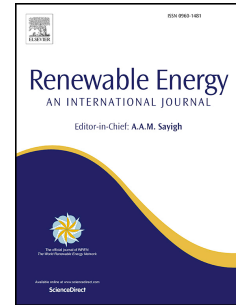


Muñoz-García, M.-Á., Fouris, T., & Pilat, E. (2021). Analysis of the soiling effect under different conditions on different photovoltaic glasses and cells using an indoor soiling chamber. *Renewable Energy*, 163, 1560–1568. doi: 10.1016/j.renene.2020.10.027

## Journal Pre-proof

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PII: S0960-1481(20)31593-7

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.renene.2020.10.027>

Reference: RENE 14317

To appear in: *Renewable Energy*

Received Date: 11 July 2020

Revised Date: 1 October 2020

Accepted Date: 6 October 2020

Please cite this article as: Muñoz-García Miguel-Á, Fouris T, Pilat E, Analysis of the soiling effect under different conditions on different photovoltaic glasses and cells using an indoor soiling chamber, *Renewable Energy* (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.renene.2020.10.027>.

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# *Analysis of the soiling effect under different conditions on different photovoltaic glasses and cells using an indoor soiling chamber*

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The effects of deposition of dust (soiling) on photovoltaic (PV) modules, mainly on their energy production, is a topic that is gaining importance, related to the increase in PV installations in very sunny arid areas and, therefore, which theoretically lead to higher energy production. Due to the multitude of influent factors regarding soiling experiments, the use of a climatic chamber dedicated to the study of soiling is a subject of great interest.

This work presents a methodology to reproduce the soiling process and the analysis of its effects, using optical and electrical approaches. The experiments included simulating different climatic conditions representative of the desert climate. In total, 19 replicates were performed for three different experiment conditions on five different glasses and two solar cells. Different glass samples, with different anti-soiling treatments, have been used to measure optical transmittance losses and to examine deposition by microscopy, while photovoltaic cells have been used to quantify electrical losses.

The dust load ranged from 1.30 to 1.63 g/m<sup>2</sup> promoting electrical losses from 4.73 to 6.90% depending not only on the dust load but also on the conditions in which it was deposited.

KEY WORDS: Soiling, Soiling chamber, Anti-reflective glass, Anti-soiling glass

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Soiling causes loss of electricity production

The effect of soiling in a photovoltaic system is mainly the loss of solar radiation that reaches the cell and, therefore, a decrease in the production of electricity. This is the main impact, but not the only one. Different studies determined that, depending on the area where the solar plant is located, it can imply a loss of 1% per day, and accumulated during dry periods can reach 40% [1] or up to 60% [2] causing significant losses [3], [4].

Other undesirable effects caused by soiling include the possibility of the appearance of hot spots, due to the shading effect of the dust on some parts of the module, which could cause long-term degradation promoted by the dust cementation.

Different works have analysed the causes and effects of soiling. The combination of factors plays an important role in the deposition of the dust in the panels. The angle of incidence [5], must be taken into account in fixed module plants, where according to experiments, the losses vary from 2.3% under normal incidence (0°) of the light to the panel, to 8% when the angle is

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58°. Also the formation of dew during the night or at dawn, is a factor that drastically influences the deposition of dust and causes cementation.

## 1.2. Influence of natural factors and system design

Soiling on a PV module is a complex issue because of the number of factors that influence deposition, in addition to the bonding forces of particles to the front sheet of PV panels [6]. Ilse et al. [7] noticed the high heterogeneity regarding the different scales of these factors that can be linked to the dust, the module and the environment. Many studies seem to assign the particle size parameter as one of the most influential factors and PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> (airborne particles with a diameter less than or equal to 2.5  $\mu\text{m}$  and 10  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively) are the primarily responsible for covering the surface of the modules [6]–[11]. Due to their lightness, these 2.5  $\mu\text{m}$  particles can travel long distances [12] and there are some well-known dust sources such as the deserts of the Middle East [13], the Sahara desert [14]–[16] or the Asiatic deserts [14] from where the particles could be emitted. The diameter of the particles is a parameter that we must consider to perform some analysis regarding soiling.[15]

All these particles, but also the dust that can be found around the site of the PV plant, can accumulate on the PV modules. The adhesion of the particles is due to various forces such as Van der Waals, capillary, electrostatic and gravitational forces [16], [17].

The sources of dust but also the location of the modules, are important because they will determine the composition of the dust and, consequently the phenomena of bonding, cementation, caking, and capillary. Several studies present an interaction between the soiling rate and the dust composition [7], [18], [19]. The cementation process occurs after deposition and requires more time to make the particles to fix well on the module. In general, cementation seems to be highly related to relative humidity (RH) in the environment where the modules are located [16]–[18]. Depending of humidity and temperature, dew may appear [20] on the modules and a thin film of water will increase the adhesion forces responsible for the cementation of the particles [21]–[23]. This factor also needs attention in indoor soiling studies. Understanding these parameters could lead to some prediction models for soiling losses.[24].

At the module scale, its characteristics also have an impact on the adhesion of particles, especially with respect to the glass surface. For some years now, some glass manufacturers are trying to develop different special anti-soiling coating to mitigate the problem [25]–[27].

## 2. Objectives of the work

The objective of this work is to simulate different soiling situations, in different solar cell glasses treated with different coatings, suggesting a methodology to carry out tests in an indoor chamber. In addition to this, not only glasses but also two whole cells of the same heterojunction technology (HET) but with a different glass treatment were analysed in order to assess the differences.

The objectives can be summarized as:

- What is the effect of dry soiling at different temperatures?
- How does dew influence the impact of soiling?
- What is the relationship between soiling and the electrical response of a cell?
- How does direct optical transmission correlate with  $I_{sc}$  drop?

## 98 3. Materials and Methods.

99

## 100 3.1. The soiling chamber

101

102 The main tool is a dedicated chamber developed by CEA. It consists of a 100 cm x 60 cm x  
103 50 cm rectangular base enclosure with temperature and humidity control. Inside the  
104 chamber, air temperature and relative humidity are controlled by a PID controller. It includes  
105 two fans on both sides of the chamber (see Figure 1). Within this enclosure, air and sample  
106 temperatures, and relative air humidity are monitored using a GL240 and a EL-GFX-2 data-  
107 loggers.

108



109

110

Figure 1.- Chamber internal view (left), and external view (right)

111 The temperature of the samples was controlled by a different system based on water flowing  
112 inside the sample holder, whose temperature was controlled through an external  
113 cooling/heating system. Therefore, samples and air temperatures were independently  
114 controlled.

115

116 The dust (soil) used for the experiments was the standardized ARIZONA ISO 12103-1  
117 composed mainly of silica and various metal oxides (see Table 1), which are often found in  
118 quartz and feldspar minerals. This soil is forced inside the chamber by using an RBG 1000  
119 dust diffuser (see Figure 2). The diffuser spreads the dust in the chamber using a rotating  
120 brush and an air pressurized volumetric dust feeding device. Upon reaching the chamber, the  
121 soil is projected onto a deflector to generate a homogeneous cloud above the tested sample.  
122 The samples are placed on a tilting heating or cooling plate, according to the scheme  
123 presented in Figure 3.

124

125



Figure 2: RBG 1000 dust generator

126

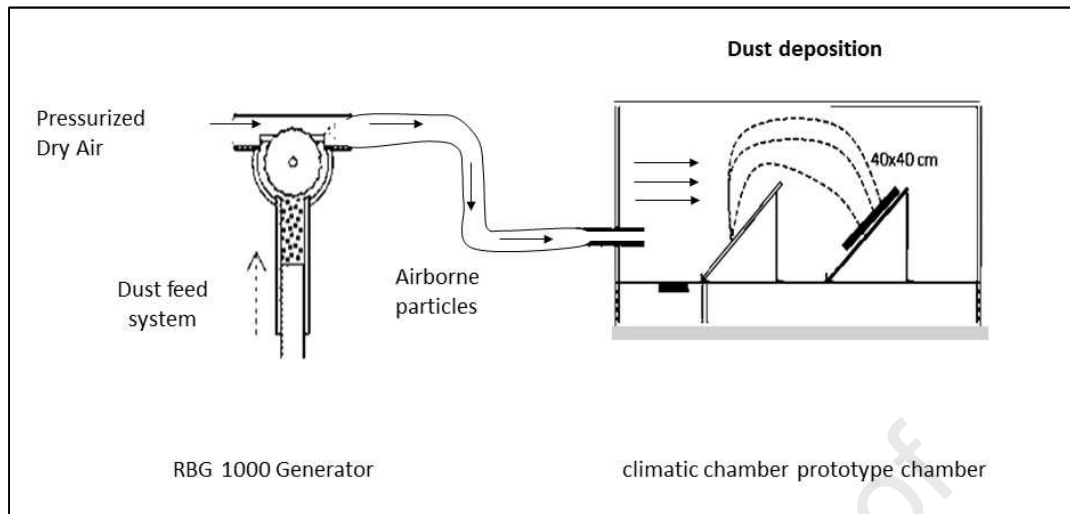
127  
128

Figure 3: schema of the process used for indoor artificial soiling

129

CAS No	Components	Quantity
14808-60-7	Silica (fine dust)	69-77%
1344-28-1	Aluminium oxide	8-14%
1305-78-8	Calcium oxide (mineral)	2.5-5.5%
12136-45-7	Potassium oxide (mineral)	2-5%
1313-59-3	Sodium oxide (mineral)	1-4%
1309-37-1	Iron (III) oxide (hematite)	4-7%
1309-48-4	Magnesium oxide	1-2%
13463-67-7	Titanium dioxide	0-1%

130

Table 1.- Arizona Dust Components list (according to 29 CFR 1910.1200 (g))

131

### 132 3.2.Experiments setup and test samples used

133

134 In order to simulate representative extreme situations in desert regions, three different climate  
135 configurations are reproduced within the chamber as shown in Table 2.

136

Name	Experiment type	Air temperature (°C)	Sample temperature (°C)	Relative Humidity (%)
Experiment1: 30_60_20	ARID	30	60	20
Experiment2: 10_5_80	DEW	10	5	80
Experiment3: 25_25_40	MID	25	25	40

137

Table 2.- Different experiments carried out.

138

139 These experiments reproduce some of the different situations that would occur in desert  
140 regions. Experiment 1 would be similar to the beginning of a sunny day, with a big difference  
141 between the solar module and the air temperatures. In addition to this, Experiment 2  
142 reproduces the dew point phenomenon, which would occur mainly at the end of the night,  
143 when there is thermal inversion between the temperatures of the solar modules and the air.  
144 During the night, the cells are dissipating their heat (IR radiation) towards the sky and, as a  
145 consequence, after a few hours, the panel temperature would be lower than the air  
146 temperature. Finally, Experiment 3 represents a case in which the balance between the air and  
147 the solar module temperatures occur, which would occur on a cloudy but relative dry day.

148

149 The test samples were chosen as follows:

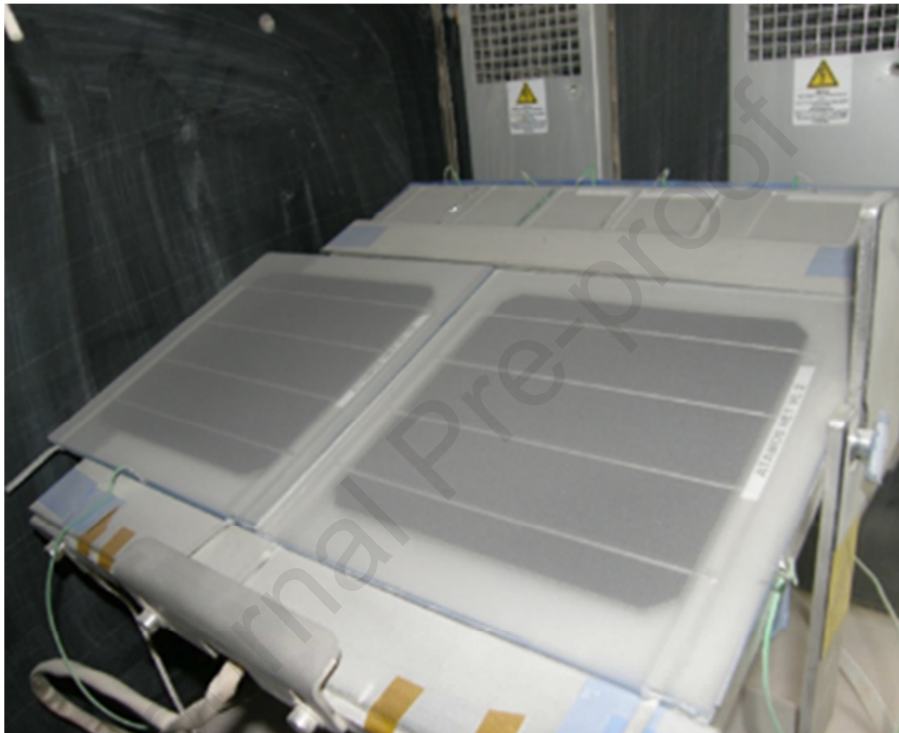
150

151 Glass family: 50 x 50 mm, 2 mm thickness: There are 5 different glasses, each with its own  
152 glass quality and coating treatment. Sample glasses include: plain glass (non-photovoltaic),  
153 untreated photovoltaic glass, anti-reflective treatment glass, hydrophobic glass and anti-  
154 reflective/anti-soiling glass.

155

156 Single-cell module family: 160 x 160 mm glass-glass Glass-glass, 5 mm thickness (see Figure  
157 4). There are two different modules, both include the same cell technology, but each with its  
158 own glass quality and coating treatment: no treatment and an anti-soiling treatment.

159



160

161 Figure 4: Five glass samples (upper part) and two cell modules (lower part) on the tilted plate inside  
162 the chamber after soiling

163 The deposited dust was weighed using a precision balance to observe and compare the  
164 amount of deposited dust per sample, and then calculated per  $\text{cm}^2$  or per  $\text{m}^2$  for the different  
165 experiments. To do this, the samples were weighed before and after each experiment.

166

### 167 3.3. Transmittance tests

168

169 There is a direct relationship between the optical transparency of the cell glass and the current  
170 generated by the cell itself. To obtain the optical transmission response, the five glass samples  
171 used for the tests were analysed by spectrophotometry. The spectrophotometer used was  
172 Shimadzu UV 2600, which wavelength range in direct transmission is 300-900 nm with a  
173 resolution of 0,1 nm:

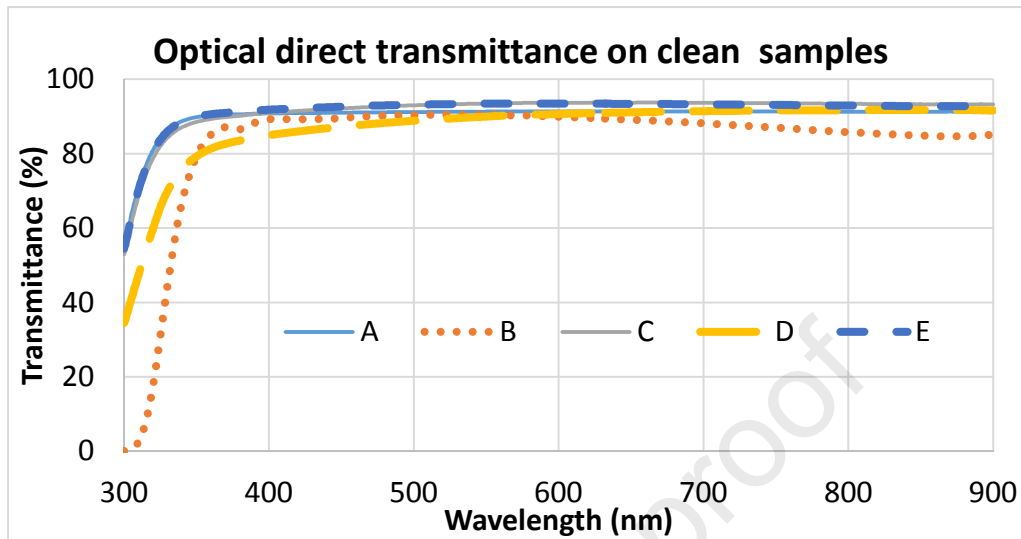
174

175 The relation between optical transmission and photovoltaic efficiency is not obvious. First,  
176 the transmitted light is formed by direct and scattered light, but the use of a spectrometer only  
177 considers direct light transmission, and second, the spectral response of cell technology  
178 favours some wavelengths over others.

179 Before artificial soiling begins, in the glass family, all samples are cleaned, and direct  
180 transmission is measured.

181 *Figure 5* shows the spectrophotometric results for each type of glass.

182



183

184 Figure 5: Optical direct transmittance curves obtained through cleaned glass samples

185 We can see that glass B does not allow transmission of wavelengths below 350 nm. This type  
186 of low-cost standard glass does not benefit from the specific manufacturing process with low  
187 contamination by iron particles. In addition, we see that glass D is significantly less  
188 transparent than others, especially below 500 nm.

189

190

### 191 3.4. Electrical parameters analysed

192

193 The electrical impact is assessed by measuring the  $I_{sc}$  drop due to the effect of soiling. Tests  
194 carried out on CEA flash solar simulator are at STC conditions ( $T_{cell}=25\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ,  $G=1000\text{ W/m}^2$ ,  
195 spectrum: 1.5 AM),  $I_{sc}$  (short circuit current) is directly affected by soiling, as it is directly  
196 proportional to the incident radiation. The flash solar simulator is a Pasan class AAA tester  
197 with an accuracy of  $\pm 0,5\%$ .

198

199 Indeed, the current generated follows the following equation [28] :

200

$$201 \quad I = I_L - I_o \left( e^{\frac{[V+IR_s]}{mVt}} - 1 \right) - \frac{[V+IR_s]}{R_p} \text{ Equation 1}$$

202

203 Where  $I_L$  is the photocurrent generated at the cell junction, and  $I$  is the current obtained  
204 outside the cell, which is affected by the series and the parallel resistances ( $R_s$  and  $R_p$ ), the  
205 working voltage  $V$  and the current of the diode  $I_o$ , as well as temperature.

206 In normal operation,  $I$  goes from 0 (open circuit) to  $I_{sc}$  (short circuit current). Focusing in  $I_{sc}$ ,  
207 it varies with radiation ( $G$ ) and temperature ( $T$ ) and any comparison should be made at STC,  
208 so  $I_{sc}$  should be translated into  $I_{sc}^*$  (short circuit current at STC) using the following formula  
209 [29], [30]:

210

$$211 \quad I_{sc}^* = I_{sc} \left( \frac{G^*}{G} \right) - \alpha (T - T^*) \text{ Equation 2}$$

212

213 In  $I_{SC}^* = I_{SC} \left( \frac{G^*}{G} \right) - \alpha (T - T^*)$  Equation 2,  $G^*, T^*$  and  $I_{SC}^*$  are the radiation, temperature and  
 214 short-circuit current at STC, while  $G, T$  and  $I_{SC}$  are the actual measured radiation, temperature  
 215 and short-circuit current, respectively. Also, the  $\alpha$  constant is intrinsic to the cell. In fact, the  
 216 cell current variation is proportional to its  $I_{SC}$  variation, according to EN-60891 and the  
 217 formula [29], [31]:

$$218 \quad I_2 = I_1 + I_{SC} \left( \frac{G_2}{G_1} - 1 \right) + \alpha (T_2 - T_1) \text{ Equation 3}$$

219  
 220 In Equation 3  $I_1$  is the current measured at a given  $G_1$  radiation and  $T_1$  temperature used to  
 221 calculate what would be the current that would be measured at a given  $G_2$  radiation and  $T_2$   
 222 temperature. To decrease the measurement uncertainty, for each experiment, at least 2  
 223 measurements are performed for the  $I_{SC}$  and the analysis results are the mean value. To  
 224 confirm the good temporal stability of the measurement, the samples are cleaned and tested  
 225 again at the end of the experiment, to confirm that the result obtained is close enough to the  
 226 previous one, before the soiling operation.

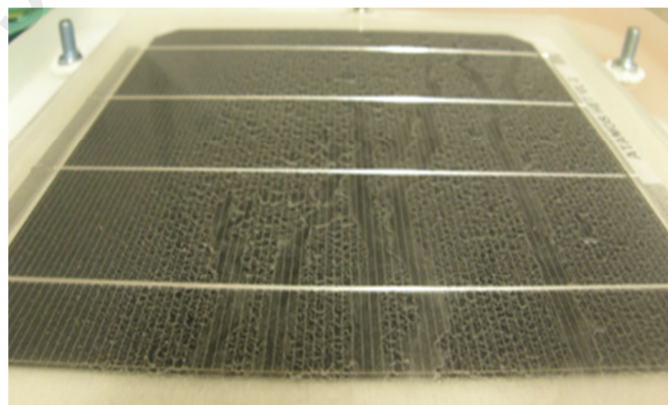
227  
 228 **3.5. Image processing and particle counting.**

229  
 230 In addition to spectrophotometric analysis, we developed and evaluated an image processing  
 231 measurement methodology with the aim of determining the soiling coverage ratio. The tools  
 232 used were a Keyence digital microscope and ImageJ software.

233  
 234 The microscope captured the images, at magnification up to x1000. To minimize the spatial  
 235 distribution error, 5 points including the sample centre and the corners were analysed for each  
 236 sample under test. Then, the mean and variance of the samples were evaluated to ensure the  
 237 validity of the test.

238  
 239 The magnification of the image depends on how the dust is distributed on the glass surface.  
 240 For example, in Experiment 2, dew generated clean channels on the glass (see Figure 6) and  
 241 high-magnification images (x1000) taken inside or outside of these channels may be  
 242 inconsistent. In this case, a lower magnification (x200) is considered more relevant.

243



244

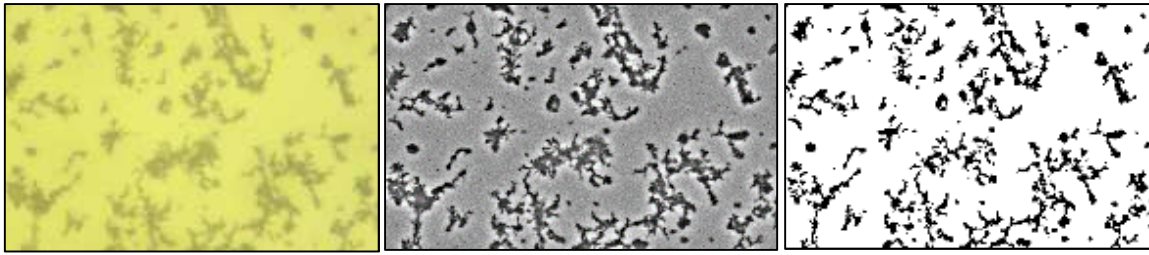
245

Figure 6.- Water channels on the glass surface because of dew

246

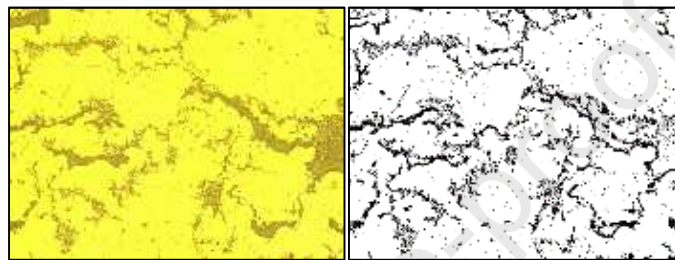
247 The images in Figure 7 show the three stages in processing the x1000 image, from the original  
 248 image to the filtered image, and finally after the threshold. In this case, the coverage  
 249 percentage was 13.9%. The case shown is one of the dry tests with high temperature  
 250 differences between the sample and the air.

251



252  
253 Figure 7.- Original (left), filtered image (middle) and processed (right) x1000 images of glass type E

254 In the case of wet tests, where the dew point was reached, the pre-filtering was not convenient  
255 as it was for the tests mentioned above, and the amplification x200. Then a “Threshold” and a  
256 “Particle Count” commands were applied. The images in Figure 8, show the stages in the  
257 x200 image processing. The coverage calculated using this method was 28.5%.  
258



259  
260 Figure 8.- Original and processed x200 images of glass type C

#### 261 4. Results and discussion

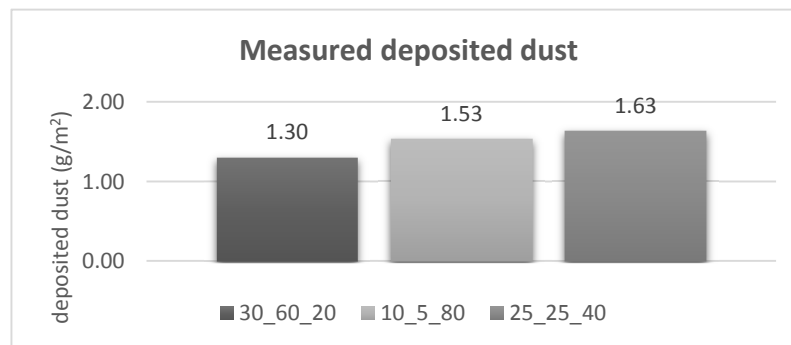
262

263 Three different environmental conditions were simulated, to analyse the different desert  
264 conditions during the day and at night, named “30\_60\_20”, “10\_5\_80”, and “25\_25\_40” as  
265 mentioned above. Only at “10\_5\_80” did the temperature difference combined with the  
266 relative humidity promote condensation on the surface of the samples. In total, 19 repetitions  
267 including different experiments were performed inside the chamber. Each of them included  
268 weighing, spectrophotometry, image analysis and I-V curve analysis.  
269

270

271 The samples were weighed before and after each experiment in order to obtain the weight of  
272 the deposited dust, and the mean values for all the samples were obtained for each  
273 experiment (see Figure 9). Even though the accumulated dust is not very high, it is  
274 comparable to low soiling rate situations that appear after a few days of exposure.  
275 Furthermore, the load is consistent with the loss of transmittance. The analysis of this point  
276 will be made later.  
277

278



279

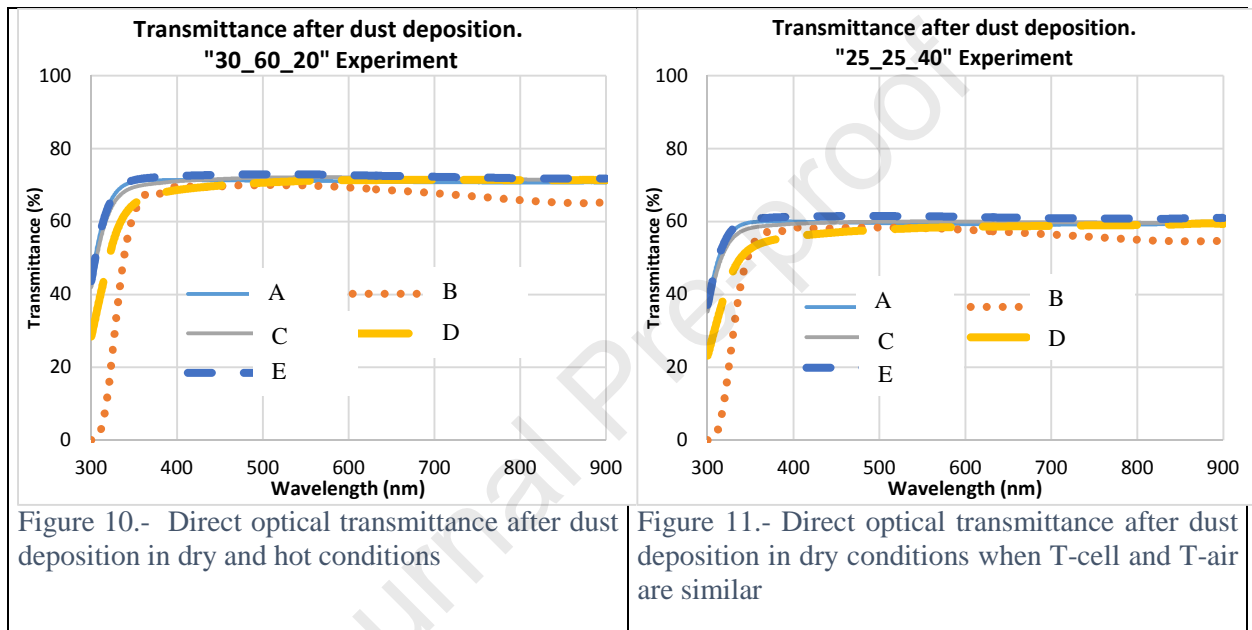
279 Figure 9 Dust deposited after each experiment.

#### 280 4.1. Analysis of direct transmittance after dust deposition

281

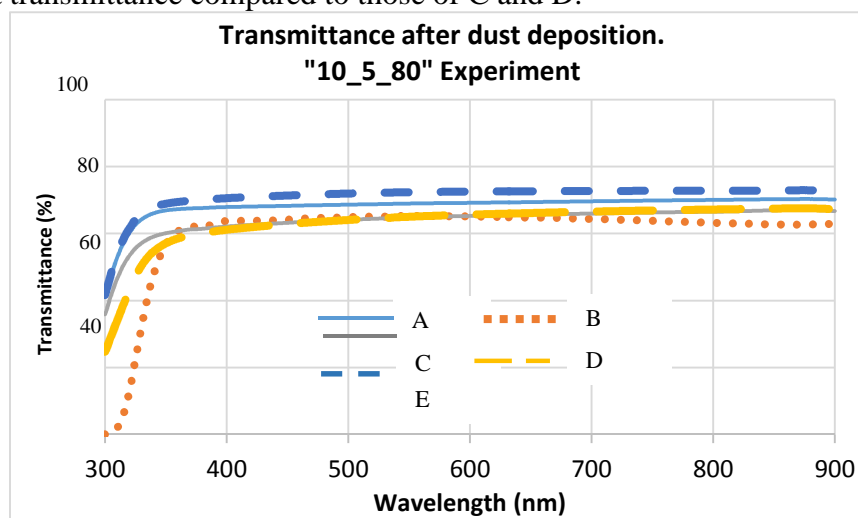
282 Direct transmittance measurements showed a significant drop in the three cases studied, for  
 283 all samples analysed. We can observe this drop for each type of glass and for each  
 284 experiment. According to the results, the highest drop occurred in the experiment "25\_25\_40"  
 285 (T-air= 25 °C, T-cell=25 °C and RH= 40%) and the lowest in the experiment "30\_60\_20" (T-  
 286 air= 30 °C, T-cell=60 °C and RH=20%) and that is confirmed regardless the type of glass.

287 Figure 10 shows the transmittance curves resulting from the experiment "30\_60\_20" and  
 288 Figure 11, those resulting from the experiment "25\_25\_40". The main difference between the  
 289 setting of these two experiments is the temperature of the glass. The results clearly show that  
 290 this temperature parameter significantly mitigates the optical impact of soiling deposition.  
 291



292

293 Regarding the experiment "10\_5\_80", where the dew point was reached, the results were not  
 294 as homogeneous as for other experiments, showing important differences depending on the  
 295 type of the glass. Then, in Figure 12 it can be seen that glass E is more efficient, showing less  
 296 loss of direct transmittance compared to those of C and D.



297

298

299

Figure 12.- Direct optical transmittance after dust deposition when dew point is reached

300

301 The figures above show the effect of soiling on the direct optical transmittance curves for  
 302 each experiment. As already mentioned, the direct transmittance presented up to now, is not  
 303 weighted according to the spectral response of any cell. However, if we compare the results in  
 304 Figure 9 with the results in Figure 10, Figure 11, and Figure 12, the dust load and direct  
 305 transmittance are related, as expected. In the next section, direct transmittance is related  
 306 (weighed) to the spectral response of cells, which is used in the family of samples from  
 307 single-cell modules.

308

#### 309 4.2. Comparing soiling optical effects using the spectral response

310

311 The direct transmittance drop was high (20-30%) for both dry cases, compared to the original  
 312 data under clean conditions. This effect must consider the spectral response of the solar cell  
 313 where each of the glasses would be used. Therefore, a further analysis was performed to  
 314 consider the spectral response of a HET cell. Relative transmittance loss, multiplied by the  
 315 Spectral Response (SR), also known as responsivity, and standard irradiance (AM1.5) at a  
 316 given wavelength  $G(\lambda)$  were used.

317

318 Depending on the responsivity of the cell, the transmittance at some wavelengths will impact  
 319 more or less than at other wavelengths. The responsivity is generally determined in units such  
 320 as photo-current density generated to the incident radiation at a given wavelength, following  
 321 the formula [32]:

322

$$323 \quad SR(\lambda) = \frac{J_{ph}(\lambda)}{G(\lambda)} \left[ \frac{A}{W} \right] \quad \text{Equation 4}$$

324

325 In this equation,  $J_{ph}$  is the density of the photocurrent in  $A/m^2$ , and  $G$  is the incident radiation  
 326 in  $W/m^2$ , both at a each wavelength  $\lambda$ . To be used, it is generally related to the quantum  
 327 efficiency (QE), defined as the number of charge carriers collected by a cell due to the flux of  
 328 the incident photon [33], and follows the next formula:

329

$$330 \quad QE(\lambda) = \frac{J_{ph}(\lambda)/q}{n_{ph}} \quad \text{Equation 5}$$

331

332 Where QE is the quantum efficiency or the electrons obtained per photon,  $q$  is the charge of  
 333 the electron in Coulombs and  $n_{ph}$  is the photons flux in photons/s- $m^2$ . Then, using the Plank-  
 334 Einstein equation ( $E=hv=hc/\lambda$ ) and the values for the Plank's constant ( $h$ ), the speed of light  
 335 ( $c$ ), and the wavelength  $\lambda$  of the incident photon, the formula can be simplified as:

336

$$337 \quad SR(\lambda) = \frac{QE(\lambda) * \lambda(\mu m)}{1.23985 (\mu m W/A)} [A/W] \quad \text{Equation 6}$$

338

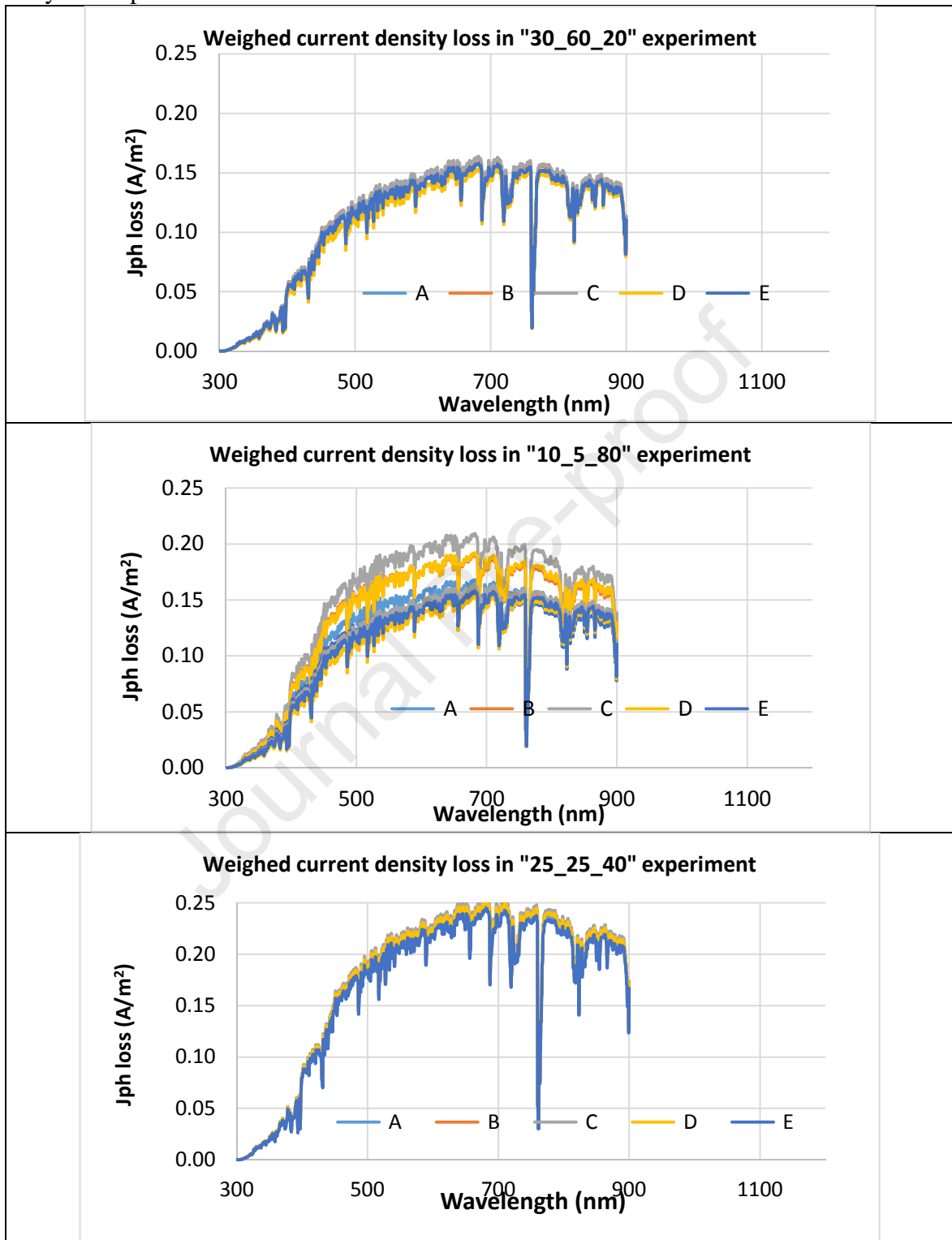
339 Finally, for our purposes, we will apply the SR on a given  $\lambda$  multiplied by the loss of  
 340 transmittance  $Td(\lambda)$  and by  $G(\lambda)$  to obtain a relative value of the influence of the decrease in  
 341 transmittance for each experiment, on the loss of current density obtained, summarized in the  
 342 formula:

343

$$344 \quad Jd(\lambda) = Td(\lambda) * SR(\lambda) * G(\lambda) \quad \text{Equation 7}$$

345

346 The calculation uses the normalized transmittance loss (relative to clean glass conditions), so  
 347  $T_d(\lambda)$  is the relative decrease and, as a result, the above formula provides the decrease in the  
 348 density of the photo-current.



349 Figure 13. Calculated current density loss by applying direct transmission to spectral response.

350 Figure 13 shows the calculated current density loss for each wavelength for the different  
 351 experiments and glasses. The calculation considers not only direct transmission loss but also  
 352 spectral response and the AM1.5 radiation. As indicated above, direct transmission is related  
 353 to the generated photocurrent, but indirect transmission must also be considered for the actual

current generated. However, all the samples are tested under the same conditions, so the comparison is valid to see differences between them. According to the results, the main conclusion is the confirmation of the higher losses in the experiment “25\_25\_40”.

By integrating the curves shown in Figure 13, the theoretical weighed short-circuit current loss, related to the direct transmittance drop, is obtained, with the only limitation of the wavelengths considered due to the limits of the spectrophotometer used in the experiments. However, when calculating the weighed short-circuit current in clean conditions, also for the same wavelength constraints, a comparison of the current generated in clean and dirty conditions is of a great interest.

$$I_{sc-loss}(\lambda_1 - \lambda_2) = \int_{\lambda_1}^{\lambda_2} Td(\lambda) * SR(\lambda) * G(\lambda) d\lambda \quad \text{Equation 8}$$

Using this equation and normalising with the  $I_{sc}$  calculated under clean conditions, the results obtained for different experiments are presented in the following table:

Experiment	Calculated theoretical relative (300-900 nm) $I_{sc}$ drop				
	A	B	C	D	E
30_60_20	23,53%	24,07%	24,32%	22,36%	23,48%
10_5_80	24,22%	24,22%	24,22%	24,22%	24,22%
25_25_40	34,88%	35,61%	35,78%	35,28%	34,27%

Table 3.-  $I_{sc}$  normalised theoretical drop of for all the glasses analysed, from 300 to 900 nm.

The previous results have only considered the direct transmission weighed by the spectral response, so these curves only take into account the optical losses measured through the glass. In the next section, the results of the effective influence of soiling on the produced current will be presented, when the actual short-circuit current is measured.

#### 4.3. Indoor flash solar simulator for $I_{sc}$ measurement

Looking at the three experiments, the measured short-circuit current suffered a significant drop in all of them. If we look at the differences in the results for the two cells of each experiment independently (Figure 14), we can conclude that the difference is not significant if we consider the measurement uncertainty. Experiment “10\_5\_80” (dew point reached) had the lowest current drop and experiment “25\_25\_40” (a similar temperature for cell and air), the highest.

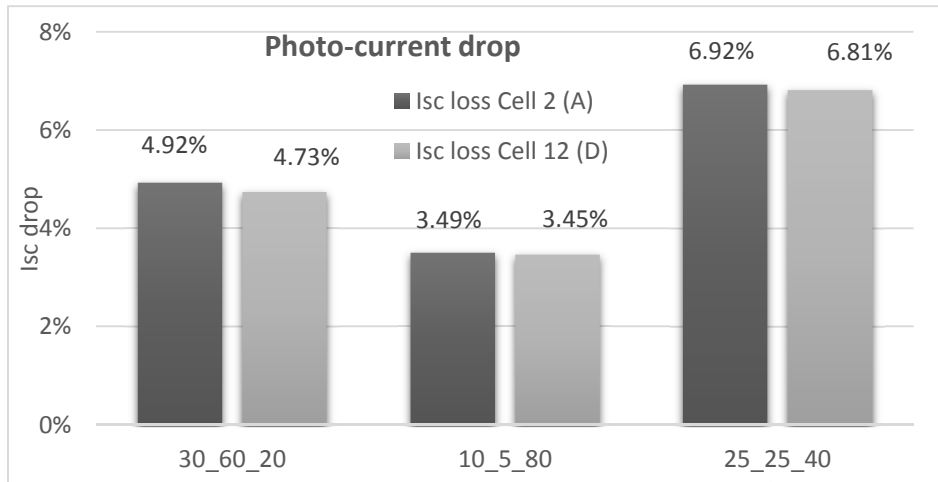


Figure 14.- Isc drop measured for the two samples in the different experiments for the two cells.

Compared to the weighed transmission losses, the actual Isc losses are not that high. This could be related to scattered light, which is not detected by transmittance analysis. Table 4 shows results and we can see that treatment D presents a better performance, mainly when cell temperature is high (30\_60\_20 experiment).

	Measured Isc drop		$\Delta(A-D)$
	Cell2 (glass A)	Cell12 (glass D)	
30_60_20	4,92%	4,73%	0,19%
10_5_80	3,49%	3,45%	0,04%
25_25_40	6,92%	6,81%	0,11%

Table 4.- Isc drop for the analysed cells.

#### 4.3.1. Current loss calculated by using direct transmittance and its relation to the measured Isc drop

One of the objectives of this work was to find a correlation between the loss of direct transmittance, weighted by the spectral response, and the actual current drop of the cells. As explained above, the theoretical results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.

For the actual Isc drop, we calculated the difference between the Isc measurements under clean conditions and after the experiments (Table 4).

In Figure 15 we compare both results and can see that the direct transmittance drop fits well with the short-circuit current drop, even if a significant difference is observed for the high humidity configuration experiments. This difference is probably due to the “water channels” already mentioned and described above.

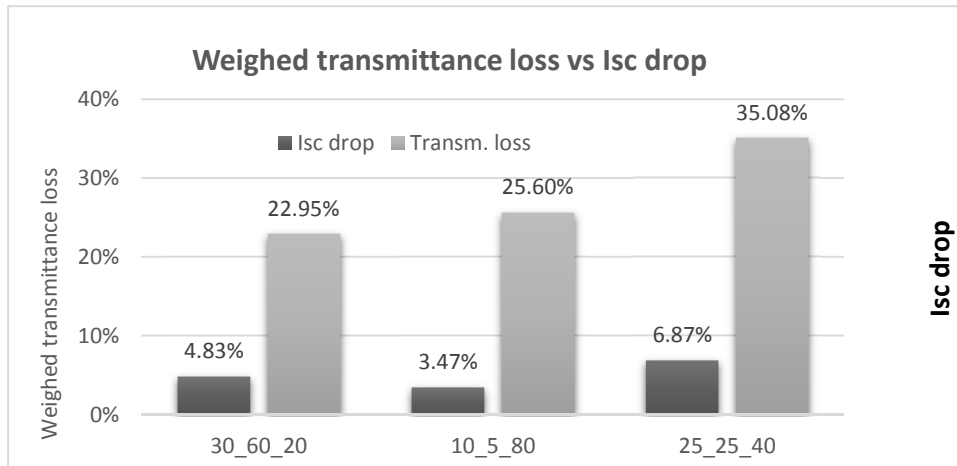


Figure 15.- Relationship between weighted direct transmittance drop and short-circuit current drop (Isc) for the three experiments

#### 4.4. Image analysis, for the different experiments

When an image analysis of the surface covered by the dust was carried out for the three situations studied, as it happened in the case of losses of current and transmittance, the results were different for the dry and wet cases.

Figure 16 shows the percentage of the surface of the two analysed cells, using the aforementioned image analysis technique. The percent coverage for each sample was related to the transmittance analysis to determine the light blockage due to the dust cover. However, the coverage obtained using the mentioned strategy was only valid for dry experiments (30\_60\_20 and 25\_25\_40).

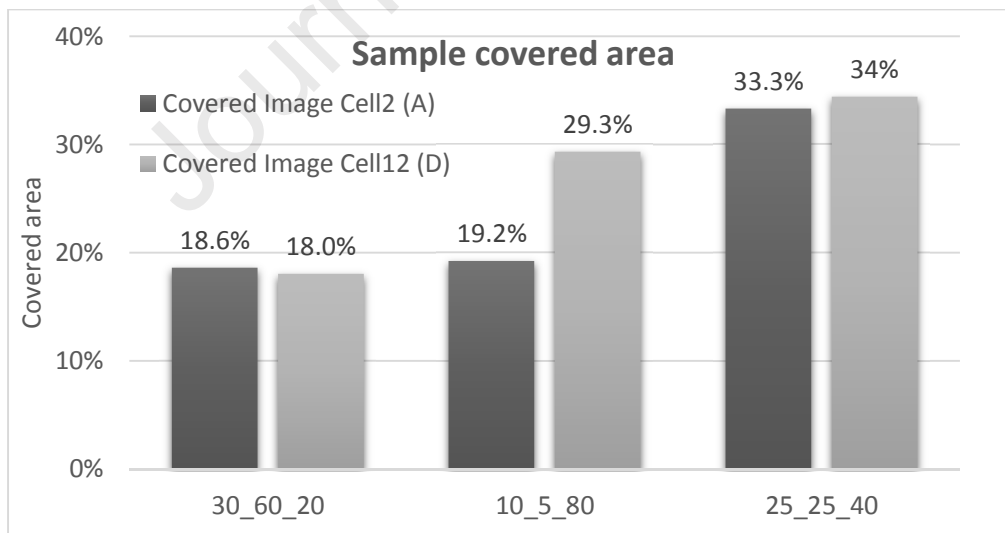


Figure 16.- Image analysis of the particle cover for the two samples in the three experiments.

The reason was probably the lack of homogeneity of the image after the wet test (10\_5\_80), which made the analysis by microscopy difficult. Then, according to the results, there was a correlation between the coverage obtained by the image analysis and the other variables: current and transmittance losses for experiments 30\_60\_20 and 25\_25\_40, but not for experiment 10\_5\_80. This finding can help in using the image analysis technique combined with an analysis of environmental conditions in order to determine if dew point was not reached and then to establish the relationship between the covered surface and the current drop.

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## 5. Conclusions

Experiments were carried out to analyse the effect of soiling, using an indoor chamber. The data obtained were studied, and different conclusions can be reached for the different analysed situations, including different temperature gradients between glass, cells and air, and different situations of relative humidity that reach or do not reach the dew point.

The indoor soiling chamber is considered a valuable tool to analyse the soiling effect simulating different test conditions. In this sense, the experience can serve to improve the chamber and intensify its use.

Taking into account the constraints of the conditions of the experiments, such as the size of the samples and the bandwidth of the spectrophotometer, interesting findings are obtained.

- Temperature of the module seems to mitigate the soiling optical impact. It was observed in all the glasses how the highest the temperature, the lower the soiling.
- When dew point is reached, a so called “water channels” appear on the glass and, as a consequence, the spectrophotometry or images measurement are not consistent enough to get a good correlation with the Isc drop. In this case, a deeper study could find relationships between reaching the dew point and non-uniformities in Isc drop.
- Cumulated soiling load of 1 to 2 g/m<sup>2</sup> can promote current losses in the cell from nearly 5% to 7%, but it is affected by the appearance of water channels in the surface, what can mitigate the loss.
- The correlation between short circuit current (Isc) drop and the optical direct transmittance measurement, weighed by the spectral response, has been demonstrated if the dew point is not reached. This can be used as a methodology to obtain one from the other.

## 6. Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the research support and the supply of equipment from the National Solar Energy Institute (CEA- INES), and to Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) for the support with the researcher’s mobility program.

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**Highlights**

- 1 Soiling process can be reproduced inside a chamber for various ambient conditions
- 2 Dust load is the main parameter but not the only one affecting soiling effects
- 3 When the dew point is reached, water channels appear reducing the impact of soiling
- 4 Spectral-response weighed optical transmission is used for photocurrent prediction
- 5 Big differences between solar cell and air temperatures decreases soiling

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**Declaration of interests**

- The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.
- The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

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Mr. Muñoz-García: Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft

Mr. Pilat: Validation, Project administration, Resources, Writing - Review & Editing

Mr. Fouris: Methodology, Investigation, Writing - Review & Editing

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