

A negative ion TPC with GridPix readout

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8 Abstract

10 The performance of GridPix technology as a negative ion TPC readout was
studied using a quad module with four Timepix3 based GridPix chips. The
12 TPC is operated using a 93.6/5.0/1.4 gas mixture of Ar/iC₄H₁₀/CS₂ with a
small amount of oxygen and water vapour at a pressure of 1030 mbar and a
14 temperature of 297 K. Tracks were produced by a pulsed N₂ laser. The GridPix
chips are sensitive to single drift ions, and allow for the determination of the
drift distance using the minority carrier(s). The 1.56 ns time resolution of the
16 Timepix3 chips allows for a precise determination of the drift properties in the
longitudinal direction. The measured mobility of majority ion charge carriers is
18 $(1.391 \pm 0.003) \text{ cm}^2/\text{V/s}$. Using the high granularity pixel readout, the trans-
verse and longitudinal diffusion coefficients were measured to correspond to an
20 effective thermal diffusion temperature of 305 K and 383 K respectively.

Keywords: Micromegas, gaseous pixel detector, micro-pattern gaseous
22 detector, Timepix, GridPix, negative ion time projection chamber

1. Introduction

24 In a negative ion Time Projection Chamber (TPC), ionisation charge is
transported to the readout plane by negatively charged ions instead of elec-
26 trons, thereby reducing the diffusion down to the thermal limit [1]. The TPC
detects interactions that create ionisation electrons in the gas of the TPC. The
28 primary ionisation electrons are captured by the highly electronegative CS₂ gas
component, and the ions formed drift to the anode by a drift field. In the high
30 field amplification region near the anode, the electrons detach and an avalanche
occurs which is detected by the readout electronics.

32 A negative ion TPC was applied to directional dark matter searches, e.g.
in the Drift II experiment [2]. The TPC was operated using a low pressure
34 30:10 Torr CF₄:CS₂ gas mixture. If oxygen is present in the gas mixture, extra
species of ions called minority carriers with a larger mobility are created [3].
36 From the difference in arrival time, the absolute position in the drift direction

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can be reconstructed without the need of knowing the event time in the detector
38 [4].

In this paper an exploratory study of GridPix technology as a negative ion
40 TPC readout is presented. A GridPix consists of a CMOS pixel chip with in-
tegrated amplification grid added by MEMS postprocessing techniques [5, 6].
42 Recently a quad module with four Timepix3 based GridPix chips was developed
in the context of a future collider experiment [7]. The GridPix TPC readout has
44 a fine granularity of $55\ \mu\text{m} \times 55\ \mu\text{m}$ and is sensitive to single charge carriers. A
negative ion TPC with GridPix readout can provide an excellent spatial resolu-
46 tion without a magnetic field. The high single ion resolution of the quad detector
allows an accurate measurement of the resolution and an experimental test of
48 the expected low diffusion coefficient for ions. This first investigation focuses
on operation of the quad module in an already existing setup at atmospheric
50 pressure.

2. Quad detector

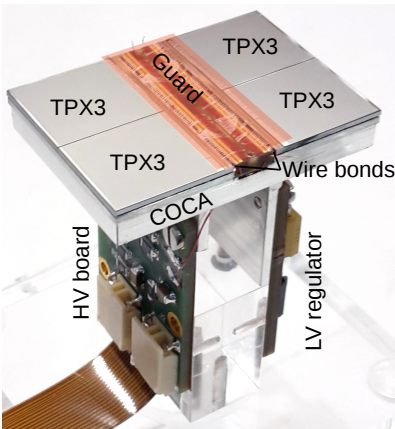


Figure 1: Picture of the quad module with four Timepix3 GridPixes (TPX3) mounted on a cold carrier plate (COCA). The central guard was omitted to show the wire bond PCB, and its operating position is indicated with a transparent rectangle. On the right the Low Voltage (LV) regulator is partially hidden behind the stump, and on the left the High Voltage (HV) board and the flexible Kapton cable are visible. This picture was previously published in [7].

52 2.1. Gridpix

The GridPix is based on the Timepix3 chip [8], which has 256×256 pixels
54 with a pitch of $55\ \mu\text{m} \times 55\ \mu\text{m}$. On the surface of the chip a $4\ \mu\text{m}$ thick silicon-
rich silicon nitride protection layer is deposited in order to prevent damage to
56 the readout electronics from discharges of the grid. On top of that, $50\ \mu\text{m}$ high

SUS pillars support a $1\ \mu\text{m}$ thick aluminium grid with $35\ \mu\text{m}$ diameter circular
 58 holes aligned to the pixels. The Timepix3 chip has a low equivalent noise charge
 ($\approx 70\ e^-$) and can measure a precise Time of Arrival (ToA) using a 640 MHz
 60 TDC. The Timepix3 chip has a data driven readout, and is connected to a
 speedy pixel detector readout (SPIDR) board at a speed of 160 Mbps [9].

62 2.2. Quad module

The quad shown in Figure 1, consists of four GridPix chips and is opti-
 64 mised for a high fraction of sensitive area of 68.9%. The external dimensions
 are $39.6\ \text{mm} \times 28.38\ \text{mm}$ and it can be tiled to cover arbitrarily large areas. The
 66 four chips which are mounted on a cooled base plate (COCA), are connected
 with wire bonds to a common central 6 mm wide PCB. A 10 mm wide guard
 68 electrode is placed over the wire bonds 1.1 mm above the grids, in order to pre-
 vent distortion of the electric drift field. On the other side, the PCB is connected
 70 to a low voltage regulator. The grids are connected by $80\ \mu\text{m}$ insulated copper
 wires to a high voltage (HV) filtering board. The module consumes about 8 W
 72 of power of which 2 W in the LV regulator.

2.3. Experimental setup

74 The quad module is embedded in a box with 7 other quad modules, re-
 sulting in a total of 32 chips. When the measurements were taken, one single
 76 quad module with 4 chips could be read out per SPIDR board. Hardware to
 simultaneously read out multiple quad modules with one SPIDR board is under
 78 development. A schematic drawing of the setup is shown in Figure 2. The inter-
 nal dimensions of the box are $79\ \text{mm} \times 192\ \text{mm} \times 53\ \text{mm}$, and it has a maximum
 80 drift length (distance between cathode and readout anode) of 40 mm. The drift
 field is shaped by a series of parallel CuBe field wires of $50\ \mu\text{m}$ diameter with a
 82 wire pitch of 2 mm and guard strips are located on all of the four sides of the

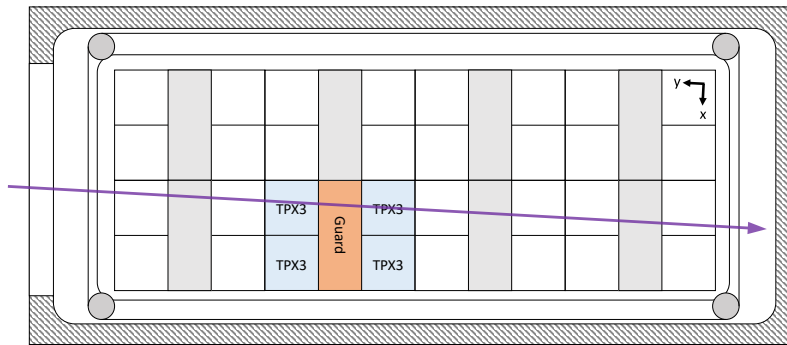


Figure 2: Schematic drawing of the 8-quad module detector with one quad in operation. In purple the laser track direction is indicated.

active area. In addition, six guard wires are suspended over the direct bound-
 84 aries of the chips at a distance of 1.10 mm–1.18 mm from the grid planes . The
 box has one Kapton window and three optical glass windows (type H-K9L) to
 86 facilitate laser measurements.

The gas volume of 780 ml is continuously flushed with a 93.6/5.0/1.4 gas
 88 mixture of Ar/iC₄H₁₀/CS₂ at atmospheric pressure. The gas is argon based
 because of the dual use of the setup for detector development for future colliders,
 90 the isobutane gas was added as a quencher to absorb UV photons produced in
 the avalanches, and the CS₂ concentration is chosen high enough to capture
 92 electrons shortly after the ionisation ($\lesssim 200 \mu\text{m}$). A small amount of oxygen
 (650 ppm–1150 ppm) and water vapour (about 4000 ppm) are present in the drift
 94 volume because of diffusion and outgassing of some of the materials. A few ppb
 of tetra-methyl-phenyleen-diamine (TMPD) molecules are added to enhance
 96 laser ionisation in the gas. During data taking, the temperature was 297 K and
 the pressure was 1030 mbar. The experimental parameters are summarised in
 98 Table 1.

The grid voltage is set to -380 V providing an amplification field strength
 100 of 76 kV/cm . A hit is registered if the charge on a pixel pad is above the
 threshold set to 55 DAC counts or about $515 e^-$. The mean time over threshold
 102 of the selected hits is $0.45 \mu\text{s}$. From this, the gain can be determined to be
 approximately 1000 and the detection efficiency is expected to be 60%. A higher
 104 gain and detection efficiency might be achieved by making the grid voltage more
 negative.

Tracks of ionisation are created by a pulsed 337 nm N₂ laser at a rate of 2.5 Hz
 106 with a pulse duration of 1 ns [10]. The laser is operated using the MOPA (Master
 108 Oscillator Power Amplifier) principle to obtain a beam near the diffraction limit.
 The parallel beam can accurately be directed in the gas volume by means of
 110 two remotely controlled stages.

Data was taken in a series of nine automated experimental runs. During a
 112 run, the drift field was set to a specific strength and the beam was positioned at
 six different drift distances 6 mm apart and at four different x -positions. Mea-
 114 surements of 2400 laser shots per run are taken in a time frame of approximately
 17 minutes.

Table 1: Overview of the experimental parameters. The ranges indicate the variation over the total data taking time

Number of runs	9
Run duration	17 minutes
E_{drift}	100 – 500 V/cm
V_{grid}	-380 V
Threshold	$515 e^-$
Temperature	295.9 – 297.0 K
Pressure	1030 – 1029 mbar
Oxygen concentration	650 – 1150 ppm
Water vapour concentration	$\sim 4000 \text{ ppm}$

116 **3. Analysis**

118 In the analysis the laser position is compared to the reconstructed position
 120 from the quad detector. The laser track is defined by the recorded stage position
 122 as a line parallel to the y -axis. The per pulse variations are smaller than $15\ \mu\text{m}$.
 124 The recorded stage position is taken as the reference to which the four chips
 126 are aligned by rotation in two dimensions, and shifts in the two dimensions
 128 perpendicular to the laser beam. The position of detected ionisation in the
 130 pixel plane is a direct translation from the pixels column (x -direction) and row
 number (y -direction). To reduce noise, only hits with a time over threshold
 above $0.1\ \mu\text{s}$ are considered. From the known laser pulse time, the z -position
 can be calculated as the product of the measured drift time t and the drift
 velocity v_{drift} . To clean up further the data set, hits are required to be within
 2 mm of a laser track in the x -direction and to be within 5 mm of the laser track
 in the z -direction. The alignment and the measurement of the drift velocity is
 an iterative process.

132 An example of a resulting drift time spectrum is shown in Figure 3 for
 134 the run at a drift field strength E_{drift} of 300 V/cm. Other experiments using
 low pressure gas mixtures containing CS_2 and oxygen could distinguish three
 136 different minority carriers as separate peaks in the drift time spectrum [3]. In
 contrast, in our measurements only one secondary peak can be found, which is
 slightly broader than the first one. This could be due to e.g. overlapping drift
 time distributions, the much lower oxygen concentration, or the much higher
 138 water vapour concentration in our gas mixture affecting the minority carrier(s)
 production.

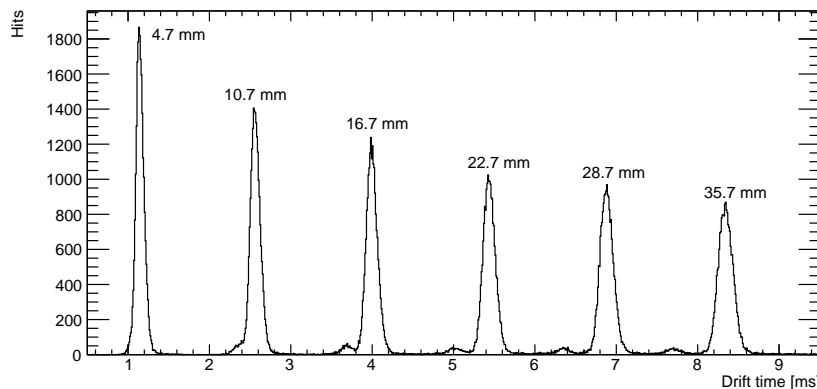


Figure 3: Drift time distribution for 400 laser pulses per z -position, annotated with the drift distance as recorded by the laser stage.

140 In order to determine the drift properties, a ‘global’ fit is made per run with
 142 measurements at different drift distances for a given electric field strength. The
 drift time t is fitted with a combination of two Gaussian distributions per laser

z-position:

$$g(t) = n_{\text{hits}} \left[\frac{f_1}{\sigma_1 \sqrt{2\pi}} \exp\left(-\frac{(t - \mu_1)^2}{2\sigma_1^2}\right) + \frac{f_2}{\sigma_2 \sqrt{2\pi}} \exp\left(-\frac{(t - r_2 \mu_1)^2}{2\sigma_2^2}\right) + \frac{f_{\text{noise}}}{u_{\text{width}}}\right], \quad (1)$$

144 where n_{hits} is the number of hits, u_{width} is the width of a uniform distribution
 set to the fit t range and f_1 is the fraction of the number of detected ions from
 146 majority carrier(s) given by $f_1 = 1 - f_2 - f_{\text{noise}}$. Four parameters are different
 for each drift distance, and two parameters are the same for all drift distances.
 148 The mean time μ_1 , the standard deviation of the majority carrier distribution
 σ_1 , the standard deviation of the minority carrier(s) distribution σ_2 and the
 150 fraction of the number of ions in the flat noise distribution f_{noise} , are fitted
 per drift distance. In the fit, the fraction of the number of ions from minority
 152 carrier(s) f_2 and the ratio of majority carrier mobility to the minority carrier(s)
 mobility r_2 are equal for all drift distances.

154 4. Performance

4.1. Number of hits

156 The mean total number of detected hits per laser pulse is 43. The number
 of hits can be tuned by adjusting the laser intensity, and the spread on the
 158 number of hits is dominated by per pulse variations of the laser intensity. In
 this gas, a minimum ionising particle is expected to create about 100 ionisation
 160 pairs per cm of which about 60 will be detected as hits per cm, because of the
 60% efficiency at a gain of 1000. An example event display for ionisation for a
 162 single laser pulse is shown in Figure 4.

4.2. Drift velocity measurements

164 The average drift times for the majority and minority charge carrier(s) are
 plotted as a function of the drift distance in Figure 5 for a drift field strength of
 166 300 V/cm. The drift velocity of the minority carrier is found to be 8.1% higher
 than that of the majority carrier.

168 The drift velocity of the majority carrier v_{drift} as function of the electric field
 is shown in Figure 6. The mean measured mobility is $(1.391 \pm 0.003) \text{ cm}^2/\text{V/s}$.
 170 The uncertainty of the measured mobility is estimated as the r.m.s. of the given
 values, and is probably dominated by fluctuations in the (local) temperature
 172 and gas composition. Because of the unique gas composition the mobility can-
 not directly be compared to the results from other experiments. However, the
 174 mobility is the same order of magnitude as previous measurements using gas
 mixtures containing CS_2 and argon [1], and mixtures containing CS_2 and helium
 176 [11].

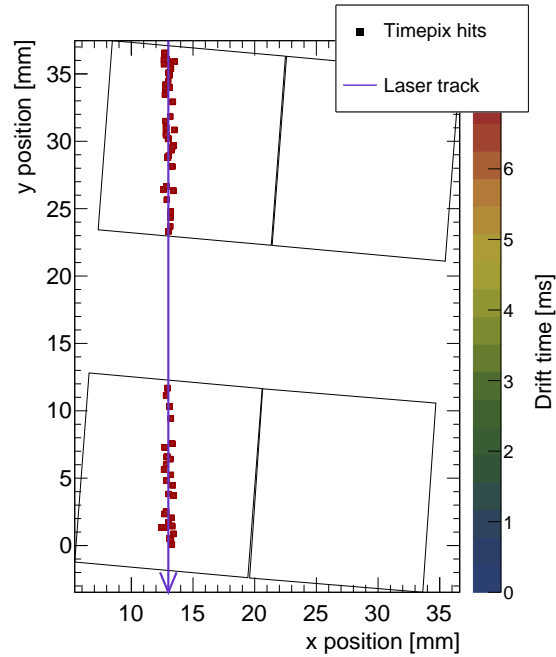


Figure 4: Example of the detected ionisation from one laser pulse with 64 hits in total. The position of the laser track (purple line) and chip edges (black outlines) are drawn in global coordinates. The pixel hits are not to scale.

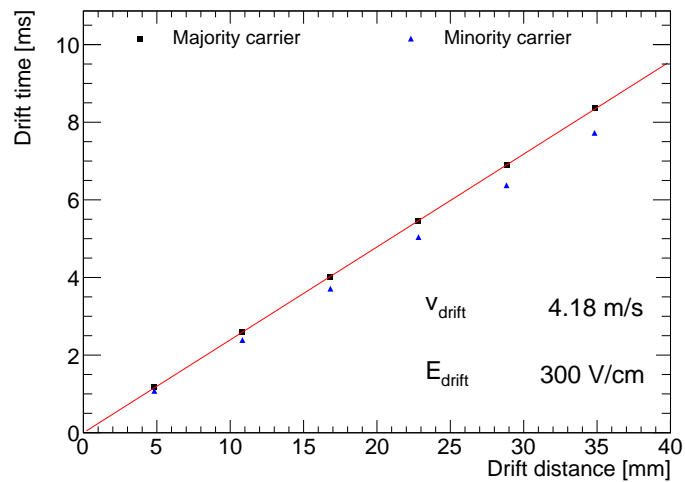


Figure 5: Drift time as a function of z -position for the majority and minority carriers

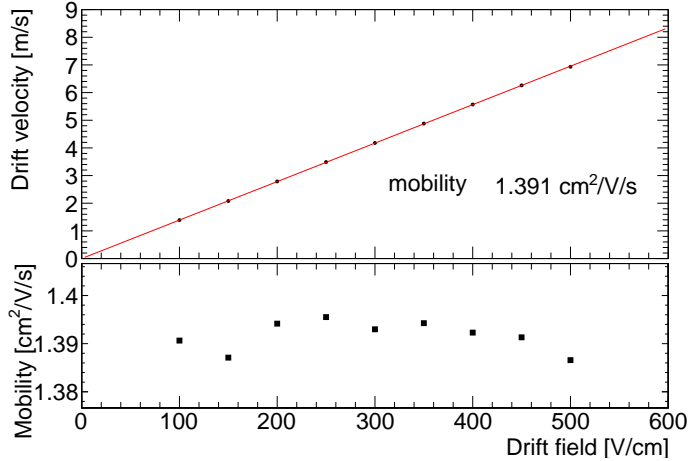


Figure 6: Drift velocity of the majority carrier ion as a function of the drift field. The mobility is acquired from a straight line fit constrained to pass through the origin (0,0).

4.3. Diffusion measurements

178 As the ions drift towards the readout plane, they diffuse which gives them
 a Gaussian spread in the longitudinal and transverse direction. The amount of
 180 diffusion is characterised by the standard deviation of the Gaussian distribution
 σ_i , where i stands for the longitudinal direction z or the transverse direction x .
 182 This can be expressed as

$$\sigma_i^2 = \sigma_{i0}^2 + D_i^2 z, \quad (2)$$

184 where σ_{i0} is the standard deviation at zero drift, D_i the diffusion coefficient,
 and z the drift distance.

186 The standard deviation is acquired from a fit to the data of one Gaussian in the
 transverse direction, or the sum of two Gaussian functions in the longitudinal
 direction, see Equation (1). The drift time is converted to a distance using
 188 the measured drift velocity v_{drift} . As an example, the standard deviation as a
 function of drift distance for the run at a drift field strength E_{drift} of 300 V/cm
 190 is shown in Figure 7.

192 The constant contribution in Equation 2 is roughly independent of the elec-
 tric field, and on average found to be $\sigma_{x0} = (94 \pm 3) \mu\text{m}$ in the transverse
 direction which can predominantly be attributed to the laser beam width plus
 194 some small per shot variation. In the longitudinal direction $\sigma_{z0} = (141 \pm 8) \mu\text{m}$
 is measured on average over all runs. This can predominantly be attributed to
 196 the laser beam width plus per shot variations, the spread on the distance trav-
 eled by electrons before they are captured by the CS_2 molecules or unrecognised
 198 minority carrier(s).

200 The diffusion coefficient depends on the electric field strength, and the mea-
 surements are shown in Figure 8. At low drift field strengths, the ions have

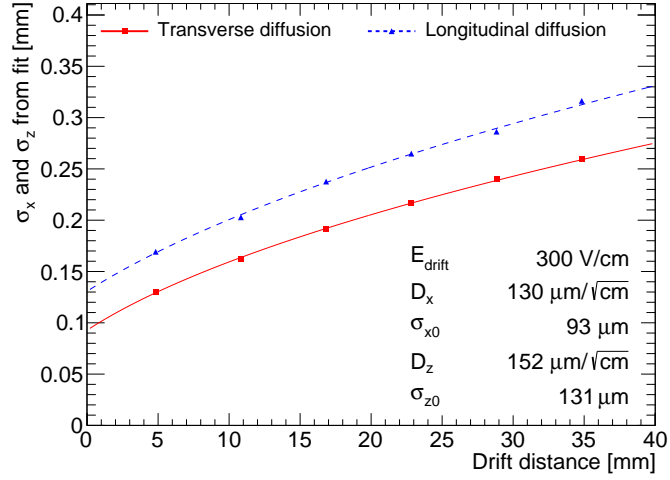


Figure 7: Standard deviation of hit positions in the transverse and longitudinal direction as a function of drift distance for the run with $E_{\text{drift}} = 300 \text{ V/cm}$. The data is fitted with Equation (2).

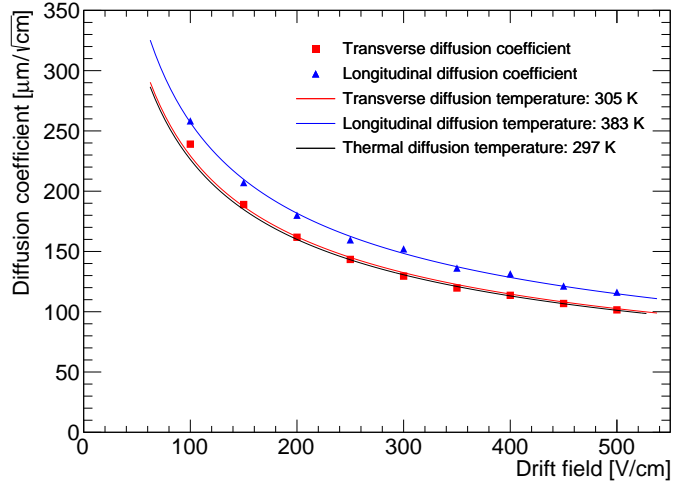


Figure 8: Diffusion coefficients in the longitudinal and transverse directions as a function of the drift field E . Both are fitted with Equation (3). For comparison the expectation for thermal diffusion is shown.

thermal energy and the diffusion coefficient can be expressed as

$$D_{\text{thermal}} = \sqrt{\frac{2k_{\text{B}}T}{eE}}, \quad (3)$$

202 where k_{B} is the Boltzmann constant, T is the temperature of the gas, e is the
 203 charge of the ion, and E is the electric field strength (see e.g. [12]). Both the
 204 transverse and longitudinal diffusion coefficients are fitted with Equation (3)
 205 with the temperature T as a free parameter. The transverse diffusion corre-
 206 sponds to an effective temperature of 305 K, which is close to the gas temper-
 207 ature. The effective temperature of the longitudinal diffusion is rather high,
 208 383 K. This could be explained by unrecognised minority carrier(s), or possibly
 209 spontaneous detaching of the electron from the CS_2^- ion, allowing the electron to
 210 drift for a short distance before being captured again by another CS_2 molecule.
 211 Alternatively, perhaps ions can change from a minority carrier(s) ion to a ma-
 212 jority carrier(s) ion and back while drifting. A simple thermal model with a
 213 $1/\sqrt{E_{\text{drift}}}$ dependence describes the data well. In both cases, the main source
 214 of uncertainty is (local) temperature fluctuations and variations in the gas com-
 215 position.

216 In other experiments using a low pressure CS_2 gas, the longitudinal diffusion
 217 is found to be in agreement with the thermal values [13]. In a 500 Torr He and
 218 200 Torr CS_2 gas mixture, longitudinal diffusion coefficients slightly below to
 219 the thermal values are found [11].

220 4.4. Reconstruction of drift distance

221 The difference in drift velocity between the majority carrier and minority
 222 carrier(s) can be used to reconstruct the absolute position in the drift direction.
 223 Previously, this technique was demonstrated in a 30:10:1 Torr $\text{CF}_4:\text{CS}_2:\text{O}_2$ gas
 224 mixture with a spread on the reconstructed drift distance of ± 2 cm [4]. A
 225 precision of 16 mm was achieved using a similar technique using an SF_6 gas [14].

226 Here, fiducialisation is applied to data from the run at the largest drift
 227 field of 500 V/cm which gives the best signal peak separation, and also has the
 228 highest oxygen concentration of about 1150 ppm. About 4.4% of the hits are
 229 attributed to the minority carrier(s), whose mobility is 8.1% higher than that
 230 of the majority carrier.

231 The reconstruction proceeds by performing per event a binned maximum
 232 likelihood fit of Equation (1) to the measured relative arrival time of ions from
 233 one or more laser pulses. A new parameter t_0 is introduced to absorb the
 234 now unknown laser pulse time. The parameters f_2 , r_2 , f_{noise} are fixed to their
 235 previously fitted values. For σ_1 Equation (2) is used, and σ_2 is by approximation
 236 fixed to σ_1 . The parameter μ_1 (the mean arrival time of the primary carrier
 237 peak) are acquired from the fit. The z -position is calculated using the measured
 238 drift velocity v_{drift} . The detected spread in the transverse direction is not utilised
 239 in the determination of the z -position.

240 By comparing the reconstructed z -position to the z -position of the laser stage
 241 for all six drift distances, the residual shown in Figure 9 is obtained. From a

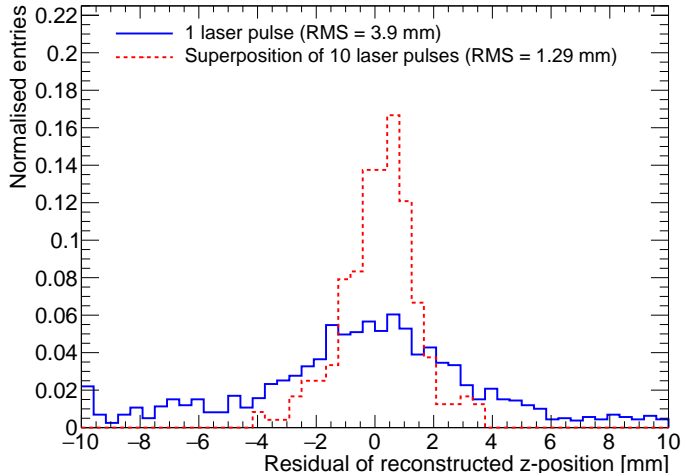


Figure 9: Residual of reconstructed z -position for 2401 laser pulses with a mean number of 43 detected ions and for 240 superpositions of ten laser pulses with a total mean number of 429 ions. The r.m.s. of the reconstructed z -positions for the single laser pulse is calculated for the 66% of the entries that fall inside the axis range.

242 single laser pulse, on average 43 ions are detected and the r.m.s. of the distri-
 243 bution is 3.9 mm for the 66 % of the laser pulses that fall within the ± 10 mm
 244 range. The determined z -position has a rather large spread, because very few
 245 minority carrier(s) ions are detected. In order to estimate the performance for a
 246 larger number of ions, a superposition of ten laser pulses at the same z -position
 247 is made by shifting their arrival times by the time difference between the laser
 248 pulses. From this we acquire emulated pulses with a mean total number of 429
 249 detected ions of which about 19 ions are attributed to the minority carrier(s).
 250 This quantity of ions, the quad is still able to detect without occupancy prob-
 251 lems. The resulting r.m.s. is 1.29 mm for the combined laser pulses and all of
 252 the entries are within the ± 4 mm range.

5. Conclusions and outlook

254 The performance of GridPix technology as a negative ion TPC readout was
 255 studied using a quad module with four Timepix3 based GridPix chips. The
 256 TPC is operated using a 93.6/5.0/1.4 gas mixture of Ar/ i C₄H₁₀/CS₂ with a
 257 small amount of oxygen and water vapour at a pressure of 1030 mbar and a
 258 temperature of 297 K. Tracks were produced by a pulsed N₂ laser. The 1.56 ns
 259 time resolution of the Timepix3 chips allows for a precise determination of
 260 the drift properties in the longitudinal direction. The measured mobility is
 261 (1.391 ± 0.003) cm²/V/s. Using the high granularity pixel readout, the trans-
 262 verse and longitudinal diffusion coefficients were measured to correspond to an

effective thermal diffusion temperature of 305 K and 383 K respectively. A simple thermal model with a $1/\sqrt{E_{\text{drift}}}$ dependence describes the data well. This confirms the expected low diffusion coefficient for ions. Furthermore, the GridPix has an efficiency of approximately 60% to detect single drift ions. By using the relative arrival time of about 19 minority carrier(s) ions, the z -position can be measured with an expected precision of 1.29 mm.

In the future, a GridPix TPC readout might be of interest to directional dark matter experiments. The often desired operation at low pressure can be investigated in combination with a GridPix readout. For these experiments gas mixtures containing SF₆ have some advantages [13], and can also be studied for operation with a GridPix readout. Alternatively, for operation around atmospheric pressure replacing Argon with the lighter Helium could increase nuclear recoils lengths important for directional dark matter searches [15].

All in all, the fine granularity and high timing precision of the GridPix TPC readout in combination with a good single ion detection efficiency, provide an excellent position resolution in the longitudinal and transverse direction.

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