The BEST Experiment

Steve Elliott, LANL

Neutrino Village & Mt. Andyrchi
North Caucasus
Kabardino-Balkarian Republic
Baksan Valley

Baksan Experiment on Sterile Transitions (BEST)

Spokesperson – Vladimir Gavrin

V.V. Barinov,[1] B.T. Cleveland,[2] S.N. Danshin,[1] H. Ejiri,[3] S.R. Elliott,[4] D. Frekers,[5] V.N. Gavrin,[1, a]
V.V. Gorbachev,[1] D.S. Gorbunov,[1] W.C. Haxton,[6, 7] T.V. Ibragimova,[1] I. Kim,[4] Yu.P. Kozlova,[1]
L.V. Kravchuk,[1] V.V. Kuzminov,[1] B.K. Lubsandorzhiev,[1] Yu.M. Malyshkin,[1] R. Massarczyk,[4]
V.A. Matveev,[8] I.N. Mirmov,[1] J.S. Nico,[9] A.L. Petelin,[10] R.G.H. Robertson,[11] D. Sinclair,[12]
A.A. Shikhin,[1] V.A. Tarasov,[10] G.V. Trubnikov,[8] E.P. Veretenkin,[1] J.F. Wilkerson,[13, 14] and A.I. Zvir[10]

[1] Institute for Nuclear Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow 117312, Russia
[2] SNOLAB, Sudbury, ON P3Y 1N2, Canada
[3] Research Center for Nuclear Physics, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan
[4] Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, NM, USA
[5] Institut für Kernphysik, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Munster, D-48149 Munster, Germany
[6] Nuclear Science Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA
[7] Department of Physics, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA
[8] Joint Institute for Nuclear Research (JINR) Joliot-Curie 6, 141980, Dubna, Moscow Region, Russia
[9] National Institute of Standards and Technology, 100 Bureau Dr, Gaithersburg, MD 20899, USA
[10] JSC 'State Scientific Center Research Institute of Atomic Reactors', Dimitrovgrad, 433510, Russia
[11] Center for Experimental Nuclear Physics and Astrophysics, and Department of Physics, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, USA
[12] Carleton University 1125 Colonel By Drive Ottawa, K1S 5B6, Canada
[13] Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA
[14] Triangle Universities Nuclear Laboratory, Durham, NC 27708, USA

Outline

The Gallium Anomaly: The measurements of the charged-current capture rate of neutrinos on ^{71}Ga from strong radioactive sources have yielded results below those expected, based on the known strength of the principal transition supplemented by theory.

- SAGE History and the Gallium Anomaly

- BEST Description and Results

- Systematic Concerns
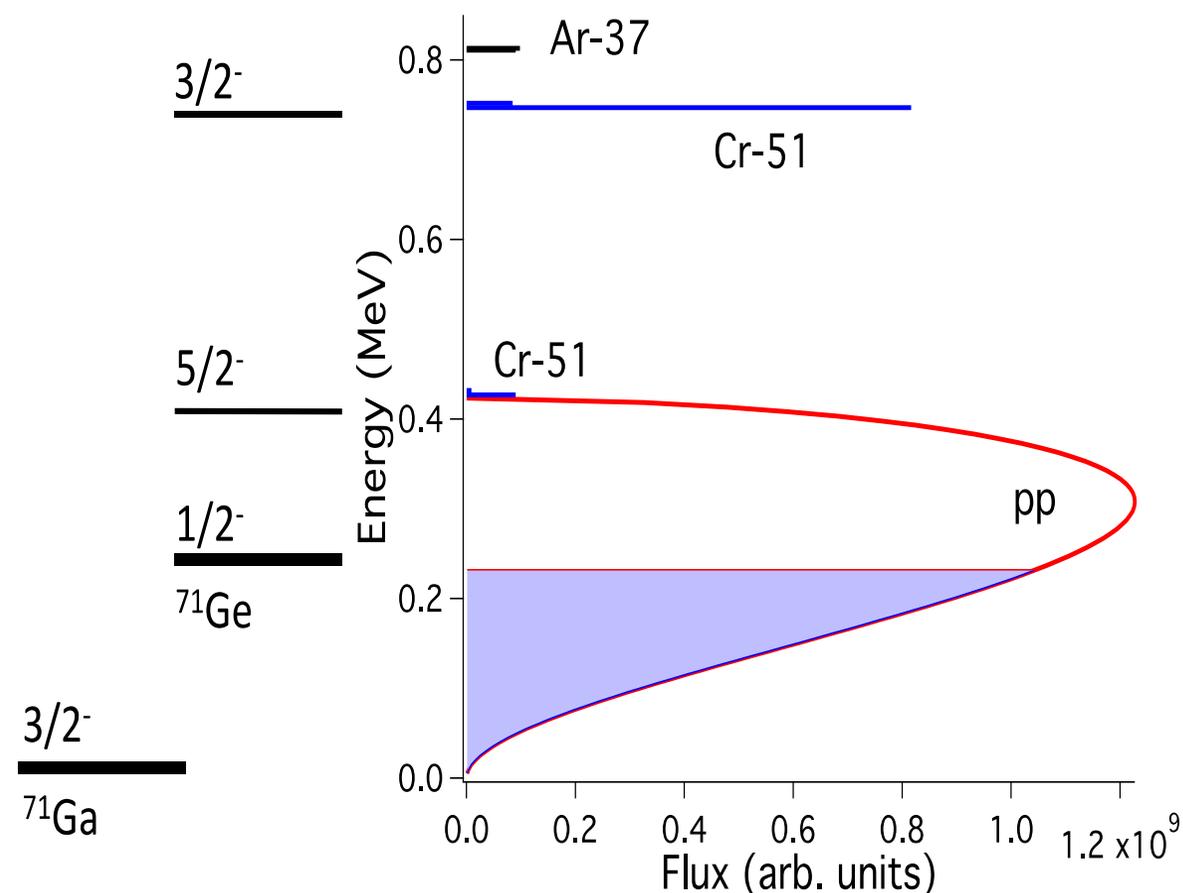
- Possible Future Measurements

Key References
BEST Coll. PRL 128 (2021) 232501
BEST Coll. PRC 105 (2021) 015031
Cross section PRC 108 (2023) 035502
PPNP review 134 (2024) 104082

Key Time Frames in the History of SAGE

- Mid 1980's, two collaborations formed to measure the low-energy neutrinos from proton-proton fusion within the Sun using Ga as a target. A well-predicted flux from the known solar luminosity.
  - The Soviet-American Gallium Experiment (SAGE).
  - The Gallium Experiment (GALLEX).

- Early 1990s, the Soviet Union separated into various states and the collaboration became the Russian-American Gallium Experiment. The new acronym seemed unfortunate and we stuck with SAGE.
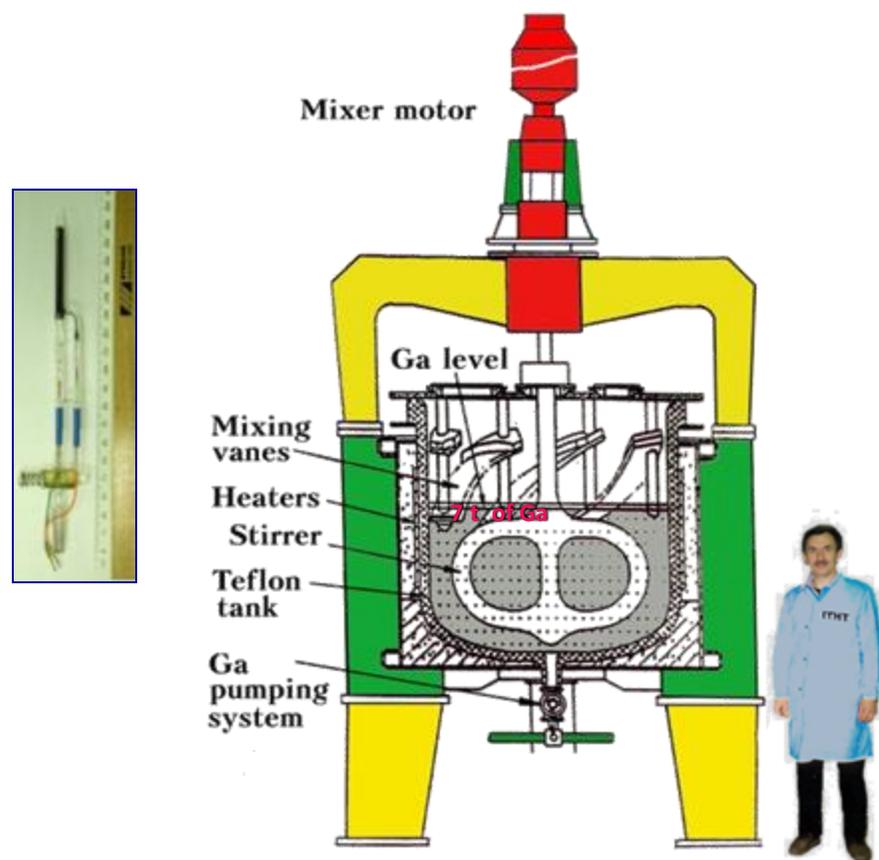
Only sensitive to ν_e.
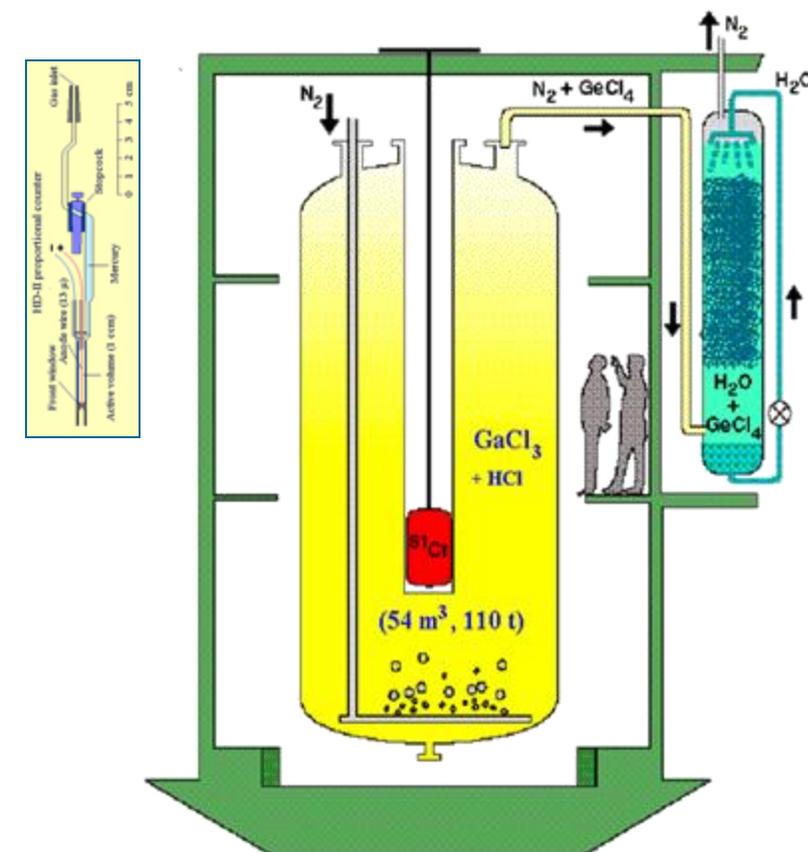
The Gallium Solar Neutrino Experiments (Kuzmin Eksp. Teor. Fiz. 49 (1965) 1532)

SAGE 50 t of Ga

GALLEX/GNO 30.3 t of Ga

Both experiments were based on radio-chemical extraction technology of a few ^{71}Ge atoms from tons of a Ga target and on technology of counting of ^{71}Ge decays in small proportional counters (~0.5 cm^3).

SAGE
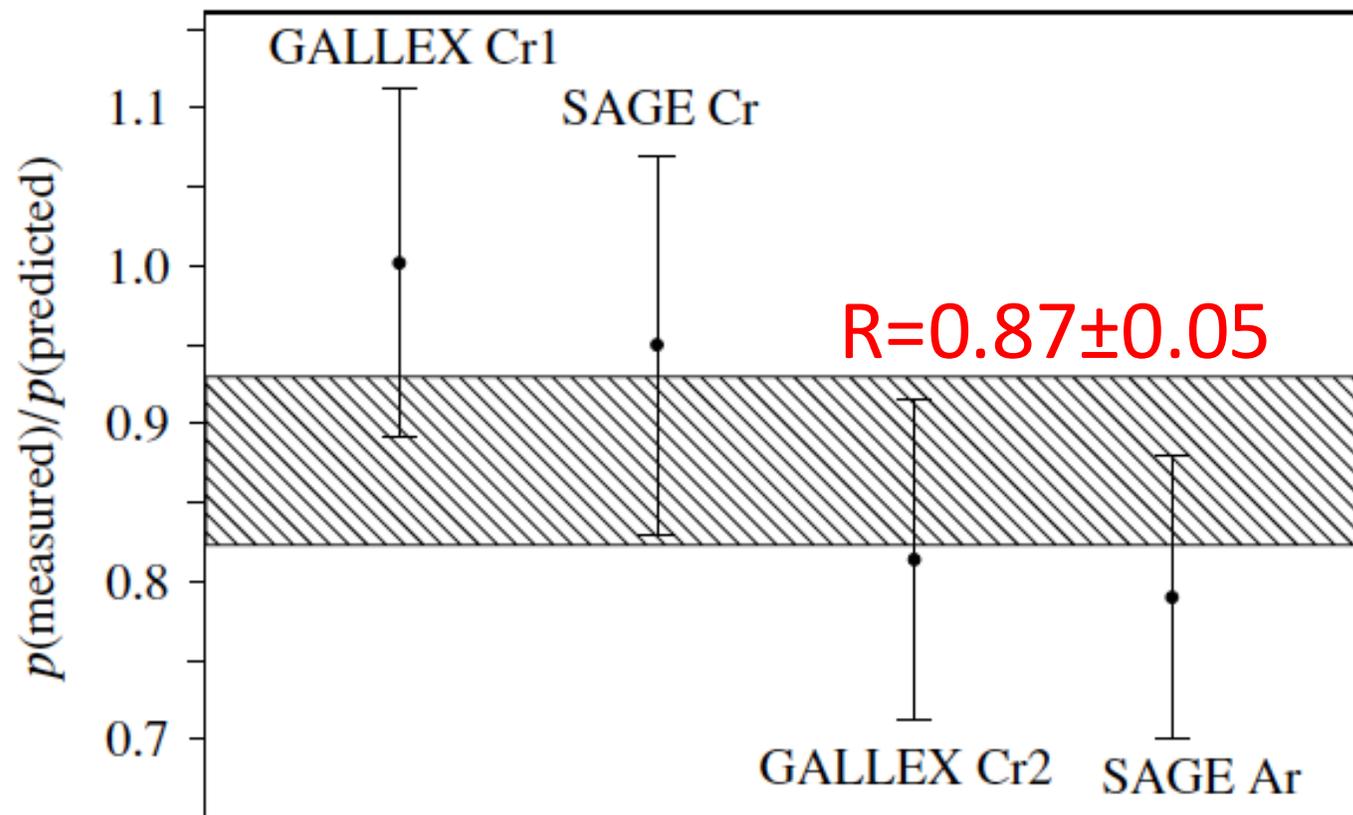

Laboratory Photo showing extraction reactors

Global intensity of muon
$(3.03 \pm 0.19) \times 10^{-9}$ /(cm^{2}s)
Fast neutron flux (>3MeV)
$(6.28 \pm 2.20) \times 10^{-8}$ /(cm^{2}s)

Source Tests of the Ga Results

The importance of the solar ν deficit led to systematic studies, including irradiation with a known ν source.

- The measured rates of $^{71}\text{Ga}(\nu_e,e)^{71}\text{Ge}$ were lower than that predicted from the known cross section and ν_e flux.
- The statistical precision was not compelling but it drew attention.
- The ν_e sources were the electron-capture isotopes, ^{51}Cr or ^{37}Ar.
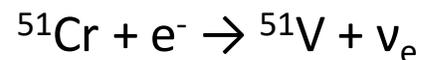

R=0.87±0.05

New Experiment: Which Hypothesis to Falsify?

- Standard model extensions to explain the sterile neutrino evidence are ubiquitous.
  - 6x6 neutrino matrix with all its mixing angles, masses and phases; CPT violation; non-standard neutrino interactions; neutrino decay; Lorentz violation; extra dimensions; energy dependent mixing parameters; dark photons; neutrinos coupled to fuzzy dark matter or dark energy; bulk neutrinos.
  - Surely more ideas will come.

- Difficult to design an experiment to verify or falsify such an hypothesis.
  - There is always a caveat to any null experiment.

- Better to design an experiment to test the hypothesis that the Ga anomaly is real.
  - Although BEST was designed with some oscillation sensitivity,
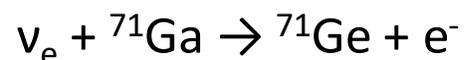 - it was, in particular, a high-sensitivity test to falsify the premise that the Ga anomaly is real.

Source Measurement Overview

- Neutrinos produced at center of Ga by ^{51}Cr decay:

$$^{51}Cr + e^- \rightarrow {}^{51}V + \nu_e$$

- This is a well-understood monochromatic spectrum of a compact source. The source intensity is well measured.

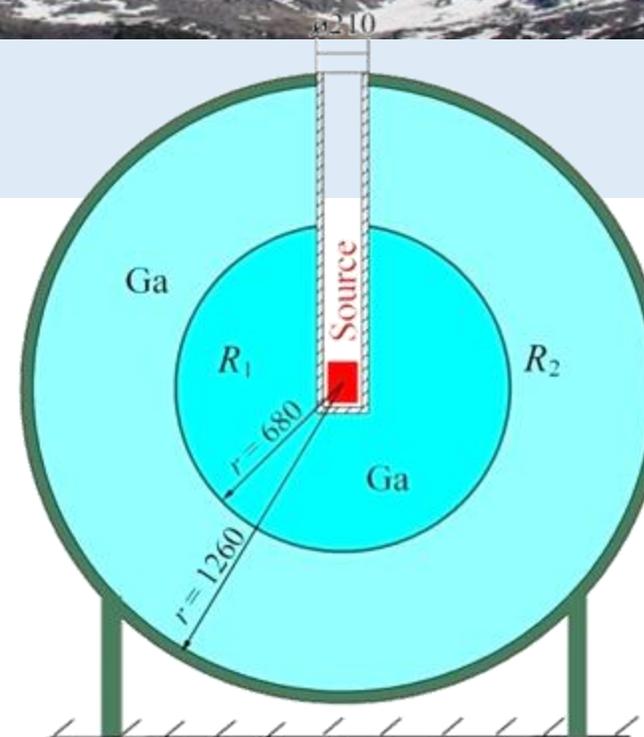- These neutrinos are detected via a charged-current (CC) reaction on Ga surrounding the source:

$$\nu_e + {}^{71}Ga \rightarrow {}^{71}Ge + e^-$$

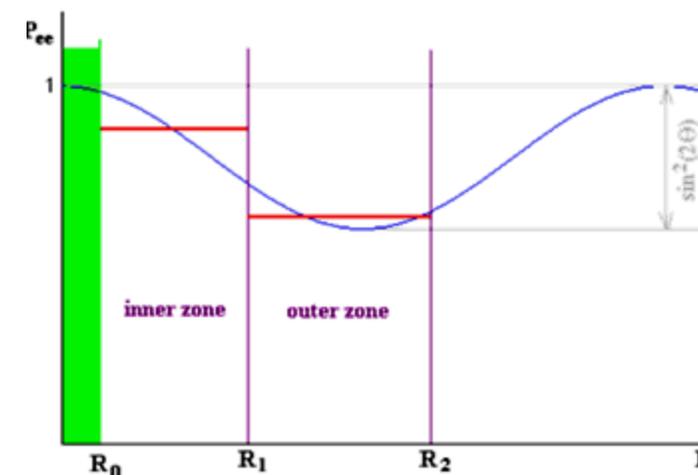- ^{71}Ge is radioactive and can be counted when it decays.

- Almost zero ν background. Mainly from the Sun.

   The source, 3.4 MCi, greatly exceeds the solar rate.

- Well established experimental procedures for extraction and counting of the ^{71}Ge developed in SAGE solar measurements.

Schematic drawing of the BEST neutrino source experiment.
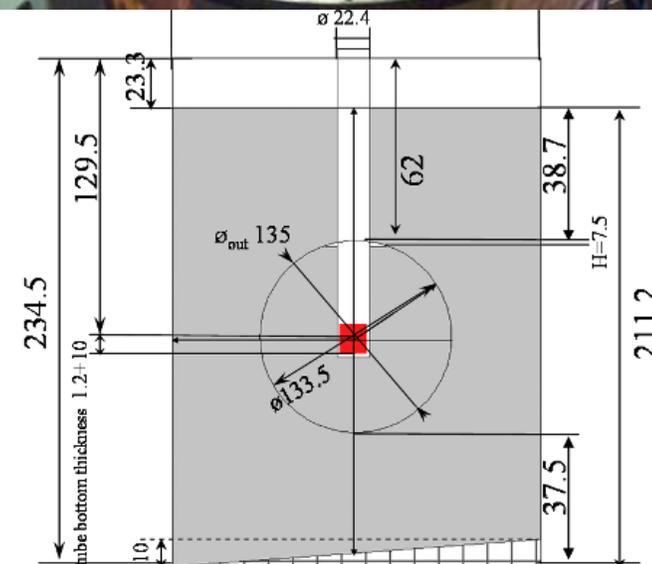
BEST Schedule

Construction began 2011

Source Arrived: July 5, 2019
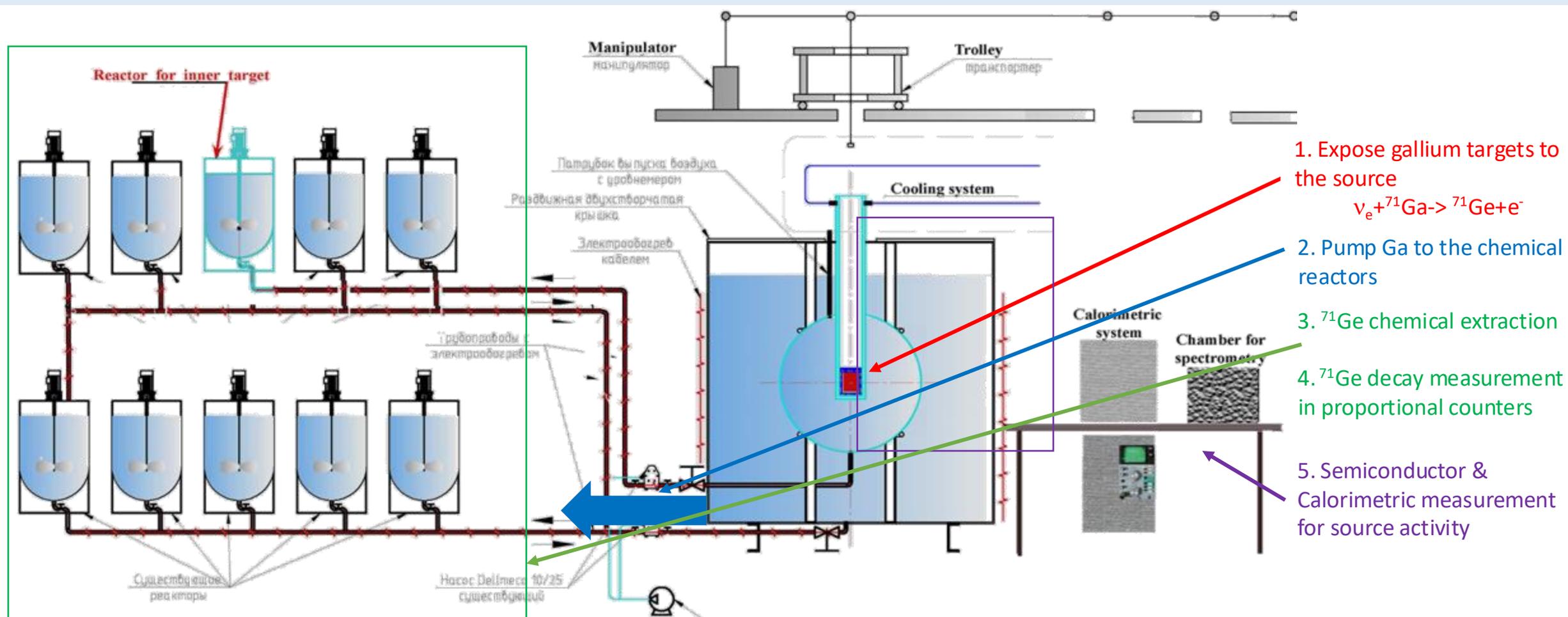
Exposures: July 5 – Oct. 13, 2019

Counting: July 16, 2019 – Mar. 20, 2020

Counter Calibration: Mar. 2020 – Jan. 2021

PRL draft posted: Sept. 2021

Installation and Operation

1. Expose gallium targets to the source
$$\nu_e + {}^{71}Ga \rightarrow {}^{71}Ge + e^-$$

2. Pump Ga to the chemical reactors

3. ^{71}Ge chemical extraction

4. ^{71}Ge decay measurement in proportional counters

5. Semiconductor & Calorimetric measurement for source activity

^{51}Cr Source (JINST 16 (2021) P04012)

Neutrino Source

Transport Container

Measurement Cell
Of Calorimeter

Ga Target
Containment

Activity at 14:02 on July 5, 2019
A = 3.414 ± 0.008 MCi
Energy/decay = 36.750 ± 0.84 keV

Flow Meter

Temp. Buffer

Circulation thermostat

Pump

Cr Source

Measurement Cell

^{71}Ge Decay

Auger decays produce point-like ionization in gas. In contrast β's or Compton recoils might deposit a similar amount of energy, but over an extended path.

Leads to a pulse shape analysis technique to remove them. BEST fits the pulse waveform.

ADP (Cl expt.): Astrophys. J. 496 (1998) 505
Pulse fit: NIM A290 (1990) 158
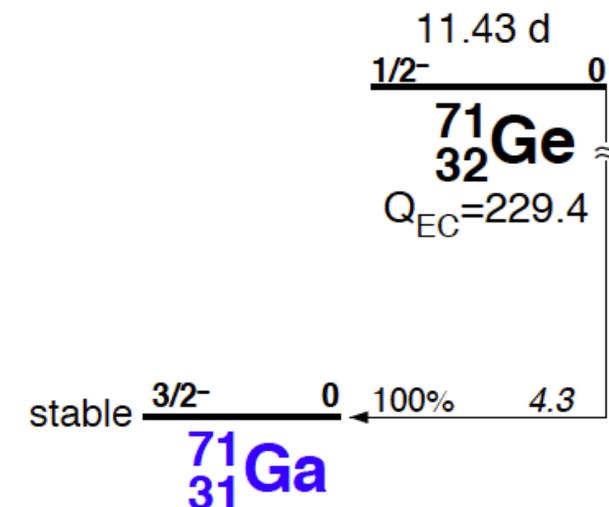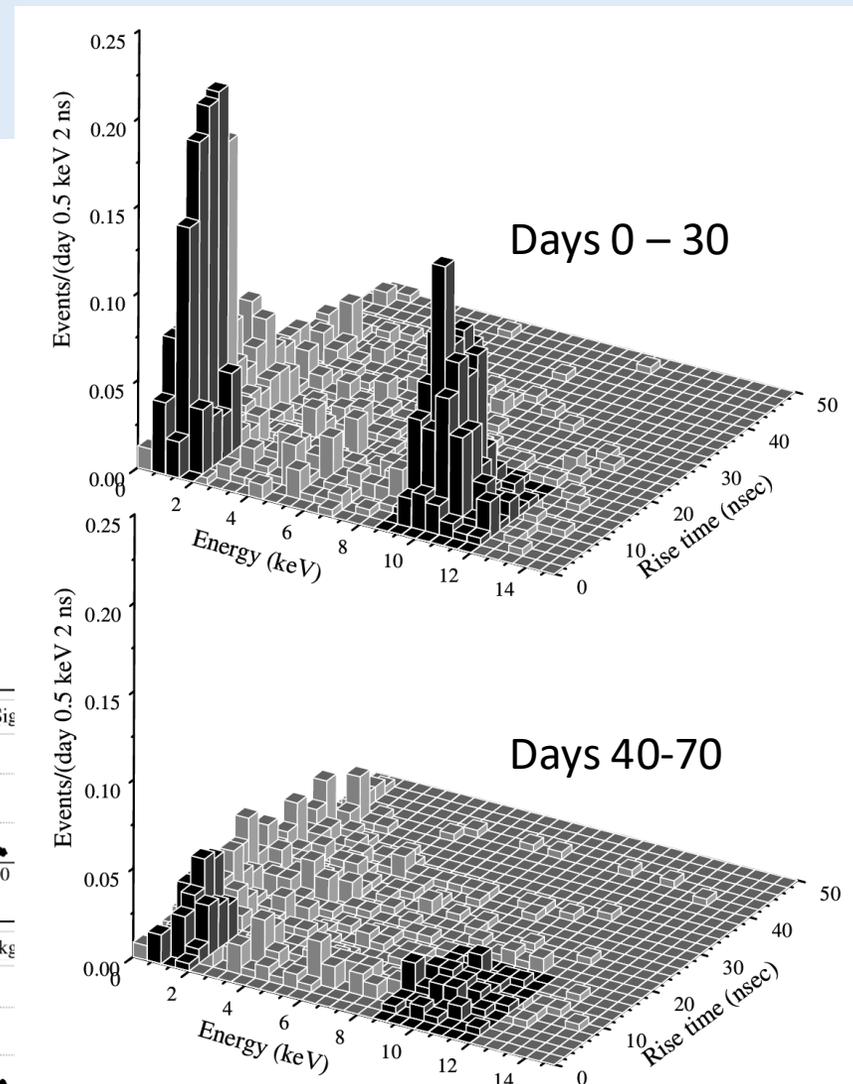
- Half-life of 11.43 d, ground state transition
  - New measurement 11.468±0.008 d
  - K Capture (88% of all decays)
  - 41.5% Auger e- 10.367 keV
  - 41.2% Auger e- 1.2 keV & x ray 9.2 keV
  - 5.3% Auger e- 0.12 keV & x ray 10.26 keV

- L and M capture give almost entirely Auger e-
  - L gives 1.2 keV Auger, M gives 0.12 keV Auger

- The proportional counter observes Auger e- with high efficiency
  - The X ray efficiency is much less
  - As a result, the measured number of K/L peak counts are about equal

^{71}Ge Candidate Event Selection

- Energy calibration

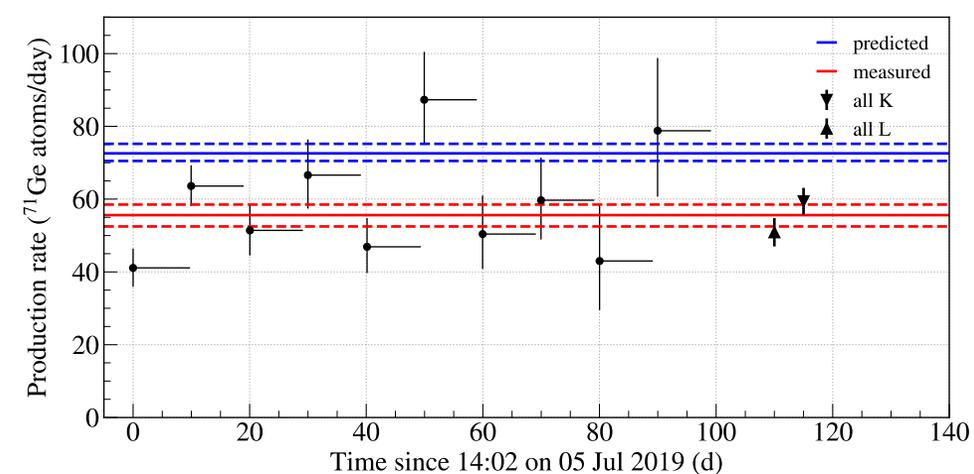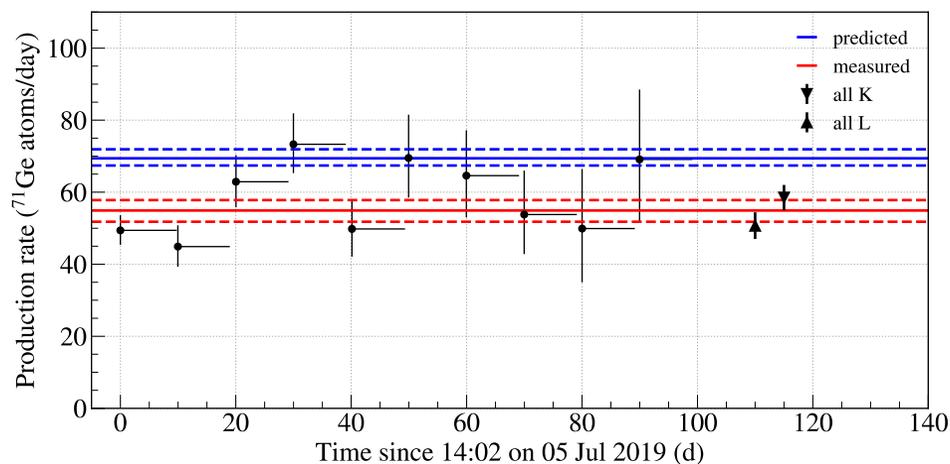- Time tagging
  - Periods of expected high background
    - Reject 2.6-hour periods after shield opening for Rn
  - Anti-coincidence with NaI system
  - Pulse shape analysis
    - Alpha-induced events
    - High-voltage breakdowns
    - Compton scattering
    - Beta-induced backgrounds

~1.5 evts /day

Risetime (RT) of the pulses

Counting Results: Ten 10-day exposures of each zone

Perform Exposures until Cr has decayed away.

Inner Zone
Blue=predicted
Red=measured

Combined Analysis after Update σ. Small Change.

Combined result:
$$R_0 = 0.82 \pm 0.05$$
Correlated Uncertainties

FIG. 8. Allowed regions for two GALLEX, two SAGE and two BEST results. The best-fit point is $\sin^2 2\theta = 0.33$, $\Delta m^2 = 1.25$ eV^2 and is indicated by a point.
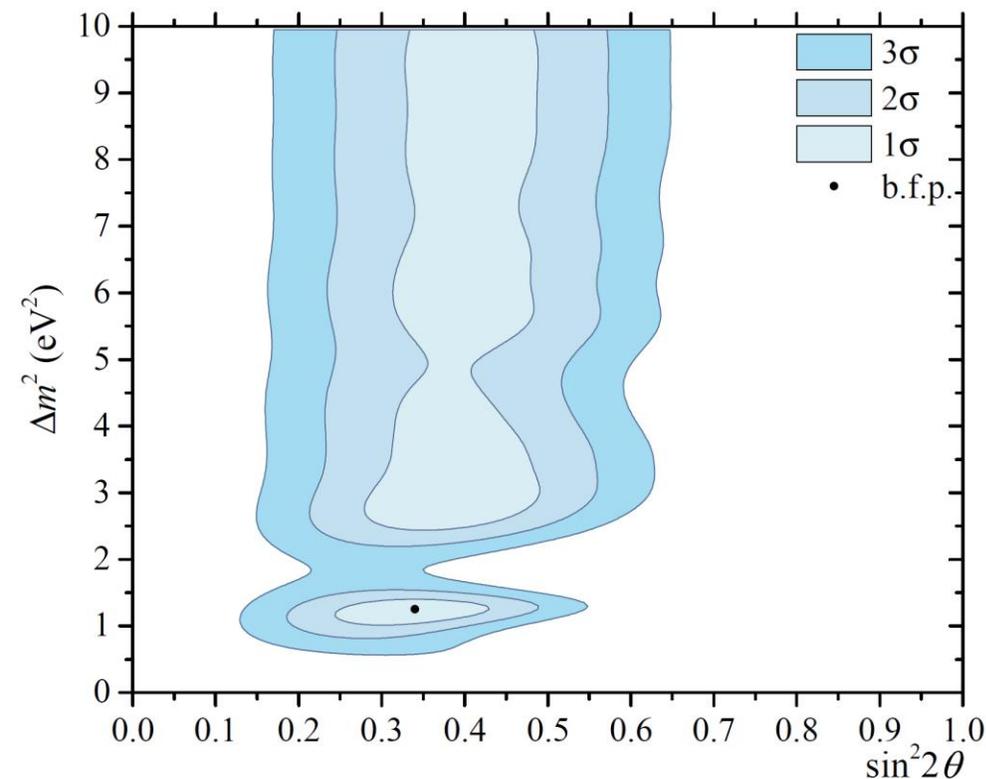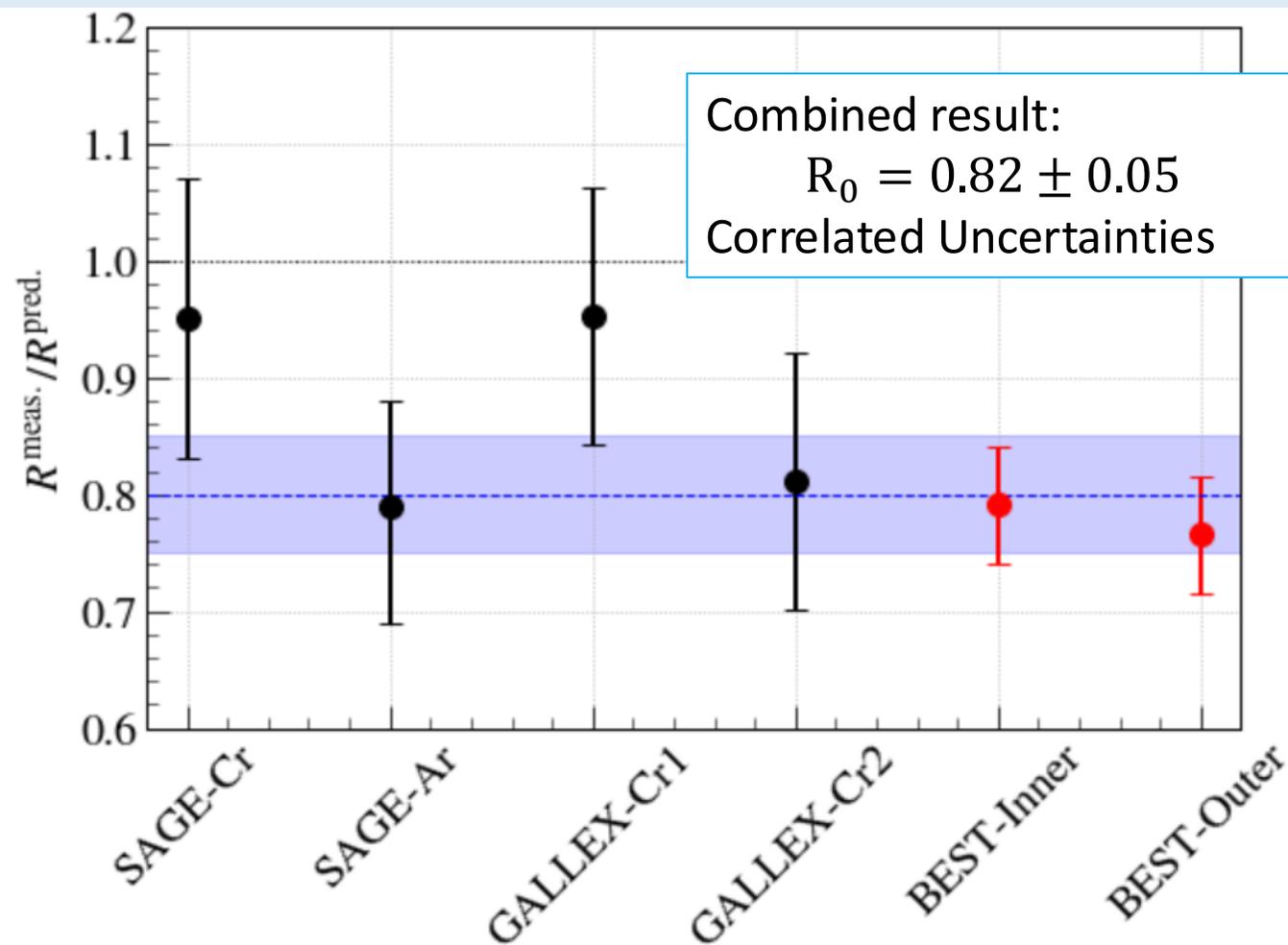
Much Tension with Other Oscillation Results

BEST Best-fit point
$$\Delta m^2 = 1.25 \,, \sin^2 2\theta = 0.34$$

Coherent Scattering

arXiv:2310.13194

Recent KATRIN Results

DANSS: Int. J. Mod. Phys. A **35**, 2044015 (2020)
Prospect: PRD **103**,032001 (2021)
Stereo: PRD **102**, 052002 (2020)
RENO+NEOS: arXiv:2011.00896 (2020)
KATRIN: PRL **126**, 091803 (2021), arXiv:2503.18667

MicroBooNE: arXiv:2111.10359
RAA: PRD **83**, 073006 (2011)
Neutrino-4: JETP Lett. **112**, 199 (2020)
Model indep. solar: PLB **816**, 136214 (2021)
Coherent ν scattering: arXiv:2310.13194

Consistent with, but not Proof of, Oscillations

These results reaffirm the Ga anomaly, with higher statistical precision.

But no dependence on oscillation length was observed. So although the results are consistent with oscillations, there is no 'smoking gun' evidence that is not subject to caveats.

Because the rate in the two volumes is equally depressed, a number of potential explanations beyond oscillations have been considered. No clear alternative has been identified.

- Cross Section
- Source Strength
- Extraction Efficiencies
- Counting Efficiencies
- Average Path Length

Possible Future Experiment

If oscillations, the oscillation length is short (large Δm^2). BEST has poor Δm^2 resolution for values greater than ~2 eV^2.

- Smaller inner volume probably not feasible.
  - Half the volume, need 8x the source strength.

- Three target zones – more distance sensitivity

- ^{65}Zn Source (PRD 97 (2018) 073001)
  - Higher energy source (1.35 MeV vs. 0.75 MeV).
  - Almost twice the cross section.
    - But adds excited states.
  - 6-7 kg of enriched ^{64}Zn to produce 0.5 MCi.
  - About 9x longer half life (244 d), many more events.
- ^{58}Co under investigation (arXiv:2501.08127)
  - 1.50 MeV neutrinos, 70.8 days

Regions where inner/outer both about 0.8 of expectation

$Sin^2 2\theta = 0.33$

Summary: see arXiv:2109.11482

- BEST measured the ^{71}Ge production in Ga from neutrinos emitted by ^{51}Cr at two distances.

- The ratio of the measured-to-predicted rates in both the inner and outer zones are depressed by about 20% from unity. The ratio-of-ratios is ~1.

- The Ga Anomaly is reaffirmed.

- No dependence on oscillation length was observed.

Construction started in 2011

2-Zone Gallium Target

Calorimeter

Lead chamber

Source

Well-Understood Neutrino Spectrum

26 Cr disks

Stainless
steel

^{51}Cr (27.7 days)

427 keV ν (9.0%)
432 keV ν (0.9%)

747 keV ν (81.6%)
752 keV ν (8.5%)

320 keV γ

^{51}V (stable)

4 kg 97%-enriched ^{50}Cr,
h = 4 mm, ⌀ 84 and 88 mm.

Irradiated for ~100 days with thermal neutrons (RIAR, Dmitrovgrad)
Thermal neutron flux density – 5×10^{15} n/(cm^2 s)

Predicted vs. Measured Production Rates (BEST PRC, old σ)

K+L-peak

Extraction	Number of candidate events	Number fit to ^{71}Ge	^{51}Cr source production	Solar ν production	Carryover	^{71}Ge Production decay rate (atoms/day)
Inner-1	180	176.3	175.5	0.8	0.0	$49.4^{+4.0}_{-4.2}$
Inner-2	129	111.5	107.7	0.8	3.1	$44.9^{+5.6}_{-5.9}$
Inner-3	132	117.6	115.3	0.7	1.6	$62.9^{+7.1}_{-7.4}$
Inner-4	93	87.3	85.6	0.6	1.1	$73.3^{+8.0}_{-8.6}$
Inner-5	134	60.2	58.4	0.6	1.2	$49.8^{+7.7}_{-8.2}$
Inner-6	81	48.8	47.7	0.4	0.7	$69.5^{+11.0}_{-12.0}$
Inner-7	91	45.0	43.9	0.5	0.6	$64.6^{+11.6}_{-12.6}$
Inner-8	59	33.6	32.4	0.6	0.6	$53.8^{+11.0}_{-12.2}$
Inner-9	106	23.7	22.7	0.6	0.4	$49.9^{+14.9}_{-16.5}$
Inner-10	88	25.2	24.3	0.6	0.3	$69.1^{+17.3}_{-19.4}$
Comb. K+L	1093	724.0	708.2	6.1	9.7	$54.9^{+2.4}_{-2.5}$

K+L-peak

Extraction	Number of candidate events	Number fit to ^{71}Ge	^{51}Cr source production	Solar ν production	Carryover	^{71}Ge Production decay rate (atoms/day)
Outer-1	181	133.4	129.6	3.7	0.1	$41.1^{+5.2}_{-5.3}$
Outer-2	174	163.8	158.6	3.3	1.9	$63.6^{+5.5}_{-5.7}$
Outer-3	116	92.5	88.2	2.8	1.5	$51.4^{+6.9}_{-7.3}$
Outer-4	98	82.3	78.9	2.5	0.8	$66.6^{+9.2}_{-9.8}$
Outer-5	120	64.0	59.5	3.5	1.0	$46.9^{+7.2}_{-7.9}$
Outer-6	97	62.3	59.3	2.6	0.4	$87.3^{+12.3}_{-13.2}$
Outer-7	69	38.0	34.4	3.2	0.4	$50.4^{+9.6}_{-10.6}$
Outer-8	68	43.4	39.2	3.9	0.4	$59.7^{+10.8}_{-11.7}$
Outer-9	66	20.2	17.0	3.0	0.2	$43.0^{+13.5}_{-15.3}$
Outer-10	81	31.8	28.0	3.6	0.2	$78.8^{+18.1}_{-20.0}$
Comb. K+L	1069	738.8	699.8	32.2	6.8	$55.6^{+2.6}_{-2.7}$

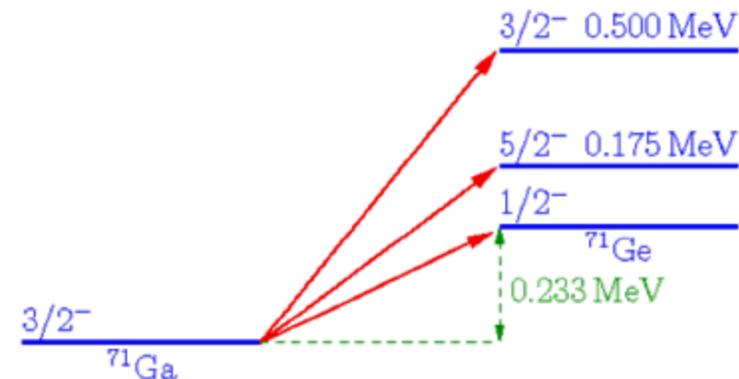|	IN	OUT
Predicted	$69.41^{+2.5}_{-2.0}$	$72.59^{+2.6}_{-2.1}$
Measured	54.9 ± 2.9	55.6 ± 3.1
Ratio	0.79 ± 0.05	0.77 ± 0.05

4.2σ and 4.8σ less than the unity

$$\text{Note: } \frac{0.77 \pm 0.05}{0.79 \pm 0.05} = 0.97 \pm 0.07$$

Similar deficits observed in both zones

Haxton and Rule cross section analysis (PRC 108 (2023) 035502)

$$\sigma_{\text{gs}} = \frac{G_F^2 \cos^2\theta_C}{\pi} \, p_e E_e \mathcal{F}(Z_f, E_e) \, g_A^2 \, \tilde{B}_{\text{GT}}^{(\nu,e)}(\text{gs}) \, \frac{[1 + g_{v,b}]_{(\nu,e)}}{[1 + g_{v,b}]_{EC}} \, [1 + \epsilon_q].$$

- Recent re-examination of the cross section and its uncertainties.

- Considered effects not previously evaluated, weak magnetism, non-universality in radiative corrections. These turned out to be small (~0.5% each).

- Developed shell-model technique to estimate the interference between Gamow-Teller and Tensor contributions to the charge exchange measurements. This is critical when the GT strength is small – like the case of ^{71}Ga.
  - Compared to experimental cases of (p,n) and beta decay amplitudes.
  - Found $(5.69^{+0.28}_{-0.06}) \times 10^{-46}$ cm^2 compared to Bahcall $(5.81^{+0.21}_{-0.16}) \times 10^{-46}$ cm^2.
  - Agrees to 1σ.

BEST Extraction Procedure (PRC 60 (1999) 055801)

^{71}Ge extraction (30 hours in *total*) :

1) Add Ge carrier to Ga.

2) Pump Ga from each zone to chemical reactors:
   inner zone → 1 reactor, outer zone → 6 reactors.

2) The Ge is extracted through an oxidation reaction.

4) The gas GeH_4 is synthesized, mixed with Xe, and
   placed into a proportional counter.

5) ^{71}Ge decays are counted. *(60 – 150 days)*

Mixer motor

Ga level

Mixing vanes

Heaters

Stirrer

Teflon tank

Ga pumping system