Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research A 607 (2009) 259–260

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research A

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/nima

Optical physics of scintillation imagers by GEANT4 simulations

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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 26 March 2009

Keywords:
Monte Carlo
GEANT4
$LaBr_3$:Ce crystal
UNIFIED
Penelope
Multi Anode PMT

ABSTRACT

The recent developments of $LaBr_3$:Ce crystals makes their use in a system of gamma imaging for Single Photon Emission Tomography (SPET) applications very attractive, mainly due to their excellent scintillation properties. In this work we use the Monte Carlo simulations in order to model the optical behavior of three crystal configurations. Our goal is to better understand the intrinsic properties of a gamma camera based on $LaBr_3$:Ce crystals coupled to a position-sensitive photomultiplier tube. To this aim, the spatial and energy resolutions obtained from optimum photodetection conditions are investigated.

1. Introduction

GEANT4 [1] permits an accurate modeling of radiation source detectors and allows following with great precision the interactions within different media. The excellent scintillation properties of $LaBr_3$:Ce offer the potential to replace the most widespread scintillation crystal, the NaI:Tl. In the form of a slab, these crystals are able to provide sub-millimeter spatial resolution values comparable to scintillation arrays or better than the latter. GEANT4 simulations can model the optical behavior of different crystal configurations. Some intrinsic properties of a $LaBr_3$:Ce gamma camera, as spatial resolution and energy resolution, are therefore studied.

2. Simulation setup

For the modeling of electromagnetic interactions, the "Penelope" model of GEANT4 is used. Such a model is better suited for energies ranging from a few hundred eV to about 1 GeV. To improve the tracking of electrons, a few parameters [2] have to be tuned up. They control the numerical stability of results, the electrons step, their stopping power, and the multiple scattering. Furthermore, GEANT4 allows the simulation of the transport and boundary effects for optical photons generated by the scintillating crystal (Fig. 1). In this way, the whole process can be thoroughly simulated. The simulation starts from the radioactive decay of a ^{99m}Tc source and halts when the optical photons reach the photomultiplier. The simulated scintillation camera reproduces the experimental setup, which consists of a Multi Anodes-PMT (MA-PMT) Hamamatsu Flat Panel H8500 with quantum efficiency equal to 27%, (12 stages of metal channel dynodes and 8×8 anode array) [3]. The flat panel was coupled to a $50 \times 50 \times 4\,mm^3$ slab of $LaBr_3$:Ce crystal and a 4.5 mm glass window. The crystal is surrounded by a thin layer (0.5 mm) of aluminium. In the front, the crystal surface is covered by a very small layer of Teflon (0.3 mm) acting as a Lambertian reflector. The crystal edges were black painted in order to reduce reflections. In the simulation, the boundary processes all crystal surfaces following the rules of the UNIFIED model [4]. The optical properties of materials involved in simulations are gathered from the literature. A scintillation light yield, equal to 63,000 photons/MeV, is assumed for $LaBr_3$:Ce [5]. The scintillation photons are generated as a pure Poisson process. The total Energy Resolution (ER) can be parameterized as $ER = \sqrt{ER_{stat}^2 + ER_{int}^2}$ [6] where ER_{stat} represents the Poissonian component of ER given by the square root of the number of

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doi:10.1016/j.nima.2009.03.168

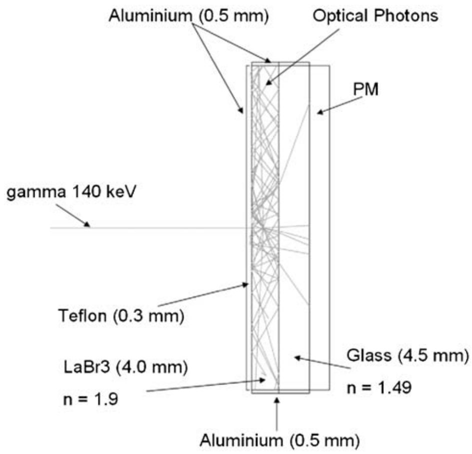

Fig. 1. Sketch of optical photons distribution inside the $LaBr_3$:Ce crystal, as simulated with GEANT4.

Table 1
Values obtained as a function of three different setups.

	Ground	Air gap	Polished	Exp
⟨Nphe⟩	1603 ± 1	1137 ± 1	1047 ± 1	–
ER %	7.4 ± 0.4	8.3 ± 0.4	8.6 ± 0.4	9.0 ± 0.1
SR (mm)	0.75 ± 0.04	0.8 ± 0.1	0.77 ± 0.02	1.1 ± 0.1

collected photoelectrons and ER_{int} is an additional intrinsic resolution, which has been computed in [6] for $LaBr_3$:Ce in a setup similar to the present one and yields (4.5 ± 0.5)% for 140 keV photons. The variance of the electron multiplier gain [6] was not taken into account in the calculation of the total energy resolution. Three different setups are simulated: "Ground", "Polished", and "Air Gap". "Ground" and "Polished" refer to the status of lateral surfaces of the crystal, while "Air Gap" is the "Ground" model with a thin air interface (0.1 mm) between the crystal and the photodetector. For every model, the reflectivity of lateral surfaces and the front surface was fixed 0.6 and 0.95, respectively [7].

3. Results

The values of spatial, energy resolution, and the average number of photoelectrons reaching the anode are summarized in Table 1, where experimental values are obtained using a crystal with polished lateral surfaces.

The output of the Monte Carlo simulations is arranged to reproduce the segmentation of an 8 × 8 anodic array of the MA-PMT in order to analyze the sampling of the charge spread. Considering a coordinate system (x, y) with the origin in the centre of the anodic plane, Fig. 2 shows the charge projection along the x-direction as simulated for three different setups with the same source position. The Monte Carlo shows in all configurations a very large light spread through the whole crystal.

The simulation results ("Polished", which corresponds to the real crystal surface treatment) show a reasonable agreement with the experimental data in terms of *ER*. For the spatial resolution, the comparison between the experiment and simulations is shown in Fig. 3. All results are obtained using a compact gamma camera scanned with a 0.4 mm collimated ^{99m}Tc spot source at 2 mm step distance.

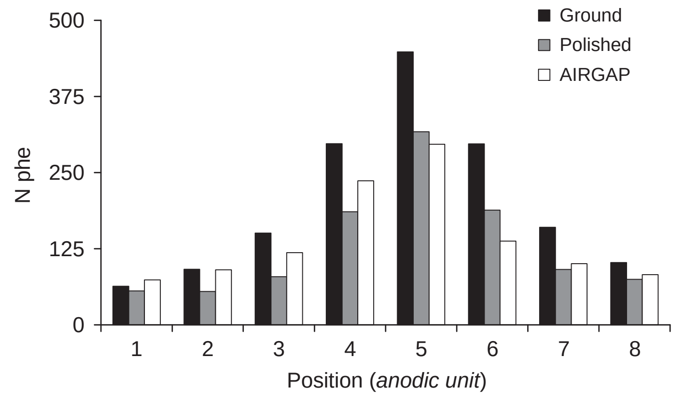

Fig. 2. Average spread of number of photoelectrons in the anodic plane for different setup configurations.

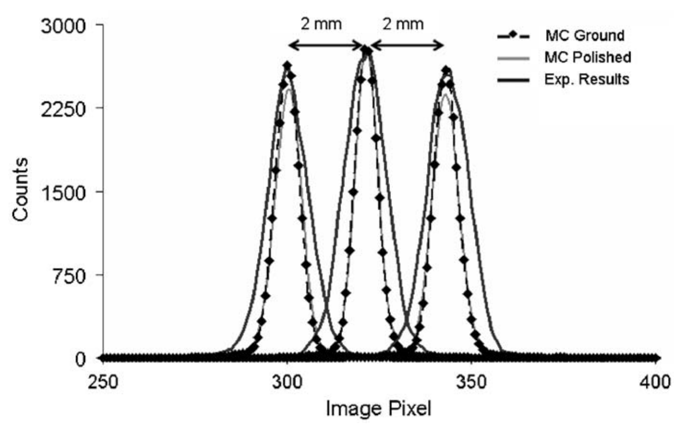

Fig. 3. Spatial resolution comparison between the Monte Carlo and experimental results: image profiles of three collimated irradiation are shown.

The Monte Carlo confirms the better performance of a ground crystal lateral surface both in terms of energy resolution and spatial resolution.

4. Conclusion

The Monte Carlo simulations help collecting important information about imaging potentials of $LaBr_3$:Ce. The energy resolution at 140 keV agrees reasonably with the experimental data. The Monte Carlo predictions allow to conclude that $LaBr_3$:Ce crystals with a ground treatment of lateral surfaces could pave the way to a sub-millimeter spatial resolution with high detection efficiency and energy resolution.

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