



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI UDINE

Università degli studi di Udine

Experimental evaluation of different refrigeration system configurations using CO₂-based blends as refrigerants

Original

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/11390/1261644> since 2024-01-02T21:30:45Z

Publisher:

International Institute of Refrigeration

Published

DOI:10.18462/iir.icr.2023.0648

Terms of use:

The institutional repository of the University of Udine (<http://air.uniud.it>) is provided by ARIC services. The aim is to enable open access to all the world.

Publisher copyright

(Article begins on next page)

Experimental evaluation of different refrigeration system configurations using CO₂-based blends as refrigerants

Emanuele SICCO^(a), Manel MARTÍNEZ-ÁNGELES^(b), Gabriele TOFFOLETTI^(a),
Laura NEBOT-ANDRÉS^(b), Daniel SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA-VACAS^(b),
Giovanni CORTELLA^(a), Rodrigo LLOPIS DOMÉNECH*^(b)

^(a) DPIA, University of Udine
Udine, Italy

^(b) Thermal Engineering Group, Mechanical Engineering and Construction Department,
Jaume I University, Castellón de la Plana, Spain

* rllolis@uji.es

ABSTRACT

Recently, blends created by mixing CO₂ with another fluid with a higher critical temperature are being considered, to allow subcritical operation at high outdoor temperature, thus increasing the COP. The goal of this work is to evaluate through an experimental approach the energy performance of the mixture CO₂/R152a. Two compositions, (95/5% and 90/10%) were tested in a single-stage refrigeration plant with and without an internal heat exchanger, and their performance is compared to that with pure CO₂. Several secondary fluid inlet temperature values at the gas cooler/condenser are considered (20-25-30-35-40°C), while the inlet temperature of the secondary fluid at the evaporator is maintained at 2.5°C. Using the investigated mixtures an enhancement of the COP compared to pure CO₂ is observed, when the base cycle is implemented, for temperatures above 25°C, reaching the largest increment at highest secondary fluid inlet temperature. Instead, when using the IHX, no improvement in the COP is obtained.

Keywords: Refrigeration, Carbon Dioxide, Mixture, COP, Internal heat exchanger, R152a

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2nd F-Gas Regulation (European Commission, 2014) supposed the start of phasing-out high-GWP refrigerants in medium and large refrigeration systems, especially in supermarket centralized refrigeration. From 2014 on, CO₂-based refrigeration supermarkets proliferated in Europe, reaching more than 57000 units in 2022 according to ATMOSphere (2022). Among them, 87.7% CO₂-stores implement medium or large-sized architectures (cooling capacity >40kW), 3.5% are industrial systems and only 8.8% are systems for low-sized capacities, which are usually known as condensing units. The higher greater diffusion of large plants is explained with economic reasons, since they allow high investment rate, so they can rely on advanced refrigeration architectures such as parallel compression (Karampour and Sawalha, 2018; Nebot-Andrés et al., 2021a), ejectors (Gullo et al., 2018; Purohit et al., 2018), mechanical subcooling systems (Catalán-Gil et al., 2019; Bush et al., 2017; Nebot-Andrés et al., 2022, D'Agaro et al., 2021), flooded evaporator (Lata and Gupta, 2020; Söylemez et al., 2022), among others. However, the investment in high-efficient CO₂ cycles for low-capacity systems is not usually cost-efficient, so they usually still rely on condensing units operating with HFC or HFO fluids.

During the last years, there has been a rising interest to extend the use of CO₂ to small systems. One of the ways that could make the CO₂ efficient also in small refrigerating plants is the use of CO₂-based mixtures. From a theoretical perspective, Kumar and Kumar (2019) investigated the use of the mixture CO₂/R-290 [85/15]. They reported that the use of the mixture instead of the pure CO₂ was able to reduce the optimum high pressure allowing subcritical operation, but they did not evaluate COP differences. Zhao et al. (2022)

considered CO₂ blending with butane, isobutane and two HFOs for the application in single and two-stage cycles with IHX for LT applications. All combinations offered COP increments in relation to pure CO₂. Xie et al. (2022) extended the analysis considering R-152a and R-161 for single-stage cycles. At the evaluated conditions, they predicted 26% increase of COP in relation to CO₂. Vaccaro et al. (2022) enlarged the analysis with three HCs (R-600a, R-600 and R-290) and three HFOs (R-1234ze(E), R-1234ze(Z) and R-1233zd(E)). They concluded that at an evaporation temperature of -15°C and a temperature of 40°C at the exit of the gas-cooler, the blends CO₂/R1234yf and CO₂/R-290 were the most efficient, offering COP increments up to 12.8% and 7.9% respectively, using a single-stage configuration with IHX. And recently, Martínez-Angeles et al. (under revision) evaluated CO₂-doping with R-152a, R-1234yf, R-1234ze(E) and R-1233zd(E) considering the single-stage cycle with IHX and the parallel compression. They predicted maximum increments up to 5.8% for the IHX layout and 10.0% for the parallel compressor cycle.

Experimental validation of the theoretical hypothesis is scarce, but Tobaly et al. (2018) were able to measure 19.7% COP increment in relation to CO₂ using the mixture CO₂/R-290 (90/10%) at air-conditioning conditions with a single-stage test rig with IHX and scroll compressor. Later, Yu et al. (2018) extended the analysis of CO₂/R-290 mixtures in air conditioning systems measuring 22% COP increments. And finally, Sánchez et al. (2019) (2020) evaluated R-290, R-1270 and R-32 as doping agents of CO₂ in a beverage cooler for positive temperature applications. In this case, under fixed climatic chamber conditions, they measured energy consumption reductions in relation to pure CO₂ up to 17.2% at an environment temperature of 25°C and up to 12.2% at 30°C. These works confirm that it is possible to enhance the performance of basic CO₂ cycles by doping it with a small quantity of another fluid. However, the existing works are focused on air-conditioning systems or small stand-alone refrigeration systems and no works have been found in relation to condensing units applicable to small-sized refrigeration applications.

Therefore, the present work aims to contribute to the CO₂ refrigerant blends study by providing the results of the experimental evaluation of two CO₂/R-152a blends (95/5% and 90/10% by mass) in a single-stage test rig for commercial purposes at medium temperature level with two refrigeration architectures, the base configuration and one with IHX. The present work, which provides validation of the heat transfer fluids in gas-cooler and evaporator, confirms that the COP of the system can be enhanced, but the experimentally measured increments are lower than the ones predicted theoretically.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Experimental test plant

The tests were run using a water-to-water single-stage refrigeration plant with a double-stage expansion system, whose scheme is detailed in Figure 1. The compressor is a semi hermetic Dorin CD380H with a displacement of 3.8 m³·h⁻¹ at nominal speed. Evaporator and gas cooler/condenser are brazed plate counter-current heat exchangers with exchange surface area of 4.794 m² and 1.224 m², respectively. It incorporates a single-pass double pipe IHX arranged in counterflow with a heat transfer surface area of 0.1194 m² which can be connected or disconnected using manual valves. The plant was regulated by using two electronic expansion valves, one that works as a back-pressure valve and one that regulated the flow in the evaporator. When the plant was run in transcritical conditions, the first valve regulated the heat rejection pressure using a custom-made PID controller, while it was left completely open when the plant was running in subcritical conditions. The second valve operated as thermostatic with external equalization. The control of the expansion valve of the evaporator was adjusted to operate with each refrigerant.

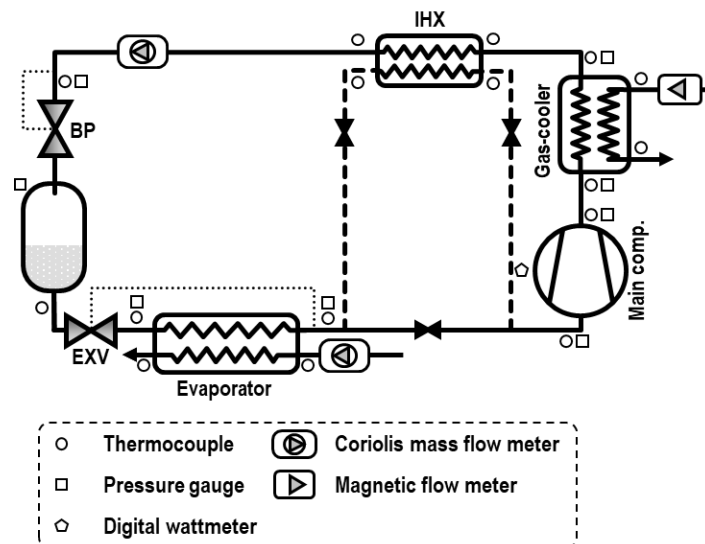


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the experimental test bench

The plant is fully instrumented to determine its energy performance (see sensors allocation in Figure 1). It incorporates 16 T-type thermocouples (gas-cooler exit and evaporator immersion thermocouples and the rest over the pipe surface), 4 high pressure gauges, 1 medium pressure gauge and 3 low pressure gauges. Refrigerant mass flow rate is measured by a Coriolis mass flow meter located upstream to the back-pressure valve, the volumetric flow of the secondary fluid of the gas-cooler (water) is measured using a volumetric flow meter, while the secondary fluid of the evaporator (water/glycol mixture, 60/40% by volume) mass flow is measured using another Coriolis mass flow meter. The compressor power consumption is registered using a digital wattmeter.

2.2. Selected refrigerant mixtures

The theoretical simulations realized by Xie et al. (2022) concluded that the use of mixtures based on CO₂ and R-152a could improve the energy performance of vapour compression cycles when compared to the use of pure CO₂. The reliability of the results is further supported by the fact that the software Refprop v. 10 (Lemmon E. W. et al., 2018), used to calculate the thermophysical properties of the considered mixtures, includes validated interaction coefficients for the equations of state for such mixtures, fitted from experimental data by Bell and Lemmon (2016). So, R152a was chosen as the second component of the blends experimentally tested.

The work compares the energy performance of a refrigeration plant obtained by using pure CO₂ and two blends, obtained mixing it with 5% and 10% of mass proportion of R152a, as refrigerants. The p-h diagrams of the three fluids are depicted in Figure 2. The blending of the CO₂ with the R152a, which has a higher critical temperature (113.3°C) and a lower critical pressure (45.2 bar), involves the increase of the critical temperature (10.6 K for 10% R-152a addition), the critical pressure (5.11 bar for 10% R152-a addition), and the latent heat of phase change (for 10% addition: 10.0% more at -10°C and 15.5% more at 30°C). Another effect, since the mixture is zeotropic, is the rise of a glide during the phase change (for 10% addition: 13.3K at -10°C and 6.6K at 30°C), that could reduce the thermal effectiveness of the evaporator and the condenser. In addition, the density of the investigated blends is lower compared to the pure CO₂ one, so the use of these mixtures implies a reduction in the volumetric cooling capacity (VCC) of the plant.

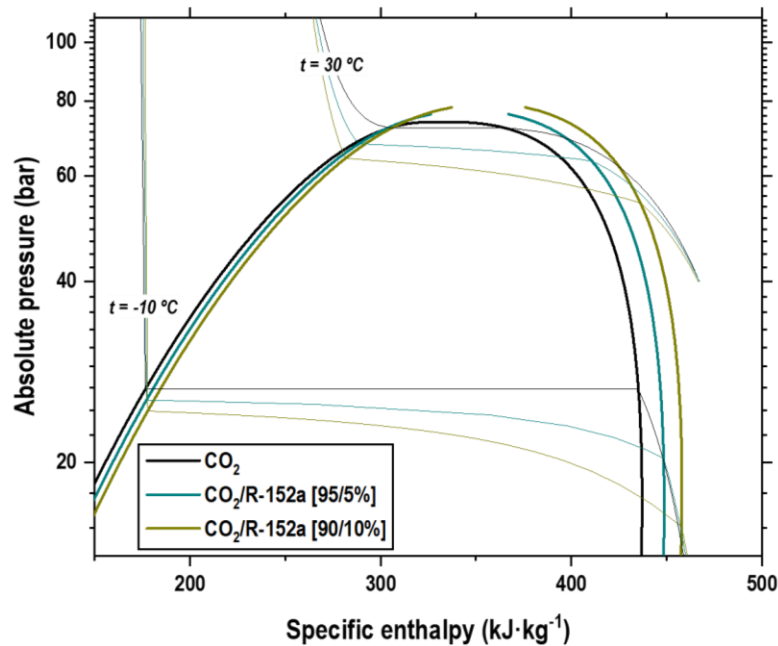


Figure 2 Pressure-enthalpy diagram of the three tested fluids

2.3. Experimental methodology

The plant was charged with 12 kg of every mixture. That amount ensured that at the inlet of the expansion valve the fluid was always in saturated liquid phase in every tested condition. The charged amounts were controlled using a certified mass balance with a measurement error of 5 g.

Every fluid was tested under the same secondary fluids' inlet conditions. While a temperature of 2.5°C and a volumetric flow of 0.7 m³·h⁻¹ of the 60% water and 40% glycol mixture at the inlet of the evaporator were maintained, the water temperature at the inlet of the gas cooler/condenser at which the plant was tested was 20-25-30-35-40°C, with a volumetric flow that was kept constant at 1.17 m³·h⁻¹. Because of the maximum allowable temperature at the discharge of the compressor (140°C) and the limits of the capacity of water heat dissipation system, it was not possible to test all the conditions for the mixture CO₂/R152a (95/5%).

When the plant was running in transcritical conditions, the gas cooler pressure was optimized to achieve the maximum COP, and only that value was considered in the comparisons (Nebot-Andrés et al. (2021b)).

3. RESULTS

In this section, the results of the experimental campaign are described. The results are presented regarding the simple cycle in subsection 3.1 and the IHX cycle in subsection 3.2.

3.1. Base configuration

The maximum COPs obtained for each condition and refrigerant are depicted in Figure 3. The COP values calculated by the use of the mixtures were higher than those achieved using pure CO₂ for temperature of the water at the inlet of the gas cooler/condenser greater than or equal to 30°C, while for lower temperature the use of the blends implied an energy efficiency similar or lower than with pure CO₂.

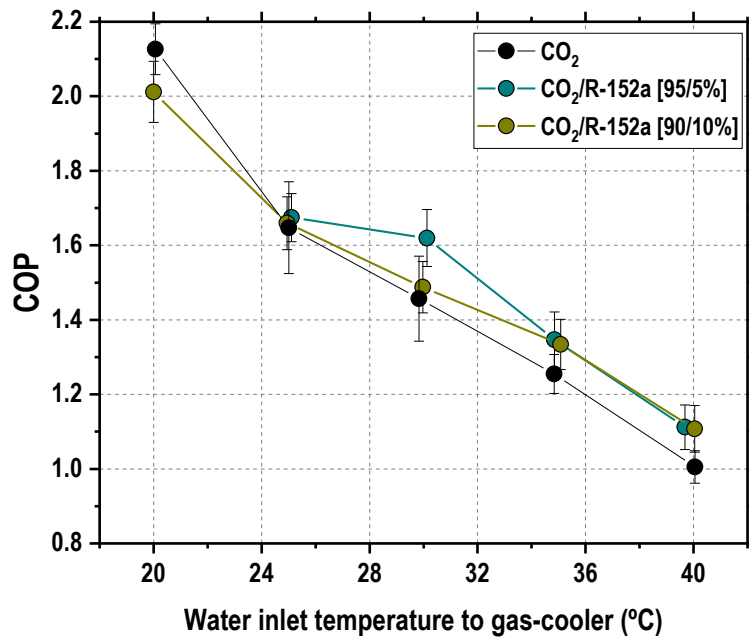


Figure 3 Evolution of the maximum COP for optimal conditions vs condenser/gas-cooler water inlet temperature for Base configuration.

Regarding the cooling capacity, the use of the mixtures always implied a decrease, as it can be seen in Figure 4, mainly due to the lower density and volumetric cooling capacity of the blends when compared with the pure CO₂. The cooling capacity reduction was higher for the use of the CO₂/R152a (90/10%) than for CO₂/R152a (95/5%).

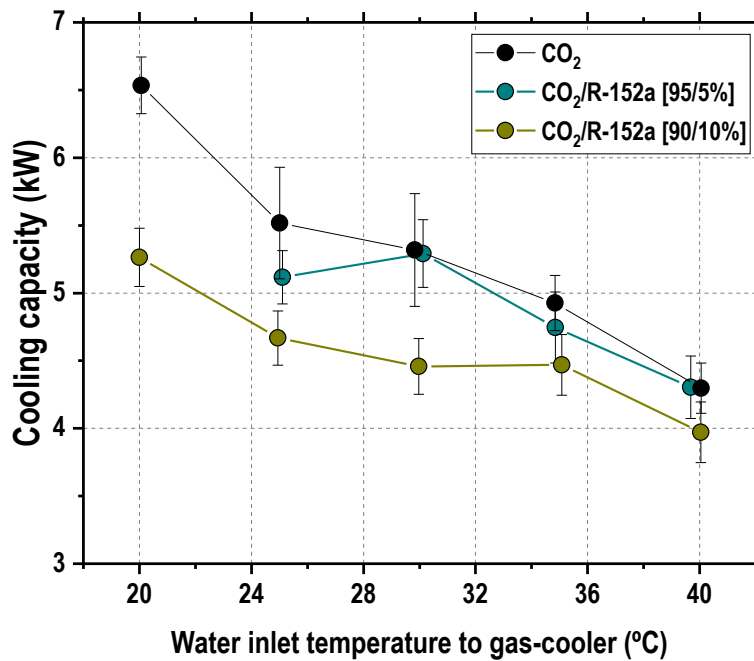


Figure 4. Evolution of the cooling capacity for optimal conditions vs condenser/gas-cooler water inlet temperature for Base configuration

Also the gas cooler/condenser pressures that gave the best COP were decreased when a second component was added to CO₂, as it can be seen in Figure 5, while the temperature of the refrigerant at the compressor

discharge was increased, as shown in Figure 6. This effect is mainly due to the decrease of the evaporating pressure when the blends are used instead of the pure CO₂, with the same temperature of the secondary fluid at the inlet of the evaporator. Both phenomena are more pronounced for the blend with the 10% of mass proportion of R152a than for the CO₂/R152a (95/5%) mixture.

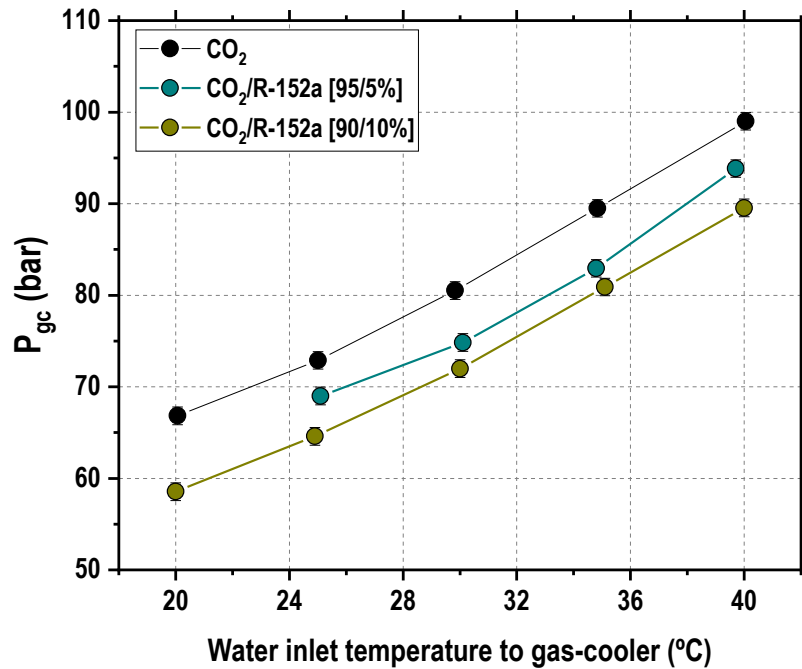


Figure 5. Optimum gas-cooler pressure vs condenser/gas-cooler water inlet temperature for base configuration.

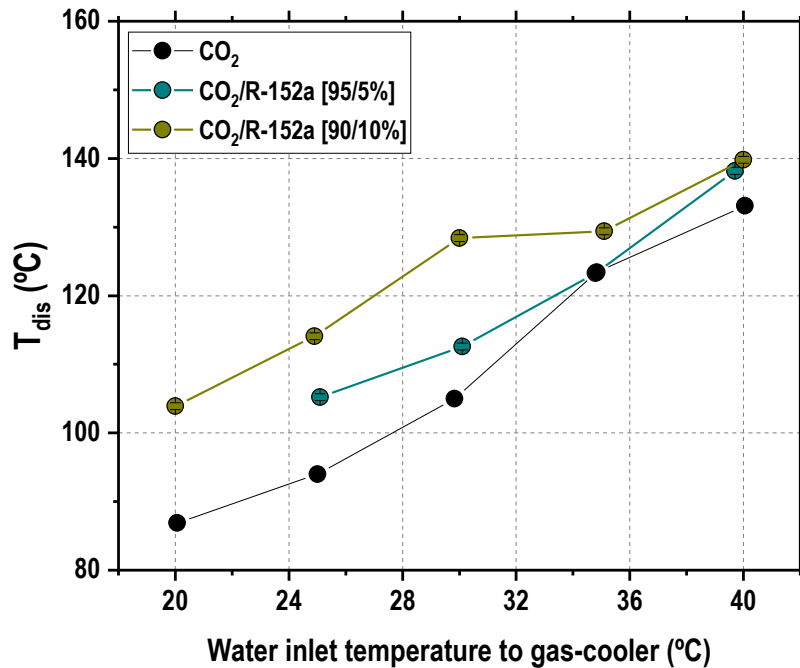


Figure 6. Compressor discharge temperature for optimal conditions vs gas-cooler water inlet temperature for base configuration.

3.2. IHX configuration

The second investigated configuration included a heat exchanger between the fluid downstream the outlet of the gas cooler/condenser and the vapour upstream the suction side of the compressor, that allows to further cool the first and to further heat the second.

In Figure 7 the values of the COP obtained when the three evaluated fluids are used at different water inlet temperature in the gas cooler/condenser are depicted. While for the higher tested temperatures the energy efficiency of the plant was similar, for the temperatures below 30°C the use of the blends instead of pure CO₂ caused the decrease of the COP.

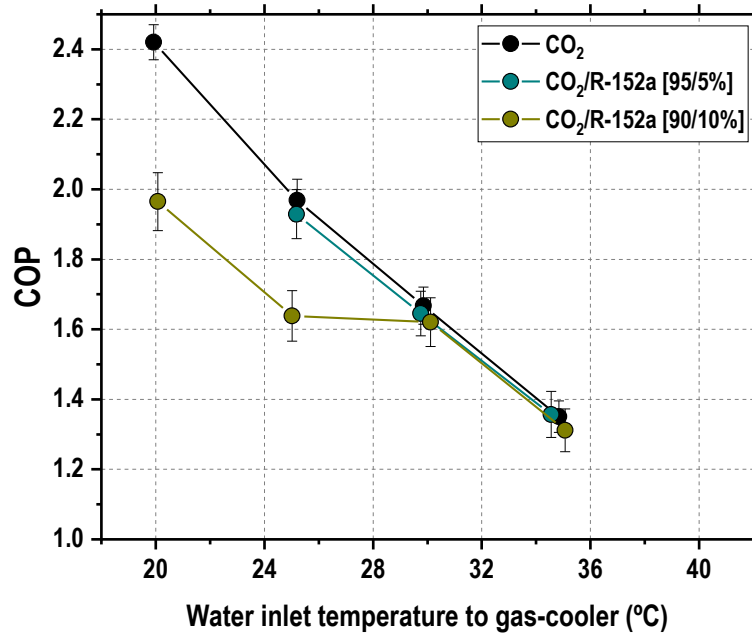


Figure 7. Maximum COP for optimal conditions vs. gas-cooler water inlet temperature for IHX configuration.

As it can be seen in Figure 8, the use of the mixtures implied a significant reduction of the cooling capacity also in the cycle with the IHX. It can be inferred that this effect is mainly due to the relevant reduction of the density of the blends when compared to the pure CO₂, and consequently of the volumetric cooling capacity of the fluid.

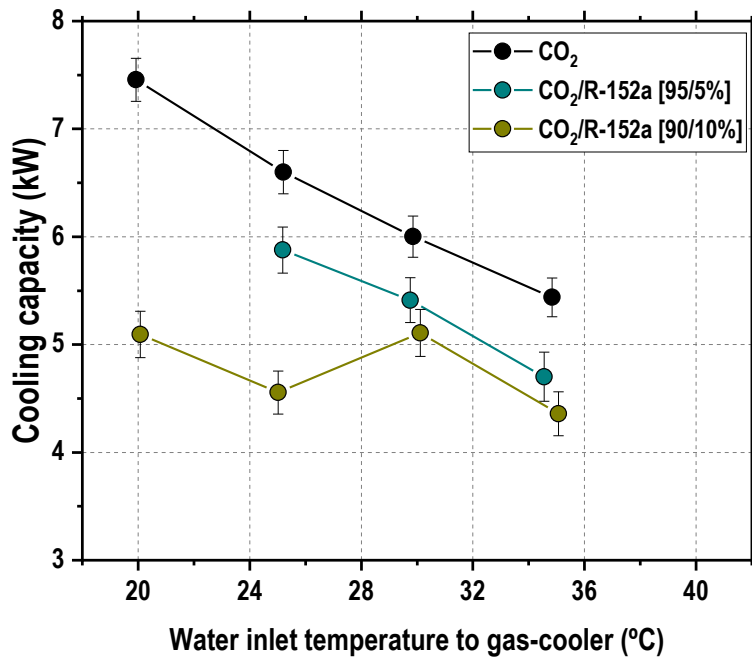


Figure 8 . Cooling capacity for optimal conditions vs. gas-cooler water inlet temperature for IHX configuration

Regarding the optimal gas cooler/condenser pressure and the compressor's discharge temperature, the use of the mixtures in the cycle with IHX implied the same effects observed for the simple cycle. The pressure for which the best COP occurs was decreased, while the discharge temperature in optimum conditions was increased, as it can be seen in Figure 9 and Figure 10, respectively.

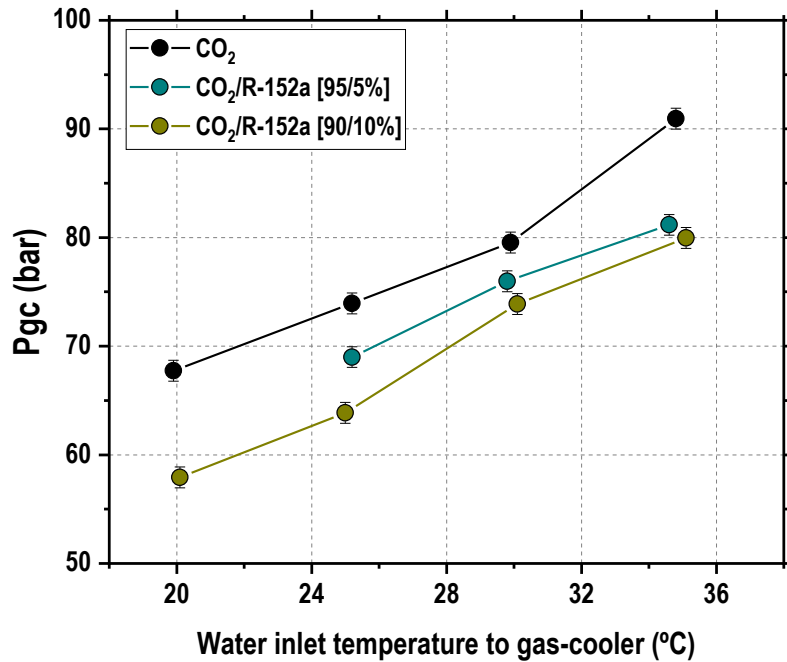


Figure 9. Optimum gas-cooler pressure vs water inlet temperature for IHX configuration.

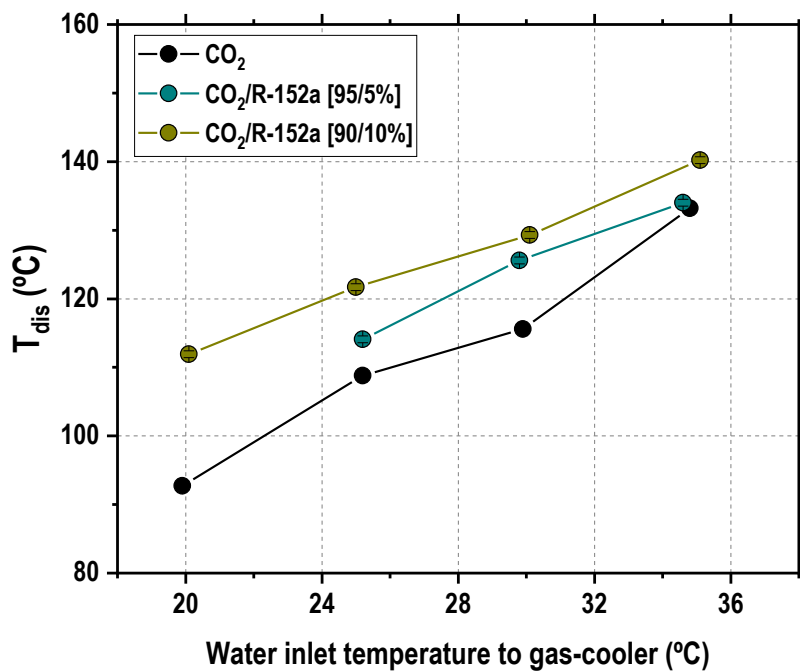


Figure 10. Compressor discharge temperature for optimal conditions vs gas-cooler water inlet temperature for IHX configuration

4. CONCLUSIONS

Two blends CO₂/R152a (90/10%) and (95/5%) were tested in a refrigeration plant with and without an IHX, and the results were compared with those achieved using pure CO₂, at 2.5°C secondary fluid at the evaporator inlet, and 20°C, 25°C, 30°C, 35°C and 40°C for the secondary fluid at the inlet of the gas cooler/condenser. The compressor was always run at nominal speed, and the gas cooler/condenser pressure was optimized at transcritical conditions.

Without IHX, a COP enhancement was measured with the mixture CO₂/R152a (90/10%) compared to pure CO₂ at high heat rejection temperature, namely 6.3% at 35°C gas cooler/condenser water inlet temperature and 10.2% at 40°C. The same happened with CO₂/R152a (95/5%), i.e. 11.2%, 7.3% and 10.2 % at 30, 35 and 40 °C water inlet temperature in the gas cooler/condenser respectively. However, using IHX no significant increases were measured.

At the same time, the use of mixtures implied a decrease in the cooling capacity for all the tested conditions, and an increase in the discharge temperature, while maximum COP is obtained at a lower gas cooler/condenser pressure.

The use of CO₂/R152a gave the best results at high heat rejection temperature with a basic cycle, which is the worst condition in terms of energy performance when compared to traditional fluids. So, the results suggest that such CO₂-based blends can be a way to enlarge the application field for carbon dioxide in replacement of high-GWP refrigerants but need further research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is part of the project TED2021-130162B-I00, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by the European Union - NextGenerationEU "NextGenerationEU"/PRTR.

Authors want to acknowledge the economic support to this study by the European Union – "NextGenerationEU" (L. Nebot, Margarita Salas postdoctoral contract MGS/2022/15; M. E. Martínez, grant INVEST/2022/294; by the Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación of Spain (project PID2021-126926OB-C21) and by Jaume I University (project UJI-B2021-10).

The research leading to these results has also received funding from the MIUR of Italy within the framework of the PRIN2017 project «The energy flexibility of enhanced heat pumps for the next generation of sustainable buildings (FLEXHEAT)», grant 2017KAAECT.

This work was supported by the University of Udine in the framework of the Strategic Plan 2022-25 – Interdepartmental Research Project ESPeRT.

NOMENCLATURE

<i>COP</i>	Coefficient of performance	<i>p</i>	Pressure, bar
<i>c_p</i>	Specific heat (kJ/kg K)	<i>P_c</i>	Power consumption, kW
<i>h</i>	Specific enthalpy (kJ/kg)	<i>Q̇_o</i>	Cooling capacity, kW
<i>ṁ</i>	Mass flow (kg/s)	VCC	Volumetric cooling capacity
<i>V̇</i>	Volumetric capacity (m ³ /s)	<i>t</i>	Temperature (K)
<i>bp</i>	Back pressure valve	<i>l</i>	Low pressure
<i>dis</i>	Compressor discharge	<i>o</i>	Evaporator
<i>g</i>	Glycol + water mixture	<i>out</i>	outlet
<i>h</i>	High pressure side	<i>ref</i>	refrigerant
<i>in</i>	Inlet	<i>sf</i>	Secondary fluid
<i>ihx</i>	Internal heat exchanger		

REFERENCES

- Aprea, C., de Rossi, F., Mastrullo, R., 1997. The uncertainties in measuring vapour compression plant performances. *Measurement* 21, 65-70.
- ATMOsphere, 2022. Natural Refrigerants: state of the industry. Commercial and industrial refrigeration in Europe.
- Bell, I.H., Lemmon, E.W., 2016. Automatic Fitting of Binary Interaction Parameters for Multi-fluid Helmholtz-Energy-Explicit Mixture Models. *Journal of Chemical & Engineering Data* 61, 3752-3760.
- Catalán-Gil, J., Llopis, R., Sánchez, D., Nebot-Andrés, L., Cabello, R., 2019. Energy analysis of dedicated and integrated mechanical subcooled CO₂ boosters for supermarket applications. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 101, 11-23.
- D'Agaro, P., Coppola, M.A., Cortella, G. 2021. Effect of dedicated mechanical subcooler size and gas cooler pressure control on transcritical CO₂ booster systems. *Applied Thermal Engineering* Volume 1825 January 2021 Article number 116145
- European Commission, 2014. Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases and repealing Regulation (EC) No 842/2006.
- Gullo, P., Hafner, A., Banasiak, K., 2018. Transcritical R744 refrigeration systems for supermarket applications: Current status and future perspectives. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 93, 269-310.
- John Bush, Mohamed Beshr, Vikrant Aute , Reinhard Radermacher, 2017. Experimental evaluation of transcritical CO₂ refrigeration with mechanical subcooling. *Science and Technology for the Built Environment*, 1-13.
- Karampour, M., Sawalha, S., 2018. State-of-the-art integrated CO₂ refrigeration system for supermarkets: A comparative analysis. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 86, 239-257.
- Kumar, K., Kumar, P., 2019. Analysis of Propane + CO₂ mixture as a working fluid in a vapor compression refrigeration system., 8th Conference on Ammonia and CO₂ Refrigeration Technology. Proceedings: Orhid, North Macedonia, , 2019.
- Lata, M., Gupta, D.K., 2020. Performance evaluation and comparative analysis of trans-critical CO₂ booster refrigeration systems with modified evaporative cooled gas cooler for supermarket application in Indian context. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 120, 248-259.
- Lemmon E. W., I.H., B., L., H.M., O., M.M., 2018. NIST Standard Reference Database 23: Reference Fluid Thermodynamic and Transport Properties-REFPROP, Version 10.0, National Institute of Standards and Technology.
- Moffat, R.J., 1985. Using Uncertainty Analysis in the Planning of an Experiment. *Journal of Fluids Engineering* 107, 173-178.
- Nebot-Andrés, L., Calleja-Anta, D., Fossi, C., Sánchez, D., Cabello, R., Llopis, R., 2022. Experimental assessment of different extraction points for the integrated mechanical subcooling system of a CO₂ transcritical plant. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 136, 8-16.
- Nebot-Andrés, L., Calleja-Anta, D., Sánchez, D., Cabello, R., Llopis, R., 2021a. Experimental assessment of dedicated and integrated mechanical subcooling systems vs parallel compression in transcritical CO₂ refrigeration plants. *Energy Conversion and Management*, 115051.
- Nebot-Andrés, L., Sánchez, D., Calleja-Anta, D., Cabello, R., Llopis, R., 2021b. Experimental determination of the optimum intermediate and gas-cooler pressures of a commercial transcritical CO₂ refrigeration plant with parallel compression. *Applied Thermal Engineering*, 116671.
- Purohit, N., Sharma, V., Sawalha, S., Fricke, B., Llopis, R., Dasgupta, M.S., 2018. Integrated supermarket refrigeration for very high ambient temperature. *Energy* 165, 572-590.

- Sánchez, D., Cabello, R., Llopis, R., Catalán, J., Nebot, L., Calleja, D., Gil, E., 2019. Energy improvements in a stand-alone transcritical refrigeration system using a low-GWP mixture of CO₂/R1270, *Refrigeration Science and Technology*, pp. 2633-2640.
- Sánchez D., Calleja-Anta, D., Nebot-Andrés, L., Catalán-Gil, J., Llopis. R., Cabello, R., 2020. Experimental analysis of alternative blends of refrigerants for CO₂ transcritical refrigeration., VIII Ibero-american congress on refrigeration sciences and technology, CYTEF 2020, Public University of Navarra, Spain.
- Söylemez, E., Widell, K.N., Gabriellii, C.H., Ladam, Y., Lund, T., Hafner, A., 2022. Overview of the development and status of carbon dioxide (R-744) refrigeration systems onboard fishing vessels. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 140, 198-212.
- Tobaly P., Terrier M. F., Bouteiller P., 2018. CO₂ + propane mixture as working fluid for refrigeration in hot climates. Experimental results of energy efficiency tests., 13th IIR Gustav Lorentzen Conference on Natural Refrigerants (GL2018). Proceedings. Valencia, Spain.
- Vaccaro, G., Milazzo, A., Talluri, L., 2022. Thermodynamic assessment of trans-critical refrigeration systems utilizing CO₂-based mixtures. *International Journal of Refrigeration*.
- Xie, J., Wang, J., Lyu, Y., Wang, D., Peng, X., Liu, H., Xiang, S., 2022. Numerical investigation on thermodynamic performance of CO₂-based mixed refrigerants applied in transcritical system. *Journal of Thermal Analysis and Calorimetry* 147, 6883-6892.
- Yu, B., Wang, D., Liu, C., Jiang, F., Shi, J., Chen, J., 2018. Performance improvements evaluation of an automobile air conditioning system using CO₂-propane mixture as a refrigerant. *International Journal of Refrigeration* 88, 172-181.
- Zhao, Z., Luo, J., Song, Q., Yang, K., Wang, Q., Chen, G., 2022. Theoretical investigation and comparative analysis of the Linde-Hampson refrigeration system using eco-friendly zeotropic refrigerants based on R744/R1234ze(Z) for freezing process applications. *International Journal of Refrigeration*.