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Recent Performance of and Plasma Outage Studies with the SNS H- Ion Source

Martin P. Stockli, Baoxi Han, Sydney N. Murray Jr., Terry R. Pennisi, Chip Piller, Manuel Santana, Robert F. Welton

Spallation Neutron Source, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, TN 37831, USA

Corresponding Author: Martin Stockli, e-mail address: stockli@ornl.gov

Early in 2014, after several years of producing neutrons with ~1 MW proton beams, SNS started to ramp to higher power levels that can be sustained with high availability. Powers of up to 1.4 MW may be possible despite a compromised RFQ, which requires higher RF power than design levels to approach the nominal beam transmission. Unfortunately at higher power the RFQ often loses its thermal stability, a problem apparently enhanced by beam losses and high influxes of hydrogen. This led to the semi-retirement of the high-performing source #3. The apparently lower beam losses of the other two sources shifted the goal to delivering as much H- beam as possible with the least amount of hydrogen in the source, which led to plasma outages. Ongoing plasma outage studies show that the 13 MHz supply struggles with the ~90% power reflected by the 1-ms long 2-MHz plasma pulses. Possible mitigations are being tested, starting with a 4-ms RC filter for the reflected power signal.

Lowering the H2 pressure initially increases the H- beam current due to reduced losses, and since mid-2014 ~50 mA are routinely injected into the RFQ. Subsequent LEBT retuning improves the RFQ transmission by better matching the reduced-divergence beams. Accordingly ~35 mA H- beams exiting the RFQ have become routine.

To further support higher powers, under-performing sources are replaced after two weeks while well-performing sources are used for up to 8 weeks, frequently exceeding 3 A h of H- without showing signs of aging.

These new approaches increased the average RFQ output peak current at the end of the pulse by ~2 mA while the standard deviation was reduced from 1.9 to 1.3 mA compared to the prior year, which included the high performing source #3.