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A Study on Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields From User Equipment Antennas above 100 GHz

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Abstract—The next-generation mobile communication technology may exploit the higher frequency spectrum beyond 100 GHz, while most studies on electromagnetic field (EMF) exposure from mobile communication devices focus on frequencies below 100 GHz. In this paper, the EMF exposure from sub-terahertz antennas designed for future mobile communication is evaluated with a multilayer flat tissue phantom. It is demonstrated that the deposited EMFs can be evaluated by neglecting the deep tissue in the simplified phantom. Then, the temperature distribution in the full-size phantom can be evaluated using the solution to the simplified electromagnetic problem to reduce the overall computation time. Considering different sizes of the averaging area for absorbed power density, the results show a good correlation between the peak absorbed power density averaged over a small area of around one square centimeter and the peak rising temperature.

Index Terms—EMF exposure, 6G, sub-THz spectrum, user equipment, absorbed power density.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE next-generation (6G) mobile communication networks are expected to be launched in the 2030s. The sub-terahertz (THz) and THz spectrum beyond 100 GHz are under consideration for 6G. Above 100 GHz, there are opportunities for relatively large amounts of spectrum, but, given the very challenging propagation conditions, it is mainly of interest for very specific scenarios requiring extreme traffic capacity and/or data rates in a dense network deployment condition [1]. Like the previous generations, wireless 6G devices and equipment need to comply with the relevant electromagnetic field (EMF) exposure limits.

The most widely adopted EMF exposure limits are provided in the guidelines established by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), and the ICNIRP guidelines covering the range 100 kHz to 300 GHz were recently updated in 2020 [2]. Basic restrictions are derived with large safety margins to prevent whole-body and localized tissue heating [2]. Below 6 GHz, the basic restrictions for local exposure averaged over 6 minutes are set in terms of specific absorption rate (SAR), which is averaged over 10 g of tissue. Above 6 GHz, the counterpart is absorbed power density (APD). According to [2], APD should be averaged over 4 cm^2

from 6 to 300 GHz and also over 1 cm^2 for frequencies ranging from 30 to 300 GHz. Most relevant APD studies focus on the frequency range below 100 GHz, e.g., [3]–[7]. Some studies only utilize plane wave sources [8], [9], single-layer phantoms [10], or one-dimensional analytical analysis [11]. Therefore, there is a need for further investigations of EMF exposure from realistic antennas covering the frequency over 100 GHz, which may be used for future 6G communication.

As basic restrictions might be difficult to evaluate, reference levels are specified by [2] using a more practical set of quantities derived from the basic restrictions. Above 6 GHz, the reference levels are set in terms of incident power density (IPD), but it cannot be used to determine compliance in the reactive near field according to [2]. There have been a few works addressing the IPD evaluation for millimeter-wave devices e.g., [12]–[14]. Nevertheless, this paper focuses on the APD for the target frequency range.

In this paper, cavity patch antenna array designs at 100, 150, and 200 GHz as the mobile user equipment are used, which might be used for 6G communication because of its small volume, low profile, wide beamwidth, and broad bandwidth. The APD, tissue temperature elevation, and the heating factor (HF) are assessed, as well as their correlations with the averaging area of APD, the array size, and the frequency.

II. MODEL, DOSIMETRY, AND METHOD

A. Exposure Scenarios

In this study, 2×2 , 4×4 , and 6×6 planar cavity patch arrays at 100, 150, and 200 GHz with high gain and broad bandwidth are designed and assumed for 6G applications. The antenna arrays are loaded with a substrate of Rogers 4350B laminate (relative permittivity of 3.66 and loss tangent of 0.0037). For each array, the inter-element spacing is 0.5λ where λ is the free-space wavelength. The configuration of the 6×6 antenna array at 100 GHz is shown in Fig. 1. The 2×2 and 4×4 arrays use the same element design and inter-element spacing.

The antenna arrays are placed at a distance, d , away from a 4-layer flat phantom based on the tissue thicknesses of the forearm model [9], as shown in Fig. 2. In this study, the range of d was set to be 1–9 mm, which transitions from the reactive

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near field to the radiated near field. The permittivity and conductivity of the tissue of this phantom are extracted from [9, Fig. 4]. Other parameters of the phantom are provided in Table I. The total input power of the arrays is set to 12 dBm.

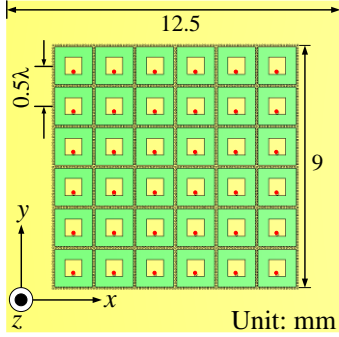


Fig. 1. Illustration of studied 6×6 antenna array at 100 GHz, where red dots are feeding points.

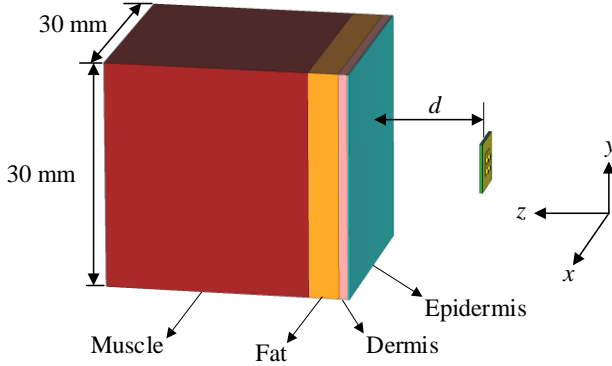


Fig. 2. The exposure scenario with a 4-layer forearm phantom.

TABLE I

SOME PARAMETERS OF THE 4-LAYER FOREARM PHANTOM

	Epidermis	Dermis	Fat	Muscle
K (W/(m ² ·°C))	0.42	0.42	0.25	0.5
B (W/(m ³ ·°C))	0	9100	1700	2700
ρ (kg/m ³)	1109	1109	911	1090
Thickness of full-size phantom (mm)	0.2	1.2	4	27
Thickness of simplified phantom (mm)	0.2	1.2	1	

B. Dosimetry Analysis

The temperature in tissue associated with EMFs can be evaluated by Pennes's bioheat transfer equation (BHTE) [15]. The steady-state form is

$$\nabla \cdot (K(\mathbf{r})\nabla T(\mathbf{r})) + \rho(\mathbf{r})SAR(\mathbf{r}) - B(\mathbf{r})(T(\mathbf{r}) - T_B(\mathbf{r})) = 0, \quad (1)$$

where T and K represent the temperature and thermal conductivity of the tissue, respectively, B and T_B denote perfusion and temperature of the blood, respectively, and \mathbf{r} is the position coordinate. Eq. (1) is denoted as the thermal problem in this paper. SAR is defined by [2]

$$SAR(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{\sigma(\mathbf{r})}{2\rho(\mathbf{r})} |\mathbf{E}(\mathbf{r})|^2, \quad (2)$$

where \mathbf{E} denotes the complex electric field, and σ and ρ are the electrical conductivity and mass density of the tissue, respectively. The BHTE is one of several theoretical models that have been proposed for heat transfer in vascularized tissues, all of which are approximations [16]–[21]. The validity of the BHTE is discussed well in [16].

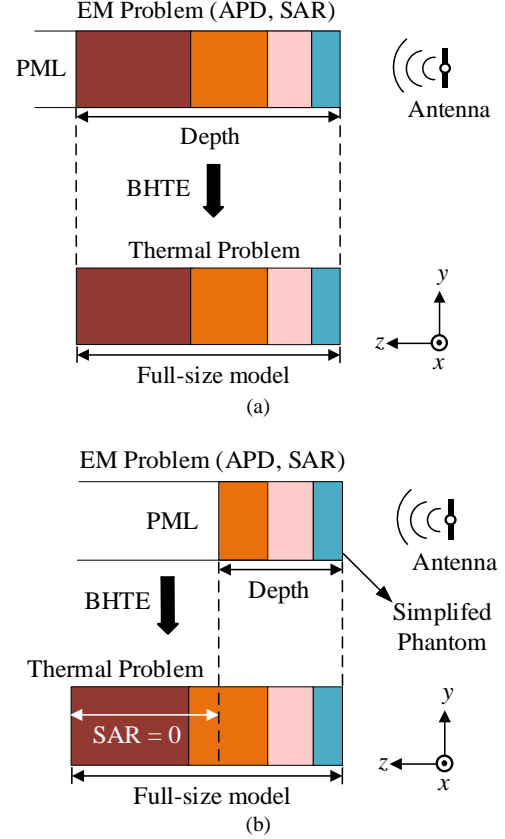


Fig. 3. Schematic view of dosimetry approaches (a) traditional assessment, where the phantom in the EM problem is the same as one in the thermal problem. (b) simplified assessment proposed in this study, where the thickness-reduced phantom was used in the EM problem and the full-size model in the thermal problem. The SAR, which is not computed in the EM problem in the deeper tissue, is enforced to be 0.

The peak temperature elevation ΔT is the maximum difference between the temperatures with and without considering EMF exposure. The spatially averaged APD, S_{ab} , is defined as [2]

$$S_{ab} = \frac{1}{A} \iint_A dx dy \int_0^{z_{\max}} SAR(\mathbf{r}) \rho(\mathbf{r}) dz, \quad (3)$$

where the phantom surface is at $z = 0$, z_{\max} is the depth of the phantom model, and A is the averaging area. Eqs. (2) and (3) are denoted as the electromagnetic (EM) problem. The boundary conditions for the EM problem and the thermal problem are set like in [22]. The full-wave simulation software CST Studio 2021 was used to solve both the EM and thermal problems. To evaluate the correlation between APD and ΔT ,

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HF is commonly used, which is defined as the ratio of ΔT to the peak APD averaged over a certain size of an area

$$HF(A) = \frac{\max \Delta T}{\max S_{ab}} \quad (4)$$

where S_{ab} is dependent on A .

C. Phantom Simplification

Traditionally, the phantom used in the EM problem is the same as the one in the thermal problem, as shown in Fig. 3(a). Due to the small penetration depth in the frequency range considered here, the thickness of the human tissue can be reduced for SAR and APD calculations to improve computation efficiency, as shown in Fig. 3(b). Then, the SAR distribution computed in the reduced phantom is imported into the thermal problem with the full-size phantom. As shown in Fig. 3(b), in the thermal problem, the SAR in the deeper tissue, which is not computed in the EM problem, is enforced to be 0. However, the phantom size in the thermal problem cannot be reduced, as the thermal problem is sensitive to the tissue thickness and boundary conditions.

TABLE II

COMPARISONS OF PEAK TEMPERATURE ELEVATION AND HF FOR DIFFERENT DEPTHS USED IN SIMPLIFIED EM PROBLEM

Reduced Depth		0.6	1	2.4	32.4 (Full-Model)
2 × 2 Array $d = 1$ mm at 100 GHz	ΔT (°C)	0.98	0.99	1.00	1.00
	HF (°Cm ² /W)	0.0016	0.0016	0.0019	0.0019
Plane-wave (Simulated)	ΔT (°C)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	HF (°Cm ² /W)	0.0193	0.0193	0.0233	0.0233
Plane-wave (Analytical)	ΔT (°C)	0.97	0.99	1.00	1.00
	HF (°Cm ² /W)	0.0223	0.0224	0.0208	0.0208

To validate such an approach and investigate the threshold of the minimum tissue depth used in the simplified EM problem, the APD and ΔT are assessed with different tissue depths in two scenarios. The first scenario uses the 2 × 2 array at 100 GHz with $d = 1$ mm, and the second scenario uses plane-wave illumination with normal incidence. For each scenario, the simplified method is compared to the traditional method by simulation. In addition, the one-dimensional analytical results for plane wave illumination with a varying-thickness phantom are also computed according to [8, Eqs. (1) – (2)], [9, Eqs. (3) – (7)]. For comparison, ΔT with the full-size model for both EM and thermal problems was set as the reference, named ΔT_{ref} . For the 2 × 2 array and plane wave illumination with different considered tissue depths in the EM problem, the total input power was adjusted such that $\Delta T_{ref} = 1^\circ\text{C}$ in this subsection.

In Table II, it can be seen that the 2.4-mm depth in the simplified EM problem can reach very good accuracy of dosimetry assessment for both realistic antenna and plane wave evaluations over 100 GHz. Further reducing the tissue depth used in the simplified EM problem can still achieve good accuracy for thermal computation. The simplified method is applied to both the realistic antenna and plane-wave scenarios

at 100 GHz in Table II. For other sub-THz frequencies above 100 GHz, the simplified phantom in the EM problem can be thinner because of the smaller penetration depth at higher frequencies. In this study, the results in section III are based on the 2.4 mm-simplified phantom (see Table I) for the EM problem and the full-size phantom for the thermal problem.

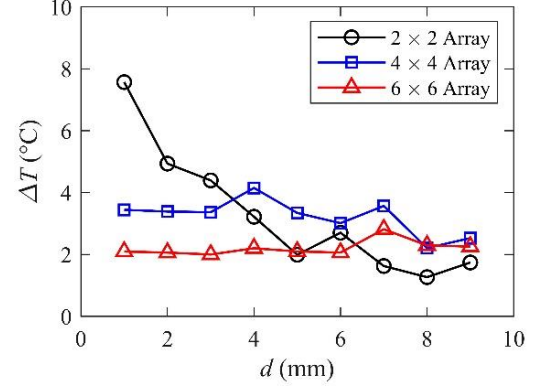


Fig. 4 Peak ΔT versus d for different array sizes at 100 GHz.

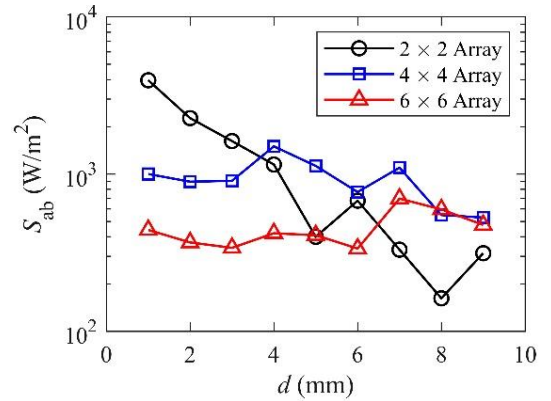


Fig. 5 Peak S_{ab} versus d for different array sizes at 100 GHz.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The examples of the resulting temperature distributions in the phantom are shown in Appendix A. Fig. 4 shows the peak ΔT versus d for different array sizes at 100 GHz. From Appendix A and Fig. 4, it can be seen that the 2 × 2 array has larger ΔT at close distances, e.g., $d \leq 5$ mm. As d increases, the peak ΔT of the 2 × 2 array is lower compared to the larger arrays. Some oscillations for peak ΔT and APD can be observed about every half wavelength, which is line with the observations in the literature, e.g., [22], due to the standing waves between the antenna and phantom.

Fig. 6 shows that the statistical HF distributions vary with A and the array size at each frequency. Each bar, including a box and whisker, shows the mean value (the red line in the boxes), 25th and 75th percentiles (the bottom and top edges of the boxes), the minimum and maximum values (the bottom and top edges of whiskers) of HFs considering all studied d . It can be seen from Fig. 6 that a larger A leads to an increased HF at a fixed frequency and with given array size. A larger spread of HF distributions for $A = 0$ cm², i.e., peak APD, can be observed,

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suggesting a poorer correlation. Fig. 7 shows the mean value μ_{HF} and 95% confidence interval of HFs for each choice of A by aggregating the HF results for all d , frequencies, and array sizes. It can be seen from Figs. 6 and 7 that the HF distributions of $A = 0.75$ and 1 cm^2 are closer to the HF corresponding to the plane wave scenario (see the dashed lines in Figs. 6 and 7). It means that when A is chosen around 1 cm^2 , the HF is similar for both near-field and far-field exposure scenarios.

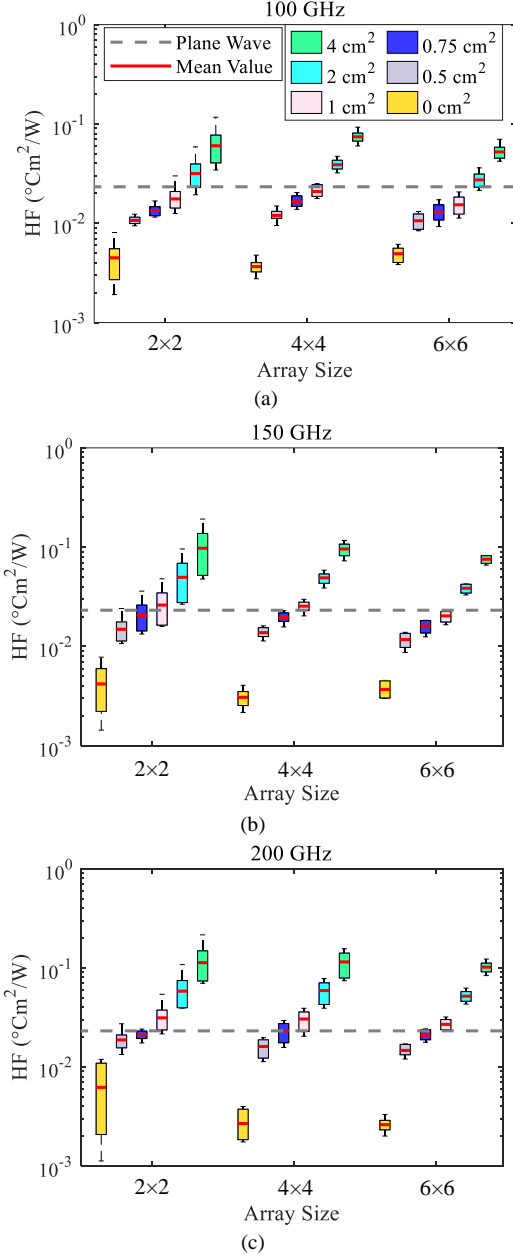


Fig. 6. HFs, in the logarithmic scale vary with array size at (a) 100 GHz; (b) 150 GHz; (c) 200 GHz. Each bar shows the 25th and 75th percentiles (bottom and top edges of box), the minimum and maximum values (bottom and top edges of whiskers) of HFs considering all the studied distances. The dashed lines indicate the HF of the plane-wave scenario with normal incidence.

Table III presents the coefficient of variation (CV) of HF for each A considering all d , frequencies, and array sizes. The CV is the ratio of the standard deviation σ_{HF} to the mean value μ_{HF} and is calculated for different sizes of A :

$$CV(A) = \frac{\sigma_{\text{HF}}(A)}{\mu_{\text{HF}}(A)}. \quad (5)$$

A smaller CV indicates a smaller deviation around the mean value. In Table III, $CV = 49.8\%$ for $A = 0 \text{ cm}^2$, which is the largest among all studied A . In contrast, $CV = 28\%$ for $A = 0.5 \text{ cm}^2$, which is the lowest among all A , then steadily increasing when A becomes larger. A moderate variation of HF for A around 1 cm^2 can be observed. Considering the results shown in Figs. 6 and 7 and in Table III, A around 1 cm^2 seems a good choice on balance, which is in line with the 1 cm^2 spatial averaging requirements in the ICNIRP guidelines above 30 GHz. Also, note that the results presented in this paper use fixed tissue thicknesses. The statistical study in [9] indicates that the HF is little affected by the dielectric properties but largely dependent on the tissue thickness. Future works might be needed to examine the effects of different tissue thicknesses on HFs and the choice of A above 100 GHz.

In [11], it is suggested that the peak APD (with $A = 0 \text{ cm}^2$) might be used for EMF compliance assessments because it provides an additional safety factor compared with $A = 1$ and 4 cm^2 , however, without considering the degrees of correlation. It should also be noted that the selected d is small corresponding to very localized exposure scenarios. When d increases, it is expected that HFs for $A = 1$ and 4 cm^2 will converge.

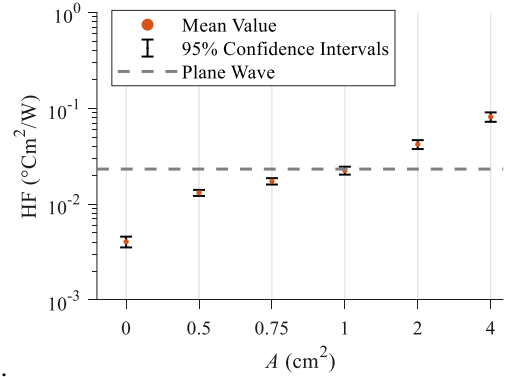


Fig. 7. HFs considering all d , frequencies, and array sizes for mean value and 95% confidence interval (in the logarithmic scale). The dashed lines indicate the HF of the plane-wave scenario with normal incidence.

$A \text{ (cm}^2\text{)}$	0	0.5	0.75	1	2	4
CV (%)	49.8	28.0	29.5	36.7	41.2	43.5

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V. CONCLUSION

In this study, we have investigated the correlation between APD for different averaging areas and temperature elevation in tissue using realistic antenna designs in the sub-THz spectrum. A simplified method has been proposed to reduce computational time, and it has been demonstrated that the simplified approach provides good accuracy in dosimetry computation. It has been observed that the HF increases with

the array size, the frequency, and the size of the APD averaging area. The results suggest that a better correlation between temperature elevation and APD can be established over 100 GHz when APD is averaged over an area of around 1 cm^2 compared to using spatial peak APD values for realistic antennas placed at very close distances shorter than 10 mm. The findings are in line with the spatial averaging requirements specified in the international EMF exposure guidelines.

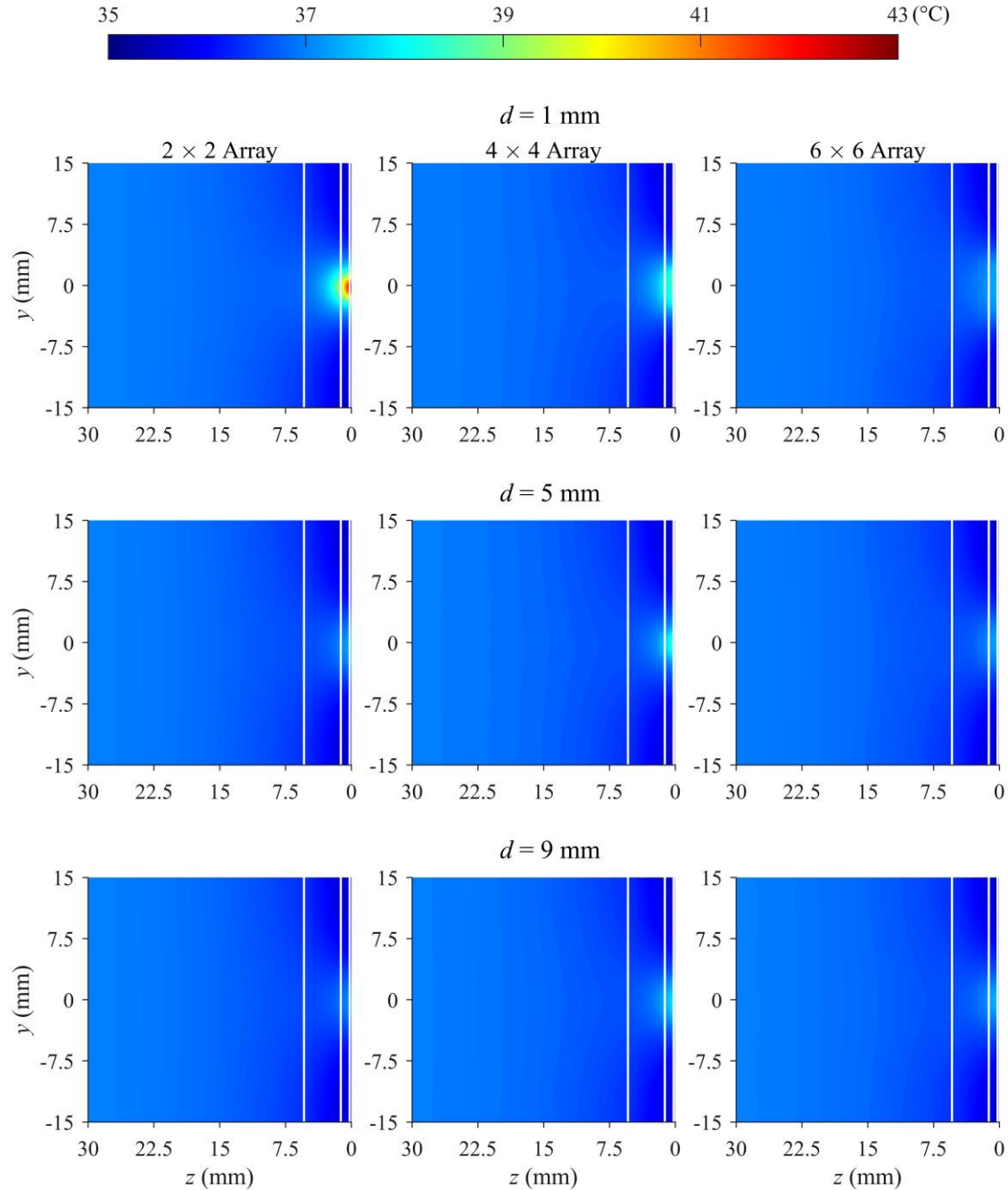


Fig. 8 Temperature distributions on the yo -plane for different d (1, 5, 9 mm) and array sizes (2×2 , 4×4 , 6×6) at 100 GHz. The white lines are the interface between the different layers of the tissue models.

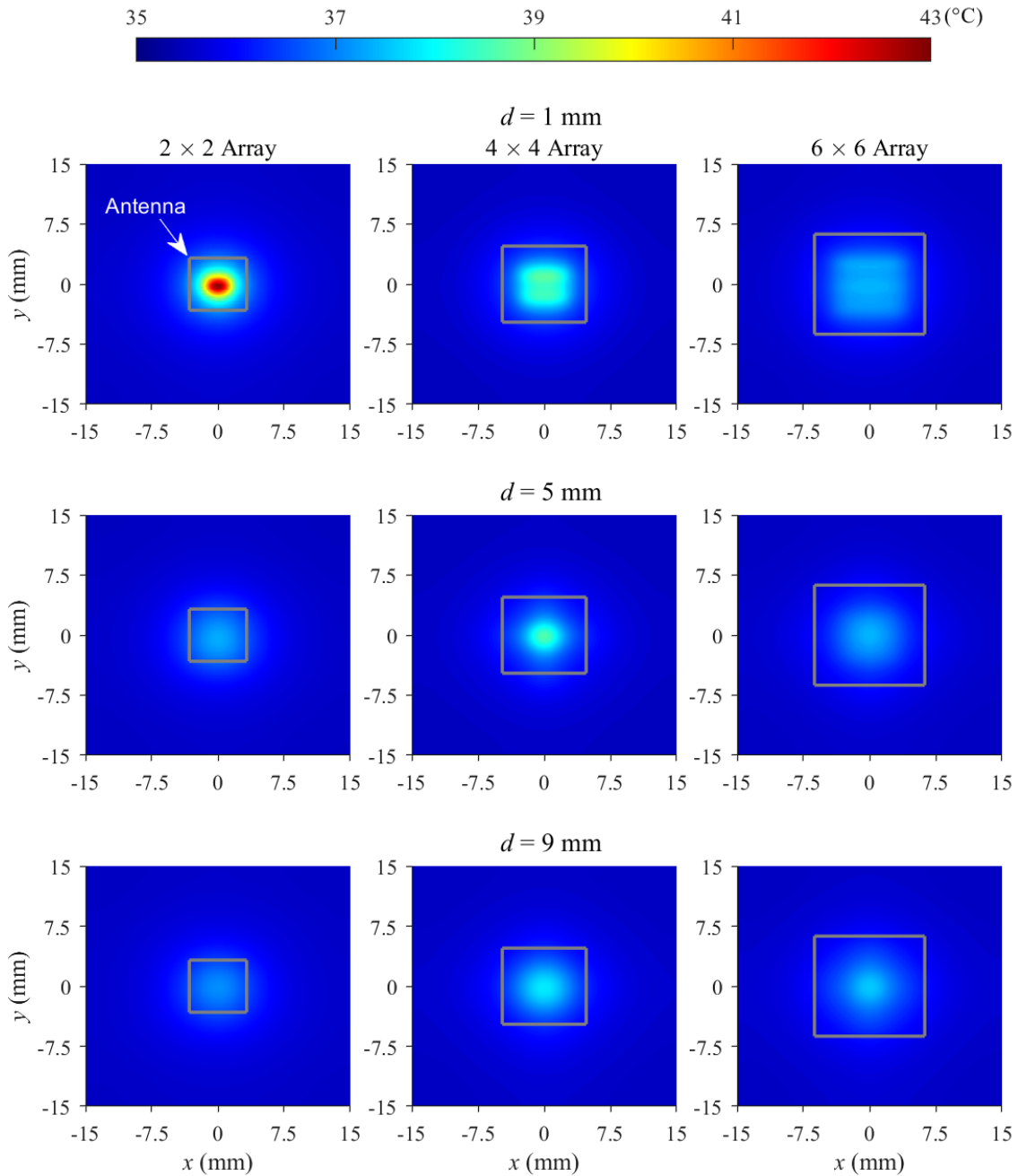


Fig. 9 Temperature distributions on the xoy -plane for different d (1, 5, 9 mm) and array sizes (2×2 , 4×4 , 6×6) at 100 GHz. The gray rectangle in each figure represents the antenna models.

APPENDIX A

Figs. 8 – 9 show the temperature distributions on the tissue phantom for different array sizes and distances. The coordinate system is shown in Fig. 1. The gray rectangles in Fig. 9 represent the antenna models. As mentioned in Section III, for the same input power, the larger temperature elevation for 2×2 array can be observed, and it is lower compared to other array sizes as d increases.

APPENDIX B

Figs. 10(a) and (b) show the SAR (on the yo z -plane) and APD derived from SAR distributions on the tissue phantom for different array sizes and distances, respectively. Similar to temperature distributions, for the same input power, the smaller array size provides more focused APD distribution at close distance.

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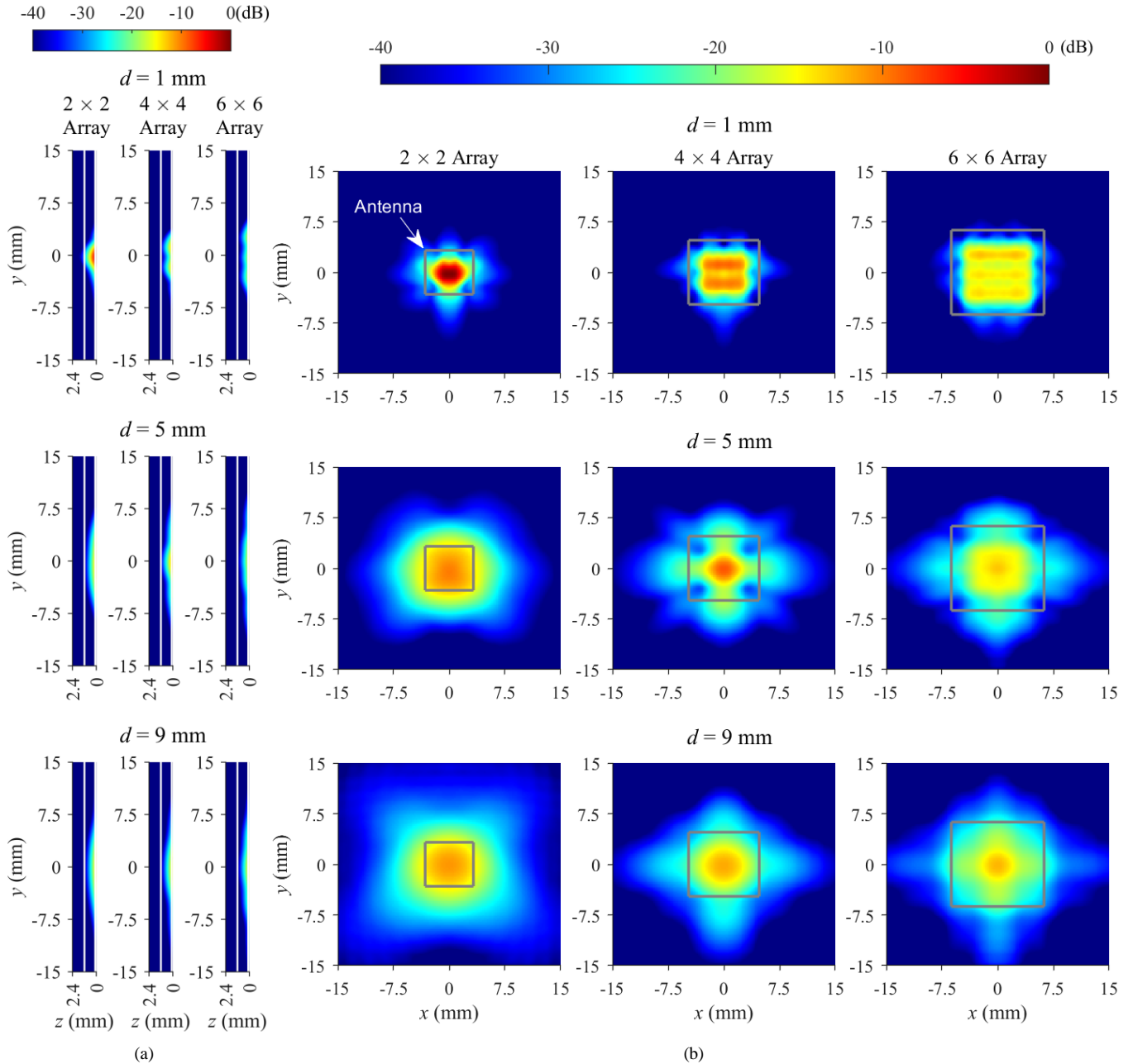


Fig. 10 Distributions for different d (1, 5, 9 mm) and array sizes (2×2 , 4×4 , 6×6) at 100 GHz. (a) SAR on the yo -plane, which is normalized to the peak SAR value of the 2×2 array for $d = 1$ mm in (a). The white lines are the interface between the different layers of the tissue model. (b) APD on xoy -plane for $A = 0$ cm², which is normalized to peak APD value of the 2×2 array for $d = 1$ mm in (b). The gray rectangle in each figure represents antenna models.

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