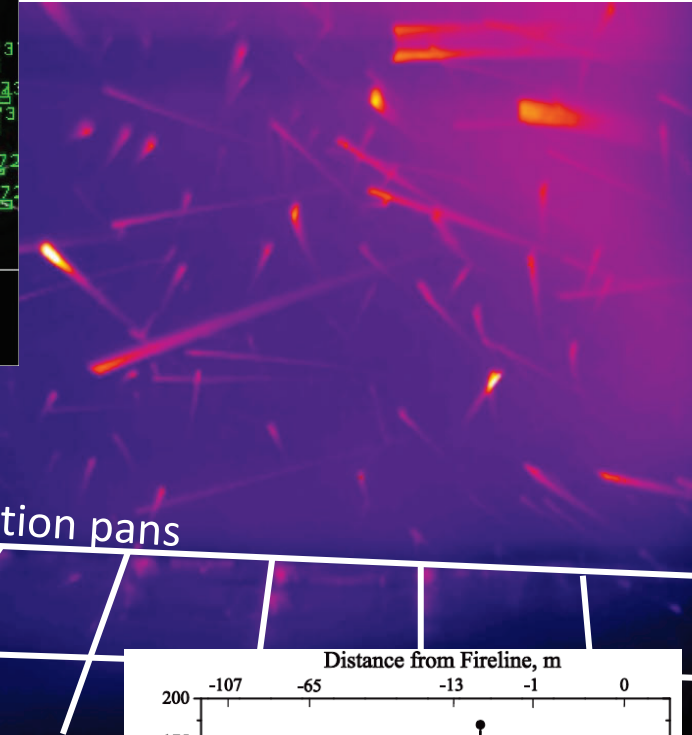
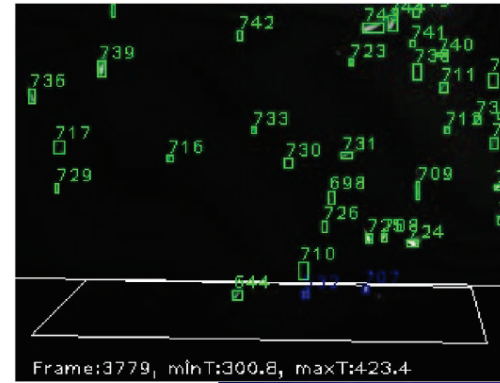
See also:
Rissel S., Ridenour K. (2013) Ember Production During the Bastrop Complex Fire. *Fire Management Today* 72(4):7-13. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fire-management-today/72-4.pdf>

- Passive/non-temporal cumulative collection ←
- Hot or cold? ←
- “Deployability”
- Two-dimensional
- Fragile
- Painstaking

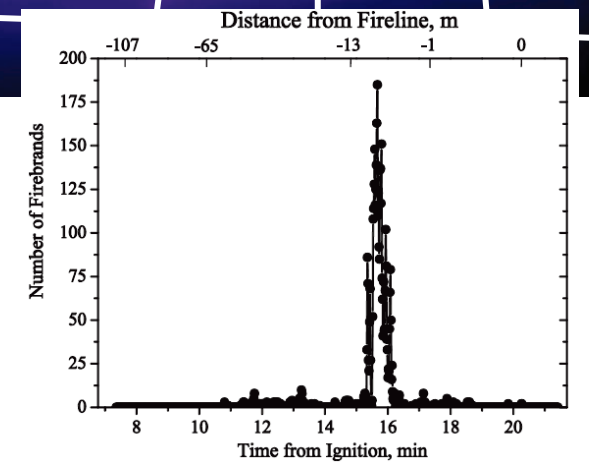
Image Tracking



Tohidi A., Gollner M. (2017) Computer Vision Techniques for Firebrand Detection and Characterization. *SUPDET 2017*.



Almeida M., Porto L., Viegas D. (2021) *Front. Mech. Eng.* 7:651135.



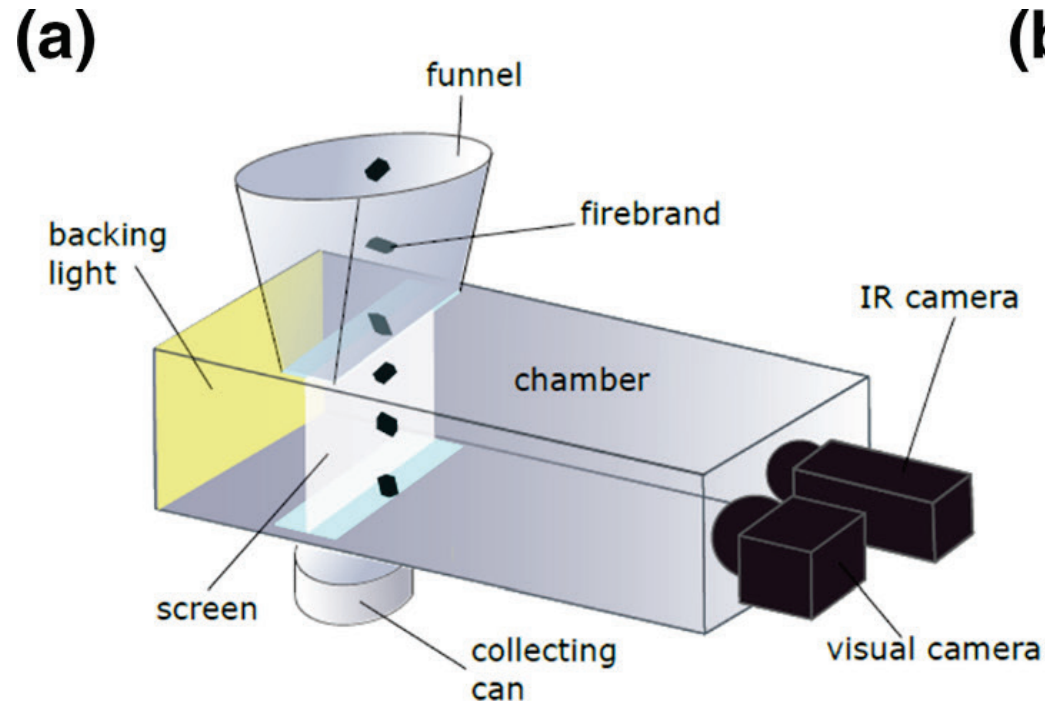
Filkov A., et al. (2017) *Proc. Comb. Inst.* 36(2):3263-3270.
Filkov A, Prohanov S (2018) *Fire Tech.* 55(3):817-836.
Prohanov S., et al. (2020) *Fire* 3(4):68.

Where does an emberometer fit in?

Emberometer: device for time-resolved, live, measurement of firebrand characteristics including size, shape, thermal state, flux

- Source/generation characteristics ←
- Aerodynamic characteristics ←
- Deposition characteristics ←
- Exposure/severity metrics ←

Develop the measurement science to **quantify** the threat of **firebrand exposure** from **WUI fires** on structures and structural materials



Physical System

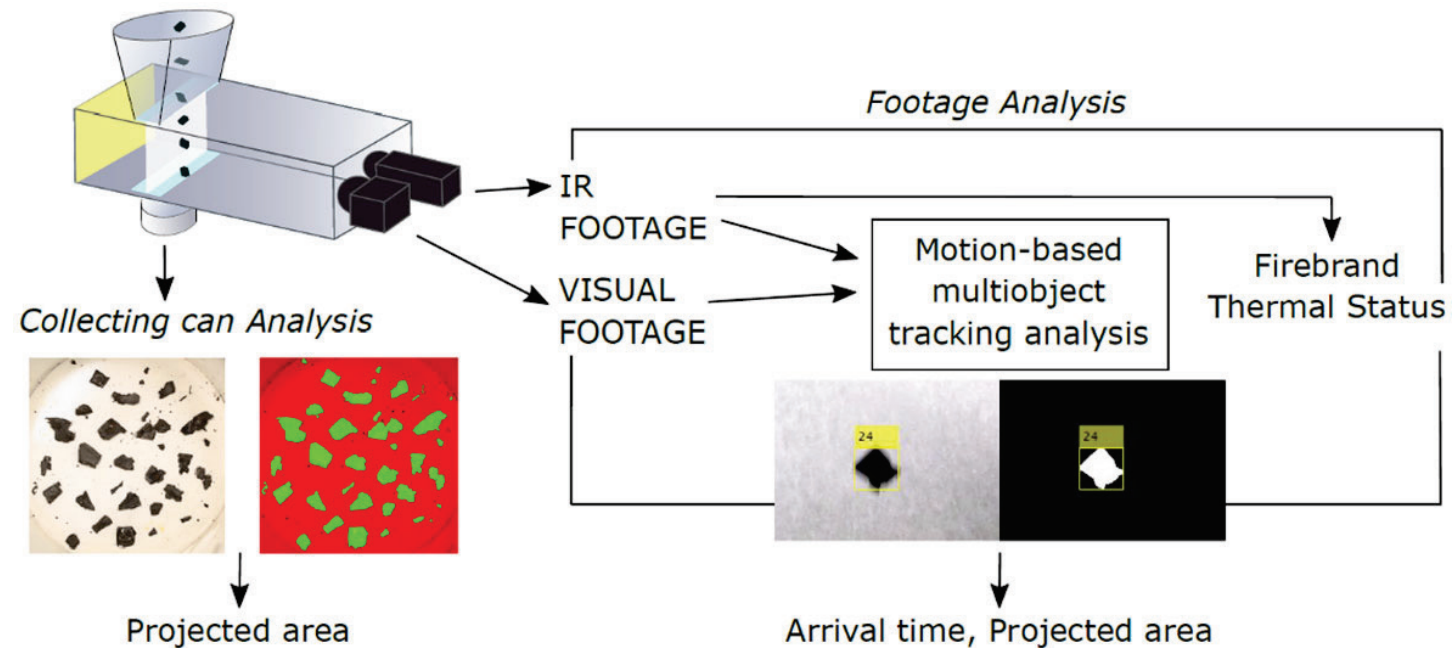
- 25 cm x 35 cm aluminum box
- 55 cm collection funnel
- Backlit screen behind falling firebrands
- Collection can

Video Recording

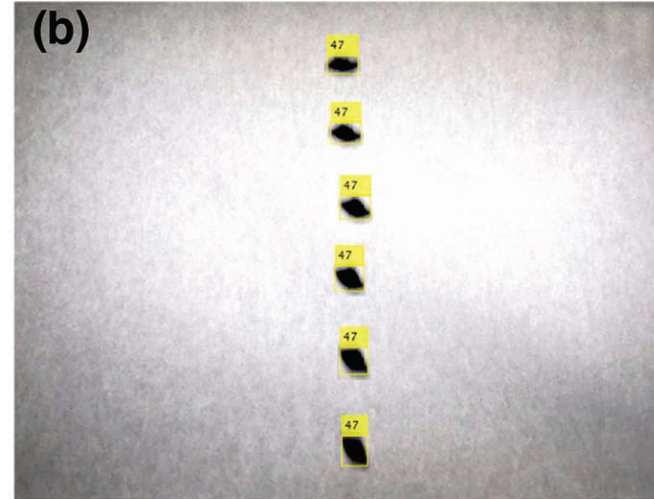
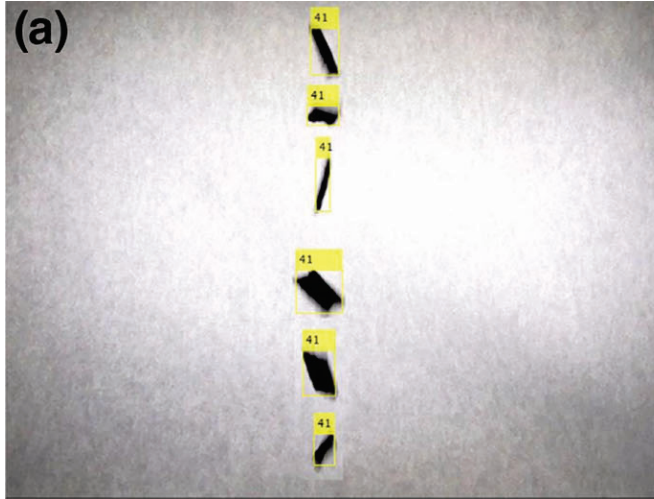
- Visible spectrum camera (50 fps)
- Longwave infrared (IR) camera (7.5–14 μm) (FLIR A615)
- ~ 0.2 s residence time

- Geometric and thermal characteristics at deposition
- Detailed time history of deposition (i.e., flux) with respect to fire progression

- IR → tracking and thermal status
- Vis → tracking
- Tracking → arrival time and projected area



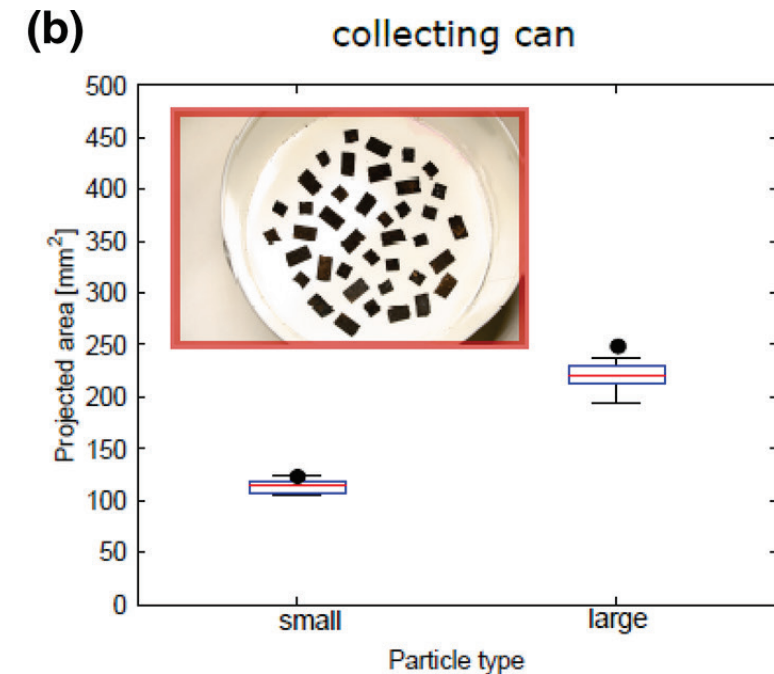
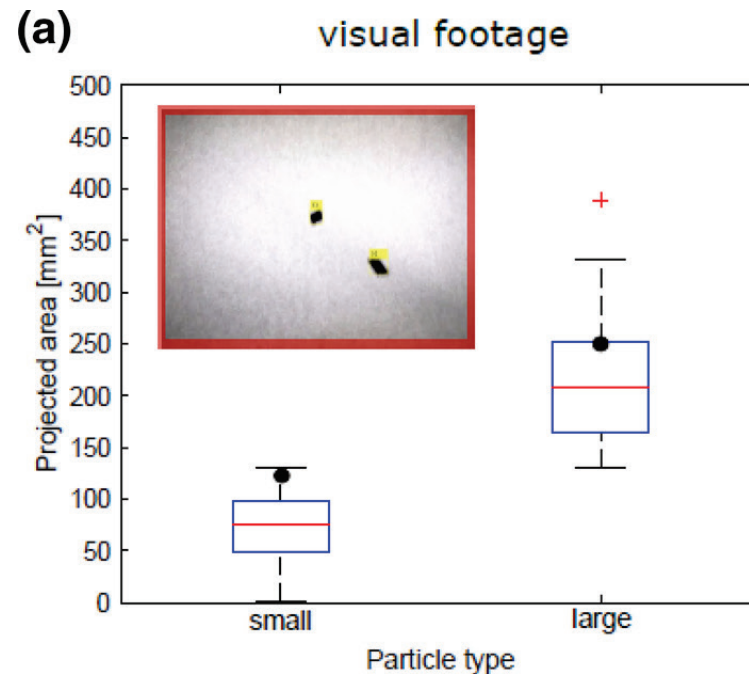
Particle Size Measurement



- Calibration $\sim 0.16 \text{ mm}^2$ per pixel
- Max. projected area observed
- Max. temperature

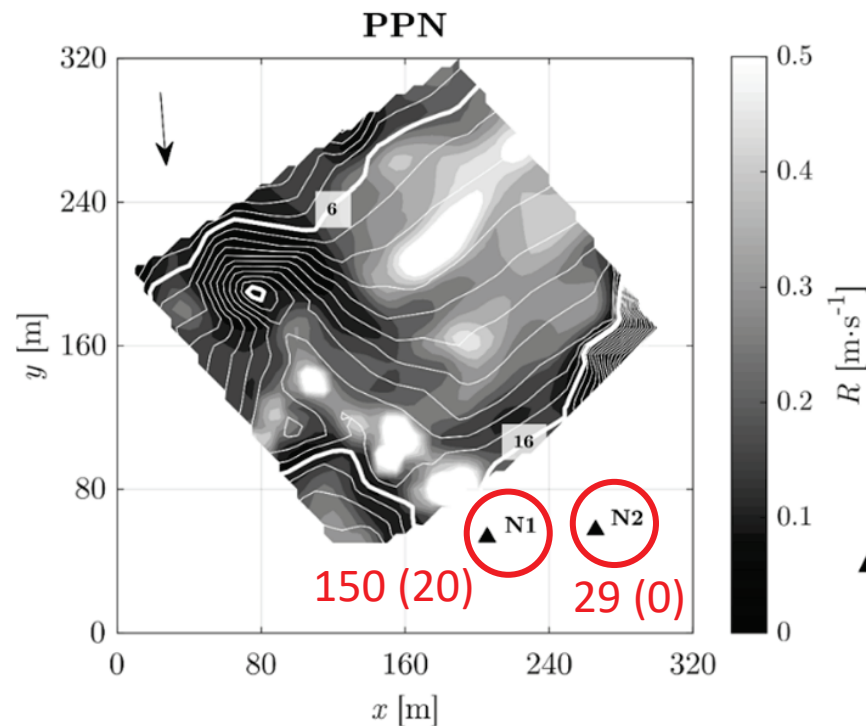
Area under-predicted in emberometer:

- Rotation and tumbling
- Overlapping
- Motion blur
- Lighting



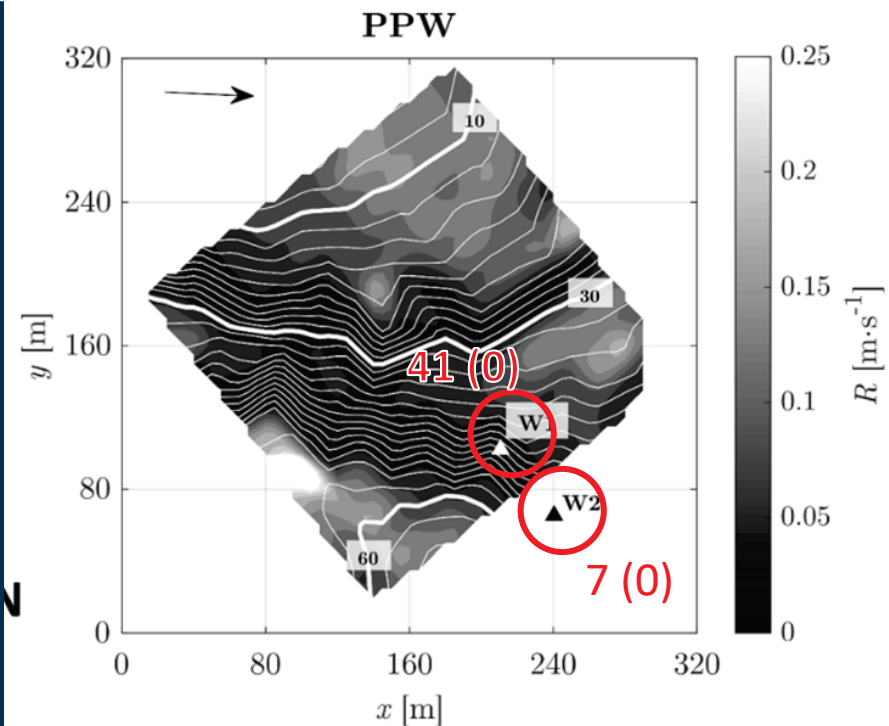
Field Deployment

- 2 prescribed burns in NJ Pine Barrens (6.25 ha [15 ac], pitch pine and oak overstory; oak, blueberry, huckleberry understory)
- 2 emberometers deployed in each burn



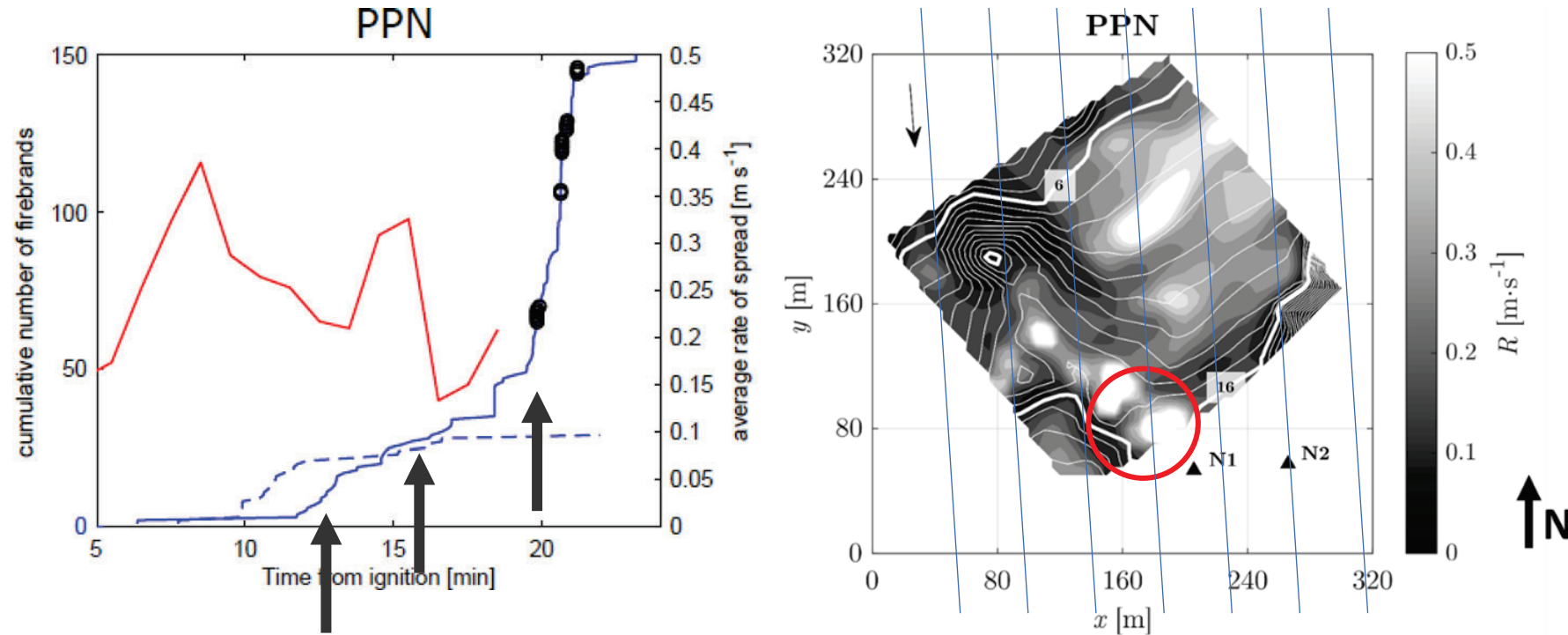
Burn 1 (PPN)

- Avg. fire spread rate: 0.26 m/s
- Outside burn plot (25, 50 m) T to burn
- $\sim 0.05 \text{ mm}^2/\text{px}$



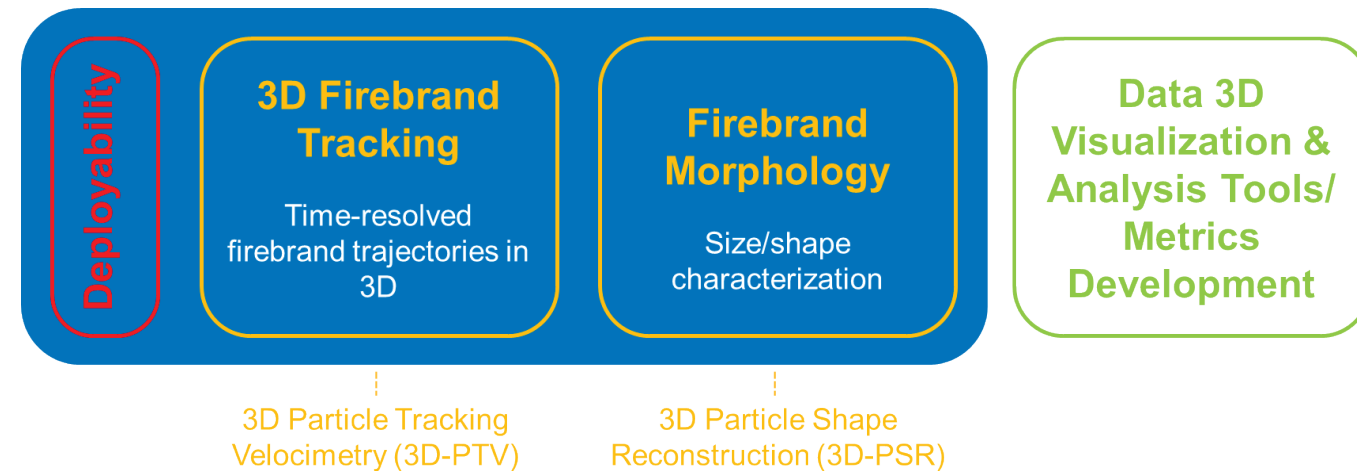
Burn 2 (PPW)

- Avg. fire spread rate: 0.09 m/s
- 1 inside (buried), 1 at 25 m outside
- $\sim 0.15 \text{ mm}^2/\text{px}$



- Increased fire intensity led to more brands
- Major shower at ~20 minutes (station N1) with hot brands
- Increased fire intensity upwind
- Travel time up to 5 minutes

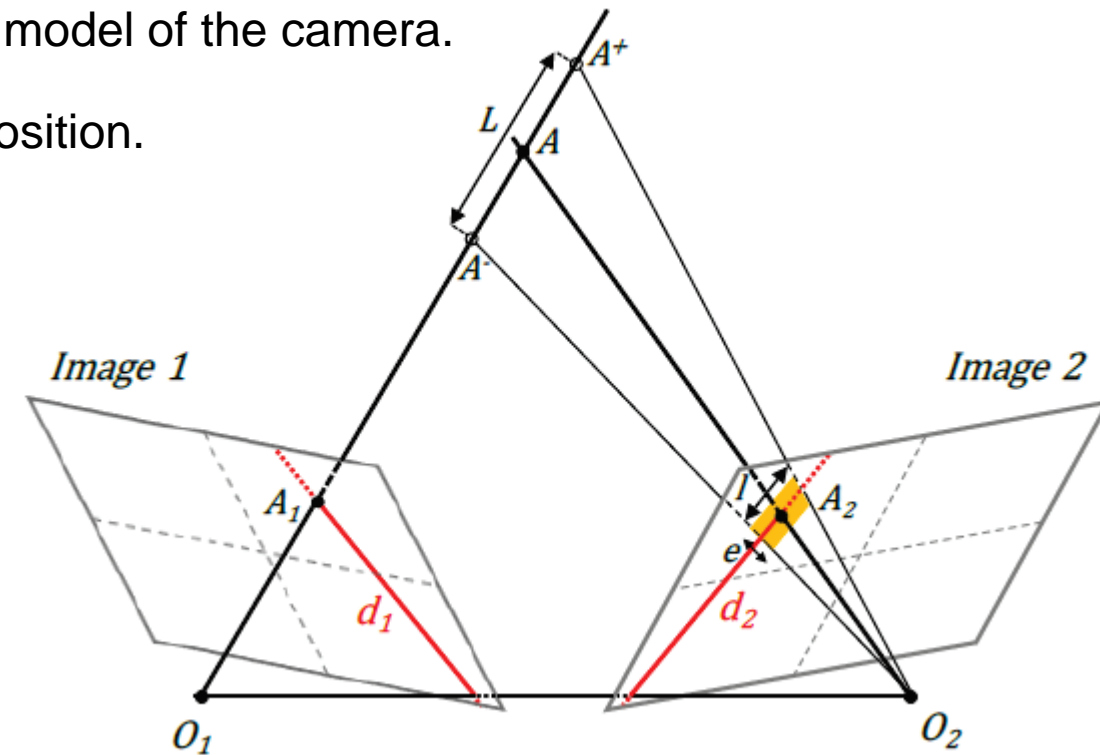
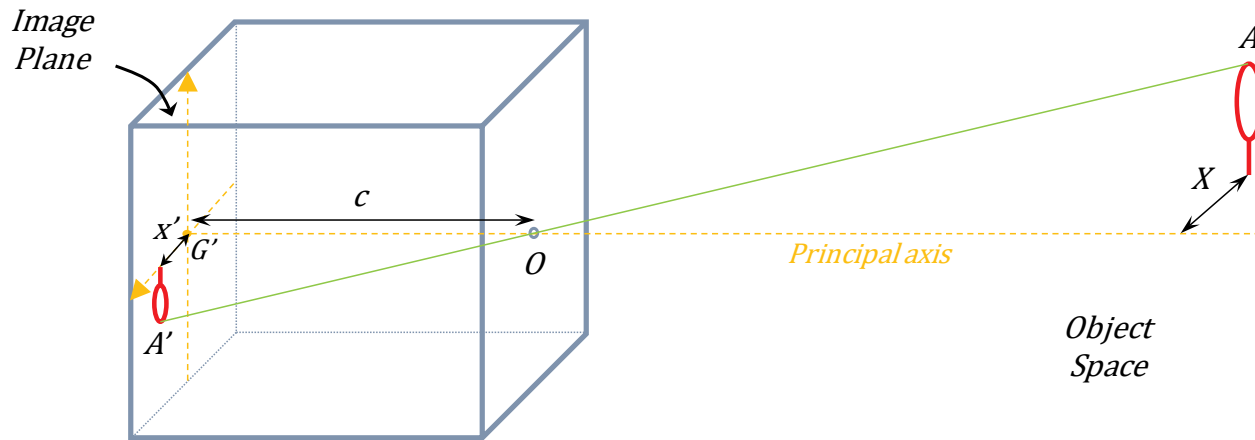
- Measurement device geared towards **field measurements**
- Two **imaging techniques**: 3D Particle Image Velocimetry (3D-PTV) and 3D Particle Shape Reconstruction (3D-PSR)
- **Quantitative** characterization of an artificially generated firebrand flow in **outdoor settings** (tracking/numbers)
- **Framework** for systematic **comparison** of firebrand exposures (3D)



Bouvet N., Link E.D., Fink S.A. (2020) Development of a New Approach to Characterize Firebrand Showers During Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Fires: a Step Towards High-Fidelity Measurements in Three Dimensions. *NIST Technical Note 2093*. National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. <https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.TN.2093>

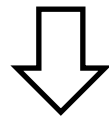
Bouvet N., Link E.D., Fink S.A. (2021) A new approach to characterize firebrand showers using advanced 3D imaging techniques. *Experiments in Fluids* 62:181. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00348-021-03277-6>

- **Photogrammetry** = 3D measurement technique using **central projection imaging**
- Makes possible the **location of an object in 3D** using the intersection of **at least** two homologous image rays (i.e. from the same object point) using two images or more (e.g. cameras with different location/view angles).
- **Interior** (intrinsic) **orientation** = internal geometric model of the camera.
- **Exterior** (extrinsic) **orientation** = camera angles/position.



3D particle sizing performed using the **Visual Hull Concept** at each time step (in-house code):

1. Back projection of **particle silhouette** (2D image) towards the measurement space using calibration information (spatial + sizing).
2. Process repeated for **all viewpoints**.
3. Intersection of all projection cones defines the **3D particle shape** = largest possible volumetric domain giving identical silhouettes in all image planes.
4. Re-orientation of particle and edge extraction (orthogonal directions).



Average size characteristics using cumulative plots of particle edges using all available timesteps

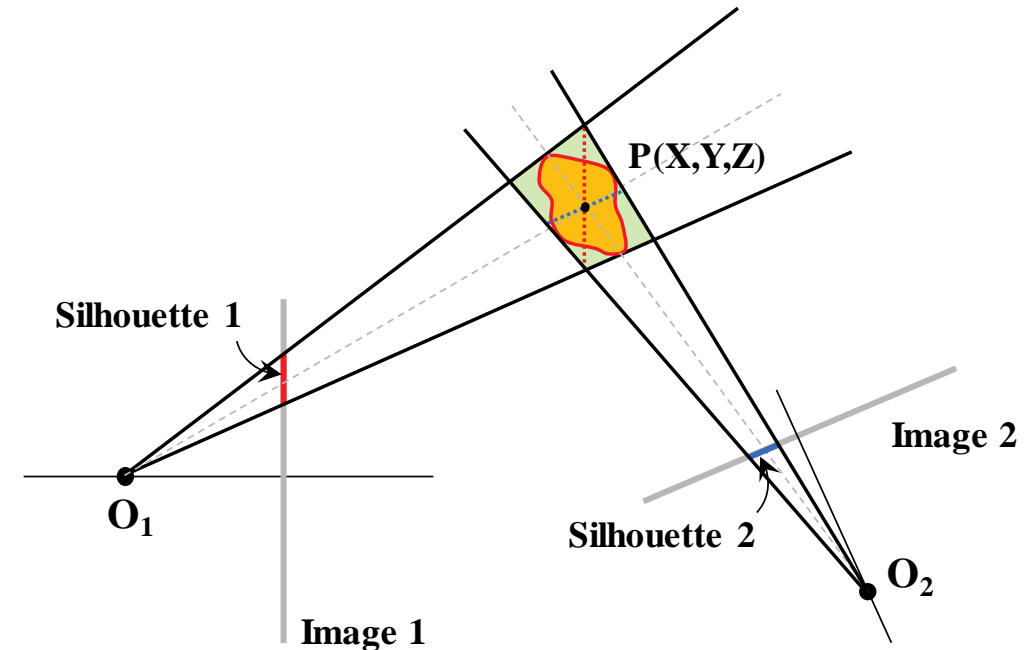
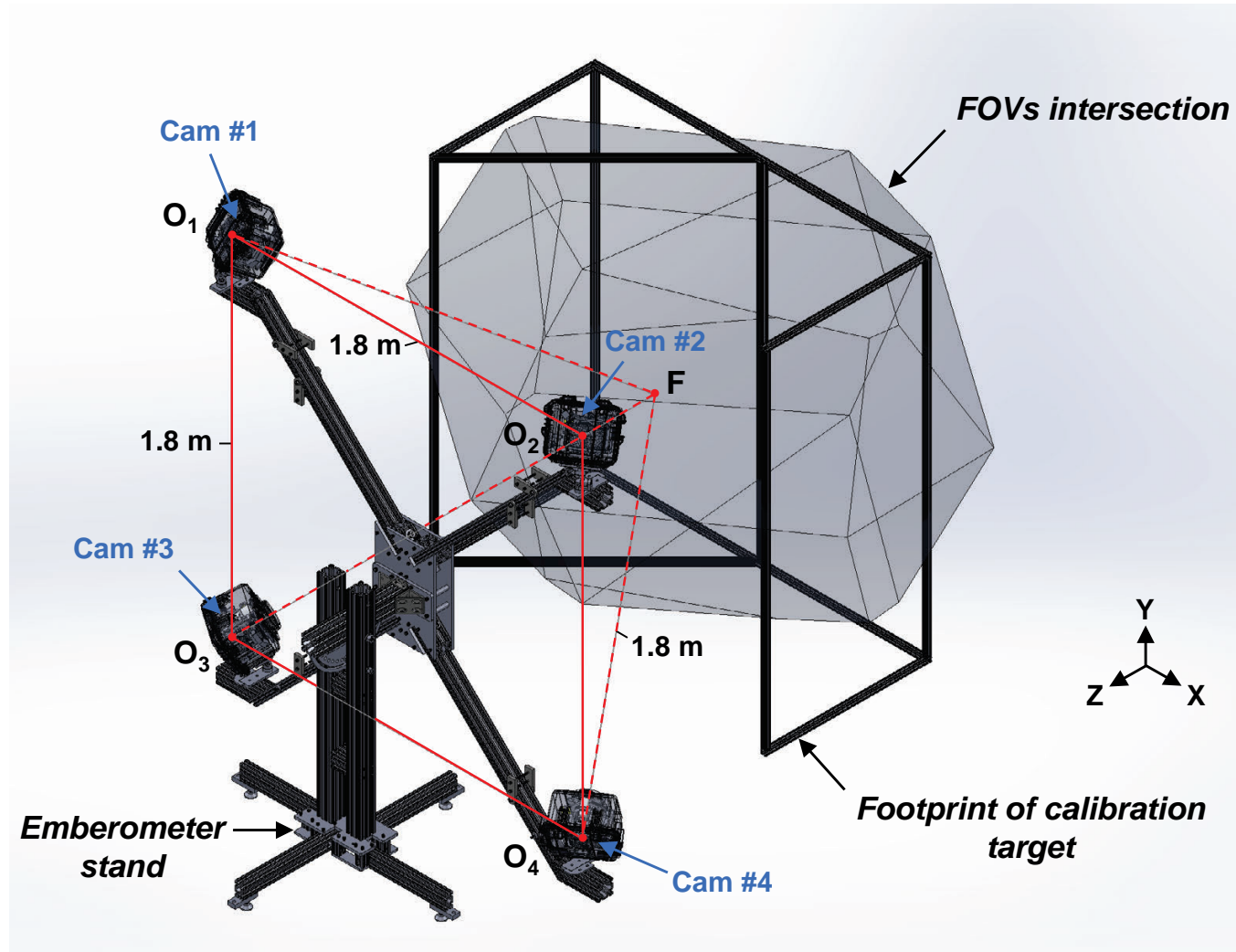


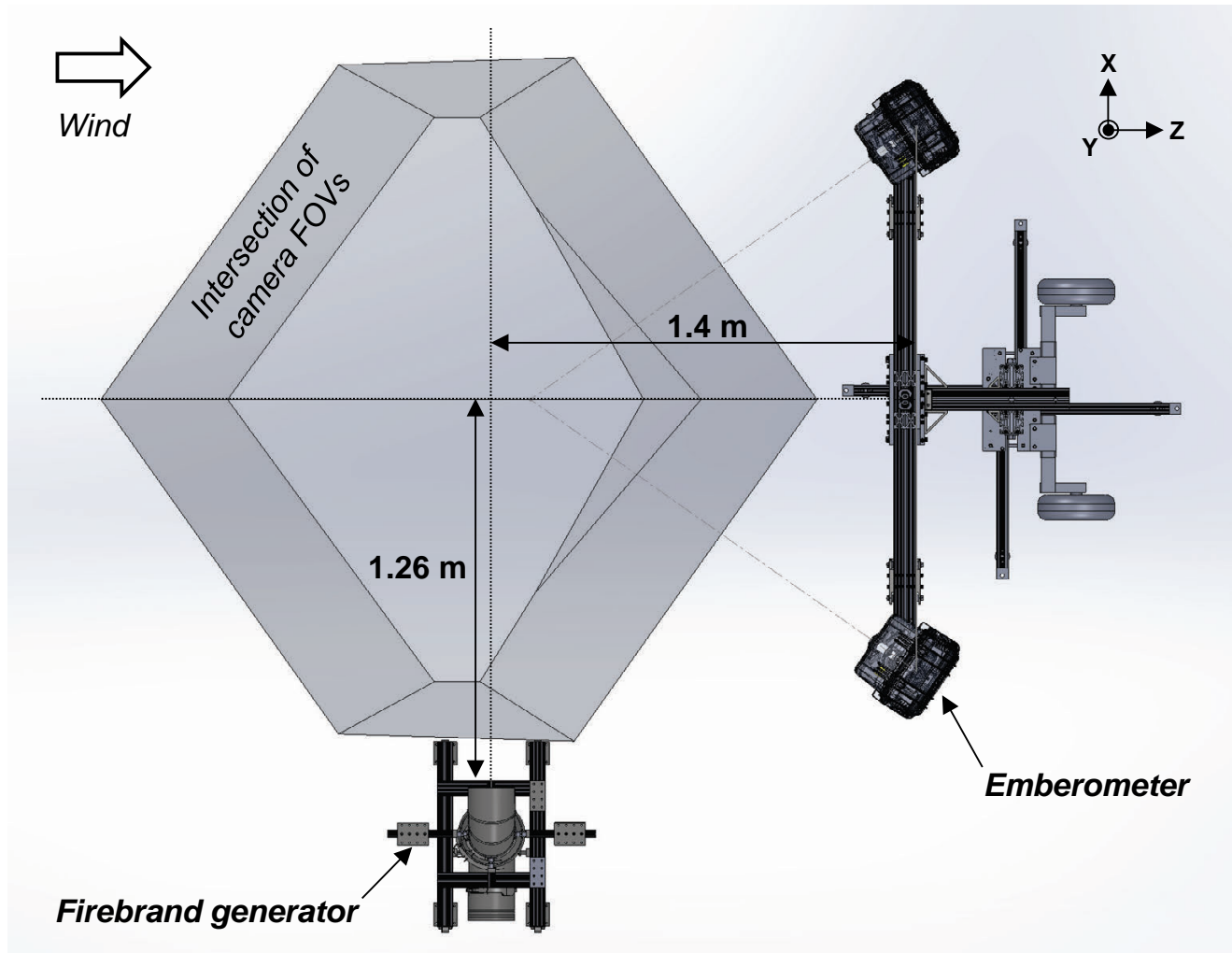
Illustration of the Visual Hull method



Emberometer schematic and optical layout

- Four compact **consumer-grade** cameras operated at min. focal length ($f = 8.8$ mm) and largest aperture ($f/2.4$)
- **Modified** cameras (**full spectrum conversion**) fitted with infrared filters ($\tau = 95\%$ above 760 nm) → **Enhanced** airborne firebrand **visualization**
- Video mode, nominal frame rate **120 fps** at **1080p**
- **Optical layout**: camera perspective centers forming the base vertices of an equilateral square pyramid (1.8 m edge length)
- FOVs intersection **volume** ≈ 3.18 m³ (tri- and stereoscopic tracking allowed)
- **Field-deployable** package with **remote control** capabilities

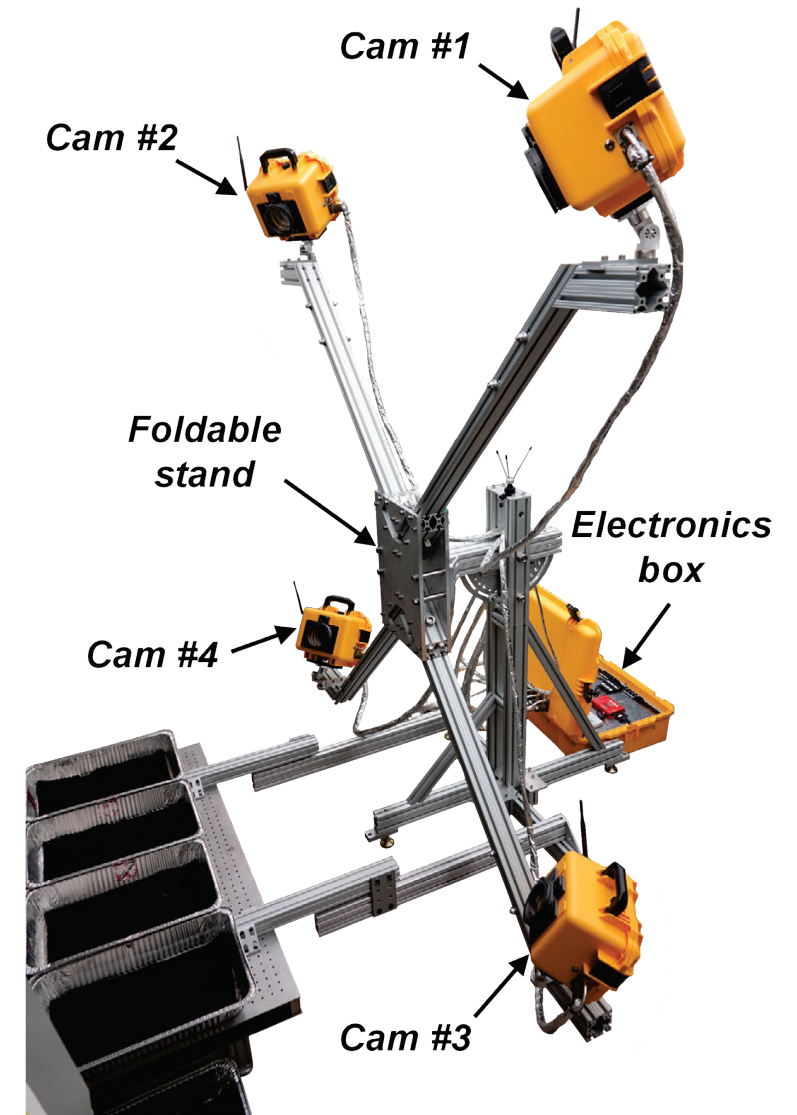
Emberometer System Configuration



Experimental layout top view

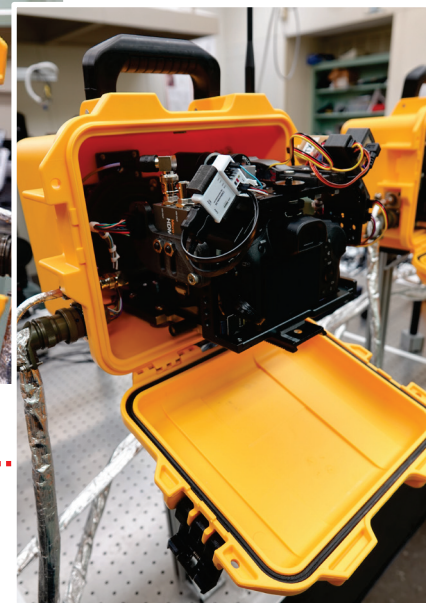
- Emberometer set downstream of **firebrand generator** (centrifugal blower + SS duct elements)
- **Fuel:** 350 g \pm 1 g of dry (MC < 6 %) **birch/maple dowels** (diam. 6.4 mm \pm 0.1 mm, length 51 mm \pm 0.4 mm)
- No specific orientation with respect to **background environment** (mix of asphalt, forested areas and clear sky)
- Mixed production of **smoldering** and **flaming** firebrands

Emberometer System Configuration



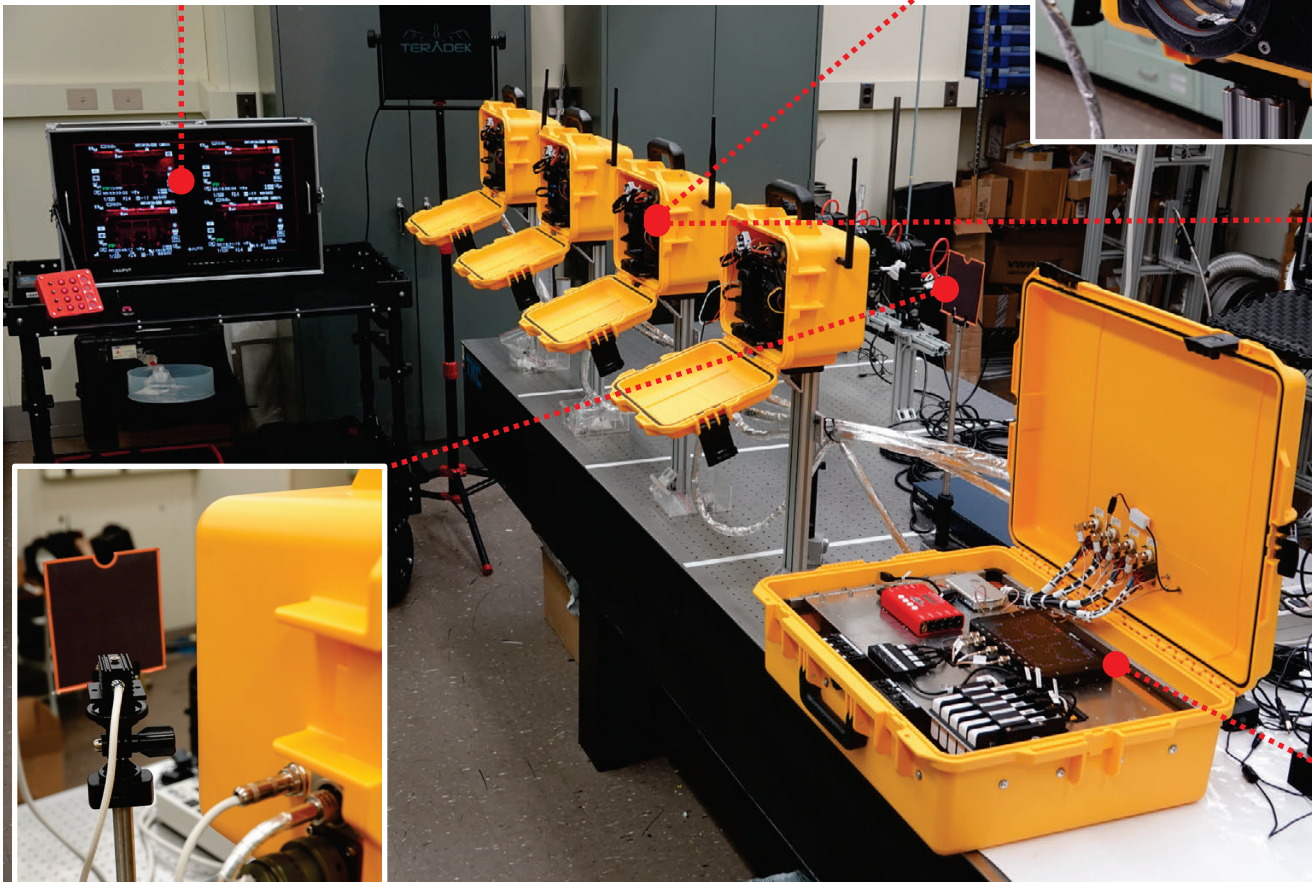
Electronics

Camera box front face



Retracted camera

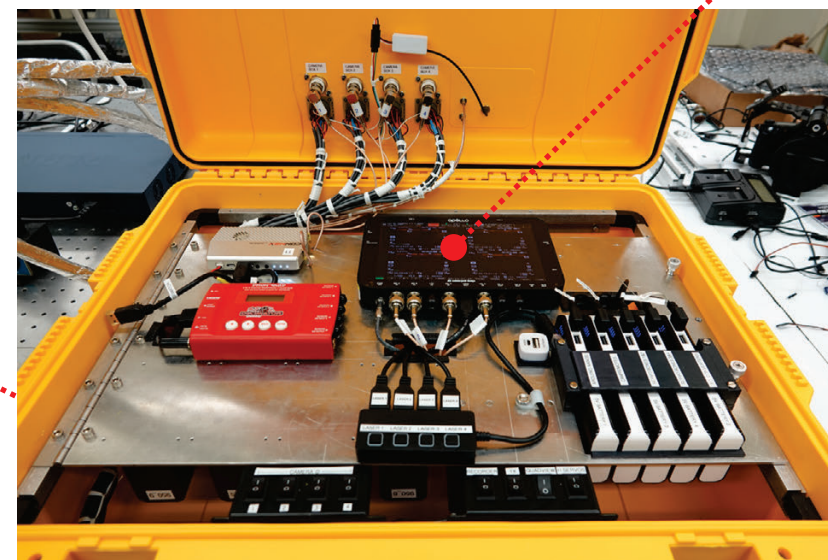
Remote viewing screen



- Batteries
- Radio transmitters
- Camera controllers
- Multi-viewer

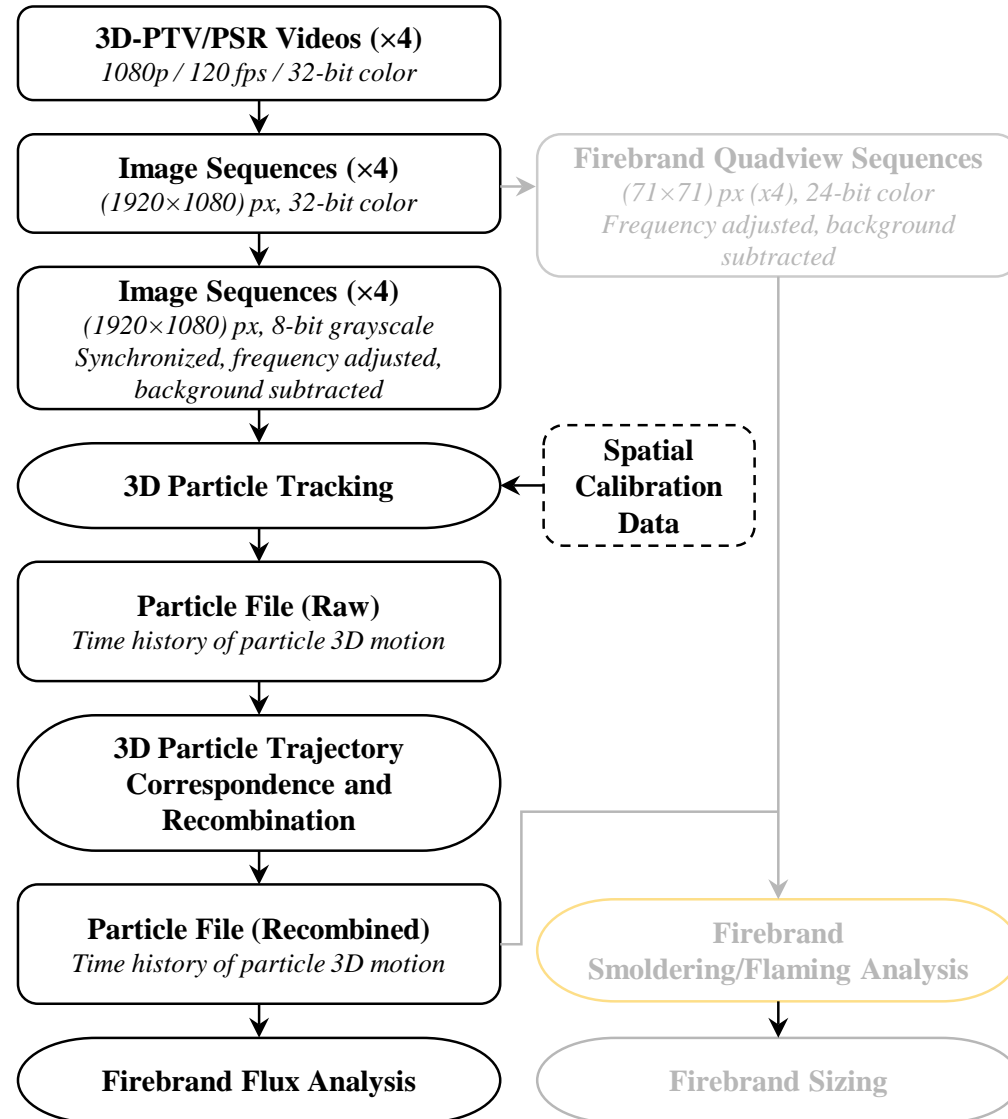


Sync. laser



Main electronics control box

Processing Flowchart



Tracking

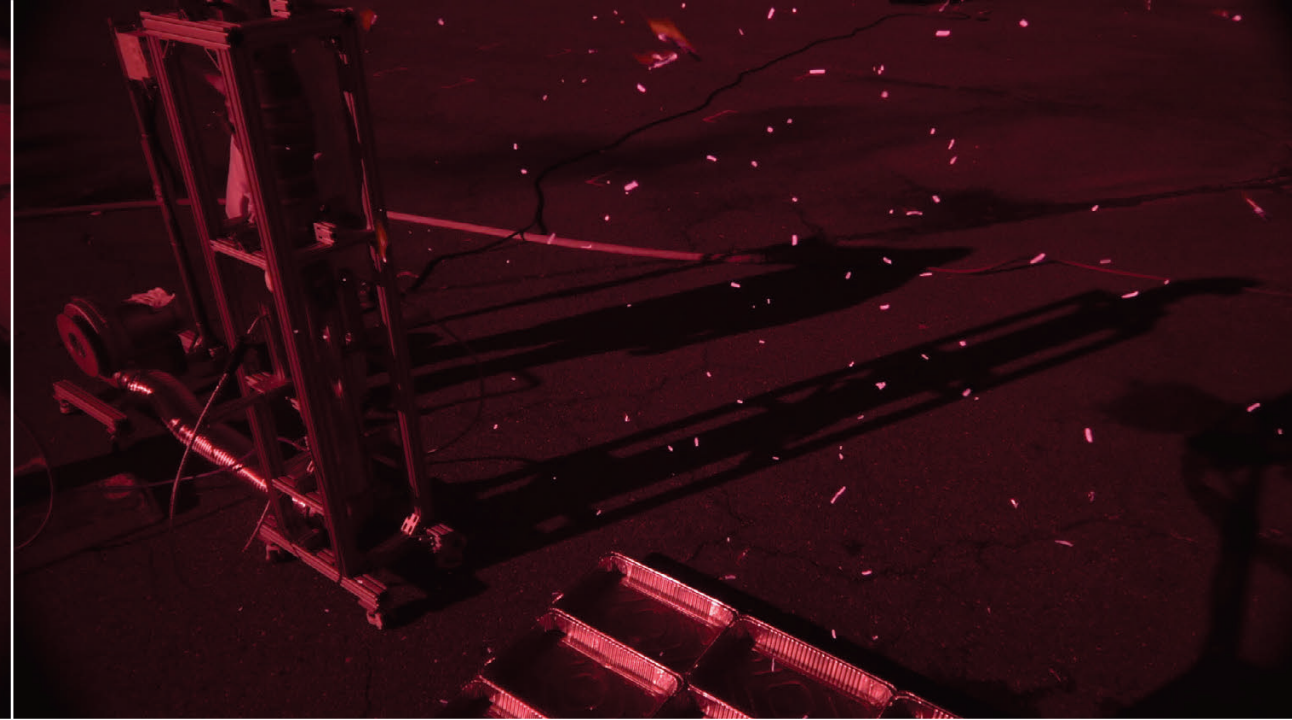
- **3D tracking** via open-source software OpenPTV

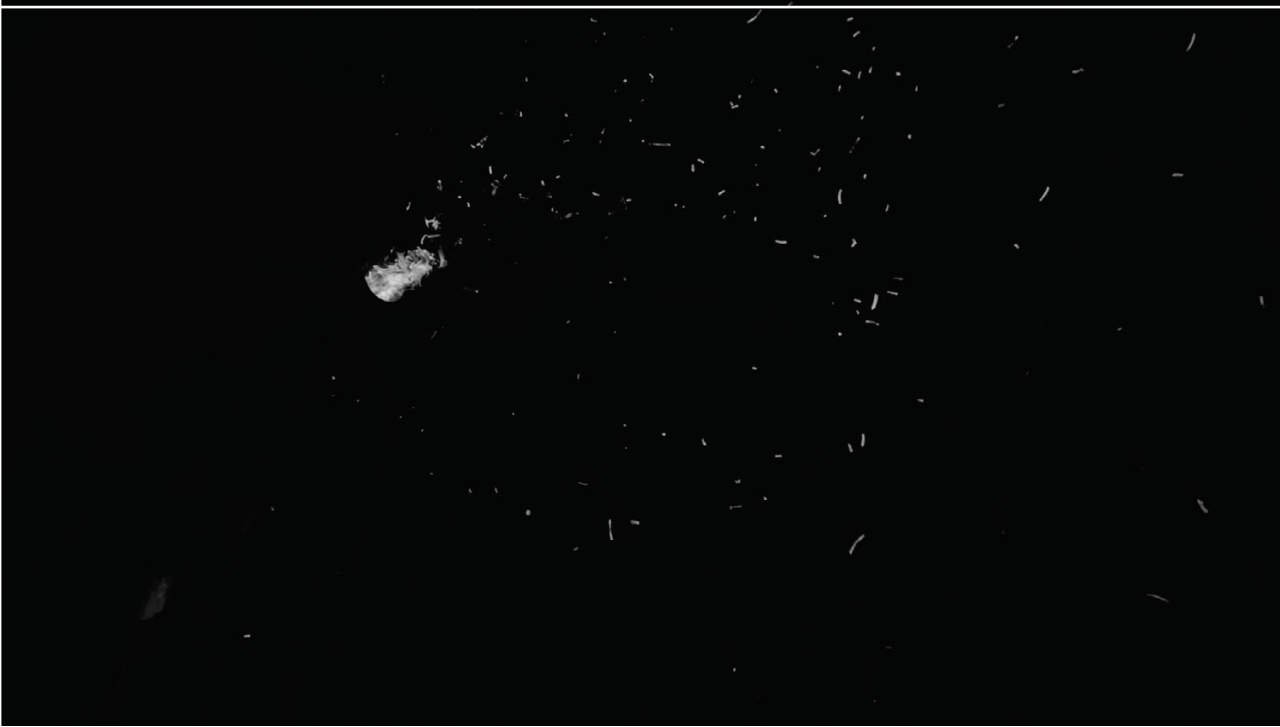
Standard set of operations including:

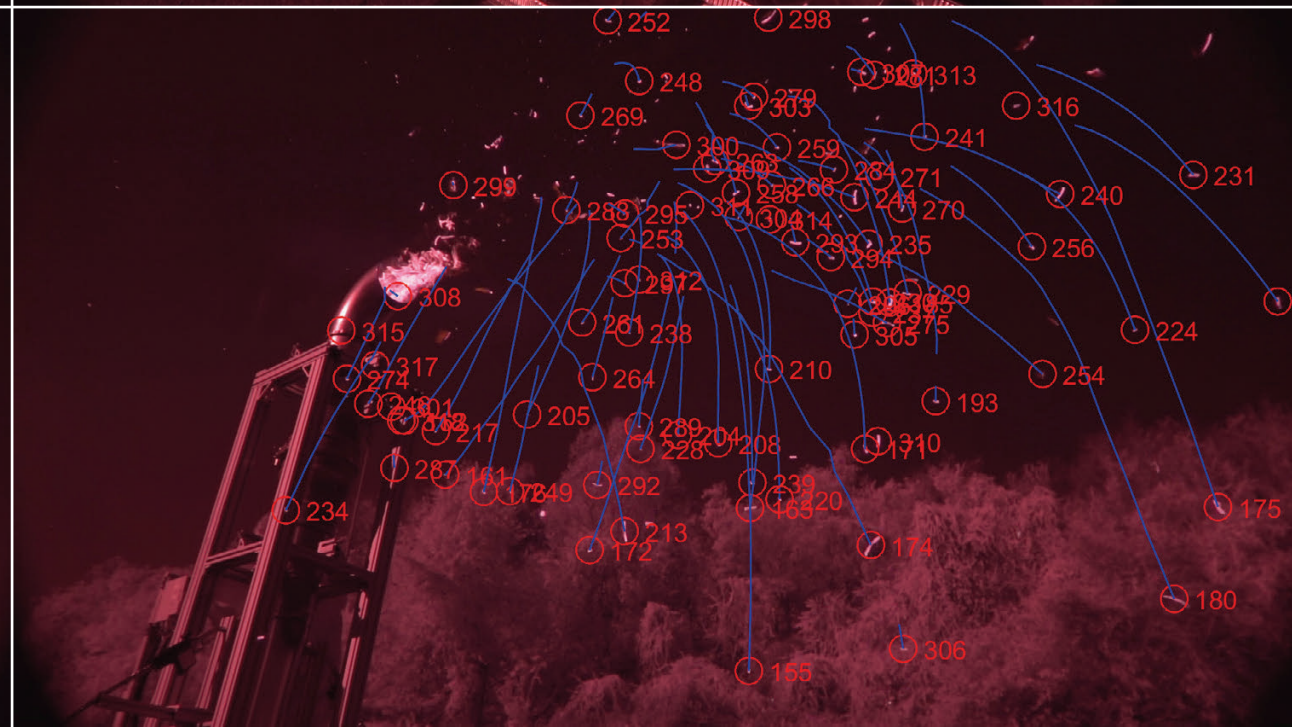
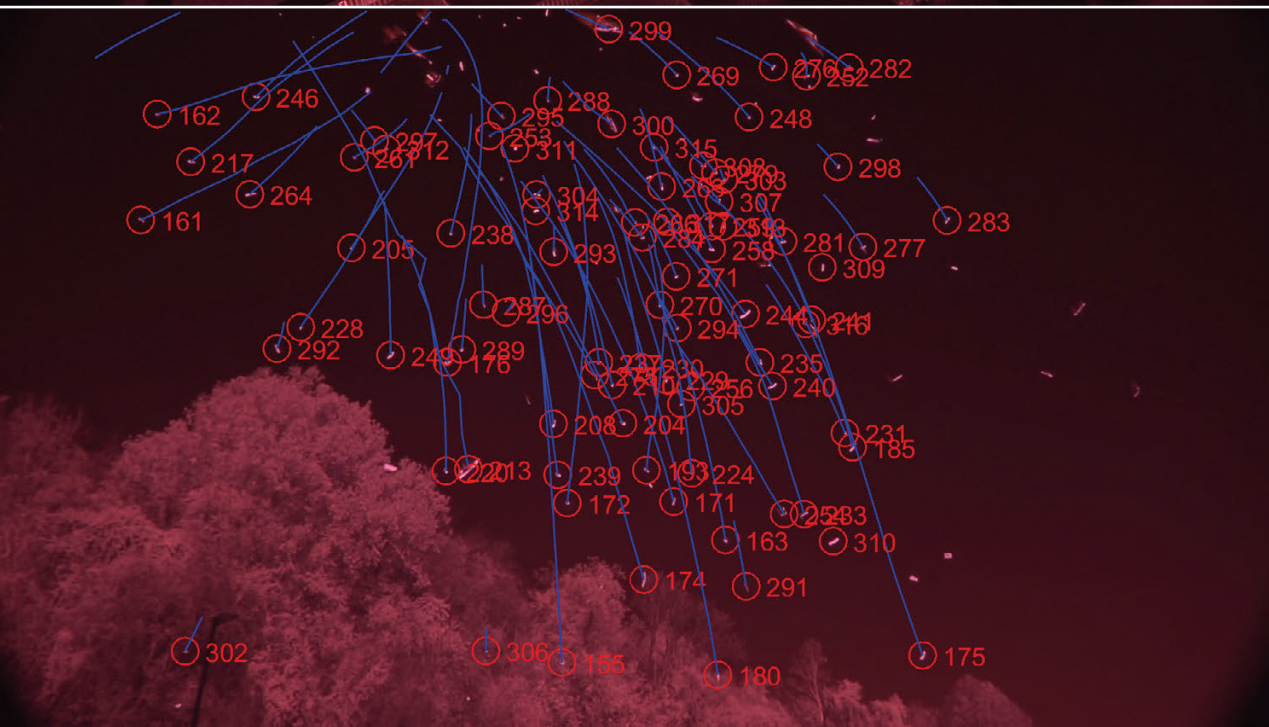
1. Multi-camera system **spatial calibration**
 2. Particle **detection** in each image plane
 3. Particle **correspondences** across all views
 4. Computation of particle **3D coordinates**
 5. **Tracking**
- Max. Particle Image Density (PID) $\approx 1.6 \times 10^{-4}$ particle-per-pixel (ppp):
 - 1 order of magnitude less than PIDs known to promote triangulation errors [1]
 - 3 orders of magnitude less than PIDs requiring advanced tracking procedure [2]

[1] Mass et al., *Exp. Fluids* 15(2): 133-146

[2] Schanz et al., *Exp. Fluids* 57(5): 70

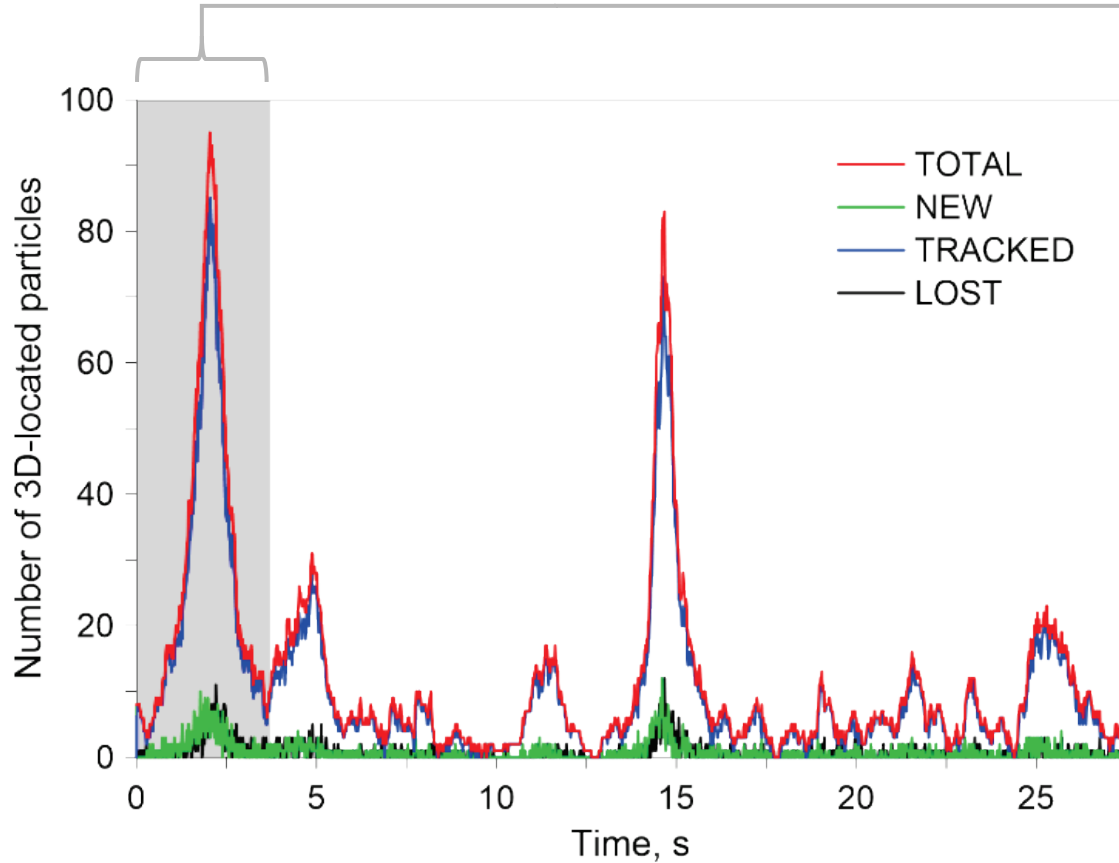






Particle Tracking Performance

430 trajectories = over 23,800 individual firebrand images



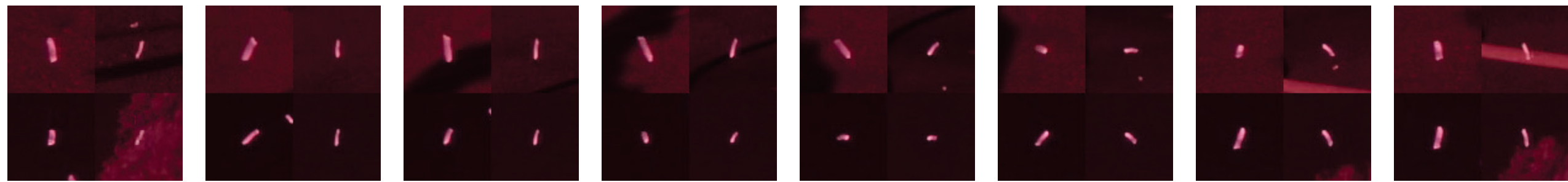
Analysis volume: $X = (-2000 \text{ to } 2000) \text{ mm}$,
 $Y = (-200 \text{ to } 2000) \text{ mm}$, and $Z = (-1100 \text{ to } 1100) \text{ mm}$

| Trajectory type | % (# of trajectories) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Single | 63.3 (272) |
| Broken | |
| Successfully recombined | 25.8 (111) |
| Not successfully recombined | |
| <i>Overlap</i> | 3.5 (15) |
| <i>Other</i> | 1.6 (7) |
| Spurious | |
| Successfully removed | 0.9 (4) |
| Not successfully removed | |
| <i>Duplicate</i> | 2.3 (10) |
| <i>Other</i> | 2.6 (11) |
| Total | 100 (430) |

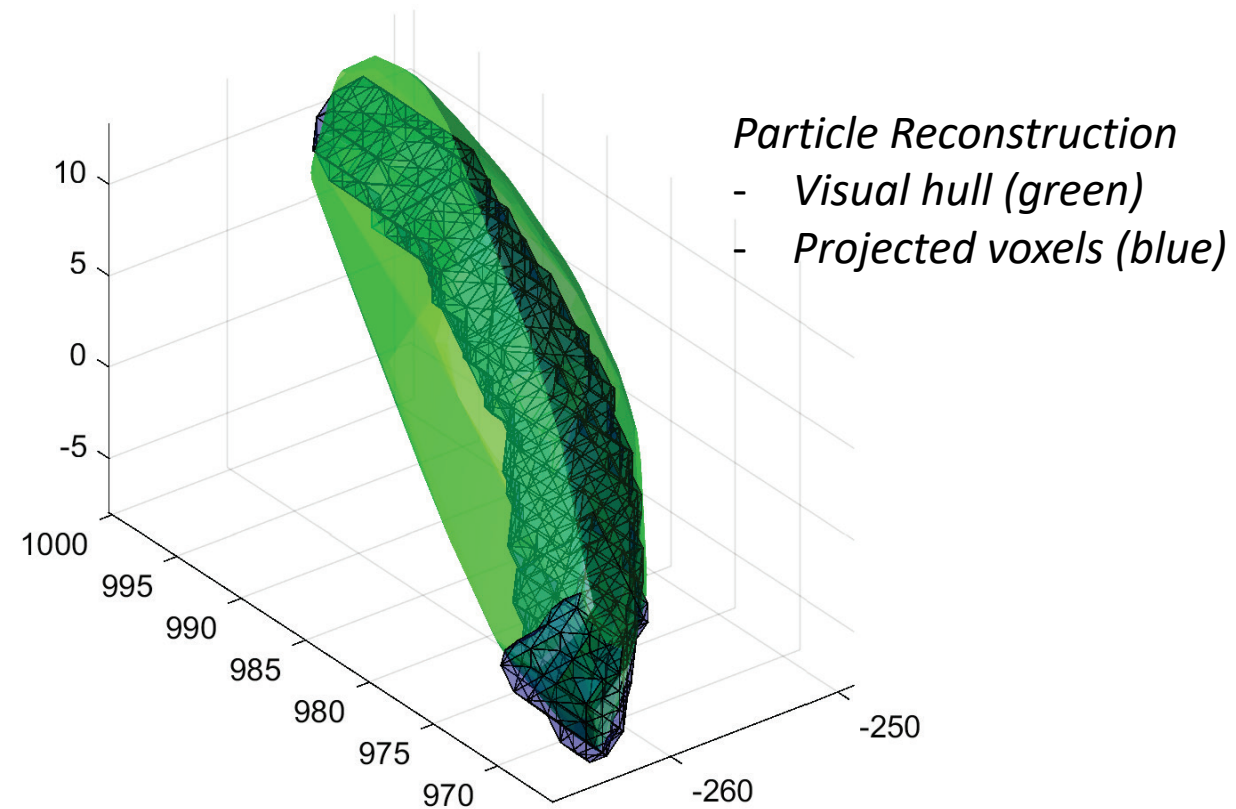
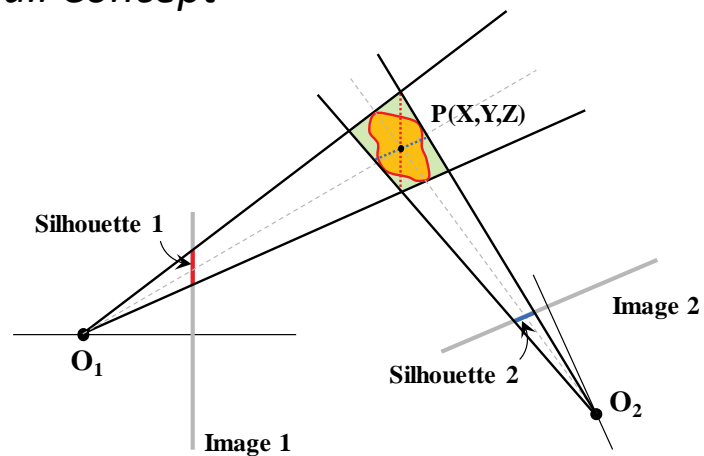
90 % of the raw trajectories accurately processed by the tracking/recombination algorithms

Up to 96 % if dual centroid detection cases (see *Overlap/Duplicate*) recouped during the later particle sizing step

Single Particle Quadview – Particle Lifetime



Visual Hull Concept

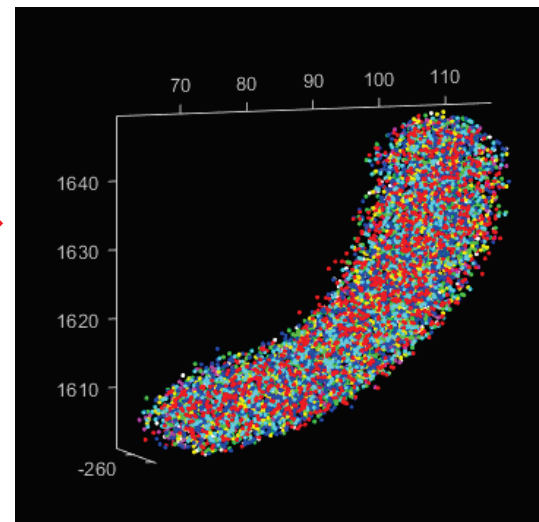
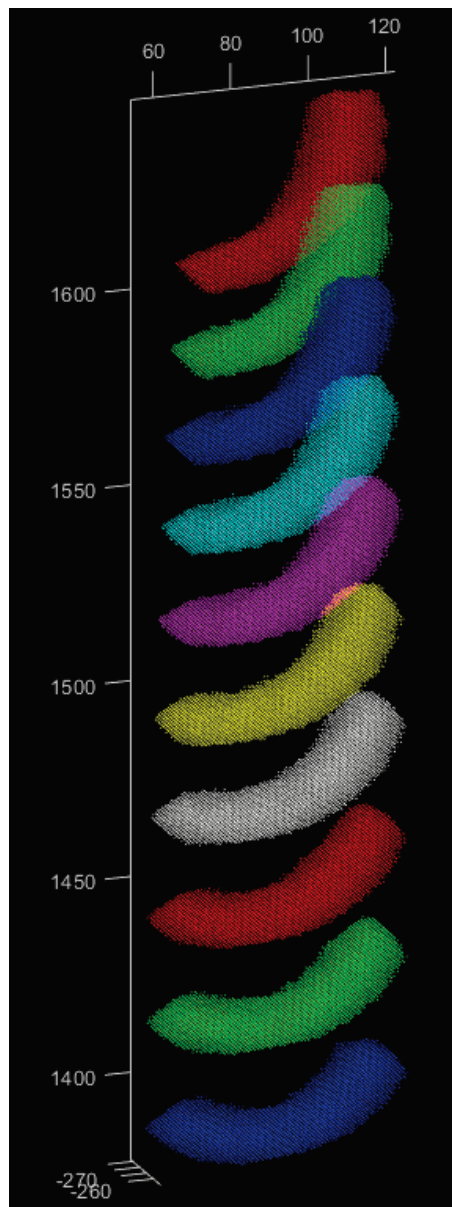


Particle Shape Reconstruction



Projected Voxels

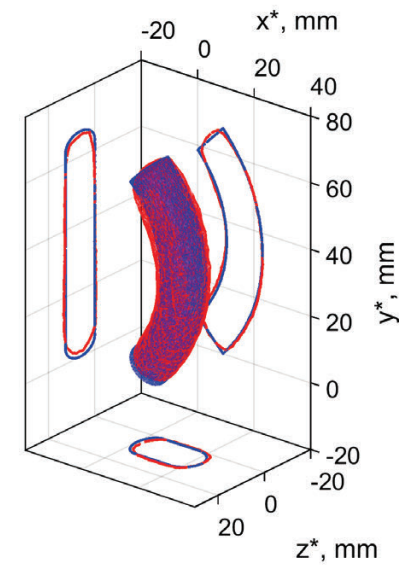
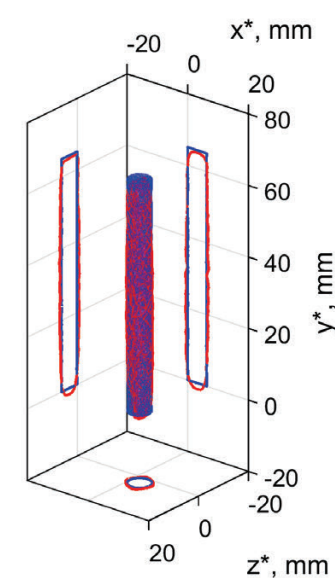
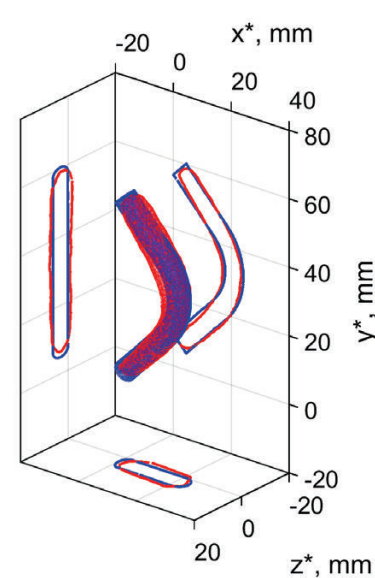
Reconstructed Particle Pointclouds at Sequential Timesteps



Combined Reconstructed Pointclouds

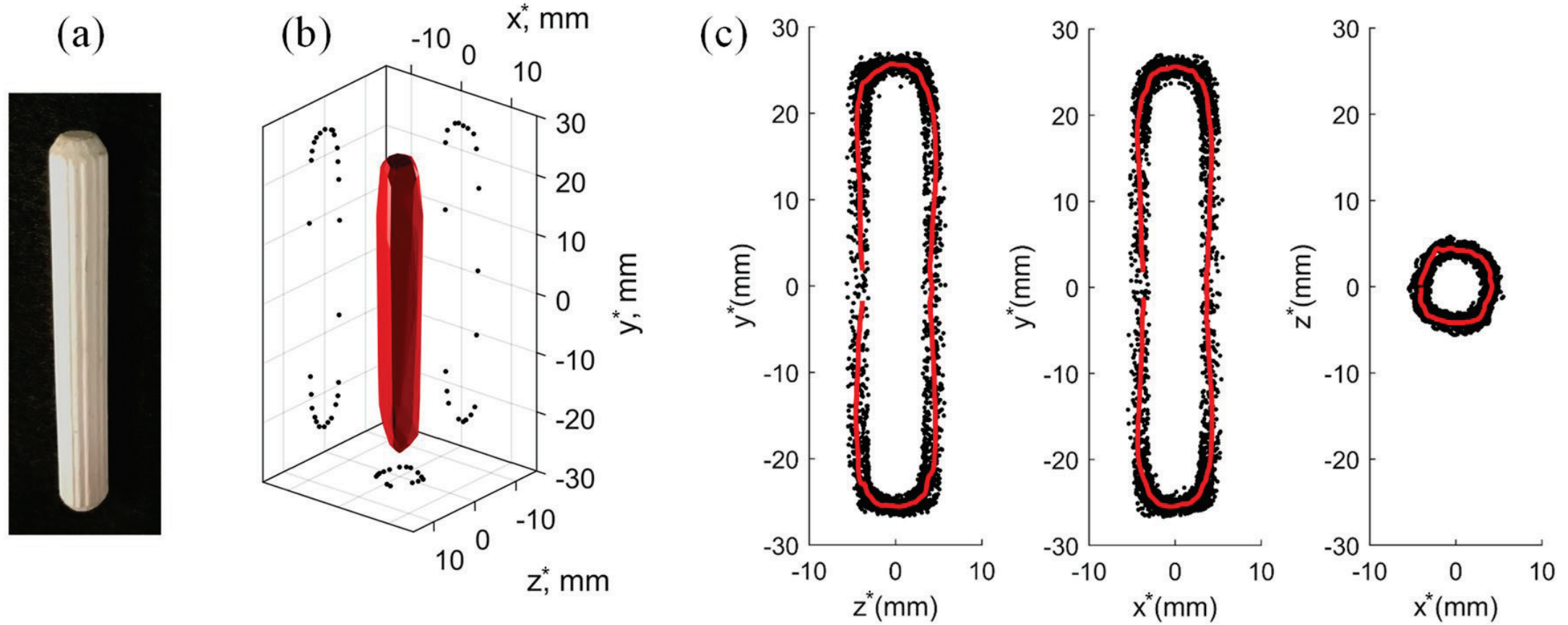


Reconstructed Particles

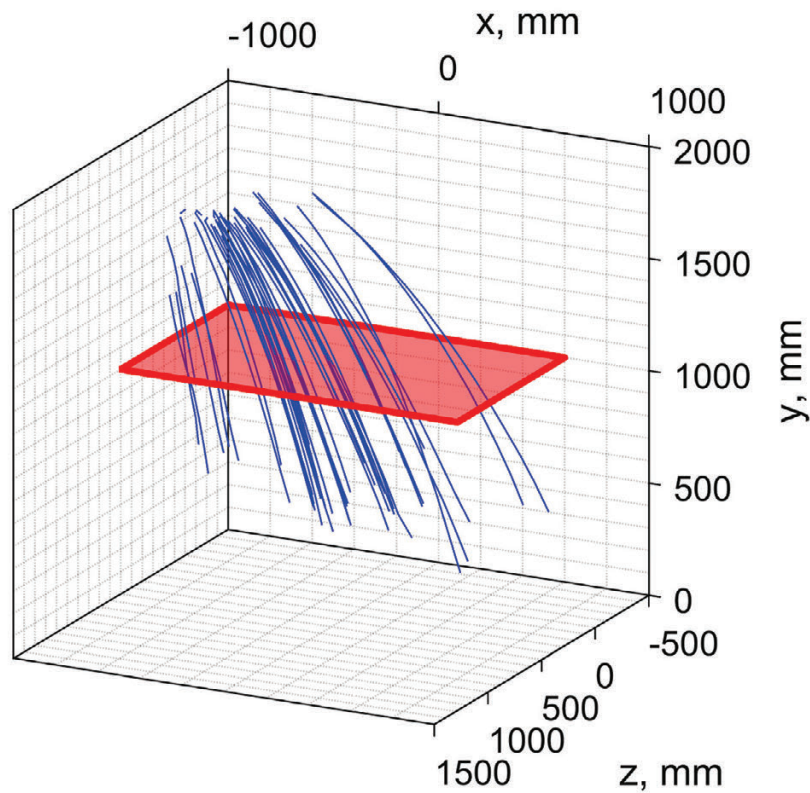


Emberometer Test (1/4 speed)

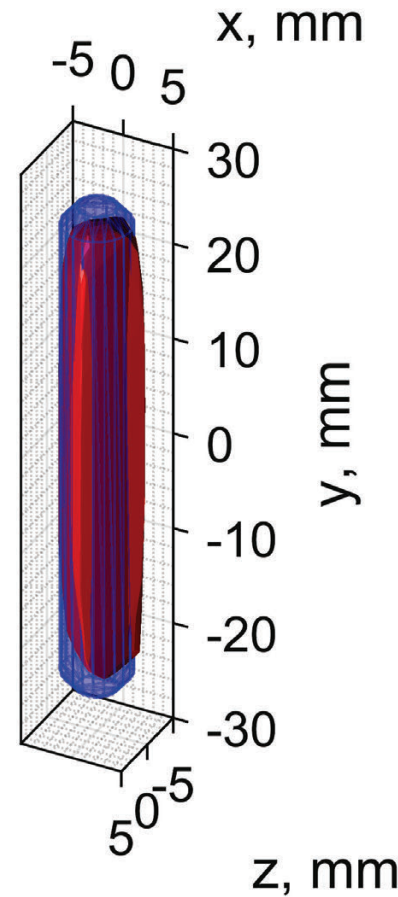
Validation with Noncombusting Particles



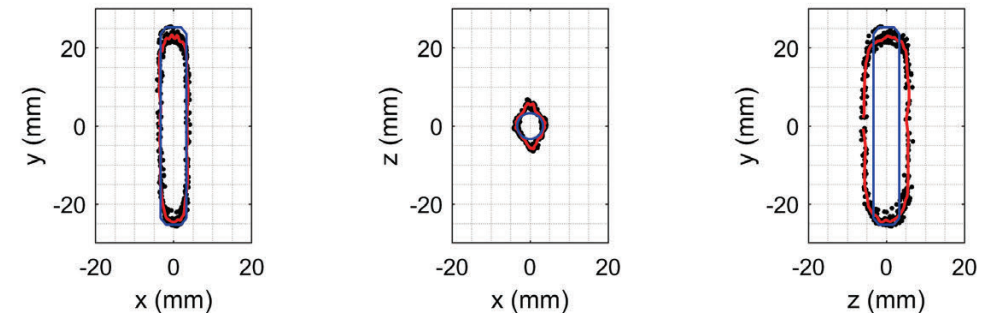
Validation with Noncombusting Particles



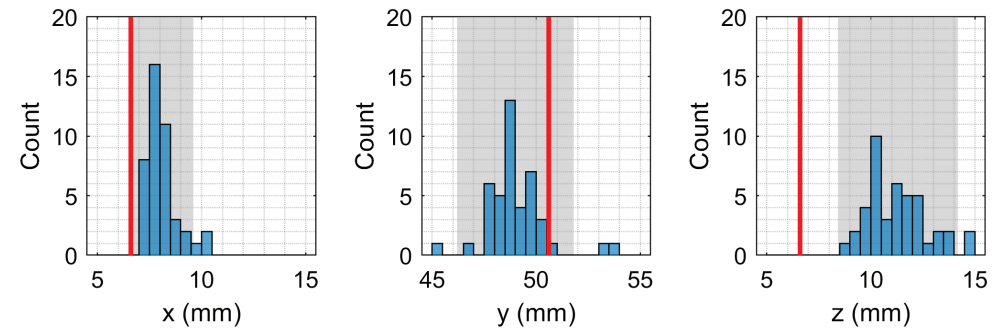
Tracking of validation particles
($N = 43$, red: reference surface)



3D-reconstructed (red) and actual shape (blue) of validation particle
(single time step)

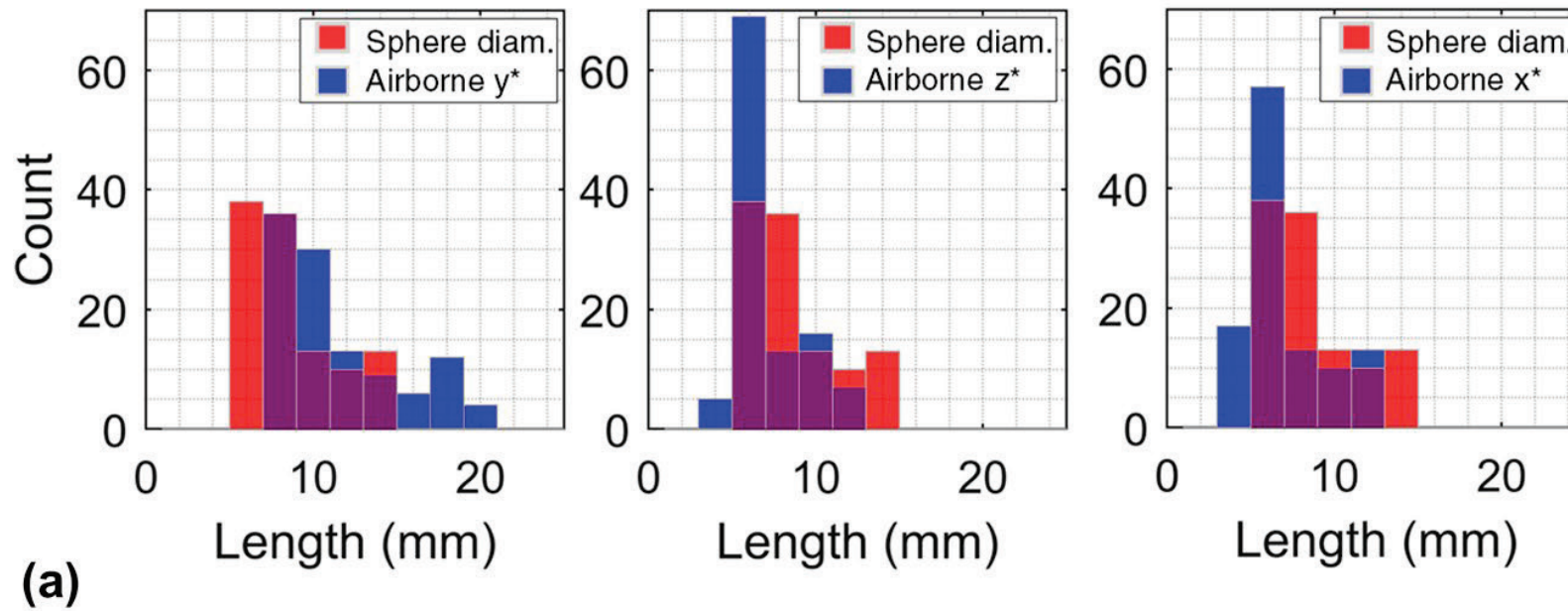


Orthogonal views of reconstructed particle (all time steps)

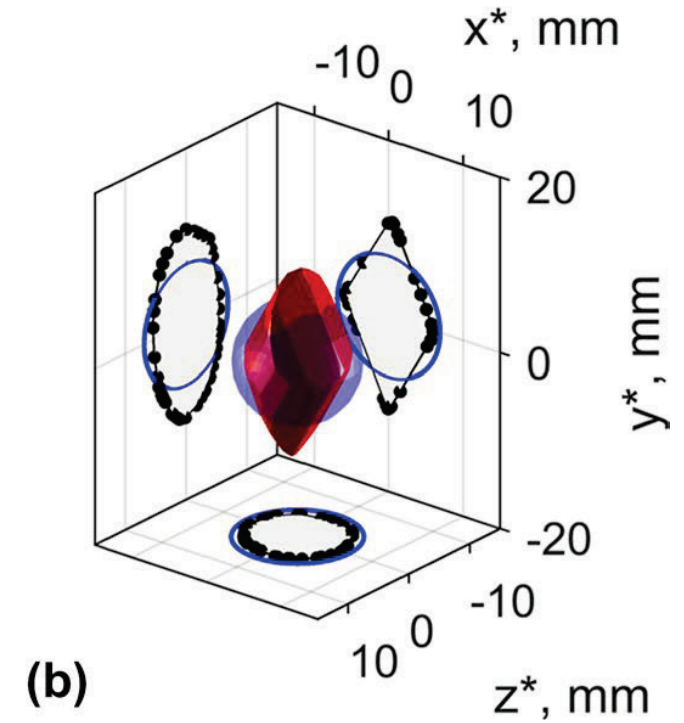


Histograms of measured dimensions
(red line: actual size, greyed area: expanded uncertainties)

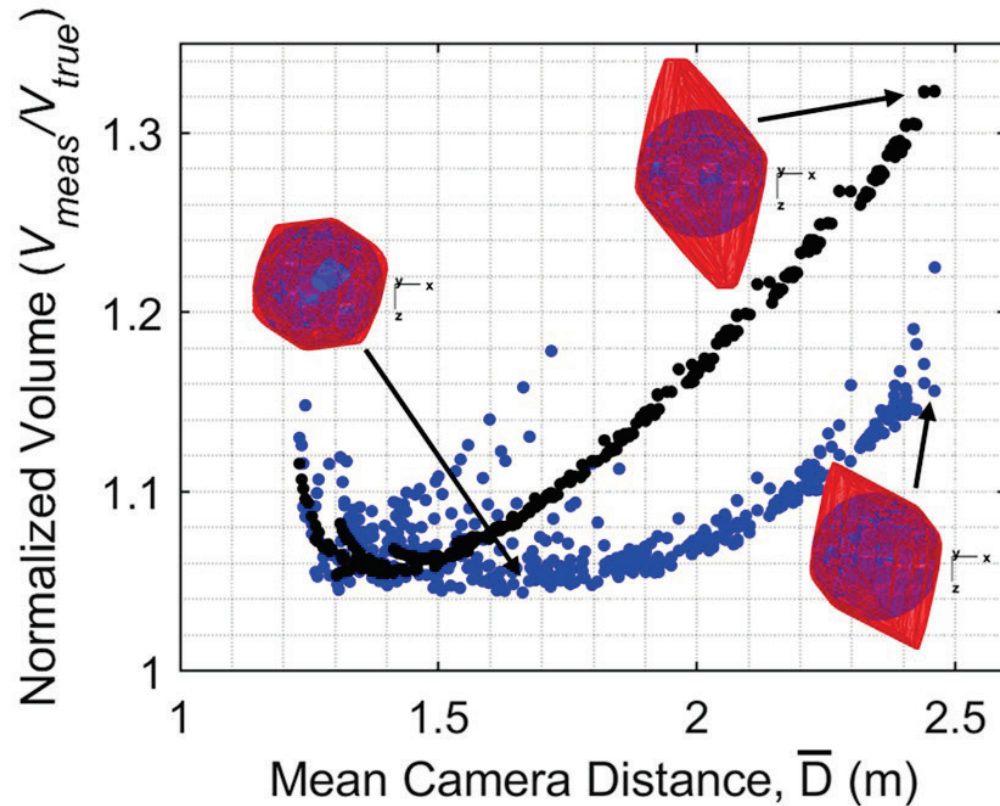
Validation with Noncombusting Particles



Actual and Measured size distribution of 110 spherical particles



Sample Reconstruction



Effect of camera position

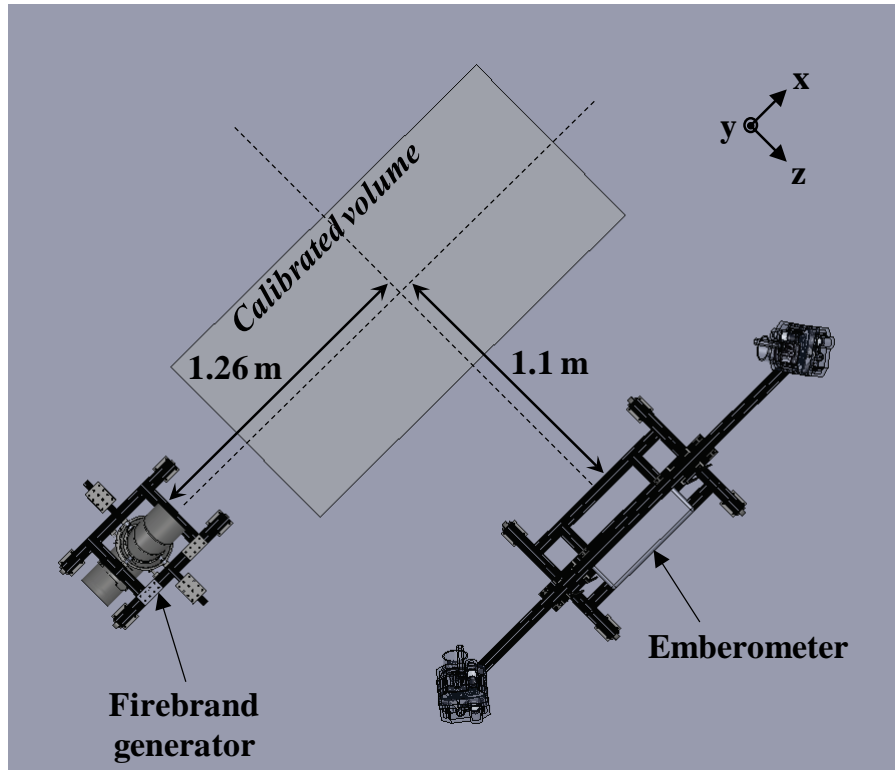
- actual
- alternate

Co-planar cameras cannot see back side of particles:

- Systematic error
- Tumbling particles
- Attempts to classify error by shape and orientation

Out-of-plane camera adds challenges for:

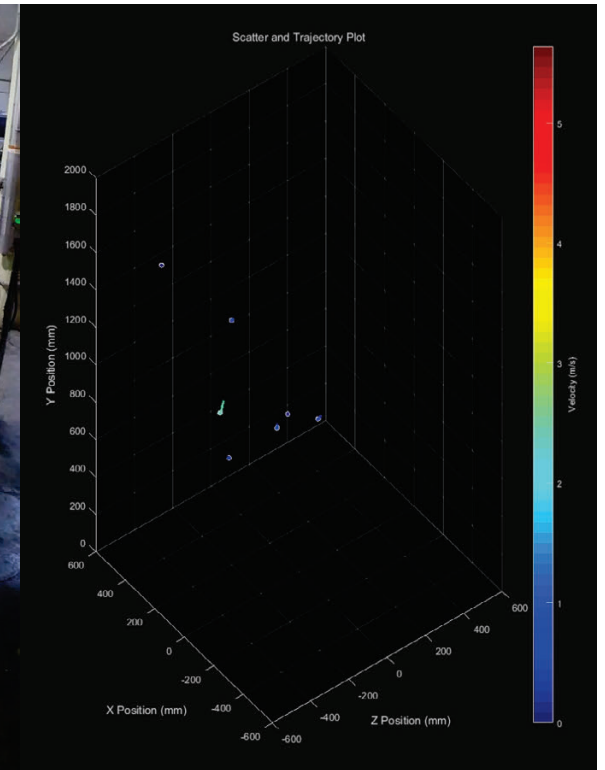
- Calibration
- Deployment



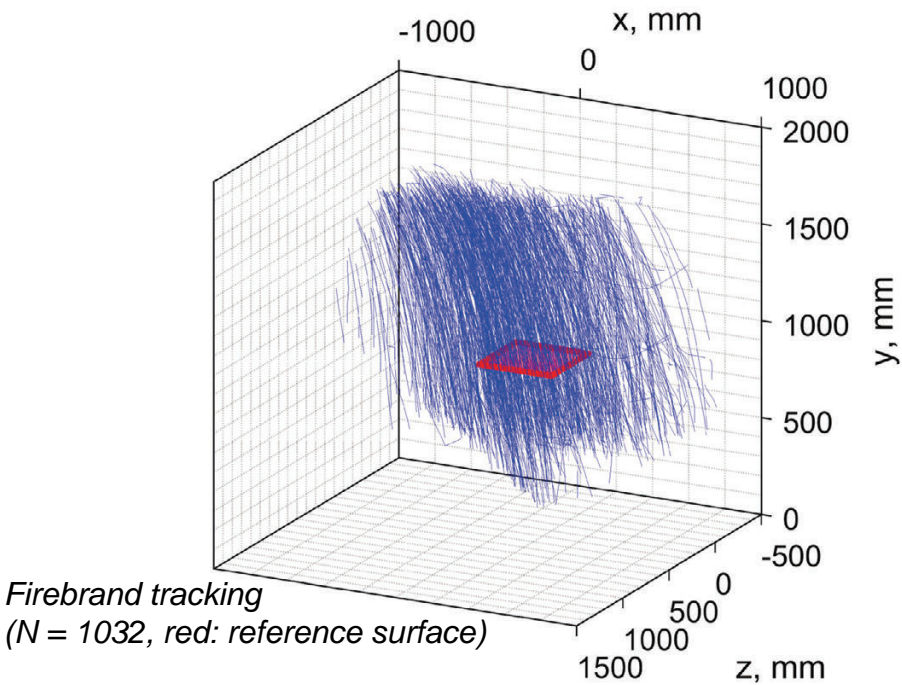
Experimental layout (Top view)



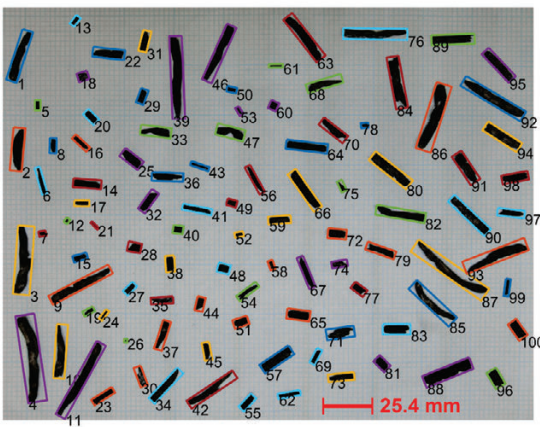
Corner view during test



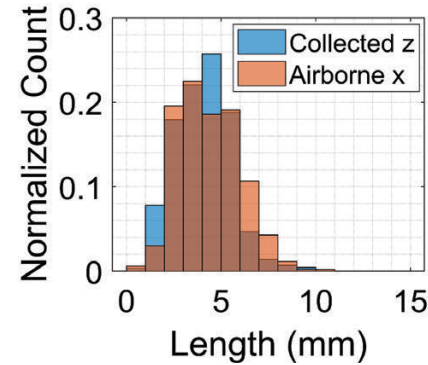
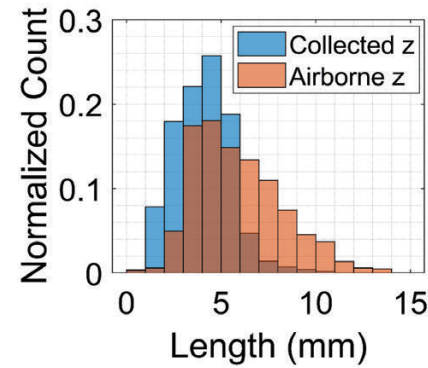
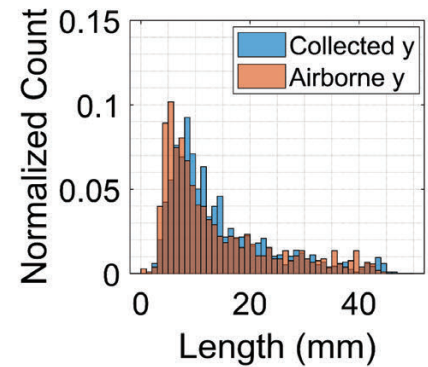
3D-reconstructed firebrand motions



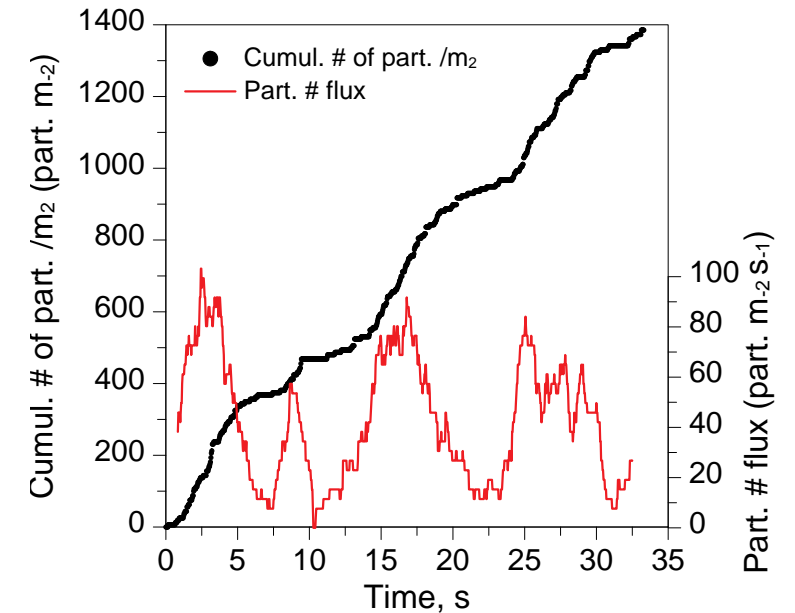
Firebrand tracking
($N = 1032$, red: reference surface)



Example of collected firebrands for size analysis



Comparison of firebrand dimensions:
emberometer measurements (red)
vs. water pan measurements (blue)



Cumulative number and number flux of firebrands during test period



Set-up view



Quad view

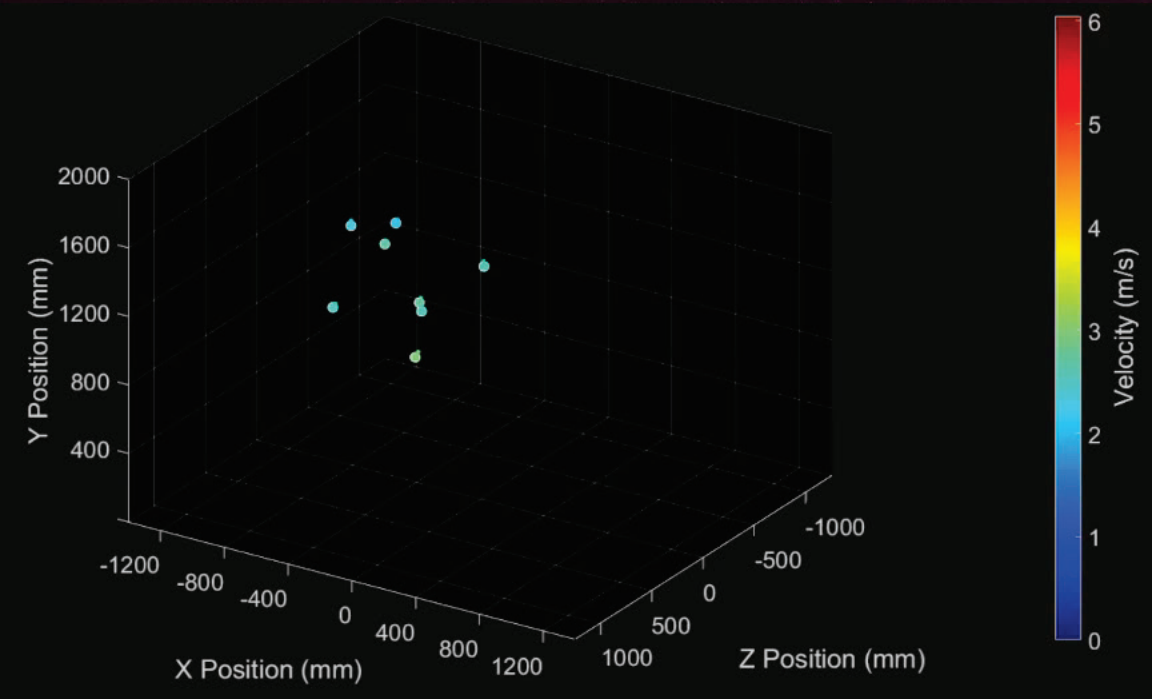
(Raw → Conditioned → Superimposed tracks & identifiers)

Cam #1

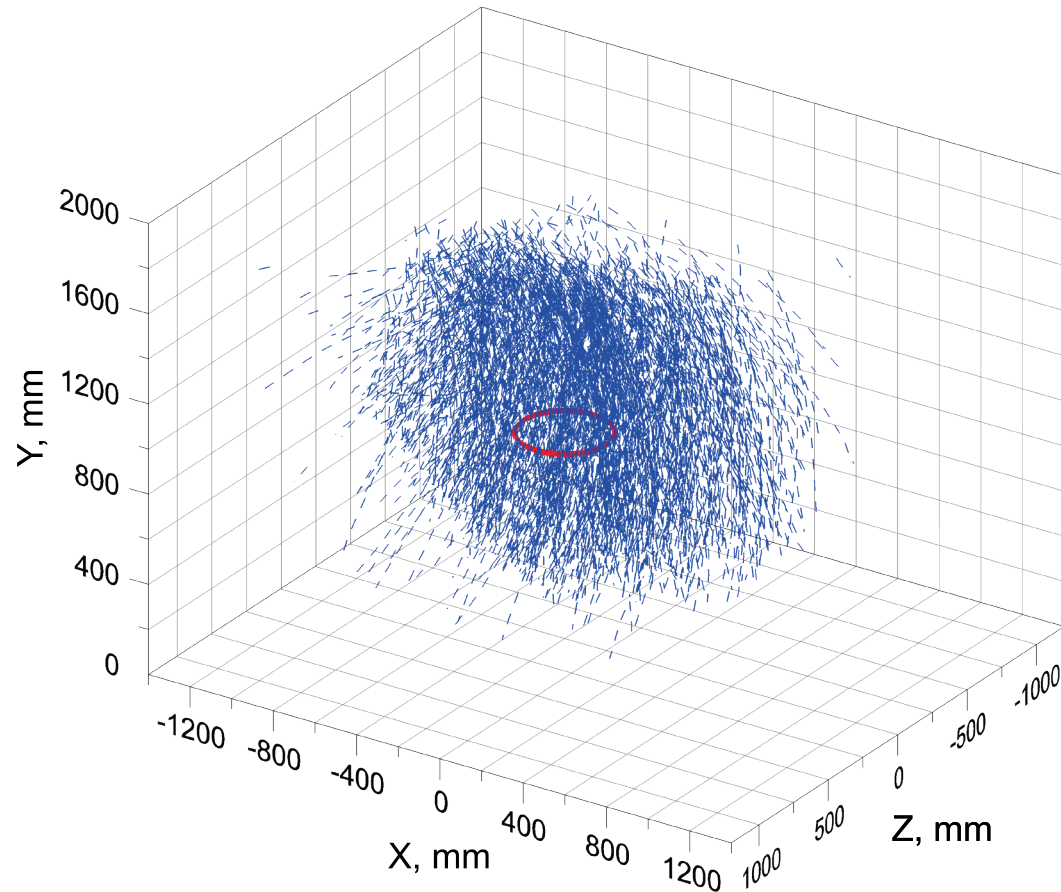
Cam #2

Cam #3

Cam #4

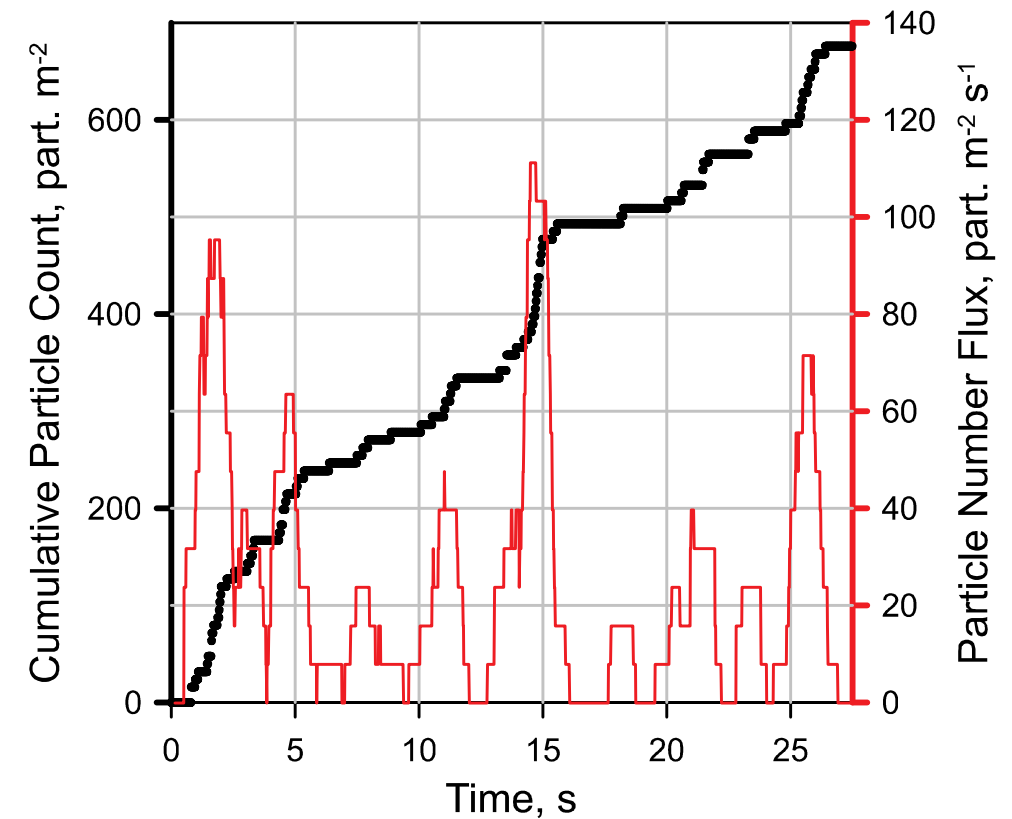


Reconstructed firebrand
3D motions



Cumulative plot of firebrand 3D trajectories

Reference surface is shown by the red circle (center location: X = -100 mm, Y = 1000 mm and Z = 150 mm, radius: 200 mm)



Cumulative Particle Count (CPC) and corresponding Particle Number Flux (PNF) vs. time
(60 timestep derivation window – ref. surface shown in left fig.)

Comparison of Measured Number Flux

| Work | Environment | Fire intensity (MW m ⁻¹) | PNF (part. m ⁻² s ⁻¹) | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Filkov and Prohanov [1]* | NJ Pine Barrens | 0.18 – 4.37 | 0.03 – 2.4 | |
| Thomas et al. [2]* | NJ Pine Barrens | 7.35 – 12.59 | 0.8 – 1.4 3 – 7 | (period of high firebrand activity only) |
| Present** | – | – | Outdoor 24.5 | Indoor 49.1 |

* *Post-fire ground collection / firebrand areal number density normalized by duration of collection*

** *Average number fluxes based on airborne firebrands PNF time series / vertical direction, 1.2 m probing height*

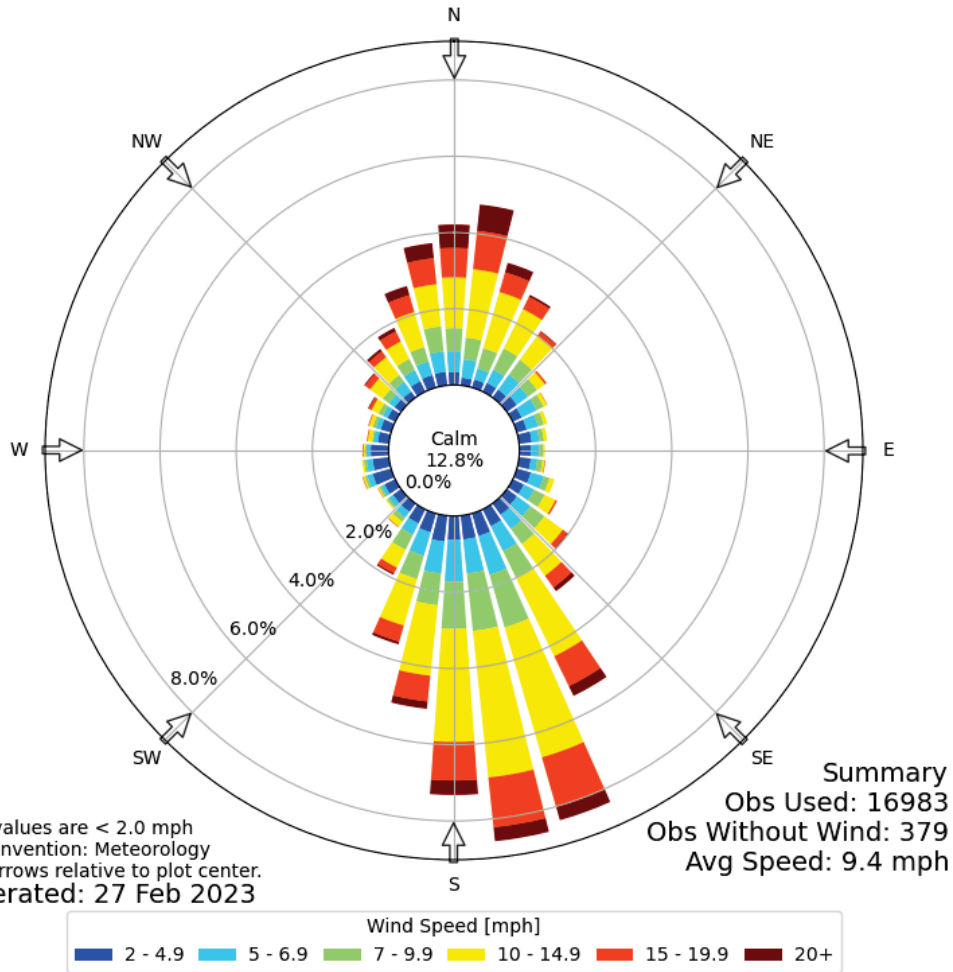
[1] Filkov and Prohanov, *Fire Technol.* 55 (2018) 817-836

[2] Thomas et al., *Fire Safety J.* 91 (2017) 864-871

Wind Rose Concept, 2D to 3D



Windrose Plot for [AUS] Austin Bergstrom Intl
Obs Between: 01 Mar 2000 12:53 AM - 31 Mar 2022 11:53 PM America/Chicago
↳ constraints: Mar



Credit: Iowa Environmental Mesonet of Iowa State University

WIND

FIREBRANDS

Graphic Type

2D

3D
(ember lofting, deposition)

Spoke Direction

Wind direction

Direction perpendicular to ref. surface

Spoke Length

% time wind blew from specified dir.

Total Cumulative Particle Count (CPC)

Spoke Class

Range of wind speed

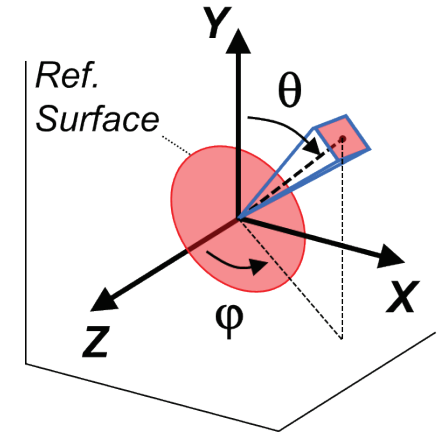
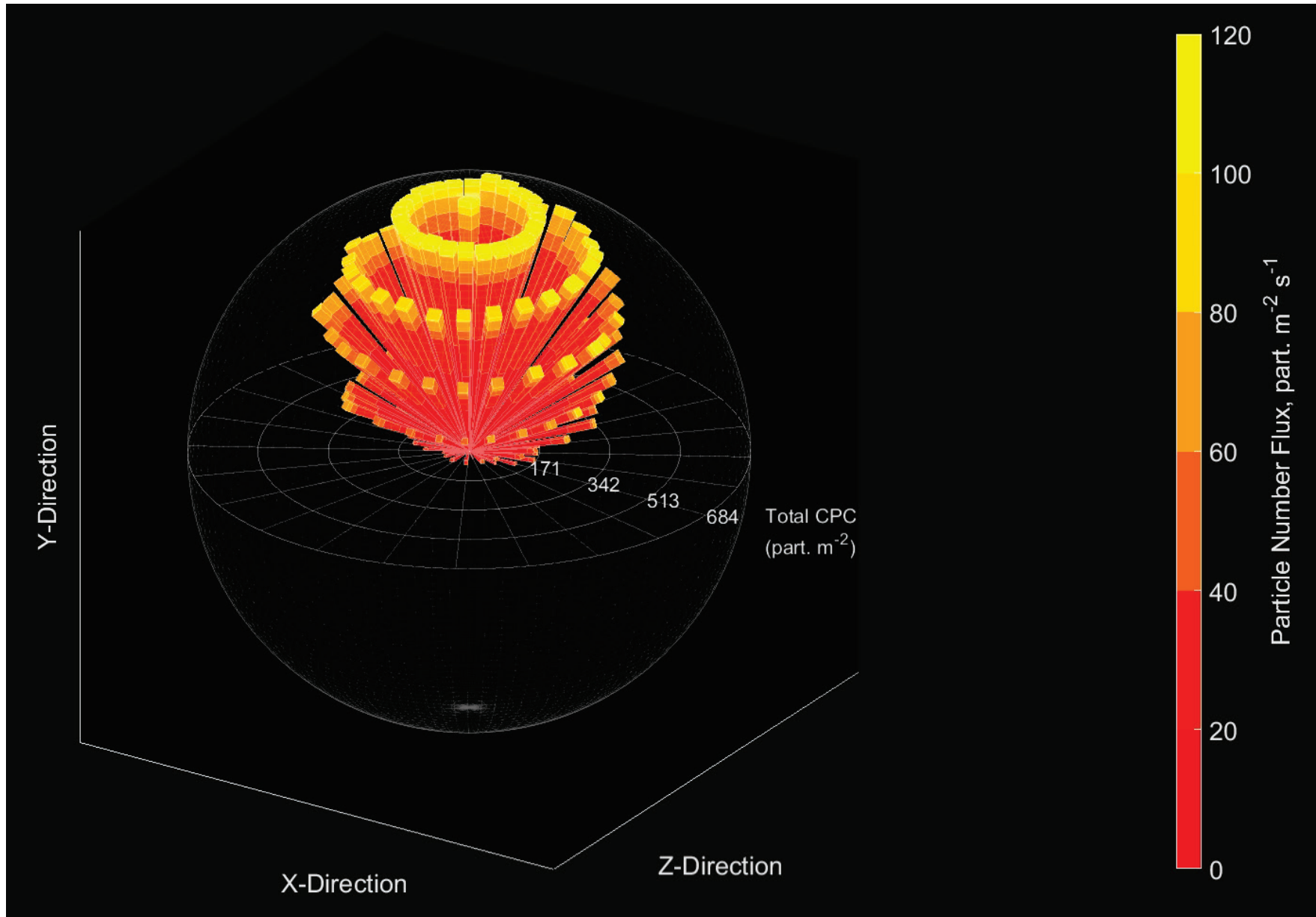
Range of Particles Number Fluxes (PNFs)

Class Width

% time wind blew in specified range

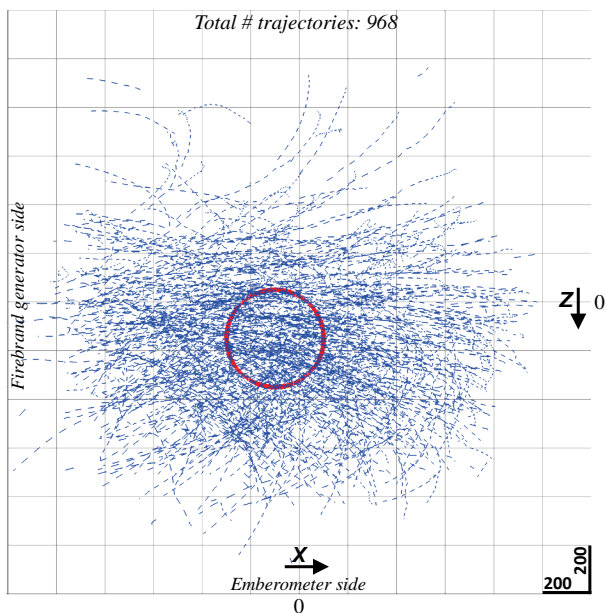
% time PNF recorded in specified range
(spoke length = 100% time)

Firebrand Shower Number Flux

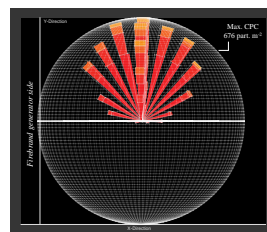


Firebrand Shower Number Flux

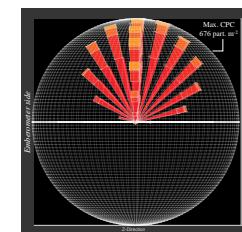
OUTDOOR



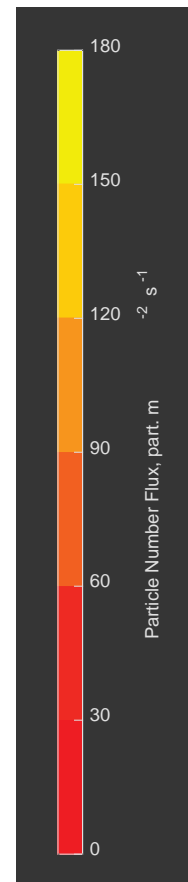
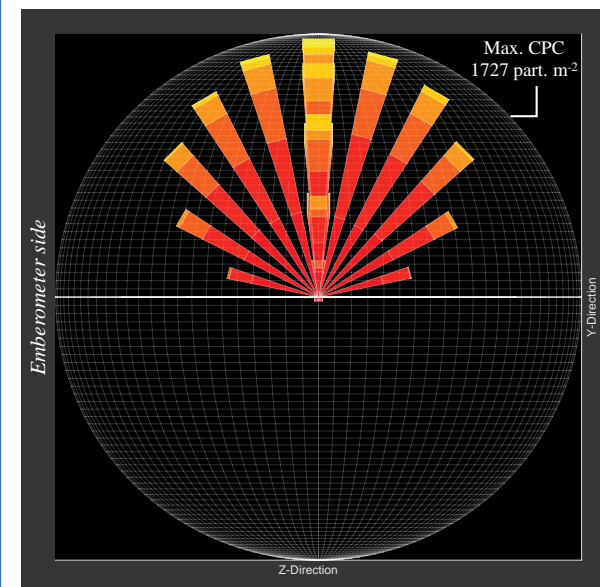
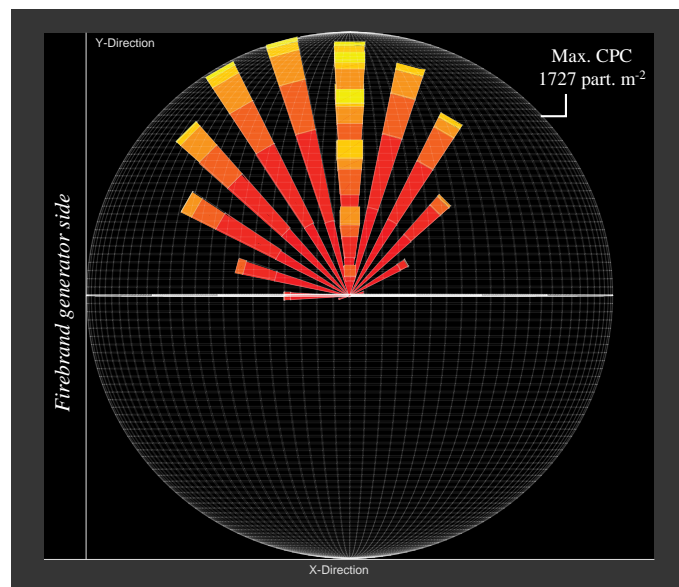
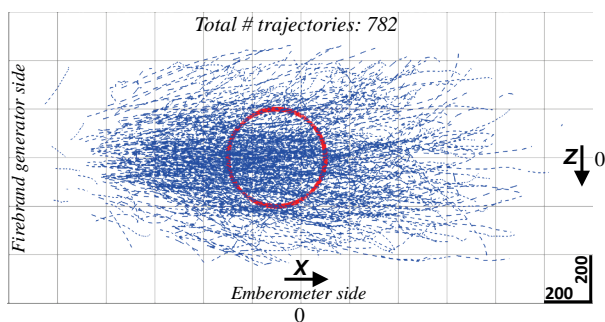
XY



YZ



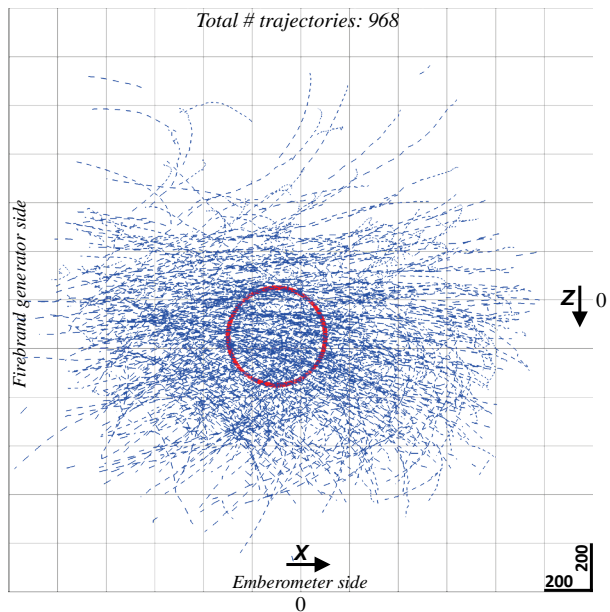
INDOOR



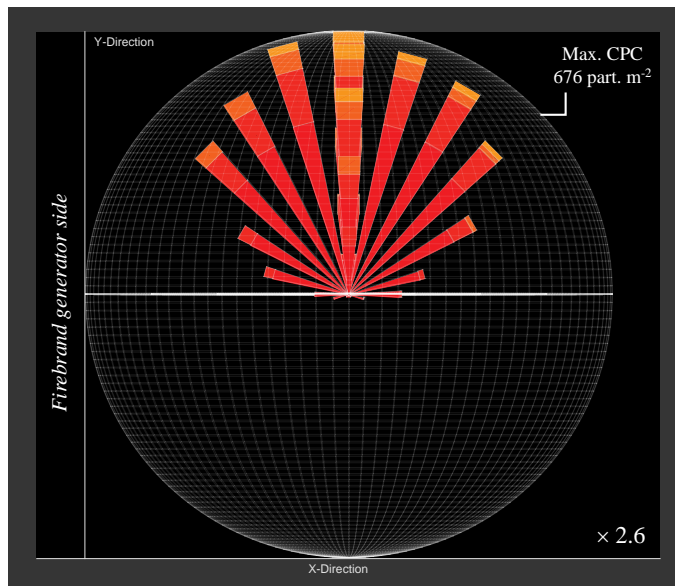
Top view 3D trajectories

Firebrand Shower Number Flux

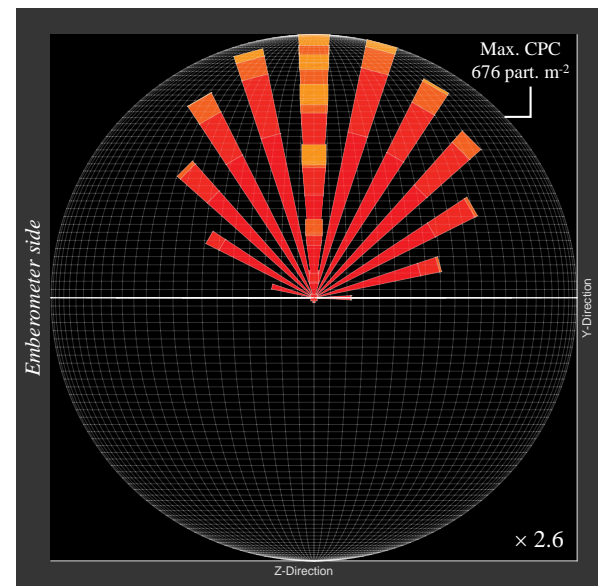
OUTDOOR



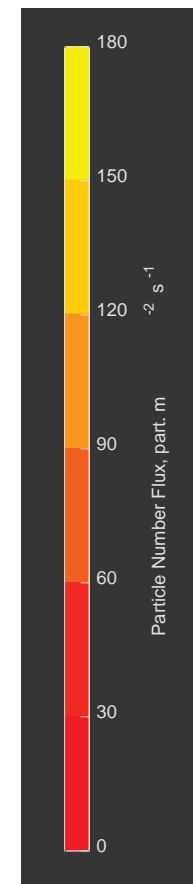
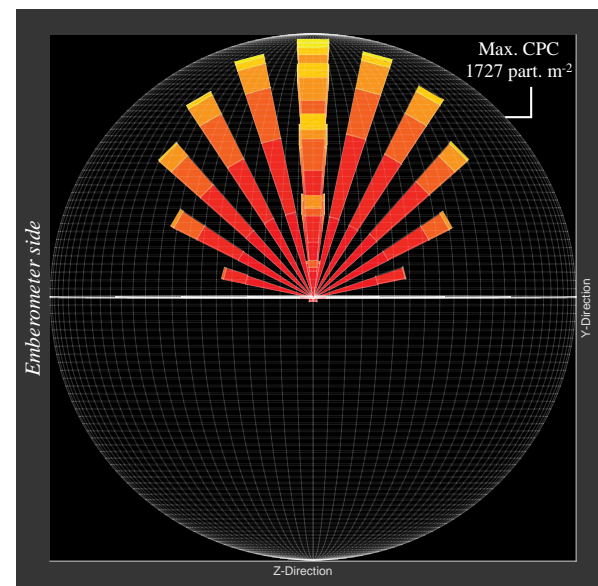
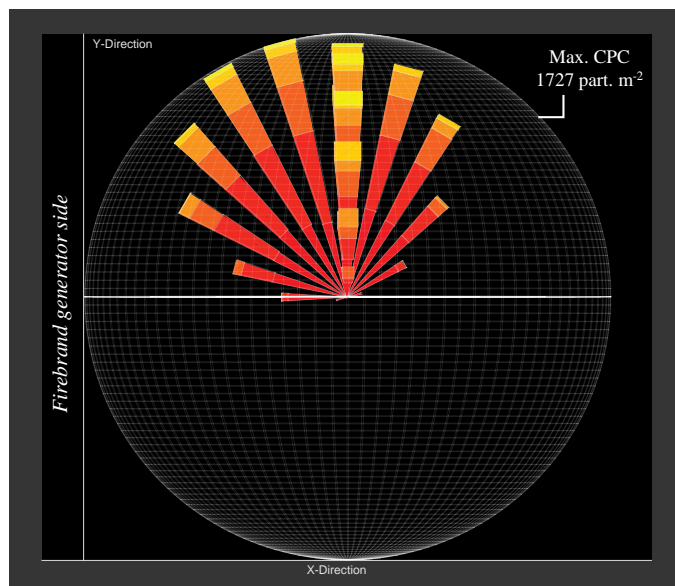
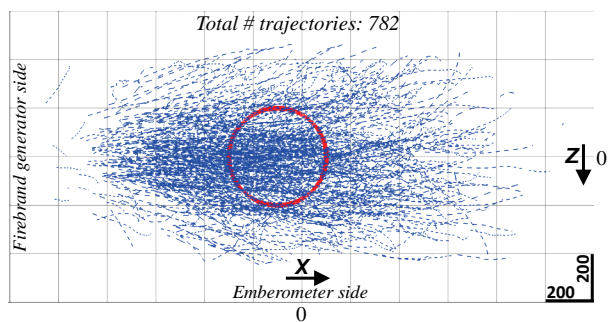
XY



YZ

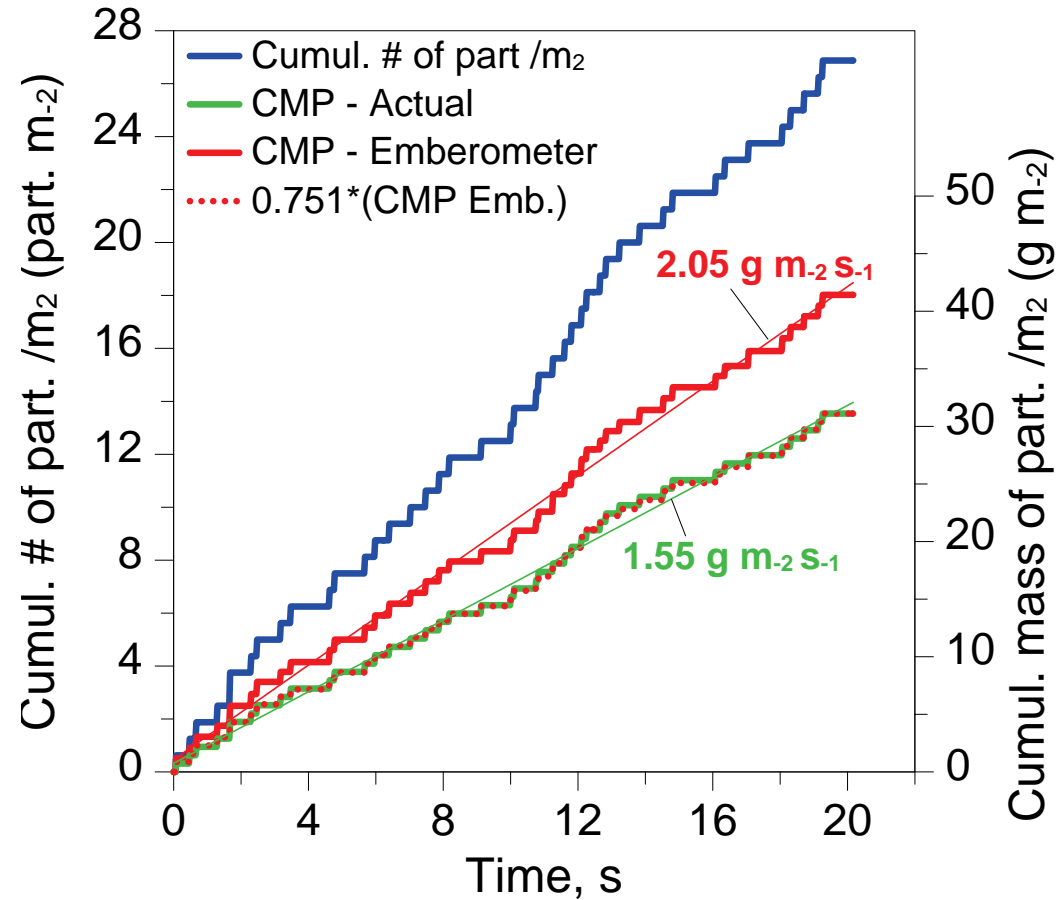


INDOOR



Top view 3D trajectories

(non-combusting sticks)



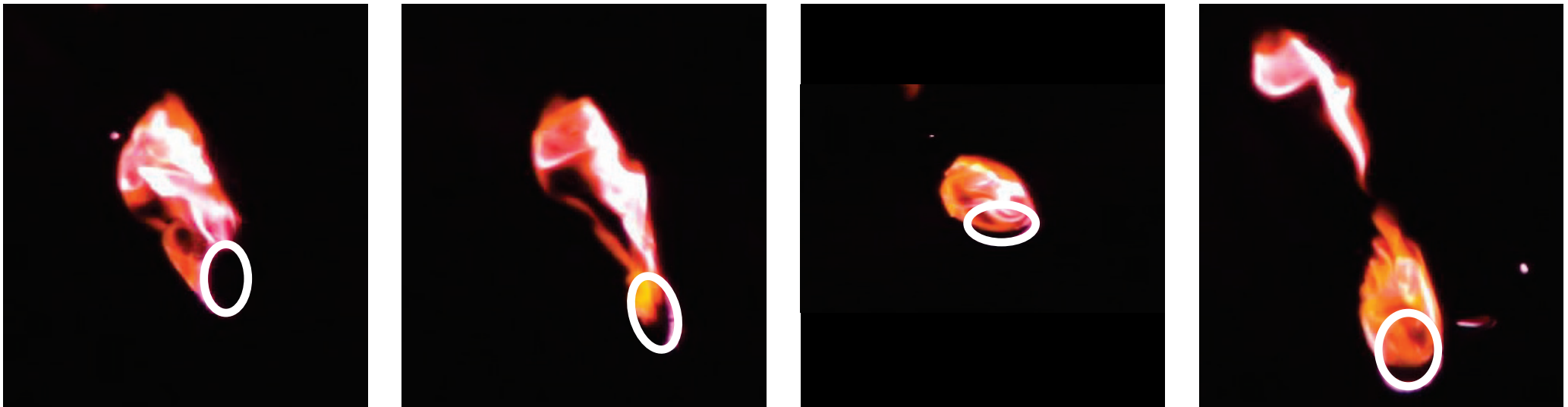
- **Number flux** is relatively simple
- **Mass flux** would broaden interpretation of exposure
- **Correction of 3D volume measurement** converges with true mass flux
- **Refine firebrand sizing** approach by improved **3D shape model** and **camera orientation** configuration

Sizing Challenge – Firebrand Combustion State

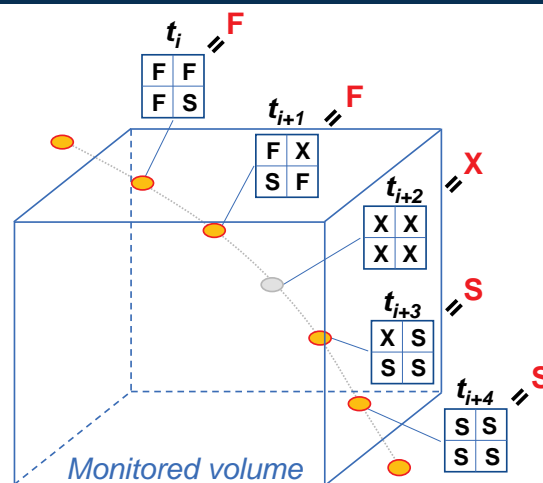
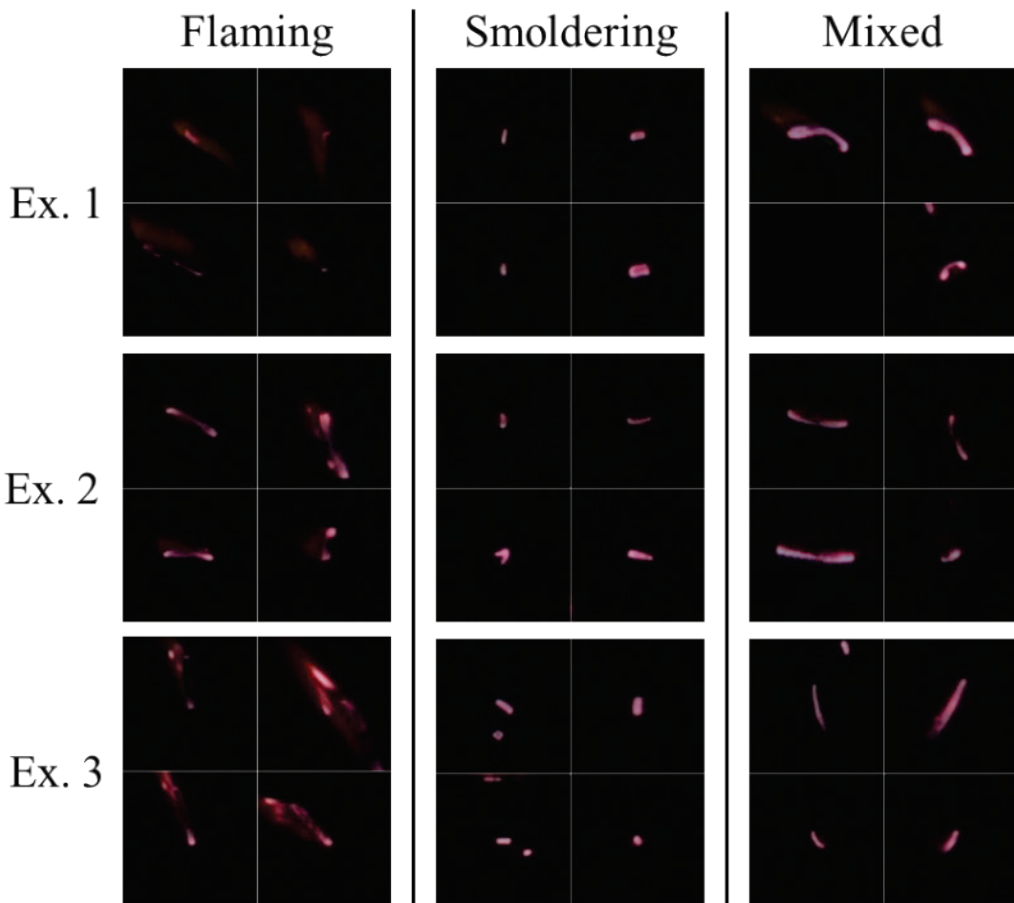
Non-Flaming



Flaming

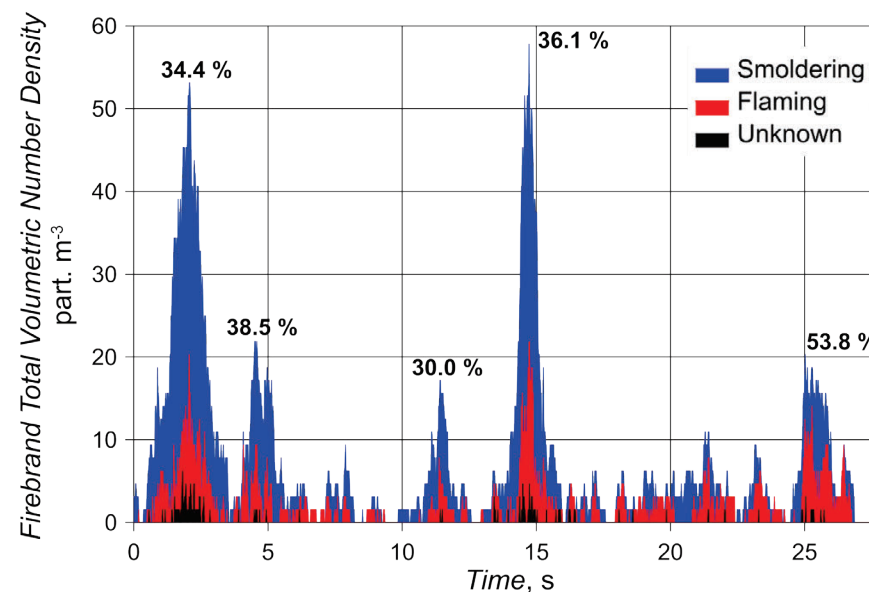


*IR filtered images of
2 in diam. disks
(fragments)*



Machine Learning Analysis

- Human classification of 293 particles (>23K images)
- 9 different CNN tested
- 95% accuracy via transfer learning to existing pre-trained CNN



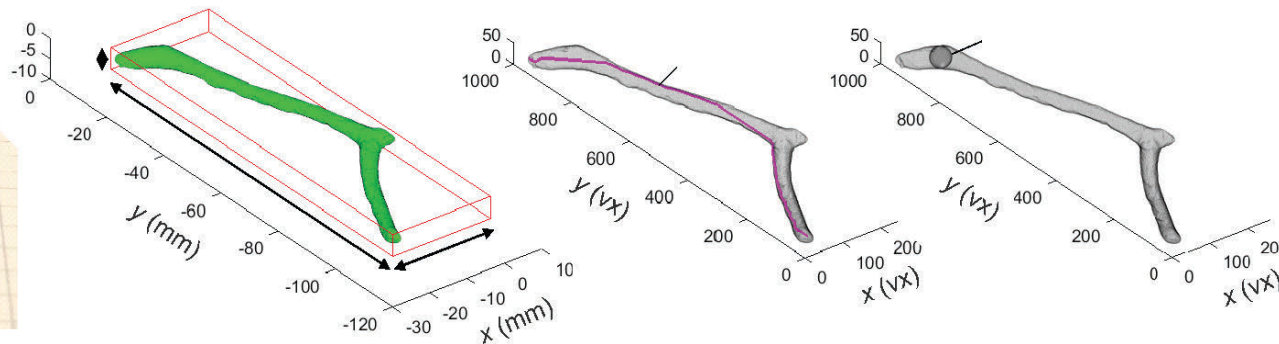
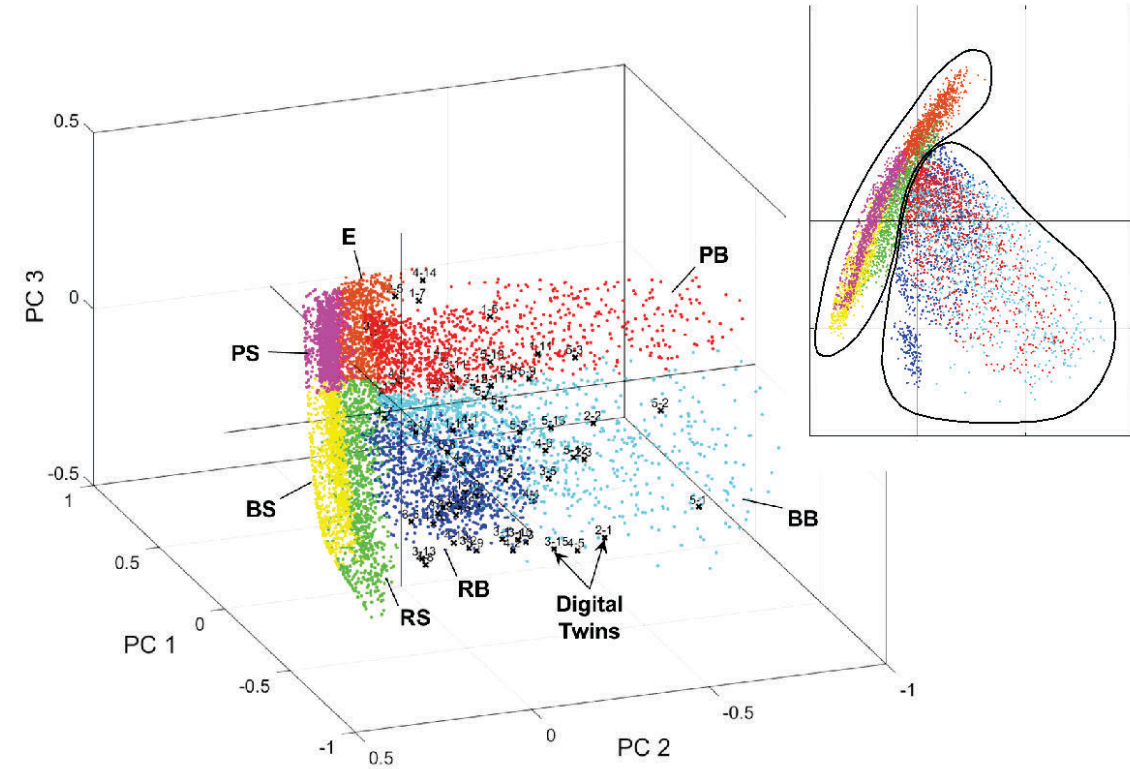
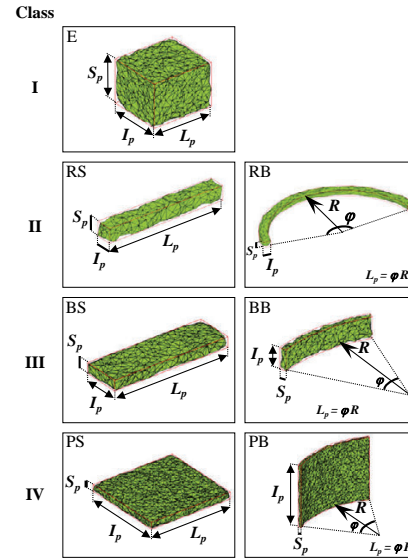
Firebrand Morphology

Measurements, e.g.:

- bounding box
- volume
- surface area
- geodesic length

Descriptors, e.g.:

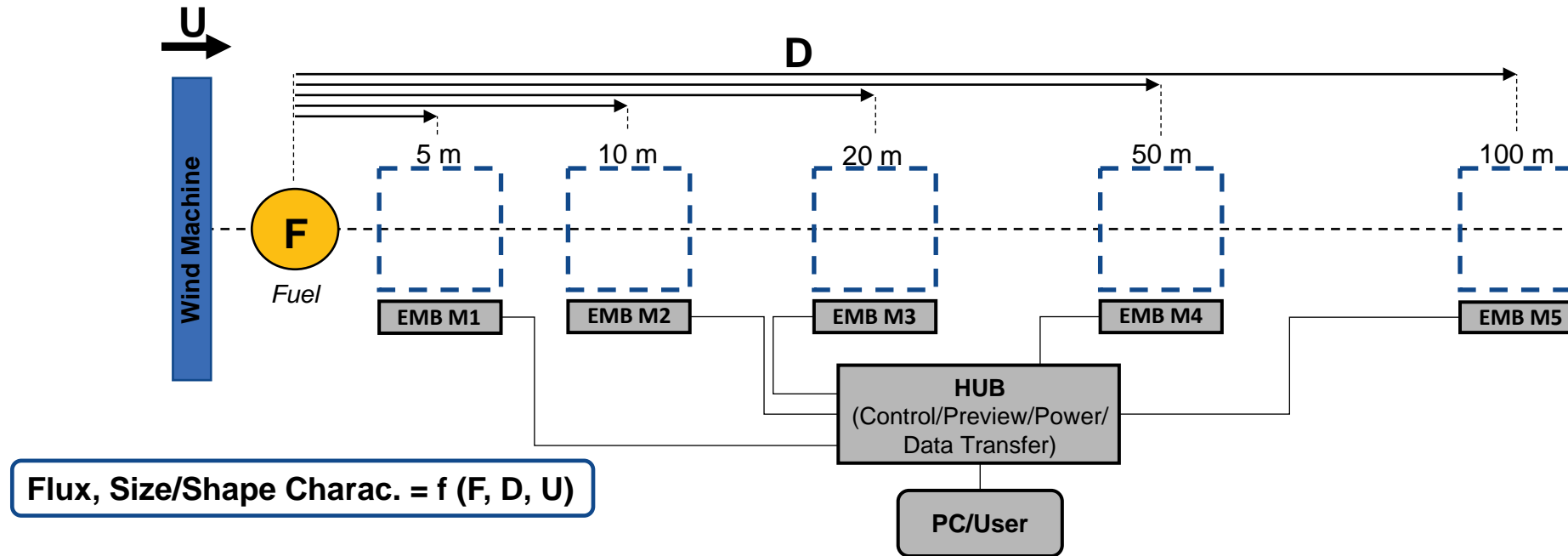
- elongation
- fatness
- sphericity
- convexity



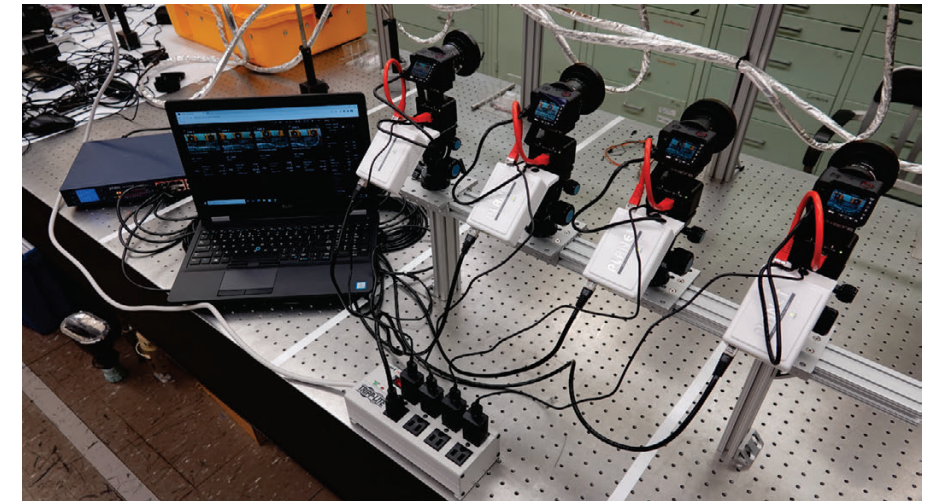
- Routine laboratory measurement
- Field deployable measurement
- Definition of firebrand shower exposures, fluxes
- *Drone-based measurement platforms*
- *Weather radar-based measurement (pyrometeor)*





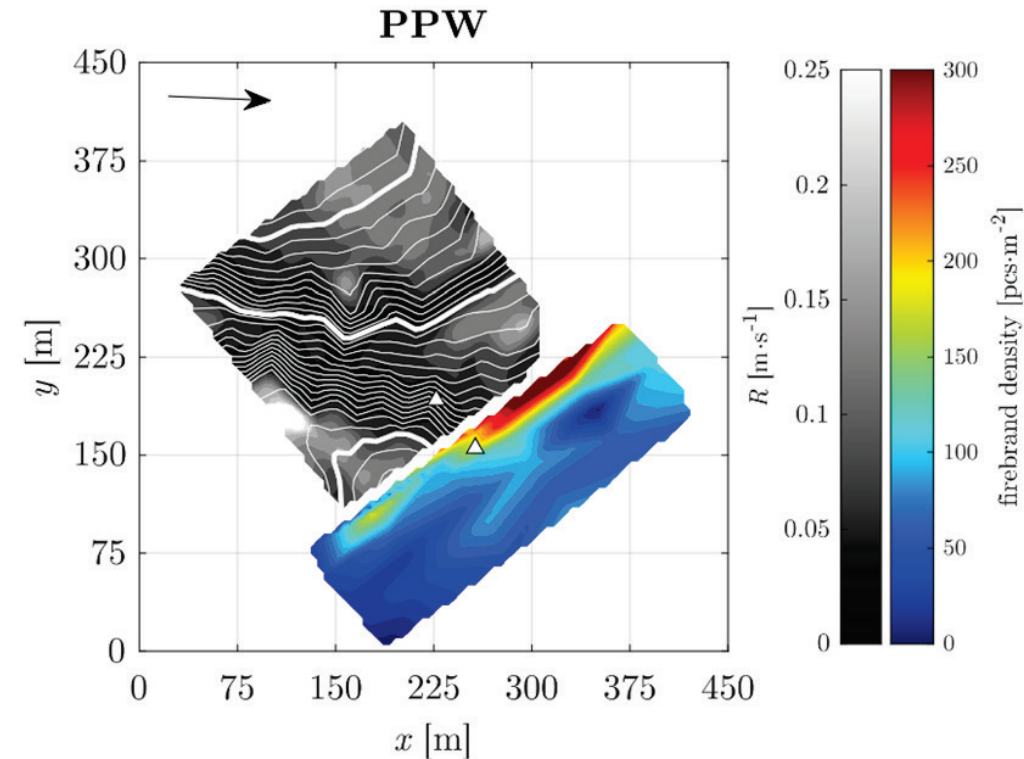


E-Light / Prototype



- Laboratory-based
- Non-hardened construction
- Multiple measurement stations

- Deployability, cost, resolution, geographic distribution (point measurement)
- Mechanism of firebrand deposition (airborne shower vs. ground flow)
- Image processing, particle detection (partially glowing, single particle detected as multiple pieces, etc.)
- Fuels characterization
- Relation to fire intensity, spread, wind



Zen S., et al. (2021) *Fire Tech* 57

Emberometer: device/system for the time-resolved measurement of firebrand and firebrand shower characteristics

Usage:

- Laboratory measurement tool; experiments; definition of standard
- Deploy in field to measure live exposures

Applications:

- Define firebrand exposures (number, size, energy, rate, etc.)
- Develop laboratory-scale testing for realistic exposure simulation
- Provide foundation for construction guidance, materials science
- Provide data to support fire spread modeling development

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