

AN007: Auto-Zero Setting CO₂ Sensor

ABSTRACT

All GSS sensors use a technique called non-dispersive infra-red (NDIR) sensing where light is injected into the optical measurement chamber, which contains the gas which has been allowed to enter it. The light that passes through the optical cavity is detected by the photo diode. The signal from the photo-diode is digitised by the microcontroller and compared with a reference level stored in memory. The microcontroller can then calculate the level of CO₂ in the optical measurement chamber.

All GSS sensors are 100% tested for measurement accuracy at multiple, different gas concentrations before leaving the factory. In use, and dependent on the conditions, the CO₂ concentration value measured by the sensor may vary from the reference value.

GSS sensors have a typical operational lifetime of more than 10 years. However, during use, the sensor optical path will change very slowly over time due to the degradation of the optical surfaces caused by environmental contamination, and reduced LED output.

This application note describes potential strategies to correct for these changes and ensure the sensor continues to provide highly accurate CO₂ measurement results.

The GSS sensor has a built-in automatic method to correct for low rate drift of the sensor 'zero-point'. Alternatively, the user can make manual adjustments to the zero value of the sensor.

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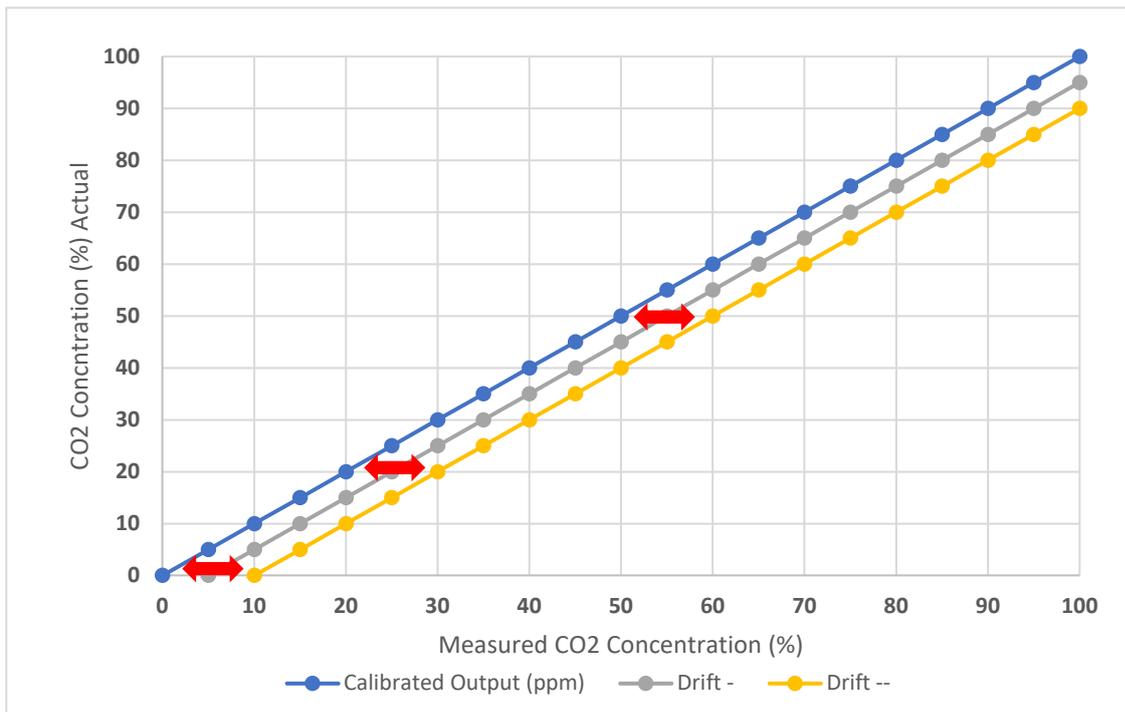
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BACKGROUND TO ZERO-POINT SETTING

All GSS sensors are calibrated for accuracy at the factory at multiple different concentration levels. In use, the sensor reference level will change, due to changes in the optical surfaces, accumulation of dirt in the sensor and other degradations. Although the wavelength of the light being emitted by the LED is not affected, the impact of these changes will be to reduce the signal level received by the photo-diode in the sensor.

The relationship between CO₂ concentration and measured CO₂ remains linear over time. However, the reference levels may change compared to the those stored in the sensor when it was shipped from the factory.

The change in reference level of the sensor can be cancelled out using a process known as zero-setting. This resets the sensor to a defined concentration level. The sensor zero-point can be reset by the user, or in some circumstances, the sensor can operate fully autonomously and periodically 'auto-zero' without user intervention.



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AUTO-ZERO SETTING PRINCIPLE OF OPERATION

All GSS sensors are calibrated using a variety of different CO₂ gas concentrations during factory calibration, typically calibrated mixtures of nitrogen and CO₂. In practice, it is difficult in use to replicate these known gas calibrations to reset the 'zero-point' of the sensor.

The built-in auto-zero setting process relies on resetting the zero-point of the sensor using the measured 'fresh air' CO₂ concentration value. Therefore, to use the auto-zero setting function, the sensor must be exposed to fresh air for correct operation. The sensor must be put fresh air and time allowed for the sensor temperature to stabilise, and for the fresh air to be fully diffused into the sensor.

All GSS are pre-programmed by default to continuously take CO₂ measurements when powered-up. Except for the CozIR®-Blink, when powered-up, GSS sensors will keep a record of the lowest measured CO₂ value in memory. This value will be used by the sensor when the auto-zero setting process is activated. This value is lost when the sensor is powered down.

The CozIR®-Blink, which is designed to be power cycled, keeps a record of the lowest measured CO₂ value in memory even when powered down.

In either case, when the auto-zero function is run, the sensor will reset the fresh-air zero point to the lowest measured CO₂ value that has been stored in memory. The value the sensor uses for this fresh-air zero-point is user programmable. The sensor default value for CO₂ in fresh air is 400ppm. When the auto-zero function is run, the sensor sets the reference value of CO₂ of the fresh air to 400ppm. The default value can be changed by the user if needed.

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AUTO-ZERO SETTINGS

By default, the sensor will automatically 'zero' using the measured CO₂ level sampled during the auto-zero period. The auto-zero function can be enabled to operate automatically, disabled, or can be forced. The user can also independently adjust the CO₂ level used for auto-zeroing. All GSS sensors have a zero-setting function that allows the user to set the measurement value of 'fresh air'. This is called the ZERO IN FRESH AIR reset value. Typically, the auto-zero reset value is set to the same value as the ZERO IN FRESH AIR reset value, but it can also be set at a different level if desired.

SUMMARY

All GSS sensors have the capability to auto-zero without any user intervention or off-sensor processing or control logic. To operate correctly, the sensor must be exposed to 'fresh air' at least once during the auto-zero period.

The best configuration will depend on the application. In some applications, it may be best to run the auto-zero function at every power-up. For others, particularly ambient CO₂ level measurement, best practice would indicate running the auto-zero function over a much longer period, typically a week.

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ADDRESS

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REVISION HISTORY

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