Energy Resources and Policy
Handout:
Solar power

1. Short-wave radiation

Figure 1 shows the spectral composition of the electromagnetic energy emitted by the sun. This range of wavelengths is known as the solar spectrum, which in practical terms extends from about 0.29 µm (1 µm = 10^{-6} meters) in the longer wavelengths of the ultraviolet region, through the visible region (0.4 to 0.8 µm), to about 3.2 µm in the far infrared. The majority of the solar energy comes from the visible and infrared parts of the spectrum in the form of light and heat respectively.

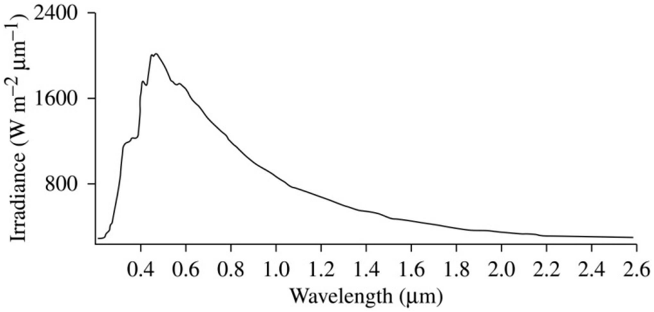


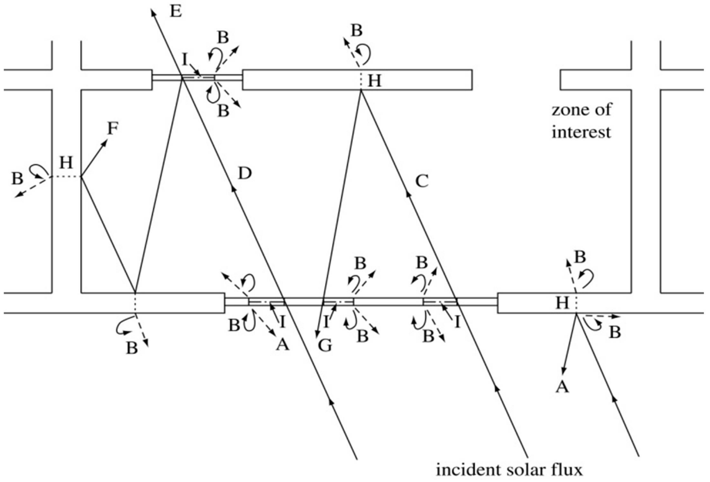
Figure 1: The solar spectrum.

To determine the terrestrial irradiance (W/m^2), the extraterrestrial solar radiation intensity may be modified to account for the effects of atmospheric transmission. As the radiation traverses the atmosphere, scattering and absorption occurs due to the natural and anthropogenic related presence of gases, aerosols and pollutants. The result is that some portion of the incoming solar irradiance is lost, while the remaining portion comprises direct and diffuse components. The direct and diffuse irradiance, whether synthesised or measured, is used in the determination of the insolation of exposed surfaces, such as external surfaces on buildings.

2. Object interaction

Figure 2 details the interactions between a building and the incident direct and diffuse solar radiation. The short-wave flux incident on external opaque surfaces will be partially absorbed and partially reflected, while some portion of the absorbed component may be transmitted to the corresponding interior surface, by conduction, to elevate the inside surface temperature and so enter the building via surface convection and longwave radiation exchange. Likewise, a portion of the absorbed component will cause outside surface temperature elevation and so give rise to a re-release of energy to ambient. If a multi-layered construction is opaque overall but has transparent elements located towards its outermost surface, some portion of the incident direct and diffuse radiation will also be transmitted inward until it strikes the intra-constructional opaque interface. Here, absorption and reflection will again occur, the latter giving rise to further absorptions and interface reflections as the flux travels outwards; the process continuing, essentially instantaneously, until the incident flux has been redistributed.

With windows, the direct and diffuse shortwave flux is reflected, absorbed and transmitted at each interface with the internally absorbed component being transmitted inward and outward by the processes of conduction, convection and long-wave radiation exchange. The transmitted direct beam continues onward to cause internal surface insolation as a function of the zone geometry. The subsequent treatment of this incident flux will depend on the nature of the receiving surface(s): absorption and reflection for an opaque surface, or absorption, reflection and transmission (to another zone or back to outside) in the case of a transparent surface. If the internal surface is a specular reflector then the reflected beam's onward path may be tracked by some suitable technique until diminished to insignificance. If the zone surface is a diffuse reflector then the apportioning of the reflected flux to other internal surfaces may be determined by weighting factors derived from the zone view factors. The same technique may be applied to the transmitted diffuse beam.



A reflected short-wave flux;
B flux emission by convection and long-wave radiation;
C short-wave flux transmission causing opaque surface insolation;
D short-wave transmission causing transparent surface insolation;
E short-wave transmission to adjacent zone;
F enclosure reflections;
G short-wave loss;
H solar energy penetration by transient conduction;
I solar energy absorption prior to retransmission by B.

Figure 2: Building-solar interaction.

The causal effect of these short-wave processes is then represented by the energy conservation equations, given that the short-wave flux injection at appropriate finite volumes can be established at each computational time-row. The requirement therefore is to establish the time-series of shortwave flux injection for finite volumes representing external opaque and transparent surfaces, intra-constructional elements, where these are part of a transparent multi-layered construction, and internal opaque and transparent surfaces.

3. Solar position

As shown in figure 3, the position of the sun may be represented in terms of altitude and azimuth angles that depend on site latitude, solar declination and local solar time.

The solar declination, d, may be determined from

$$d = 23.45 \sin(280.1 + 0.9863Y)$$

where Y is the year day number (January 1 = 1, February 1 = 32 etc.).

The solar altitude is then obtained from

$$\beta_s = \sin^{-1} [\cos L \cos d \cos \theta_h + \sin L \sin d]$$

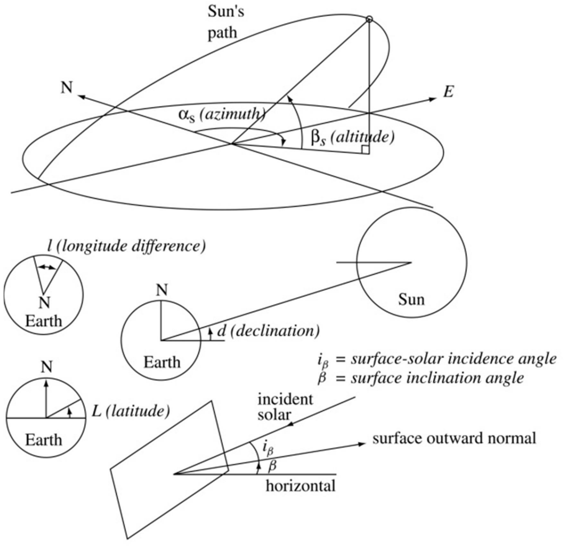


Figure 3: Solar angles.

where β_s is the solar altitude, L the site latitude (North +ve) and θ_h the hour angle, which is the angular expression of solar time and is positive for times before solar noon and negative for times thereafter:

$$\theta_h = 15\,(12 - t_s)$$

where t_s is the solar time (or local apparent time). This is a time scale which relates to the apparent angular motion of the sun across the sky vault, with solar noon corresponding to the point in time at which the sun traverses the meridian of the observer. Note that solar time does not necessarily coincide with local mean (or clock) time, t_m, with the difference given by

$$t_s - t_m = (\pm 4L + e_t)/60 + \delta$$

where L is the longitude difference (°), e_t the equation of time (minutes) and δ a possible correction for daylight saving (hours). The longitude difference is the difference between an observer's actual longitude and the longitude of the mean or reference meridian for the local time zone. The difference is negative for locations to the West of the reference meridian and positive to the East.
For the UK, the reference meridian is at 0° and local mean time is known as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). For this case the previous equation becomes

$$t_s = \mathrm{GMT} \pm L/15 + e_t/60 + \delta$$

where l' is the actual longitude of the observer. The equation of time makes allowance for the observed disturbances to the earth's rate of rotation:

$$e_t = 9.87 \sin(1.978Y - 160.22) - 7.53 \cos(0.989Y - 80.11) - 1.5 \sin(0.989Y - 80.11).$$

The solar azimuth is given by

$$\alpha_s = \sin^{-1} [\cos d \sin \theta_h / \cos \beta_s].$$

The angle of incidence of the direct beam, i_β, may be found from

$$i_\beta = \cos^{-1} [\sin \beta_s \cos(90 - \beta_f) + \cos \beta_s \cos \omega \sin(90 - \beta_f)]$$

where ω is the surface-solar azimuth (= $|\alpha_s - \alpha_f|$) and α_f & β_f are the surface azimuth and elevation respectively. Note that negative values of $\cos i_\beta$ imply that the surface in question faces away from the sun and is therefore not directly insolated.

4. Inclined surface irradiation

The total radiation incident on an exposed opaque or transparent surface of inclination β_f and azimuth α_f has three components: direct, surroundings-reflected and sky diffuse.

The direct irradiance is relatively straightforward to determine since it involves only angular operations on the known direct horizontal irradiance:

$$I_{d\beta} = I_{dh} \cos i_\beta / \sin \beta_s$$

where $I_{d\beta}$ is the direct intensity on the inclined surface and I_{dh} is the direct horizontal intensity (both W/m^2).

Alternatively, if the solar direct beam radiation (I_{dn}) is measured, them the direct irradiance on the inclined surface is given by:

$$I_{d\beta} = I_{dn} \cos i_{\beta}$$

The surroundings-reflected component comprises short-wave reflections from the surfaces of surrounding buildings and the ground. The former may be estimated as a fraction of the short-wave flux incident on the corresponding face of the target building. The ground is usually considered as a, isotropic source (diffuse reflector) and representative view factors are used to associate portions of the reflected radiation with each building surface. For an unobstructed vertical surface ($\beta_f = 0$), the view factor between the surface and the ground, and between the surface and the sky is in each case 0.5 and so the radiation intensity at the surface due to ground reflection is given by

$$I_{rv} = 0.5\ (I_{dh} + I_{fh})r_g$$

where I_{fh} is the horizontal diffuse radiation and r_g the ground reflectivity. For a surface of non-vertical inclination, a simple view factor modification is introduced so that

$$I_{r\beta} = 0.5\ [1 - \cos(90 - \beta_f)](\ I_{dh} + I_{fh})r_g$$

where $I_{r\beta}$ is the ground reflected radiation incident on a surface of inclination β_f.

Calculating the sky diffuse component on a surface of inclination β_f is more involved because of the anisotropic nature of the sky radiance distribution. The following approach, one of several possible models, increases the intensity of the diffuse flux due to circumsolar activity and horizon brightening:

$$I_{s\beta} = I_{fh}\{0.5[1+\cos(90-\beta_f)]\}.\{1+[1-(I_{fh}^2/I_{gh}^2)]\sin^3 0.5\beta_f\}.\{1+[1-(I_{fh}^2/I_{gh}^2)]\cos^2 i_{\beta}\ \sin^3(90-\beta_s)\}$$

where I_{gh} the global horizontal radiation, $I_{dh}+I_{fh}$. When the sky is completely overcast, $I_{fh}/_{gh}=1$ and the expression reduces to the isotropic sky case.

$$I_{s\beta} = I_{fh}\{0.5[1+\cos(90-\beta_f)]\}\ \text{(isotropic sky)}$$

The foregoing equations allow the computation of direct and diffuse shortwave radiation impinging upon exposed external surfaces. These flux quantities, when multiplied by surface absorptivity, are the short-wave nodal heat generation terms, q_{SI}, of the nodal energy conservation equations.

5. Intra-zone short-wave distribution

The above equations permit the calculation of the direct and diffuse irradiance of exposed building surfaces. For opaque surfaces, irradiance modification by surface absorptivity and shading factors will give the short-wave heat injection to be applied to surface nodes via the excitation matrix (**C**). For a window system, the transmitted portion of the direct beam can be evaluated from

$$Q_{dt} = I_{dh}/\sin \alpha_s[\tau_{i\beta}(1-P_g)A_g.\cos i_{\beta}]$$

where Q_{dt} is the transmitted direct beam flux (W), $\tau_{i\beta}$ the overall transmissivity for a given flux incidence angle, P_g the window shading factor (proportion of 1) and $A_g.\cos i_{\beta}$ the apparent window area. If, as is often the case, more than one internal surface will share this transmitted radiation then any internal surface will receive a heat injection given by

$$q_{Si} = Q_{dt} P_i \Omega_i / A_i$$

where Ω_i is the surface absorptivity, A_i the surface area and P_i the proportion of the window direct beam transmission that strikes the surface in question (proportion of 1).
The first reflected flux is given by

$$q_{Ri} = q_{Si}(1 - \Omega_i) / \Omega_i .$$

The accumulated flux reflections from each surface can now be further processed to give the final apportioning between all internal surfaces. If the usual assumption of diffuse reflections is made then apportionment can be decided on the basis of enclosure view factor information as described in the following section. For the case of specular reflections a recursive ray tracing technique can be employed.

Where the internal surface is composed of opaque and transparent portions, there will be onward transmission of incident short-wave flux to a connected zone or back to the outside. This can have a significant impact within buildings incorporating passive solar features.

The diffuse beam transmission can be determined from

$$Q_{ft} = (I_{s\beta} + I_{r\beta}) A_g \cos 51\ \tau_{51}$$

where τ_{51} is the overall transmissivity corresponding to a 51° incidence angle, representing the average approach angle for anisotropic sky conditions.

This flux quantity can now be processed by the technique described for the direct beam: internal surface distribution on the basis of specular or diffuse reflections.