

Flow in a Hydrocyclone

Introduction

Cyclones are used in a variety of applications ranging from the mining industry to vacuum cleaners (Ref. 1). In the pulp and paper industry, hydrocyclones are used for contaminant removal, pulp thickening and fiber fractionation. Most cyclones do not contain any moving parts, and the flow is hence entirely driven by the applied pressure drops between the inlet(s) and the two outlets. The forward stream in the process is referred to as the accept flow whereas the discarded stream is referred to as the reject flow. Depending on the application, the accept outlet could either be the overflow located at the base of the cone, near the inlet(s), or the underflow near the apex of the cone. The former configuration is used for removal of heavy (compared to the carrier fluid) contaminants, whereas the latter is used for removal of light contaminants and in thickening processes. In fractionation processes the definition of accept and reject is more or less a matter of convenience since both streams are applied forward in the system.

Model Definition



The model geometry used in this application is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Model geometry showing the inlets, overflow, here the accept outlet, and underflow, reject outlet.

Two circular inlets are tangentially attached to the annular inlet chamber which is separated from the overflow by a wall called the "vortex finder". This design creates a strong swirl in the incoming flow. From the annular inlet chamber, the flow enters a conical chamber where the separation takes place. The conical shape preserves the angular momentum and stabilizes the vortex core - the central region of the swirl motion characterized by solid body rotation. A portion of the flow is effluxed through the underflow near the apex of the conical separation chamber, and the rest exits through the overflow.

The flow in a hydrocyclone is characterized by a very strong swirl, which makes it difficult to simulate using an isotropic turbulence model. It is imperative that the swirl flow is accurately captured in order to assess the separation efficiency for various particles. The streamlines essentially follow the azimuthal direction whereas mixing of momentum by turbulent fluctuations takes place in the radial direction which also happens to be the wall-normal direction in the major part of the hydrocyclone. This makes the v2-f turbulence model a good candidate for the prevailing flow conditions.

Stationary operating conditions corresponding to those of heavy contaminant removal are studied in this application. The flowing medium is pure water at 20° C. The hydrocyclone is assumed to be pressurized, and hence is operating without an air core. Initial values were chosen as zero velocity and zero pressure, and default values for the turbulence variables. No-slip conditions with automatic wall treatment were applied on all walls. At the two inlets the velocity is set to 5 m/s, and the turbulence conditions to isotropic with an intensity of 5 % and a length scale of 0.07 times the inlet diameter. 5 % of the flow exits through the underflow where a uniform velocity profile is specified. A constant pressure condition is applied at the overflow. The outlet conditions can be improved by attaching outlet chambers at both ends.

y z x

Figure 2 shows the streamlines for the swirling flow in the hydrocyclone.



Figure 2: Streamlines for the overflow (burgundy) and underflow (teal).

The streamlines describe the typical flow field encountered in hydrocyclone applications. From the inlet chamber, the flow is diverted toward the underflow. In this case, 95 % of the incoming flow is reversed, and exits through the overflow. This is illustrated by the burgundy streamlines in the core. The remainder (teal) stays closer to the wall and exits through the underflow.

The pressure drop and in-plane streamlines on two orthogonal cut-planes through the hydrocyclone are displayed in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Pressure drop and in-plane streamlines in the xz- and yz-planes.

The two jets mix in the inlet chamber, resulting in azimuthal pressure variations on the vortex core. For certain hydrocyclone designs, this may cause the vortex core to destabilize resulting in poor separation performance. The optimal number and design of the inlet pipes, and the design of the inlet chamber, is an active research field. The pressure drop between the inlets and outlets is of the order 100 kPa. Figure 4 shows a contour surface displaying a vertical (stable) vortex core. The swirl flow in the hydrocyclone can be divided

into an outer region, described by a semi-free vortex, and an inner region of solid body rotation.



Figure 4: Contour surface of the vortex core.

y z x

The graph in Figure 5 shows the azimuthal velocity component as a function of the radius at a vertical position 10 cm below the vortex finder. An inner core of solid-body rotation is clearly distinguishable from the outer semi-free vortex.



Figure 5: Azimuthal (swirl) velocity versus radius 10 cm below the vortex finder.

Notes About the COMSOL Implementation

The mesh is deliberately made coarse to reduce the computational time for this tutorial model. If the maximum size of the elements is reduced by thirty percent, the maximum swirl velocity in Figure 5 reaches 12 m/s.

Reference

1. D.Bradley, "The Hydrocyclone, 1st Edition, International Series of Monographs in Chemical Engineering," *Pergamon*, 1965.

Application Library path: CFD_Module/Single-Phase_Tutorials/hydrocyclone

From the File menu, choose New.

NEW

In the New window, click Model Wizard.

MODEL WIZARD

- I In the Model Wizard window, click 3D.
- 2 In the Select Physics tree, select Fluid Flow>Single-Phase Flow>Turbulent Flow> Turbulent Flow, v2-f (spf).
- 3 Click Add.
- 4 Click Study.
- 5 In the Select Study tree, select Preset Studies>Stationary with Initialization.
- 6 Click Done.

GLOBAL DEFINITIONS

Parameters

- I In the Model Builder window, under Global Definitions click Parameters.
- 2 In the Settings window for Parameters, locate the Parameters section.
- **3** In the table, enter the following settings:

Name	Expression	Value	Description
u_in	5[m/s]	5 m/s	Inlet velocity
r_in	0.0725[m]	0.0725 m	Inlet radius
r_out	0.07[m]	0.07 m	Reject radius
R_f	0.05	0.05	Reject volume fraction
u_out	R_f*2*(r_in/ r_out)^2*u_in	0.53635 m/s	Reject velocity

GEOMETRY I

Work Plane I (wp1)

- I On the Geometry toolbar, click Work Plane.
- 2 In the Settings window for Work Plane, locate the Plane Definition section.
- 3 From the Plane list, choose xz-plane.

Plane Geometry

In the Model Builder window, under Component I (compl)>Geometry I> Work Plane I (wpl) click Plane Geometry.

Polygon I (poll)

- I On the Work Plane toolbar, click Primitives and choose Polygon.
- 2 In the Settings window for Polygon, locate the Coordinates section.
- **3** In the **xw** text field, type 0.4,0.4,r_out,0,0,0.15,0.15,0.18,0.25,0.4.
- **4** In the **yw** text field, type 1,0.8, -1, -1, 1.2, 1.2, 0.7, 0.7, 1, 1.
- 5 Click Build Selected.
- 6 In the Model Builder window, click Geometry I.

Revolve I (rev1)

- I On the Geometry toolbar, click Revolve.
- 2 In the Settings window for Revolve, locate the Revolution Angles section.
- **3** Clear the **Keep original faces** check box.

Cylinder I (cyl1)

- I On the Geometry toolbar, click Cylinder.
- 2 In the Settings window for Cylinder, locate the Size and Shape section.
- 3 In the Radius text field, type r_in.
- 4 In the **Height** text field, type 0.5.
- 5 Locate the Position section. In the x text field, type 0.3215.
- 6 In the y text field, type -0.5.
- 7 In the z text field, type 0.9.
- 8 Locate the Axis section. From the Axis type list, choose y-axis.

Cylinder 2 (cyl2)

- I On the Geometry toolbar, click Cylinder.
- 2 In the Settings window for Cylinder, locate the Size and Shape section.
- 3 In the Radius text field, type r_in.
- 4 In the **Height** text field, type 0.5.
- 5 Locate the **Position** section. In the **x** text field, type -0.3215.
- 6 In the z text field, type 0.9.
- 7 Locate the Axis section. From the Axis type list, choose y-axis.

8 On the Geometry toolbar, click Build All.

ADD MATERIAL

- I On the Home toolbar, click Add Material to open the Add Material window.
- 2 Go to the Add Material window.
- 3 In the tree, select Built-In>Water, liquid.
- 4 Click Add to Component in the window toolbar.

MATERIALS

Water, liquid (mat1)

On the Home toolbar, click Add Material to close the Add Material window.

TURBULENT FLOW, V2-F (SPF)

Inlet 1

- I On the Physics toolbar, click Boundaries and choose Inlet.
- 2 Select Boundaries 13 and 46 only, corresponding to the two inlets.
- 3 In the Settings window for Inlet, locate the Velocity section.
- **4** In the U_0 text field, type u_in.
- **5** Locate the **Turbulence Conditions** section. In the $I_{\rm T}$ text field, type 0.05.
- 6 In the $L_{\rm T}$ text field, type 0.07*2*r_in.

Outlet I

- I On the Physics toolbar, click Boundaries and choose Outlet.
- 2 Select Boundaries 26, 27, 35, and 36 only, corresponding to the reject outlet.
- 3 In the Settings window for Outlet, locate the Boundary Condition section.
- 4 From the list, choose Velocity.
- **5** Locate the **Velocity** section. In the U_0 text field, type u_out.

Outlet 2

- I On the Physics toolbar, click Boundaries and choose Outlet.
- 2 Select Boundaries 24, 25, 34, and 37 only.
- 3 In the Settings window for Outlet, locate the Pressure Conditions section.
- 4 Select the Normal flow check box.
- **5** Clear the **Suppress backflow** check box.

MESH I

In the Model Builder window, under Component I (comp1) right-click Mesh I and choose Edit Physics-Induced Sequence.

Size

- I In the Model Builder window, under Component I (compl)>Mesh I click Size.
- 2 In the Settings window for Size, click to expand the Element size parameters section.
- **3** Locate the **Element Size Parameters** section. In the **Maximum element size** text field, type 0.03.
- 4 In the Minimum element size text field, type 0.002.

Size 1

- I In the Model Builder window, under Component I (compl)>Mesh I click Size I.
- 2 In the Settings window for Size, locate the Element Size section.
- 3 Click the **Custom** button.
- **4** Click to expand the **Element size parameters** section. Locate the **Element Size Parameters** section. Select the **Maximum element size** check box.
- **5** In the associated text field, type 0.03.
- 6 Select the Minimum element size check box.
- 7 In the associated text field, type 0.001.

Boundary Layer Properties 1

- In the Model Builder window, expand the Component I (compl)>Mesh I> Boundary Layers I node, then click Boundary Layer Properties I.
- 2 In the Settings window for Boundary Layer Properties, locate the Boundary Layer Properties section.
- **3** In the Number of boundary layers text field, type 9.
- 4 In the Boundary layer stretching factor text field, type 1.1.
- 5 On the Home toolbar, click Build Mesh.
- 6 Click Compute.

RESULTS

Data Sets

First, create data sets needed to produce Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 5.

Surface 2

- I On the Results toolbar, click More Data Sets and choose Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Surface, locate the Selection section.
- 3 Click Paste Selection.
- 4 In the Paste Selection dialog box, type 2, 4-6, 10-12, 16-23, 28-33, 38-45, 49, 51-52 in the Selection text field.
- 5 Click OK.

Edge 3D I

- I On the Results toolbar, click More Data Sets and choose Edge 3D.
- **2** Select Edges 1, 2, 4, 7, 12–15, 21, 23–25, 27, 28, 32, 33, 35–37, 39, 42–45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 63, 66, 67, 69, 71, 73, 74, 80, 81, 83, 84, 89, 91, 93, and 95 only.

Cut Plane 2

- I On the Results toolbar, click Cut Plane.
- 2 On the Results toolbar, click Cut Plane.
- 3 In the Settings window for Cut Plane, locate the Plane Data section.
- 4 From the Plane list, choose xz-planes.

Cut Line 3D 1

- I On the **Results** toolbar, click **Cut Line 3D**.
- 2 In the Settings window for Cut Line 3D, locate the Line Data section.
- **3** In row **Point I**, set **x** to -0.5.
- **4** In row **Point 2**, set **x** to **0**.
- **5** In row **Point I**, set **z** to **0.6**.
- 6 In row **Point 2**, set **z** to **0.6**.

The following steps reproduce Figure 2.

Velocity (spf)

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results click Velocity (spf).
- 2 In the Settings window for 3D Plot Group, type Streamlines in the Label text field.
- 3 Click to expand the Title section. From the Title type list, choose None.
- 4 Locate the Plot Settings section. Clear the Plot data set edges check box.

Slice

I In the Model Builder window, expand the Results>Streamlines node.

2 Right-click Slice and choose Delete. Click Yes to confirm.

Surface 1

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results right-click Streamlines and choose Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Surface 2.
- 4 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Coloring list, choose Uniform.
- 5 From the Color list, choose Gray.

Line 1

- I Right-click Streamlines and choose Line.
- 2 In the Settings window for Line, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Edge 3D I.
- 4 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Coloring list, choose Uniform.
- 5 From the Color list, choose Custom.
- 6 On Windows, click the colored bar underneath, or if you are running the crossplatform desktop — the **Color** button.
- 7 Click Define custom colors.
- 8 Set the RGB values to 128, 128, and 128, respectively.
- 9 Click Add to custom colors.
- **IO** Click **Show color palette only** or **OK** on the cross-platform desktop.

Streamline 1

- I Right-click Streamlines and choose Streamline.
- 2 In the Settings window for Streamline, locate the Streamline Positioning section.
- **3** In the **Number** text field, type **10**.
- 4 Select Boundaries 24, 25, 34, and 37 only.
- 5 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Line type list, choose Tube.
- 6 In the Tube radius expression text field, type 0.0025.
- 7 Select the Radius scale factor check box.
- 8 In the associated text field, type 1.
- 9 From the Color list, choose Custom.
- **10** On Windows, click the colored bar underneath, or if you are running the crossplatform desktop — the **Color** button.

II Click Define custom colors.

- 12 Set the RGB values to 128, 0, and 64, respectively.
- **I3** Click **Add to custom colors**.
- I4 Click Show color palette only or OK on the cross-platform desktop.

Streamline 2

- I Right-click Streamlines and choose Streamline.
- **2** Select Boundaries 26, 27, 35, and 36 only.
- 3 In the Settings window for Streamline, locate the Streamline Positioning section.
- **4** In the **Number** text field, type **2**.
- 5 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Line type list, choose Tube.
- 6 In the Tube radius expression text field, type 0.0025.
- 7 Select the Radius scale factor check box.
- 8 In the associated text field, type 1.
- 9 From the Color list, choose Custom.
- **10** On Windows, click the colored bar underneath, or if you are running the crossplatform desktop — the **Color** button.
- II Click Define custom colors.
- 2 Set the RGB values to 0, 128, and 192, respectively.
- **I3** Click **Add to custom colors**.
- 14 Click Show color palette only or OK on the cross-platform desktop.

Streamlines

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results click Streamlines.
- 2 On the Streamlines toolbar, click Plot.
- 3 Click the **Zoom Extents** button on the **Graphics** toolbar.

Continue to reproduce Figure 3.

Pressure (spf)

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results click Pressure (spf).
- 2 In the Settings window for 3D Plot Group, locate the Plot Settings section.
- 3 Clear the **Plot data set edges** check box.

Surface

I In the Model Builder window, expand the Pressure (spf) node, then click Surface.

- 2 In the Settings window for Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Surface 2.

Line I

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results right-click Pressure (spf) and choose Line.
- 2 In the Settings window for Line, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Edge 3D I.
- 4 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Coloring list, choose Uniform.
- 5 From the Color list, choose Custom.
- 6 On Windows, click the colored bar underneath, or if you are running the crossplatform desktop — the **Color** button.
- 7 Click Define custom colors.
- 8 Set the RGB values to 128, 128, and 128, respectively.
- 9 Click Add to custom colors.
- IO Click Show color palette only or OK on the cross-platform desktop.

Pressure

In the Model Builder window, under Results>Pressure (spf) right-click Pressure and choose Delete. Click Yes to confirm.

Surface 2

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results right-click Pressure (spf) and choose Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Cut Plane I.
- **4** Locate the **Expression** section. In the **Expression** text field, type p.
- 5 Click to expand the Range section. Select the Manual color range check box.
- 6 In the Minimum text field, type -13000.
- 7 In the Maximum text field, type 106000.
- 8 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Color table list, choose JupiterAuroraBorealis.
- **9** Select the **Reverse color table** check box.

Surface 3

- I Right-click Pressure (spf) and choose Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Cut Plane 2.

- **4** Locate the **Expression** section. In the **Expression** text field, type p.
- 5 Locate the Range section. Select the Manual color range check box.
- 6 In the Minimum text field, type 13000.
- 7 In the Maximum text field, type 106000.
- 8 Locate the Coloring and Style section. Clear the Color legend check box.
- 9 From the Color table list, choose JupiterAuroraBorealis.

IO Select the **Reverse color table** check box.

Pressure (spf)

In the Model Builder window, under Results click Pressure (spf).

Streamline Surface 1

- I On the Pressure (spf) toolbar, click More Plots and choose Streamline Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Streamline Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Cut Plane I.
- **4** Locate the **Expression** section. In the **x component** text field, type **0**.
- 5 Locate the Streamline Positioning section. From the Positioning list, choose Magnitude controlled.
- 6 In the **Density** text field, type 16.
- 7 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Line type list, choose Tube.
- 8 In the Tube radius expression text field, type 0.002.
- 9 Select the Radius scale factor check box.
- **IO** In the associated text field, type 1.
- II From the Color list, choose Custom.
- 12 From the Color list, choose Gray.

Pressure (spf)

In the Model Builder window, under Results click Pressure (spf).

Streamline Surface 2

- I On the Pressure (spf) toolbar, click More Plots and choose Streamline Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Streamline Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Cut Plane 2.
- **4** Locate the **Expression** section. In the **y** component text field, type **0**.

- 5 Locate the Streamline Positioning section. From the Positioning list, choose Magnitude controlled.
- 6 In the **Density** text field, type 16.
- 7 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Line type list, choose Tube.
- 8 In the Tube radius expression text field, type 0.002.
- 9 Select the Radius scale factor check box.
- **IO** In the associated text field, type **1**.
- II From the Color list, choose Custom.
- 12 From the Color list, choose Gray.

Pressure (spf)

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results click Pressure (spf).
- 2 In the Settings window for 3D Plot Group, locate the Title section.
- 3 From the Title type list, choose None.
- 4 On the Pressure (spf) toolbar, click Plot.
- 5 Click the Zoom Extents button on the Graphics toolbar.

The following steps reproduce Figure 4.

3D Plot Group 4

- I On the Home toolbar, click Add Plot Group and choose 3D Plot Group.
- 2 In the Settings window for 3D Plot Group, type Vortex core in the Label text field.
- 3 Locate the Title section. From the Title type list, choose None.
- 4 Locate the Plot Settings section. Clear the Plot data set edges check box.

Surface 1

- I Right-click Vortex core and choose Surface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Surface, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Surface 2.
- 4 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Coloring list, choose Uniform.
- 5 From the Color list, choose Gray.

Line I

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results right-click Vortex core and choose Line.
- 2 In the Settings window for Line, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Edge 3D I.

- 4 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Coloring list, choose Uniform.
- **5** From the **Color** list, choose **Custom**.
- 6 On Windows, click the colored bar underneath, or if you are running the crossplatform desktop — the **Color** button.
- 7 Click Define custom colors.
- 8 Set the RGB values to 128, 128, and 128, respectively.
- 9 Click Add to custom colors.
- IO Click Show color palette only or OK on the cross-platform desktop.

Isosurface I

- I Right-click Vortex core and choose Isosurface.
- 2 In the Settings window for Isosurface, click Replace Expression in the upper-right corner of the Expression section. From the menu, choose Component I>Turbulent Flow, v2-f> Velocity and pressure>Vorticity field>spf.vorticityz Vorticity field, z component.
- 3 Locate the Levels section. From the Entry method list, choose Levels.
- 4 In the Levels text field, type 90.
- **5** Select the **Interactive** check box.

Depending on the boundary conditions, the value may need to be adjusted by sliding the interactive bar. This visualizes the vortex core in Figure 4.

- 6 Locate the Coloring and Style section. From the Coloring list, choose Uniform.
- 7 From the Color list, choose Custom.
- 8 On Windows, click the colored bar underneath, or if you are running the crossplatform desktop — the **Color** button.
- 9 Click Define custom colors.
- **IO** Set the RGB values to 0, 128, and 192, respectively.
- II Click Add to custom colors.
- 12 Click Show color palette only or OK on the cross-platform desktop.
- **I3** Clear the **Color legend** check box.

Vortex core

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results click Vortex core.
- 2 On the Vortex core toolbar, click Plot.
- **3** Click the **Zoom Extents** button on the **Graphics** toolbar.

The following steps reproduce Figure 5.

ID Plot Group 5

- I On the Home toolbar, click Add Plot Group and choose ID Plot Group.
- 2 In the Settings window for ID Plot Group, type Swirl velocity in the Label text field.
- 3 Click to expand the Title section. From the Title type list, choose None.
- 4 Locate the Plot Settings section. Select the x-axis label check box.
- **5** In the associated text field, type r (m).
- 6 Select the y-axis label check box.
- 7 In the associated text field, type v (m/s).
- 8 On the Swirl velocity toolbar, click Line Graph.

Swirl velocity

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results click Swirl velocity.
- 2 In the Settings window for ID Plot Group, locate the Data section.
- 3 From the Data set list, choose Cut Line 3D I.

Line Graph 1

- I In the Model Builder window, under Results>Swirl velocity click Line Graph I.
- 2 In the Settings window for Line Graph, locate the y-Axis Data section.
- 3 In the Expression text field, type $(x*v-y*u)/sqrt(x^2+y^2+eps)$.
- 4 Locate the x-Axis Data section. From the Parameter list, choose Expression.
- **5** In the **Expression** text field, type -x.
- 6 On the Swirl velocity toolbar, click Plot.
- 7 Click Plot.
- 8 Click the **Zoom Extents** button on the **Graphics** toolbar.

20 | FLOW IN A HYDROCYCLONE