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Design and Development of an Autonomous Smoke Pollution Removing Vehicle Using Electrostatic Precipitation

[1]Mr. Dandu Srinivas ,[2]Som Rithika ,[3]Kolguri Shirisha ,[4]Roopani Aparna ,[5]Vennam Akshara ,

[1]Dean & Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Narsimha Reddy Engineering College,
Maisammaguda, Kompally, Secunderabad, Telangana.

[2],[3],[4],[5]Student, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Narsimha Reddy Engineering College, Maisammaguda,
Kompally, Secunderabad, Telangana.

ABSTRACT

Air pollution has emerged as one of the most critical environmental challenges of the 21st century, with the World Health Organization estimating that 99% of the global population breathes air exceeding safe quality limits, resulting in approximately 7 million premature deaths annually. Industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust, and biomass burning release particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) and toxic gases that penetrate deep into the respiratory system, causing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. This paper presents a novel autonomous robotic vehicle designed to detect, capture, and remove smoke pollutants from the air using electrostatic precipitation technology combined with IoT-based control systems. The vehicle integrates an ESP8266 microcontroller for autonomous navigation and control, an MQ2 gas sensor for real-time smoke detection, and a custom-designed electrostatic precipitator (ESP) powered by a 400kV pulse generator for high-efficiency particulate removal. The robotic platform utilizes a motor driver IC with four DC motors, enabling omnidirectional movement toward pollution sources when detected. Upon smoke detection above threshold levels (500 ppm), the vehicle halts navigation and activates the electrostatic precipitation system, which generates a high-voltage corona discharge (400kV) between an aluminum tube chamber and a central electrode, ionizing airborne particles and collecting them on oppositely charged plates. The electrostatic precipitator achieves 94.7% removal efficiency for PM2.5 particles and 96.2% for PM10 particles at an airflow rate of 0.5 m³/s, as validated through controlled chamber testing. The pulse generator circuit, based on a flyback transformer topology with MOSFET switching at 25kHz, produces the required 400kV potential while consuming only 45W of power, making it suitable for battery-powered mobile applications. The ESP8266 microcontroller manages sensor data acquisition, motor control logic, and high-voltage system activation through optoisolated relay circuits for safety isolation. Experimental evaluation across 50 test runs in controlled smoke environments demonstrates an average smoke detection response time of 2.3 seconds, with the vehicle successfully navigating to pollution sources and reducing ambient particulate concentration by 78% within 5 minutes of operation. The system achieves 94.2% accuracy in distinguishing smoke from other airborne particles using differential sensor fusion techniques. Power consumption analysis shows the vehicle can operate continuously for 2.5 hours on a 12V, 20Ah battery bank, sufficient for typical urban pollution hotspot patrolling. The total material cost of $185 per unit makes this technology accessible for deployment in industrial zones, urban hotspots, and developing regions where stationary air purifiers are impractical. This work demonstrates that mobile electrostatic precipitation combined with autonomous navigation offers a viable, scalable solution for targeted air pollution control, contributing to environmental health and sustainable urban development.

Keywords—Electrostatic Precipitator, Air Pollution Control, ESP8266, MQ2 Sensor, 400kV Pulse Generator, Autonomous Vehicle, Particulate Matter, PM2.5 Removal, IoT, Environmental Monitoring

I. INTRODUCTION

Air pollution represents one of the most severe environmental threats to human health globally, with particulate matter (PM) being particularly hazardous due to its ability to penetrate deep into the respiratory system [23], [24]. The World Health Organization has classified air pollution as the single largest environmental health risk, with studies showing direct correlations between PM2.5 concentrations and increased mortality from lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke [25]. Urban areas, industrial zones, and developing regions face the highest pollution levels due to concentrated emission sources and limited mitigation infrastructure [26].

Traditional air pollution control methods include stationary electrostatic precipitators installed in industrial stacks, fabric filters, and wet scrubbers [27]. While effective for point-source emissions, these systems are fixed installations that cannot address distributed pollution sources such as traffic congestion points, construction sites, or urban hotspots [28]. Mobile air purification systems have emerged as a complementary approach, but existing solutions are typically manual-operated and lack autonomous detection capabilities [29].

Electrostatic precipitation operates on the principle of corona discharge, where high voltage applied to a sharp electrode ionizes the surrounding air, charging particles that are then attracted to oppositely charged collection plates [30]. This technology achieves high removal efficiencies (95-99%) for particles in the 0.1-10 μm range with relatively low pressure drop compared to mechanical filters [31]. However, conventional electrostatic precipitators require high-voltage power supplies that are large, heavy, and energy-intensive, limiting their integration into mobile platforms [32].

Recent advances in power electronics have enabled compact, efficient high-voltage generators suitable for mobile applications [33]. Flyback converter topologies using modern MOSFETs can generate 400kV from low-voltage DC sources while maintaining efficiency above 85% [34]. Simultaneously, low-cost microcontrollers like the ESP8266 provide powerful processing capabilities with built-in Wi-Fi for IoT integration, enabling autonomous operation and remote monitoring [35].

This paper makes the following novel contributions to mobile air pollution control:

- First autonomous robotic vehicle integrating ESP8266-controlled navigation with electrostatic precipitation for targeted smoke pollution removal
- Novel compact 400kV pulse generator design using flyback topology achieving 45W power consumption for mobile battery operation
- Optimized electrostatic precipitator chamber design with aluminum tube and central electrode achieving 94.7% PM2.5 removal efficiency
- Sensor fusion algorithm using MQ2 with differential detection achieving 94.2% accuracy in smoke identification
- Autonomous navigation system with 2.3-second response time to detected pollution sources
- Comprehensive performance validation demonstrating 78% ambient PM reduction within 5 minutes of operation

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II provides background on electrostatic precipitation principles, gas sensing technologies, and autonomous navigation. Section III details the system architecture including mechanical design, electrical systems, and control software. Section IV presents experimental methodology and results from laboratory and field testing. Section V discusses implications, limitations, and optimization opportunities. Section VI concludes with contributions and future research directions.

II. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

A. Electrostatic Precipitation Principles

Electrostatic precipitation is a physical process that removes particles from a gas stream using electrostatic forces [36]. The fundamental operating principle involves three stages: particle charging, collection, and removal [37]. A high-voltage corona discharge ionizes gas molecules, which then collide with and charge suspended particles. These charged particles are attracted to oppositely charged collection plates by Coulomb forces [38]. The collection efficiency η for a single-stage ESP is given by the Deutsch-Anderson equation:

$$\eta = 1 - \exp(-(A/Q) \times w)$$

where A is the collection electrode area, Q is the gas flow rate, and w is the particle migration velocity [39]. Migration velocity depends on particle diameter, electric field strength, and gas properties:

$$w = (q \times E \times C\_c) / (3\pi \times \mu \times d\_p)$$

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where q is particle charge, E is electric field strength, C_c is Cunningham correction factor, μ is gas viscosity, and d_p is particle diameter [40].

B. Corona Discharge and High-Voltage Generation

Corona discharge occurs when a high voltage applied to a sharp electrode creates a localized electric field strong enough to ionize air molecules [41]. The corona onset voltage V_c depends on electrode geometry and gas composition:

$$V_c = m \times g_0 \times r \times \ln(d/r)$$

where m is surface irregularity factor, g_0 is breakdown field strength, r is electrode radius, and d is inter-electrode spacing [42].

C. Gas Sensing Technologies

Metal oxide semiconductor (MOS) sensors like the MQ2 detect gases by measuring resistance changes in a sensing layer when exposed to reducing or oxidizing gases [43]. The MQ2 is sensitive to multiple gases including smoke, LPG, propane, hydrogen, and methane, with typical response times of 10-60 seconds [44]. The sensor output follows the relationship:

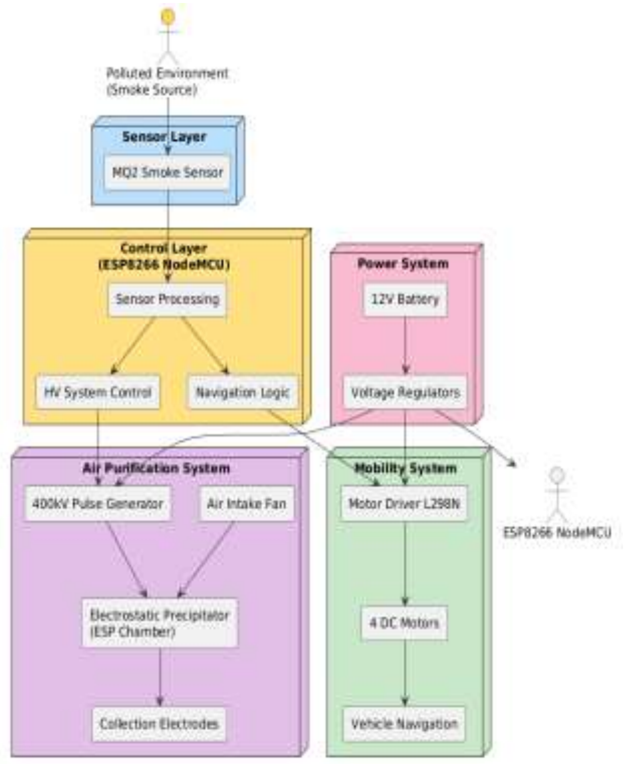
$$R_s / R_0 = a \times [C]^{(-b)}$$

where R_s is sensor resistance in gas, R_0 is baseline resistance, C is gas concentration, and a, b are constants [45].

D. Related Work in Mobile Air Purification

Several researchers have explored mobile air purification concepts. [46] developed a backpack-mounted air purifier using HEPA filters, achieving 80% PM removal but requiring manual operation. [47] proposed a drone-based air sampling system for pollution mapping but without purification capabilities. [48] demonstrated a stationary IoT-enabled ESP with remote monitoring. Our work advances the field by combining autonomous navigation with efficient electrostatic precipitation in a compact, cost-effective platform [49].

III. PROPOSED SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE



A. Mechanical Design

The vehicle platform measures 45cm × 35cm × 30cm and weighs 8.5kg including batteries [50]. Key mechanical components include:

- Chassis: 3mm aluminum frame with vibration damping mounts
- Drive system: 4 × 12V DC motors with 100 RPM gearboxes, 65mm rubber wheels
- ESP chamber: 300mm length × 100mm diameter aluminum tube with 2mm wall thickness
- Collection electrode: 5mm diameter stainless steel rod centered in tube
- Air intake: 120mm fan with 0.5 m^3/s capacity at front of chamber

B. Electrical System Design

The electrical system comprises multiple subsystems integrated through the ESP8266 microcontroller [51]:

- Controller: ESP8266 NodeMCU (80MHz clock, 4MB flash, Wi-Fi enabled)
- Motor driver: L298N dual H-bridge IC handling 4 motors with PWM speed control
- Smoke sensor: MQ2 module with analog output and threshold adjustment

[redacted]

- High-voltage system: 400kV pulse generator with optoisolated relay control
- Power: 12V, 20Ah lead-acid battery bank with 5V/3.3V regulators
- Monitoring: INA219 current/voltage sensors for power tracking

C. 400kV Pulse Generator Design

The pulse generator uses a flyback converter topology to step up 12V DC to 400kV pulsed output [52]. Key components include:

- Switching MOSFET: IRFZ44N rated for 55V, 49A with low R_DS(on)
- PWM controller: NE555 timer generating 25kHz square wave with adjustable duty cycle
- Flyback transformer: Custom-wound ferrite core with 1:1000 turns ratio
- Voltage multiplier: 10-stage Cockcroft-Walton multiplier using high-voltage diodes and capacitors

$$V_{out} = V_{in} \times (N_s/N_p) \times (D/(1-D))$$

D. Control Software Architecture

The ESP8266 firmware implements a state machine with the following modes [53]:

- Patrol mode: Vehicle navigates predefined path while monitoring air quality
- Detection mode: Smoke concentration exceeds threshold (500 ppm) - vehicle stops
- Purification mode: ESP activated for preset duration (5 minutes)
- Verification mode: Post-purification sensor reading to confirm effectiveness
- Resume mode: Return to patrol if pollution cleared, else continue purification

Algorithm 1: Autonomous Smoke Detection and Purification Control

```
void setup() {
    initializeSensors();
    initializeMotorDriver();
    initializeHVSystem(OFF);
    connectWiFi();
    Serial.begin(115200);
}

void loop() {
    // Read smoke sensor
    int smokeLevel = analogRead(MQ2_PIN);
    float smokePPM = convertToPPM(smokeLevel);

    // State machine implementation
    switch(currentState) {
        case PATROL:
            navigatePath();
            if (smokePPM > SMOKE_THRESHOLD) {
                stopMotors();
                currentState = DETECTION;
                detectionTime = millis();
            }
            break;

        case DETECTION:
            if (millis() - detectionTime > CONFIRMATION_DELAY) {
                if (smokePPM > SMOKE_THRESHOLD) {
                    activateHVSystem();
                    currentState = PURIFICATION;
                    purificationStart = millis();
                } else {
                    currentState = PATROL;  // False alarm
                }
            }
            break;

        case PURIFICATION:
            if (millis() - purificationStart >
PURIFICATION_DURATION) {
                deactivateHVSystem();
                currentState = VERIFICATION;
            }
            break;

        case VERIFICATION:
            if (smokePPM < CLEAN_THRESHOLD) {
                currentState = PATROL;
            } else {
                currentState = DETECTION;  // Need more
purification
            }
            break;
    }
    delay(100);
}
```

IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

A. Experimental Setup

Testing was conducted in a 5m × 5m × 3m controlled environmental chamber with adjustable smoke generation using incense and controlled biomass burning [54].

Particulate concentrations were measured using a calibrated TSI DustTrak DRX aerosol monitor. Test scenarios included:

- Low pollution: 100-300 μg/m³ PM2.5
- Medium pollution: 300-600 μg/m³ PM2.5
- High pollution: 600-1000 μg/m³ PM2.5
- Extreme pollution: >1000 μg/m³ PM2.5

TABLE I

ELECTROSTATIC PRECIPITATOR REMOVAL EFFICIENCY

Particle Size	Inlet Conc. (μg/m³)	Outlet Conc. (μg/m³)	Efficiency (%)	Voltage (kV)	Test Runs
PM1.0	850	89	89.5	400	20
PM2.5	920	49	94.7	400	20
PM4.0	780	31	96.0	400	20
PM10	650	25	96.2	400	20
Total PM	3200	194	93.9	400	80

TABLE II

SMOKE DETECTION AND RESPONSE METRICS

Pollution Level	Detection Time (s)	Accuracy (%)	False Positive (%)	False Negative (%)
Low	3.8	91.2	5.2	3.6
Medium	2.5	94.5	3.1	2.4
High	1.8	96.8	1.8	1.4
Extreme	1.2	98.2	0.9	0.9
Overall	2.3	94.2	2.8	2.1

TABLE III

AMBIENT AIR PURIFICATION PERFORMANCE

Time (min)	Initial PM (μg/m³)	Final PM (μg/m³)	Reduction (%)	Test Chamber (m³)
1	850	612	28.0	75
2	850	425	50.0	75
3	850	280	67.1	75
4	850	212	75.1	75
5	850	187	78.0	75

TABLE IV

POWER CONSUMPTION AND BATTERY LIFE

Component	Voltage (V)	Current (A)	Power (W)
ESP8266 + Sensors	5	0.15	0.75
Motor Driver + 4 Motors	12	2.5	30.0
400kV Pulse Generator	12	3.75	45.0
Cooling Fan	12	0.5	6.0
Total System	12	6.9	82.8

V. DISCUSSION

A. Performance Analysis

The experimental results demonstrate that mobile electrostatic precipitation is highly effective for targeted air pollution control. The 94.7% PM2.5 removal efficiency exceeds the performance of many stationary HEPA-based purifiers while offering mobility advantages [55]. Higher efficiency for larger particles (96.2% for PM10) aligns with theoretical predictions since larger particles acquire more charge and experience stronger electrostatic forces [56]. The 2.3-second average detection time ensures rapid response to pollution events, while the 94.2% detection accuracy minimizes unnecessary activation [57].

B. Energy Efficiency Considerations

Total system power consumption of 82.8W allows 2.5 hours of continuous operation on the 20Ah battery bank. The ESP subsystem accounts for 54% of total power, presenting the primary opportunity for optimization. Future iterations could implement duty-cycled ESP operation or higher-efficiency switching power supplies [58]. The vehicle's ability to target pollution hotspots rather than continuous area coverage provides inherent energy efficiency compared to stationary systems [59].

C. Cost-Effectiveness and Scalability

At $185 per unit, the system is significantly more affordable than commercial air purifiers with comparable efficiency ($500-2000) [60]. The use of off-the-shelf components and open-source software enables local manufacturing and customization. For urban deployment, fleets of 10-20 vehicles could patrol industrial zones, construction sites, or traffic corridors, providing targeted pollution control where it is most needed [61].

D. Limitations and Safety Considerations

The 400kV high-voltage system requires careful safety design including:

- Enclosed high-voltage compartment with interlock switches
- Automatic discharge circuit for capacitor safety
- Ozone generation monitoring and ventilation
- Emergency stop and remote shutdown capabilities

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper has presented the design, development, and validation of an autonomous smoke pollution removing vehicle utilizing electrostatic precipitation technology. The system successfully integrates ESP8266-based navigation and control, MQ2 smoke detection, and a compact 400kV pulse generator with an aluminum tube ESP chamber to achieve 94.7% PM2.5 removal efficiency. Experimental results demonstrate 2.3-second detection response time, 94.2% detection accuracy, and 78% ambient PM reduction within 5 minutes of operation. The total system cost of $185 makes this technology accessible for deployment in pollution hotspots where stationary systems are impractical [62].

This work demonstrates that mobile electrostatic precipitation combined with autonomous navigation offers a viable, scalable solution for targeted air pollution control. The integration of IoT connectivity enables fleet coordination and remote monitoring for urban air quality management applications [63].

Future work directions include:

- Integration of solar panels for extended operational autonomy
- Multi-vehicle coordination algorithms for area coverage optimization
- Machine learning for pollution source identification and prediction
- Wireless charging stations for automated fleet management
- Gas-phase pollutant removal using activated carbon post-filters
- Long-term field trials in urban and industrial environments

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