

Sensitive Method for the Identification of Potential Sensitizing Impurities in Reaction Mixtures by Fluorescent Nitrobenzoxadiazole-Labeled Glutathione

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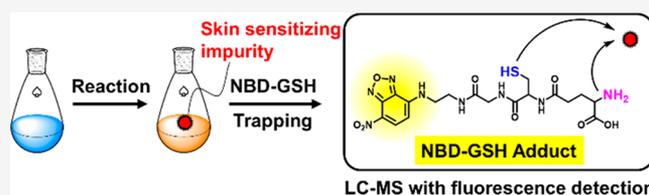


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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Allergic contact dermatitis is a critical issue in the development of new chemicals. Minor impurities with strong skin-sensitizing properties can be generated as byproducts. However, it is very difficult to identify these skin sensitizers in product mixtures. In this study, fluorescent nitrobenzoxadiazole-labeled glutathione (NBD-GSH) was synthesized to identify small amounts of skin sensitizers in reaction mixtures. Twelve known skin sensitizers and three nonsensitizers were reacted with NBD-GSH. Adducts formed only with the skin sensitizers, which allowed for their detection by a fluorescence detector. Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS) analyses showed that NBD-GSH reacted with the skin sensitizers via its thiol and amino groups. An adduct of NBD-GSH with the strong skin sensitizer 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene was detected with a limit of detection of 6×10^{-8} mol/L by high-performance liquid chromatography with fluorescence detection. When a reaction mixture from primary alcohol oxidation was incubated with NBD-GSH, a NBD-GSH adduct formed with skin-sensitizing aldehyde impurities and could be specifically detected by LC-MS with fluorescence detection. This method will be useful for detection and identification of small amounts of skin sensitizers in raw materials, intermediates, reaction mixtures, and end products in the chemical industry.



INTRODUCTION

In the chemical industry, the risk of allergic contact dermatitis is a critical issue in the development of new chemicals. For the protection of workers and consumers, skin-sensitizing potentials of chemicals in manufacturing processes, including raw materials, intermediates, and products, must be assessed at an early stage of product development. It is known that some unexpected minor impurities with strong skin-sensitizing properties are generated as byproducts and can contaminate the nonsensitizing target product, which can then give the entire sample strong skin-sensitizing properties.¹ In such cases, it is not easy to identify the component that is the main cause of skin sensitization. In previous research with the commercial dye Sudan III, each component was fractionated by column chromatography and skin sensitization with each fraction was evaluated to identify the main skin sensitizer.¹ Other studies have also used chromatographic separation before evaluation to identify the skin-sensitizing components in a German chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*) extract² and a *Commiphora myrrha* (myrrh) extract used as a natural skin remedy.³

The guinea pig maximization test,^{4–6} Buehler test,^{4,7,8} and the murine local lymph node assay^{9–11} have been validated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development as animal tests for evaluating skin sensitization. In recent years, because of increasing public awareness of animal welfare, the use of test animals for scientific purposes has been

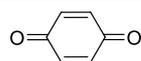
restricted.¹² Many alternatives to animal testing have been developed on the basis of the key events from adverse outcome pathways.¹³ The direct peptide reactivity assay (DPRA)^{14–16} and the amino acid derivative reactivity assay^{14,17} can be used to assess the skin-sensitizing potentials of chemicals on the basis of key event 1 of covalent binding of the chemical to skin proteins. These tests evaluate the reactivity of chemicals toward model synthetic peptides as a surrogate for proteins. The KeratinoSens^{18,19} and LuSens^{18,20} tests have been designed around key event 2, the activation of keratinocytes, to evaluate activation of the Keap1-Nrf2-ARE pathway by oxidative stress in keratinocytes. Another set of tests are based on a third key event, the activation of dendritic cells, and include the human cell line activation test (h-CLAT),^{21,22} U-SENS,^{21,23} and IL-8 Luc assay.^{21,24} All types of testing, including both animal tests and alternative methods, require time-consuming steps for chromatographic fractionation,

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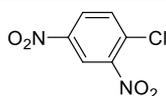
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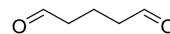
Sensitizers



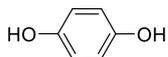
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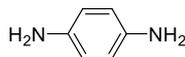
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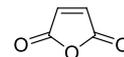
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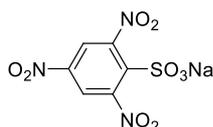
Hydroquinone



p-Phenylenediamine



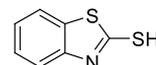
Maleic anhydride



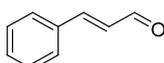
Trinitrobenzenesulfonic acid



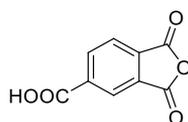
Formaldehyde



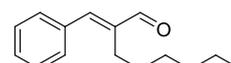
2-Mercaptobenzothiazole



Cinnamaldehyde

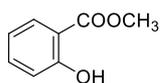


Trimellitic anhydride

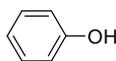


α-Hexylcinnamaldehyde

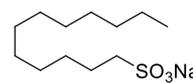
Non-sensitizers



Methyl salicylate



Phenol



Sodium dodecyl sulfate

Figure 2. Structures of the tested compounds.

(Waters Corporation, Milford, MA) and ZORBAX Eclipse XDB-C18 column (50 × 3 mm, 1.8 μm; Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA) was directly hyphenated with a Waters ACQUITY TQD mass spectrometer. The composition of the mobile phase of water/acetonitrile was increased linearly from 95:5 (v/v) to 5:95 (v/v) in 4.33 min. The mobile phase flow rate was 0.86 mL/min. The LC flow was split before the mass spectrometer with a split ratio of 4:1. A Waters ACQUITY UPLC H-class and a Waters Synapt G2-Si mass spectrometer equipped with a Waters ACQUITY UPLC BEH C18 column (100 × 2.1 mm, 1.7 μm) were used to obtain high-resolution mass spectra for structure elucidation of the NBD-GSH adducts and skin-sensitizing impurities in the reaction mixture. The chromatographic conditions used for the high-resolution MS were the same as those for LC-MS with fluorescence detection. High-resolution mass spectra were recorded under the following conditions: electrospray ionization mode, positive; capillary voltage, 0.25 kV; ion source temperature, 100 °C; desolvation gas temperature, 450 °C; desolvation gas flow rate, 1200 L/h; and mass range, m/z 50–1500. Masslynx software (version 4.2, Waters Corporation) was used for data analysis. A Bruker AVANCE II 600 MHz NMR spectrometer (Bruker BioSpin Corporation, Billerica, MA) was used for ^1H NMR measurements. The ATR FTIR spectra were measured using a Jasco FT/IR-6300 spectrometer (Jasco Corporation, Tokyo, Japan) equipped with a single reflection diamond ATR accessory (ATR Pro One, Jasco Corporation). Aliquots of the samples were placed on

the surface of the diamond ATR crystal and pressure was applied using a metal rod to obtain the spectrum. The spectral range was 350–4000 cm^{-1} . A F-2700 fluorescence spectrophotometer (Hitachi High-Tech Science Corporation, Tokyo, Japan) was used. The absorption spectrum of a NBD-GSH solution in water/acetonitrile (1:1, v/v) with the concentration of 4×10^{-6} mol/L was obtained from 220 to 730 nm. The excitation wavelength was set to 470 nm and the emission wavelength was scanned from 220 to 730 nm in 0.5 nm increments.

Synthesis of Fluorescent NBD-GSH. NBD-GSH was synthesized from GSH as shown in Figure 1. ^1H NMR (600 MHz, D_2O): δ 8.30 (br d, $J = 9.0$ Hz, 1H, benzofurazan H-5), 6.21 (d, $J = 9.0$ Hz, 1H, benzofurazan H-6), 4.33 (t, $J = 6.6$ Hz, 1H, Cys- α -methine), 3.90 (t, $J = 6.6$ Hz, 1H, Glu- α -methine), 3.78 (s, 2H, Gly- α -methylene), 3.61 (br s, 2H, $-\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2-$), 3.51 (br t, $J = 6.6$ Hz, 2H, $-\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2-$), 2.74 (d, $J = 6.0$ Hz, 1H, Cys- β -methylene), 2.51–2.40 (m, 2H, Glu- γ -methylene), 2.15–2.05 (m, 1H, Glu- β -methylene). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, D_2O): δ 174.5, 172.4, 172.2, 171.7, 146.4, 144.2, 143.8, 139.0, 120.5, 99.8, 55.7, 52.8, 42.7, 42.5, 38.0, 30.8, 25.5, 25.2. HRMS (ESI+): calcd for $\text{C}_{18}\text{H}_{25}\text{N}_8\text{O}_8\text{S}$ [$M + \text{H}$] $^+$, 513.1516; found, 513.1519. IR: 3276, 3072, 2946, 1641, 1618, 1590, 1525, 1413, 1354, 1242, 1187, 1132, 836, 721, 594, 517, 448 cm^{-1} . The detailed procedure for the preparation of NBD-GSH is given in the Supporting Information, section 1.1–1.5.

Table 1. Comparison of Skin -Sensitizing Activities and NBD-GSH Adduct Formation for Different Compounds^a

chemical	skin-sensitizing activity			NBD-GSH adduct	references
	guinea pig maximization test	local lymph node assay	DPRA		
benzoquinone	+	+ extreme	+	D	11,36
1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene	+	+ extreme	+	D	11,36
glutaraldehyde	N/A	+ strong	+	D	36
hydroquinone	+	+ strong	+	D	11,36
<i>p</i> -phenylenediamine	+	+ strong	+	D	11,36
maleic anhydride	+	+ strong	+	D	35,36
trinitrobenzenesulfonic acid	N/A	+ strong	+	D	38
formaldehyde	+	+ strong	+	D	11,36
2-mercaptobenzothiazole	+	+ moderate	+	D	11,36
<i>trans</i> -cinnamaldehyde	+	+ moderate	+	D	11,36
trimellitic anhydride	+	+ moderate	+	D	11,36
α -hexylcinnamaldehyde	+	+ weak	-	D	11,36
methyl salicylate	-	-	-	ND	11,36
phenol	N/A	-	N/A	ND	37
sodium dodecyl sulfate	-	- ^b	-	ND	11,36

^aSymbols and abbreviations: +, sensitizing; -, nonsensitizing; N/A, not available; D, detected; ND, not detected. ^bCharacterized as a false positive in LLNA.³⁹

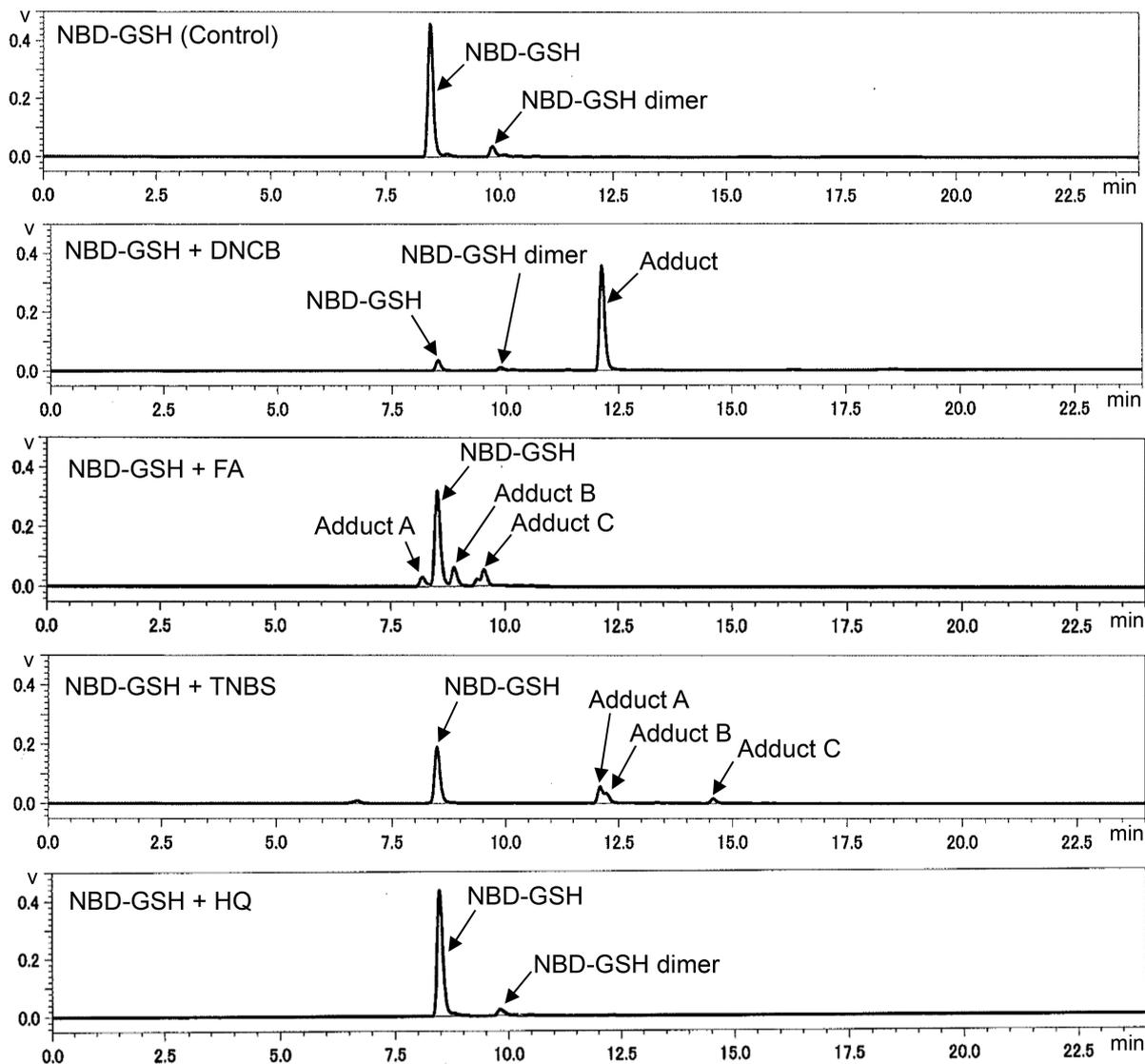


Figure 3. Chromatograms from liquid chromatography with fluorescence detection of incubated solutions of 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene (DNCB), formaldehyde (FA), trinitrobenzenesulfonic acid (TNBS), and hydroquinone (HQ) with NBD-GSH.

Incubation of NBD-GSH with Known Skin Sensitizers and Nonsensitizers. NBD-GSH was dissolved in 0.2 mol/L phosphate buffer (pH 7.0) at a concentration of 20 $\mu\text{mol/mL}$ (0.6 mg/mL). The test chemicals, 12 skin sensitizers, and 3 nonsensitizers were dissolved in acetonitrile or acetonitrile/water (1:1, v/v) at 20 $\mu\text{mol/mL}$. NBD-GSH and the chemical solutions were then mixed in a 1:1 molar ratio (NBD-GSH/chemical). After incubation for 1 h at 37 °C, the reaction mixtures were analyzed.

Limit of Detection of NBD-GSH Adducts with Skin Sensitizers. For an estimation of the limit of detection, 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene was dissolved in acetonitrile in the range from 4×10^{-5} to 4 $\mu\text{mol/L}$. These solutions were reacted with the NBD-GSH solution (4 $\mu\text{mol/L}$). Adduct peaks were detected using a fluorescence detector at 540 nm ($\lambda_{\text{em}} = 470$ nm). The limit of detection was calculated using the signal-to-noise ratio method.²⁹ The magnitude of the noise and the adduct peak height were measured manually on the chromatogram and a signal-to-noise ratio of 3 was used for the limit of detection.

Incubation of NBD-GSH with a Reaction Mixture. According to the procedure described by Giacomini and co-workers,³⁰ the oxidation of 2-phenyl-1-propanol was carried out to obtain 2-phenylpropionic acid, which is a substructure of ibuprofen. A mixture of 2-phenyl-1-propanol (1.36 g, 10 mmol), 35% aqueous H_2O_2 (0.2 mL), $\text{Na}_2\text{WO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (33 mg, 0.1 mmol), tetrabutylammonium bromide (32 mg, 0.1 mmol), and 10 mol % KHSO_4 was stirred at 1000 rpm for 4 h at 90 °C. After the reaction was quenched with sodium thiosulfate, 40 μL of the obtained organic layer was diluted 10-fold with acetonitrile. Then 50 μL of the diluted solution was reacted for 10 min at 37 °C with 50 μL of a 4 mmol/L solution of NBD-GSH in 100 mmol/L phosphate buffer (pH 7.0)/acetonitrile (1:1). Finally, 10 μL of 400 mmol/L NaBH_3CN aqueous solution was added and the mixture was reacted for 50 min at 37 °C to trap any skin-sensitizing byproducts. The reactant was analyzed by LC-MS with fluorescence detection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis and Characterization of NBD-GSH. NBD-GSH was synthesized from GSH in five steps with a total yield of 12%. It is known that thiol groups and primary amino groups in proteins react with electrophilic skin sensitizers.³¹ Therefore, in the DPRA method, the cysteine peptide with a thiol group and the lysine peptide with a primary amino group were used for trapping different types of skin sensitizers.^{14–16} NBD-GSH was designed to contain both a thiol group and a primary amino group. NBD was bound to the carboxyl group of GSH via an ethylene diamine linker to retain the free amino group and reduce steric hindrance of the reactive thiol and amino group caused by introduction of the NBD group. The NMR spectrum indicated that NBD was introduced selectively at the carboxyl group of the glycyl moiety (Figure S1, Supporting Information). This selectivity might be caused by steric hindrance of the butoxycarbonyl protective group toward the glutamyl moiety. NBD-GSH was dissolved in the HPLC mobile phase $\text{H}_2\text{O}/\text{CH}_3\text{CN}$ (1:1, v/v). The maximum excitation wavelength was 467 nm and the maximum emission wavelength was 539 nm (Figure S2). These wavelengths were used to detect all adducts. The emission wavelength of NBD³² is long enough to prevent overlap with the absorption wavelengths of a wide variety of chemicals and to give high selectivity in detection.

Trapping Known Skin Sensitizers with NBD-GSH. NBD-GSH was incubated with 12 known skin sensitizers and 3 nonsensitizers (Figure 2) for 1 h to obtain fluorescent adducts. After the reaction, the obtained reaction mixtures were analyzed with HPLC with fluorescence detection to confirm generation of the adduct peaks. All 12 skin sensitizers

produced new peaks, whereas the 3 skin nonsensitizers did not give any peaks. The prohapten hydroquinone and *p*-phenylenediamine did not form adducts with NBD-GSH within the 1 h reaction time. Adduct peaks were detected when the reaction time was extended to 24 h. It was presumed that benzoquinone and quinonediimine formed in the reaction solution by autoxidation.^{33,34}

The results are summarized in Table 1. Results reported for guinea pig maximization tests, local lymph node assays, and DPRA results in previous research studies are provided for comparison.

LC-MS Structure Confirmation of the Adducts of Known Skin Sensitizers with NBD-GSH. The structures of the NBD-GSH adducts with skin sensitizers were confirmed by LC-MS. Chromatograms of the reaction mixtures of DNCB, formaldehyde, and TNBS with NBD-GSH are shown in Figure 3.

DNCB reacted completely with NBD-GSH within 1 h and a single adduct peak was observed. The adduct peak gave m/z 679 in LC-MS, and its isotope peak pattern did not indicate the presence of a chlorine atom in the molecule. Therefore, the chlorine atom of DNCB was substituted by NBD-GSH (Figure 4).

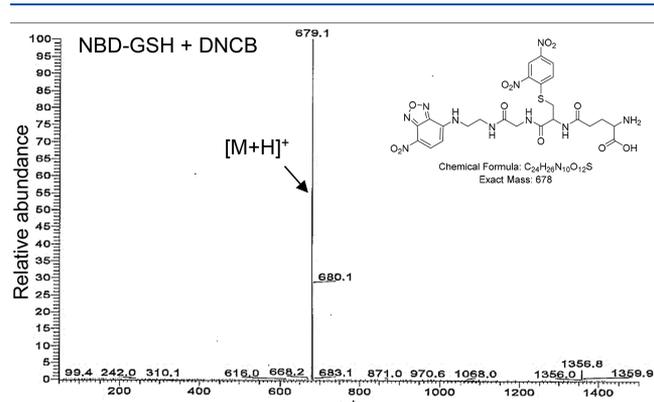


Figure 4. Mass spectrum of the NBD-GSH adduct with 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene (DNCB). Adduct structure was proposed according to the molecular weight.

Formaldehyde gave three peaks for adducts formed with NBD-GSH: one peak (m/z 543) was for an adduct formed via the thiol group and the other two peaks (m/z 525 and 537) were for adducts formed via the amino group (Figure 5).

Peaks for three adducts were observed with TNBS: Adducts A and B (m/z 724) with one TNBS and adduct C (m/z 935) with two TNBS (Figure 6). These results confirmed that NBD-GSH had two binding sites, at the thiol group and the primary amino group, as designed. The LC-MS results for the other chemicals are shown in Figures S3–S12.

Limit of Detection of the Adduct of NBD-GSH with DNCB. A DNCB concentration of 6×10^{-8} mol/L in the acetonitrile solution was required to give a NBD-GSH adduct peak 3 times the height of the noise by HPLC with fluorescence detection.

Trapping of Skin-Sensitizing Impurities Using NBD-GSH in a Reaction Mixture from Oxidation of 2-Phenyl-1-propanol. For obtainment of a phenyl propionic acid, 2-phenyl-1-propanol was oxidized by hydrogen peroxide with a tungsten catalyst. The obtained reaction mixture was reacted with NBD-GSH for 1 h to trap unknown skin-

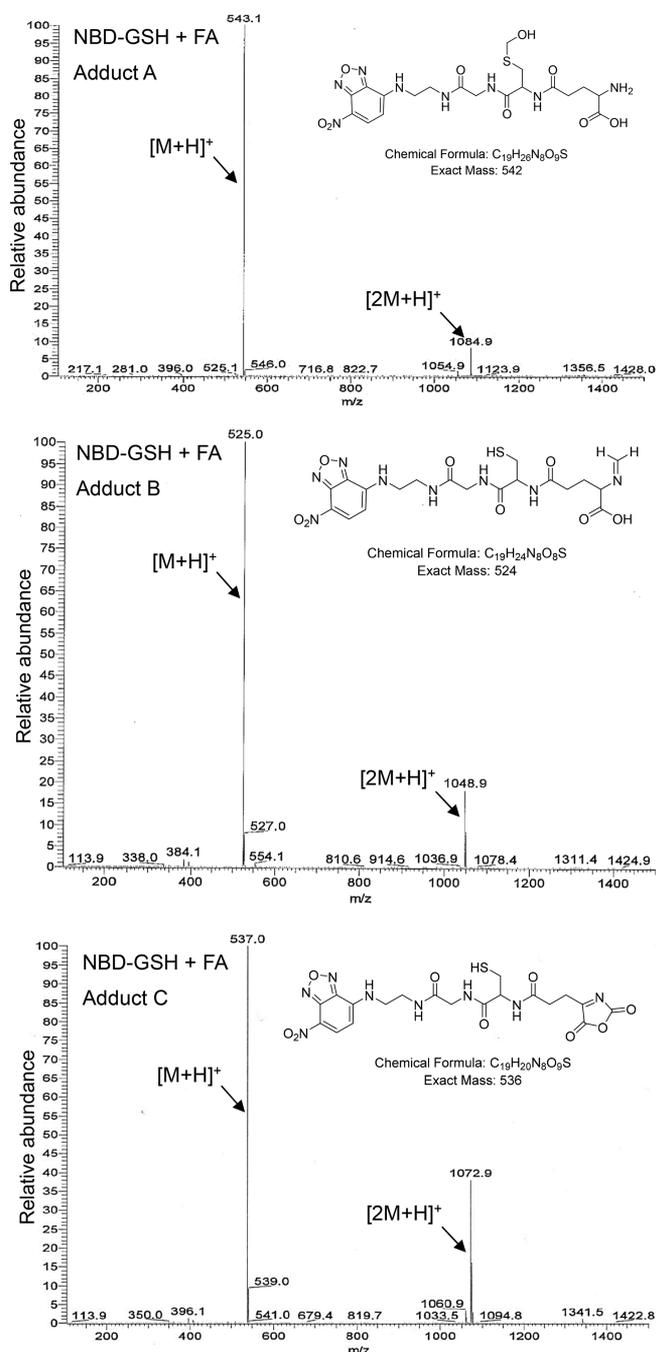


Figure 5. Mass spectra of the NBD-GSH adducts with formaldehyde (FA). Adduct structures were proposed according to the molecular weight.

sensitizing byproducts and then analyzed by LC-MS with fluorescence detection. One peak that was considered a fluorescent NBD-GSH adduct with unknown skin-sensitizing impurities was detected (Figure 7).

The mass spectrum of the adduct (m/z 631) and its elemental composition, $C_{27}H_{34}N_8O_8S$, from a high-resolution mass spectrum strongly suggested that the reduced adduct was formed by reaction of the amino group of NBD-GSH with the aldehyde byproduct 2-phenyl-1-propanal, which is known to be a skin sensitizer.^{38–40} This aldehyde formed as an intermediate between the corresponding alcohol and carboxylic acid and remained in the reaction system as an impurity. Although

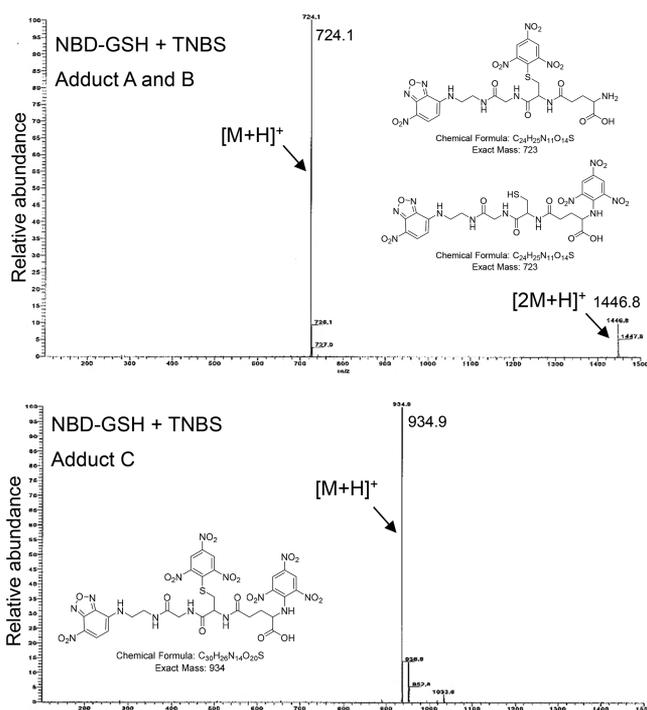


Figure 6. Mass spectra of the NBD-GSHs adducts with trinitrobenzenesulfonic acid (TNBS). Adduct structures were proposed according to the molecular weight.

adduct formation (m/z 629) occurred without using a reducing agent, the amount formed was very small because of the equilibrium between the amine and imine. Therefore, for breaking of the chemical equilibrium between the amine and imine and for production of the reduced adduct of NBD-GSH irreversibly, a reducing agent⁴¹ was added following a previous report.⁴² Even a small amount of an aldehyde generated as a strong skin-sensitizing impurity can give the final product strong skin-sensitizing properties; thus, the addition of a reducing agent is of great importance to allow for detection of the reduced adduct of NBD-GSH with high sensitivity and for identification of the cause of skin sensitization.

CONCLUSIONS

A method was developed for identifying small amounts of impurities with skin-sensitizing potential in reaction mixtures. Fluorescent NBD-GSH was synthesized from commercial GSH in five steps with a total yield of 12%. NBD-GSH formed adducts with 12 known skin sensitizers through its thiol group and/or amino group. These adducts were detected selectively using a fluorescence detector. The limit of detection of this method was determined as 6×10^{-8} mol/L of DNCB in the acetonitrile solution. For evaluation of the practicality of this method, a reaction mixture from alcohol oxidation of 2-phenylpropionic acid was assessed using the NBD-GSH binding assay. Under fluorescence detection, the obtained mixture produced a peak for a NBD-GSH adduct with skin-sensitizing potential impurity. Analysis of the peak by LC-MS analysis with fluorescence detection and HPLC-MS identified 2-phenyl-1-propanal as the skin-sensitizing impurity in the reaction mixture. This method eliminates the requirement for chromatographic separation and assessment of each fraction using animal or nonanimal tests to identify the main cause of

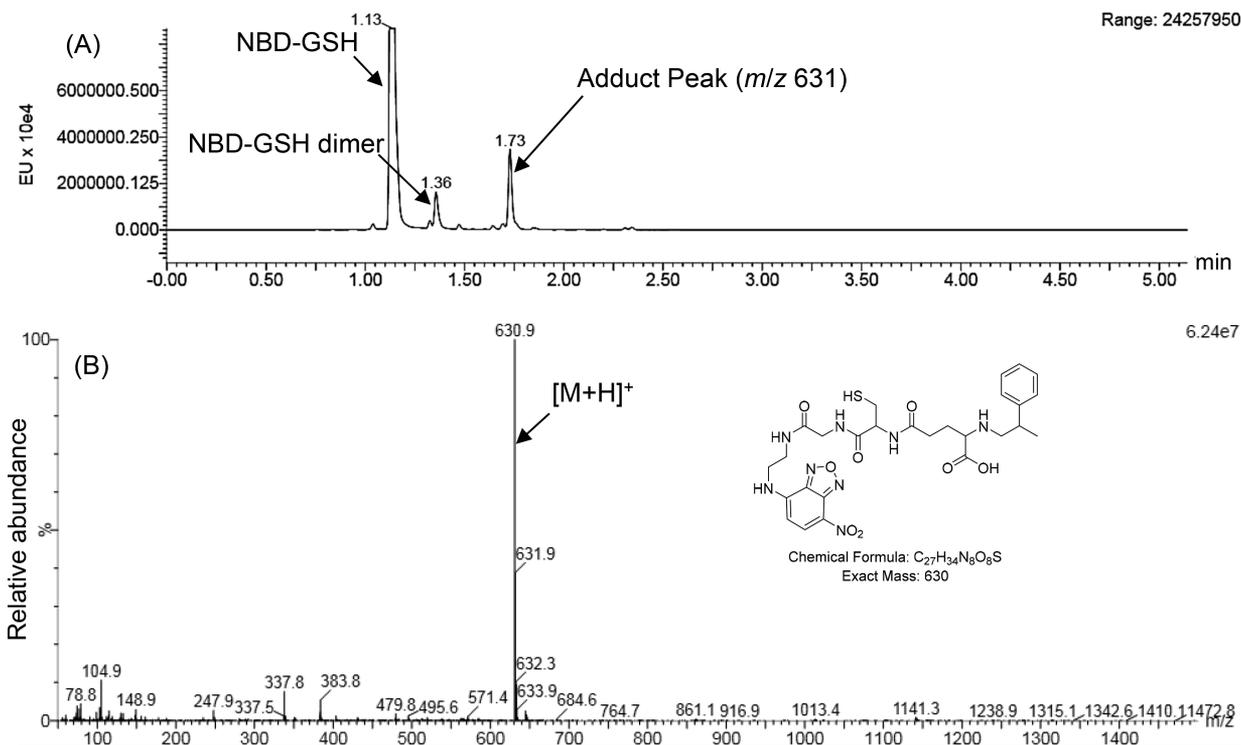


Figure 7. Trapping of skin-sensitizing impurities by NBD-GSH from the reaction mixture for oxidation of 2-phenyl-1-propanol. (A) Chromatogram from liquid chromatography with fluorescence detection of the incubated solution of the reaction mixture with NBD-GSH and NaBH_3CN . (B) Mass spectrum of the NBD-GSH adduct with the skin sensitizer 2-phenyl-1-propanol in the reaction mixture. The adduct structure was proposed according to the molecular weight.

the skin-sensitizing property in the mixture. Consequently, it will be useful for identifying small amounts of skin sensitizers in raw materials, intermediates, reaction mixtures, and end products in the chemical industry.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.chemrestox.0c00327>.

Detailed procedure of NBD-GSH synthesis; introduction of NBD to GSH; fluorescence spectra of NBD-GSH; chromatograms from liquid chromatography with fluorescence detection; and LC mass spectra of the NBD-GSH adducts (PDF)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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