High-energy neutrino follow-up search of gravitational wave event GW150914 with ANTARES and IceCube

S. Adrián-Martínez et al.*

(ANTARES Collaboration, IceCube Collaboration, LIGO Scientific Collaboration, and Virgo Collaboration)

(Received 21 February 2016; published 23 June 2016)

We present the high-energy-neutrino follow-up observations of the first gravitational wave transient GW150914 observed by the Advanced LIGO detectors on September 14, 2015. We search for coincident neutrino candidates within the data recorded by the IceCube and ANTARES neutrino detectors. A possible joint detection could be used in targeted electromagnetic follow-up observations, given the significantly better angular resolution of neutrino events compared to gravitational waves. We find no neutrino candidates in both temporal and spatial coincidence with the gravitational wave event. Within the gravitational wave event, the number of neutrino candidates detected by IceCube and ANTARES were three and zero, respectively. This is consistent with the expected atmospheric background, and none of the neutrino candidates were directionally coincident with GW150914. We use this nondetection to constrain neutrino emission from the gravitational-wave event.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevD.93.122010

I. INTRODUCTION

Advanced LIGO’s first observation periods [1,2] represent a major step in probing the dynamical origin of high-energy emission from cosmic transients [3]. The significant improvement in gravitational wave (GW) search sensitivity enables a comprehensive multimessenger observational effort involving partner electromagnetic observatories from radio to gamma-rays, as well as neutrino detectors. The goals of multimessenger observations are to gain a more complete understanding of cosmic processes through a combination of information from different probes, and to increase search sensitivity over an analysis using a single messenger [4–6].

The merger of neutron stars and black holes, and potentially massive stellar core collapse with rapidly rotating cores, are expected to be significant sources of GWs [3]. These events can result in a black hole plus accretion disk system that drives a relativistic outflow [7,8]. Energy dissipation in the outflow produces nonthermal, high-energy radiation that is observed as gamma-ray bursts (GRBs), and may have a $\gg$GeV neutrino component at comparable luminosities.

Multiple detectors have been built that can search for this high-energy neutrino signature, including the IceCube Neutrino Observatory—a cubic-kilometer facility at the South Pole [9–11], and ANTARES [12–14] in the Mediterranean sea. The construction of the KM3NeT cubic-kilometer scale neutrino detector in the Mediterranean Sea has started in December 2015 with the successful deployment of the first detection string [15]. IceCube is planning a substantial increase in sensitivity with near-future upgrades [16,17]. Another facility, the Baikal Neutrino Telescope is also planning an upgrade to cubic-kilometer volume [18]. An astrophysical high-energy neutrino flux has recently been discovered by IceCube [19–22], demonstrating the production of nonthermal high-energy neutrinos. The specific origin of this neutrino flux is currently unknown. Multimessenger analyses constrain the common sources of high-energy neutrinos and GWs have been carried out in the past with both ANTARES and IceCube [23–25].

On September 14, 2015 at 09:50:45 UTC, a highly significant GW signal was recorded by the LIGO Hanford, WA and Livingston, LA detectors [26]. The event, labeled GW150914, was produced by a stellar-mass binary black hole merger at redshift $z \approx 0.09^{+0.03}_{-0.04}$. The reconstructed mass of each black hole is $\sim 30 M_\odot$. Such a system may produce electromagnetic emission and emit neutrinos if the merger happens in a sufficiently baryon-dense environment, and a black hole plus accretion disk system is formed [27]. Current consensus is that such a scenario is unlikely, nevertheless, there are no significant observational constraints.

Here we report the results of a neutrino follow-up search of GW150914 using ANTARES and IceCube. After brief descriptions of the GW search (Sec. II) and the neutrino follow-up (Sec. III), we present the joint analysis, results of the search and source constraints, and conclusions (Sec. IV).

II. GRAVITATIONAL WAVE DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCOVERY

GW150914 was initially identified by low-latency searches for generic GW transients [28–30]. Subsequent...
analysis with three independent matched-filter analyses using models of compact binary coalescence waveforms [31,32] confirmed that the event was produced by the merger of two black holes. The analyses established a false alarm rate of less than 1 event per 203000 years, equivalent to a significance >5.1σ [26]. Source parameters were reconstructed using the LALInference package [32–34], finding black-hole masses $36_{-6}^{+5} \, M_\odot$ and $29_{-4}^{+3} \, M_\odot$ and luminosity distance $D_{gw} = 410_{-160}^{+180} \, \text{Mpc}$, where the error ranges correspond to the range of the 90% credible interval. The duration of the signal within LIGO’s sensitive band was 0.2 s.

The directional point spread function (sky map) of the GW event was computed through the full parameter estimation of the signal, carried out using the LALInference package [33,34]. The LALInference results presented here account for calibration uncertainty in the GW strain signal. The sky map is shown in Fig. 1. At 90% (50%) credible level (CL), the sky map covers 610 deg$^2$ (150 deg$^2$).

III. HIGH-ENERGY NEUTRINO COINCIDENCE SEARCH

High-energy neutrino observatories are primarily sensitive to neutrinos with $\gg$GeV energies. IceCube and ANTARES are both sensitive to through-going muons (called track events), produced by neutrinos near the detector, above $\sim$100 GeV. In this analysis, ANTARES data include only up-going tracks for events originating from the Southern hemisphere, while IceCube data include both up-going tracks (from the Northern hemisphere) as well as down-going tracks (from the Southern hemisphere). The energy threshold of neutrino candidates increases in the Southern hemisphere for IceCube, since downward-going atmospheric muons are not filtered by the Earth, greatly increasing the background at lower energies. Neutrino times of arrival are determined at $\mu$s precision.

Since neutrino telescopes continuously take data observing the whole sky, it is possible to look back and search for neutrino counterparts to an interesting GW signal at any time around the GW observation.

To search for neutrinos coincident with GW150914, we used a time window of $\pm$500 s around the GW transient. This search window, which was used in previous GW-neutrino searches, is a conservative, observation-based upper limit on the plausible emission of GWs and high-energy neutrinos in the case of GRBs, which are thought to be driven by a stellar-mass black hole—accretion disk system [35]. While the relative time of arrival of GWs and neutrinos can be informative [36–38], here we do not use detailed temporal information beyond the $\pm$500 s time window.

The search for high-energy neutrino candidates recorded by IceCube within $\pm$500 s of GW150914 used IceCube’s online event stream. The online event stream implements an event selection similar to the event selection used for neutrino point source searches [39], but optimized for real-time performance at the South Pole. This event selection consists primarily of cosmic-ray-induced background events, with an expectation per 1000 seconds of 2.2 events in the Northern sky (atmospheric neutrinos), and 2.2 events in the Southern sky (high-energy atmospheric muons). In the search window of $\pm$500 s centered on the GW alert time (see below), one event was found in the Southern sky and two in the Northern sky, which is consistent with the background expectation. The properties of these events are listed in Table I. The neutrino candidates’ directions are shown in Fig. 1.

The muon energy in Table I is reconstructed assuming a single muon is producing the event. While the event from the Southern hemisphere has a significantly greater reconstructed energy [41] than the other two events, 12.5% of the background events in the same declination range in the Southern hemisphere have energies in excess of the one observed. The intense flux of atmospheric muons and bundles of muons that constitute the background for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>$\Delta T$ [s]</th>
<th>RA [h]</th>
<th>Dec [°]</th>
<th>$\sigma_{E_{\mu}}$ [°]</th>
<th>$E_{rec}$ [TeV]</th>
<th>Fraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>+37.2</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>-16.6</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+163.2</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+311.4</td>
<td>-7.23</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IceCube in the Southern hemisphere gradually falls as the cosmic ray flux declines with energy [42]. The use of energy cuts to remove most of this background is the reason that IceCube’s sensitivity in the Southern sky is shifted to higher energies.

An additional search was performed using the high-energy starting event selection described in [19]. No events were found in coincidence with GW150914.

The IceCube detector also has sensitivity to outbursts of MeV neutrinos (as occur for example in core-collapse supernovae) via a sudden increase in the photomultiplier rates [43]. The global photomultiplier noise rate is monitored continuously, and deviations sufficient to trigger the lowest-level of alert occur roughly once per hour. No alert was triggered during the ±500 s time window around the GW candidate event.

The search for coincident neutrinos for ANTARES within ±500 s of GW150914 used ANTARES’s online reconstruction pipeline [44]. A fast and robust algorithm [45] selected up-going neutrino candidates with \( \sim \) mHz rate, with atmospheric muon contamination less than 10%. In addition, to reduce the background of atmospheric neutrinos [46], a requirement of a minimum reconstructed energy reduced the online event rate to 1.2 events/day. Consequently, for ANTARES the expected number of neutrino candidates from the Southern sky in a 1000 s window in the Southern sky is 0.015. We found no neutrino events from ANTARES that were temporally coincident with GW150914. This is consistent with the expected background event rate.

### IV. RESULTS

#### A. Joint analysis

We carried out the joint GW and neutrino search following the analysis developed for previous GW and neutrino data sets using initial GW detectors [23,25,35,47]. After identifying the GW event GW150914 with the cWB pipeline, we used reconstructed neutrino candidates to search for temporal and directional coincidences between GW150914 and neutrinos. We assumed that the a priori source directional distribution is uniform. For temporal coincidence, we searched within a ±500 s time window around GW150914.

The relative difference in propagation time for \( \gg \) GeV neutrinos and GWs (which travel at the speed of light in general relativity) traveling to Earth from the source is expected to be \( \ll 1 \) s. The relative propagation time between neutrinos and GWs may change in alternative gravity models [48,49]. However, discrepancies from general relativity could in principle be probed with a joint GW-neutrino detection by comparing the arrival times against the expected time frame of emission.

Directionally, we searched for overlap between the GW sky map and the neutrino point spread functions, assumed to be Gaussian with standard deviation \( \sigma_{\mu\text{rec}} \) (see Table I).

The search identified no ANTARES neutrino candidates that were temporally coincident with GW150914.

For IceCube, none of the three neutrino candidates temporally coincident with GW150914 were compatible with the GW direction at 90% CL. Additionally, the reconstructed energy of the neutrino candidates with respect to the expected background does not make them significant. See Fig. 1 for the directional relation of GW150914 and the IceCube neutrino candidates detected within the ±500 s window. This nondetection is consistent with our expectation from a binary black hole merger.

To better understand the probability that the detected neutrino candidates are consistent with background, we briefly consider different aspects of the data separately. First, the number of detected neutrino candidates, i.e. 3 and 0 for IceCube and ANTARES, respectively, is fully consistent with the expected background rate of 4.4 and \( \ll 1 \) for the two detectors, with p-value \( 1 - F_{\text{pois}}(N_{\text{observed}} \leq 2, N_{\text{expected}} = 4.4) = 0.81 \), where \( F_{\text{pois}} \) is the Poisson cumulative distribution function. Second, for the most significant reconstructed muon energy (Table I), 12.5% of background events will have greater muon energy. The probability that at least one neutrino candidate, out of 3 detected events, has an energy high enough to make it appear even less background-like, is \( 1 - (1 - 0.125)^3 \approx 0.33 \). Third, with the GW sky area 90% CL of \( \Omega_{\text{gw}} = 610 \text{ deg}^2 \), the probability of a background neutrino candidate being directionally coincident is \( \Omega_{\text{gw}}/\Omega_{\text{all}} \approx 0.015 \). We expect 3\( \Omega_{\text{gw}}/\Omega_{\text{all}} \) directionally coincident neutrinos, given 3 temporal coincidences. Therefore, the probability that at least one of the 3 neutrino candidates is directionally coincident with the 90% CL skymap of GW150914 is \( 1 - (1 - 0.015)^3 \approx 0.04 \).

#### B. Constraints on the source

We used the nondetection of coincident neutrino candidates by ANTARES and IceCube to derive a standard frequentist neutrino spectral fluence upper limit for GW150914 at 90% CL. Considering no spatially and temporally coincident neutrino candidates, we calculated the source fluence that on average would produce 2.3 detected neutrino candidates. We carried out this analysis as a function of source direction, and independently for ANTARES and IceCube.

The obtained spectral fluence upper limits as a function of source direction are shown in Fig. 2. We considered a standard \( dN/dE \propto E^{-2} \) source model, as well as a model with a spectral cutoff at high energies: \( dN/dE \propto E^{-2} \exp[-\sqrt{(E/100 \text{ TeV})}] \). The latter model is expected for sources with exponential cutoff in the primary proton spectrum [50]. This is expected for some galactic sources, and is also adopted here for comparison to previous
surrounded by a white line shows the part of the sky in which limits
E South region farther South (hereafter credible region of the GW skymap. For the larger region limits separately for the two distinct areas in the 90% fluence limits on source direction, we calculate these is 200 TeV to 100 PeV.

at this southern declination the corresponding energy range from 3 TeV to 1 PeV, whereas for IceCube close to the GW candidate. For an
7

To characterize the dependence of neutrino spectral fluence limits on source direction, we calculate these limits separately for the two distinct areas in the 90% credible region of the GW skymap. For the larger region farther South (hereafter South region), we find upper limits \( E^2 dN/dE \approx 1.2_{-0.25}^{+0.25} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \) and \( E^2 dN/dE = 7.0_{-2.5}^{+2.5} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \) for our two spectral models without and with a cutoff, respectively. The error bars define the 90% confidence interval of the upper limit, showing the level of variation within each region. The average values were obtained as geometric averages, which better represent the upper limit values as they are distributed over a wide numerical range. For the smaller region farther North (hereafter North region), we find upper limits \( E^2 dN/dE = 0.10_{-0.06}^{+0.12} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \) and \( E^2 dN/dE = 0.55_{-0.44}^{+1.79} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \). As expected, we see that the limits are much more constraining for the North region, given the stronger limits at the Northern hemisphere due to IceCube’s greatly improved sensitivity there. Additionally, we see that the 90% confidence intervals for the South region, which is much more likely to contain the real source direction than the North region, are fairly small around the average, with the lower and higher limits only differing by about a factor of 2. The upper limits within this area can be considered essentially uniform. We observe a much greater variation in the North region.

To provide a more detailed picture of our constraints on neutrino emission, we additionally calculated neutrino fluence upper limits for different energy bands. For these limits, we assume \( dN/dE \propto E^{-2} \) within each energy band. We focus on Dec = −70°, which is consistent with the most likely source direction, and also with most of the GW sky area’s credible region. For each energy range, we use the limit from the most sensitive detector within that range. The obtained limits are given in Table II.

We now convert our fluence upper limits into a constraint on the total energy emitted in neutrinos by the source. To obtain this constraint, we integrate emission within [100 GeV, 1 PeV] for each source model. The obtained constraint will vary with respect to source direction as we saw above. It will also depend on the uncertain source distance. To account for these uncertainties, we provide the range of values from the lowest to the highest possible within the 90% confidence intervals with respect to source direction and the 90% credible interval with respect to source distance. For simplicity, we treat the estimated source distance and its uncertainty independent of the source direction. We consider both of the distinct sky regions to provide an inclusive range. For our two spectral

analyses [51]. For each spectral model, the upper limit shown in each direction of the sky is the more stringent limit provided by one or the other detector. We see in Fig. 2 that the constraint strongly depends on the source direction, and is mostly within \( E^2 dN/dE \sim 10^{-1} – 10 \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \). Furthermore, the upper limits by ANTARES and IceCube constrain different energy ranges in the region of the sky close to the GW candidate. For an \( E^{-2} \) power-law source spectrum, 90% of ANTARES signal neutrinos are in the energy range from 3 TeV to 1 PeV, whereas for IceCube at this southern declination the corresponding energy range is 200 TeV to 100 PeV.

To characterize the dependence of neutrino spectral fluence limits on source direction, we calculate these limits separately for the two distinct areas in the 90% credible region of the GW skymap. For the larger region farther South (hereafter South region), we find upper limits \( E^2 dN/dE = 1.2_{-0.25}^{+0.25} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \) and \( E^2 dN/dE = 7.0_{-2.5}^{+2.5} \text{ GeV cm}^{-2} \) for our two spectral models without and with a cutoff, respectively. The error bars define the

TABLE II. Upper limits on neutrino spectral fluence \((\nu_\mu + \bar{\nu}_\mu)\) from GW150914, separately for different spectral ranges, at Dec = −70°. We assume \( dN/dE \propto E^{-2} \) within each energy band.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy range</th>
<th>Limit [GeV cm^{-2}]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 GeV–1 TeV</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 TeV–10 TeV</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 TeV–100 TeV</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 TeV–1 PeV</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 PeV–10 PeV</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 PeV–100 PeV</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 PeV–1 EeV</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example, typical GRB isotropic-equivalent energies are comparable in some scenarios for accreting stellar-mass black holes. The total energy radiated in high-energy neutrinos in the case of GRBs can be comparable\[^5\] \(\sim 5 \times 10^{54}\) erg. This value can also be compared to high-energy emission expected in case of high-energy electromagnetic emission. There is little reason, however, to expect an associated GRB for a binary black hole merger (see, nevertheless, \[^60\]).

\[E_{\nu,\text{dot}}^{\text{all}} = 5.4 \times 10^{51} - 1.3 \times 10^{54} \text{ erg} \quad (1)\]
\[E_{\nu,\text{dot}}^{\text{all (cutoff)}} = 6.6 \times 10^{51} - 3.7 \times 10^{54} \text{ erg} \quad (2)\]

with the first and second lines of the equation corresponding to the spectral models without and with cutoff, respectively. For comparison, the total energy radiated in GWs from the source is \(\sim 5 \times 10^{54}\) erg. This value can also be compared to high-energy emission expected in some scenarios for accreting stellar-mass black holes. For example, typical GRB isotropic-equivalent energies are \(\sim 10^{51}\) erg for long and \(\sim 10^{59}\) erg for short GRBs\[^52\].

The total energy radiated in high-energy neutrinos in the case of GRBs can be comparable\[^53\] \(^5\)–\[^57\] or in some cases much greater\[^58\] \(^5\)–\[^59\] than the high-energy electromagnetic emission. There is little reason, however, to expect an associated GRB for a binary black hole merger (see, nevertheless, \[^60\]).

\[E_{\nu,\text{dot}}^{\text{all (cutoff)}} = 6.6 \times 10^{51} - 3.7 \times 10^{54} \text{ erg} \quad (2)\]

\section*{V. CONCLUSION}

The results above represent the first concrete limit on neutrino emission from this GW source type, and the first neutrino follow-up of a significant GW event. With the continued increase of Advanced LIGO-Virgo sensitivities for the next observation periods, and the implied source rate of \(2 - 400 \text{ Gpc}^{-3} \text{ yr}^{-1}\) in the comoving frame based on this first detection\[^61\], we can expect to detect a significant number of GW sources, allowing for stacked neutrino analyses and significantly improved constraints. Similar analyses for the upcoming observation periods of Advanced LIGO-Virgo will be important to provide constraints on or to detect other joint GW and neutrino sources.

Joint GW and neutrino searches will also be used to improve the efficiency of electromagnetic follow-up observations over GW-only triggers. Given the significantly more accurate direction reconstruction of neutrinos (\(\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2\) for track events in IceCube\[^40\] \(^4\) and\[^41\] and \(\sim 0.2 \text{ deg}^2\) in ANTARES\[^62\]) compared to GWs (\(\gtrsim 100 \text{ deg}^2\)), a joint event candidate provides a greatly reduced sky area for follow-up observatories\[^63\]. The delay induced by the event filtering and reconstruction after the recorded trigger time is typically \(3 - 5 \text{ s}\) for ANTARES\[^44\], \(20 - 30 \text{ s}\) for IceCube\[^64\], and \(O(1 \text{ min})\) for LIGO-Virgo, making data available for rapid analyses.

\section*{ACKNOWLEDGMENTS}

The authors acknowledge the financial support of the funding agencies: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Commissariat à l’énergie atomique et aux énergies alternatives (CEA), Commission Européenne (FEDER fund and Marie Curie Program), Institut Universitaire de France (IUF), IdEx program and UnivEarthS Labex program at Sorbonne Paris Cité (ANR-10-LABX-0023 and ANR-11-IDEX-0005-02), Région Île-de-France (DIM-ACAV), Région Alsace (contrat CPER), Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Département du Var and Ville de La Seyne-sur-Mer, France; Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF), Germany; Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (INFN), Italy; Stichting voor Fundamenteel Onderzoek der Materie (FOM), Nederlandse organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO), the Netherlands; Council of the President of the Russian Federation for young scientists and leading scientific schools supporting grants, Russia; National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS), Romania; Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (MINECO), Prometeo and Grisólía programs of Generalitat Valenciana and MultiDark, Spain; Agence de l’oriental and CNRST, Morocco. We also acknowledge the technical support of Ifremer, AIM and Foselev Marine for the sea operation and the CC-IN2P3 for the computing facilities. We acknowledge the support from the following agencies: U.S. National Science Foundation-Office of Polar Programs, U.S. National Science Foundation-Physics Division, University of Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the Grid Laboratory Of Wisconsin (GLOW) grid infrastructure at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, the Open Science Grid (OSG) grid infrastructure; U.S. Department of Energy, and National Energy Research Scientific Computing Center, the Louisiana Optical Network Initiative (LONI) grid computing resources; Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, WestGrid and Compute/Calcul Canada; Swedish Research Council, Swedish Polar Research Secretariat, Swedish National Infrastructure for Computing (SNIC), and Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, Sweden; German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), Helmholtz Alliance for Astroparticle Physics (HAP), Research Department of Plasmas with Complex Interactions (Bochum), Germany; Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS-FWO), FWO Odysseus programme, Flanders Institute to encourage scientific and technological research in industry (IWT), Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (Belspo); University of Oxford, United Kingdom; Marsden Fund, New Zealand; Australian Research Council; Japan Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS); the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), Switzerland; National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF); Danish National Research Foundation, Denmark (DNRF). The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the United States National Science Foundation (NSF) for the construction and operation of the LIGO Laboratory and Advanced LIGO as well as the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) of the United Kingdom, the Max-Planck-Society (MPS), and the State of
Niedersachsen/Germany for support of the construction of Advanced LIGO and construction and operation of the GEO600 detector. Additional support for Advanced LIGO was provided by the Australian Research Council. The authors gratefully acknowledge the Italian Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (INFN), the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and the Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, for the construction and operation of the Virgo detector and the creation and support of the EGO consortium. The authors also gratefully acknowledge research support from these agencies as well as by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research of India, Department of Science and Technology, India, Science & Engineering Research Board (SERB), India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, India, the Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad, the Conselleria d’Economia i Competitivitat and Conselleria d’Educació, Cultura i Universitats of the Govern de les Illes Balears, the National Science Centre of Poland, the European Commission, the Royal Society, the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Universities Physics Alliance, the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA), the Lyon Institute of Origins (LIO), the National Research Foundation of Korea, Industry Canada and the Province of Ontario through the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation, the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council Canada, Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, the Brazilian Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, Russian Foundation for Basic Research, the Leverhulme Trust, the Research Corporation, Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Taiwan and the Kavli Foundation. The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the NSF, STFC, MPS, INFN, CNRS and the State of Niedersachsen/Germany for provision of computational resources. This article has LIGO document number LIGO-P1500271.


(ANTARES Collaboration)


PHYSICAL REVIEW D 93, 122010 (2016)


HIGH-ENERGY NEUTRINO FOLLOW-UP SEARCH OF

PHYSICAL REVIEW D 93, 122010 (2016)

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1Institut d’Investigació per a la Gestió Integrada de les Zones Costaneres (IGIC) - Universitat Politècnica de València. C/ Paraninfo 1, 46730 Gandia, Spain
2GRPHE - Université de Haute Alsace - Institut universitaire de technologie de Colmar, 34 rue du Grillenbréit BP 50568 - 68008 Colmar, France
3Technical University of Catalonia, Laboratory of Applied Bioacoustics, Rambla Exposició, 08800 Vilanova i la Geltrú, Barcelona, Spain
4INFN - Sezione di Genova, Via Dodecaneso 33, 16146 Genova, Italy
5Erlangen Centre for Astroparticle Physics, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, D-91058 Erlangen, Germany
6Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS/IN2P3, CPPM UMR 7346, 13288 Marseille, France
7APC, Université Paris Diderot, CNRS/IN2P3, CEA/IRFU, Observatoire de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, 75025 Paris, France
8IFIC - Instituto de Física Corpuscular (CSIC - Universitat de València), c/Catedrático José Beltrán, 2, 46980 Paterna, Valencia, Spain
9LAM - Laboratoire d’Astrophysique de Marseille, Pôle de l’Étoile Site de Château-Gombert, rue Frédéric Joliot-Curie 38, 13388 Marseille Cedex 13, France
10INFN - Laboratori Nazionali del Sud (LNS), Via S. Sofia 62, 95123 Catania, Italy
11Nikhef, Science Park, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
12Huygens-Kamerlingh Onnes Laboratory, Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands
13Universiteit van Amsterdam, Instituut voor Hoge-Energie Fysica, Science Park 105, 1098 XG Amsterdam, The Netherlands
14INFN - Sezione di Roma, P.le Aldo Moro 2, 00185 Roma, Italy
15Dipartimento di Fisica dell’Università La Sapienza, P.le Aldo Moro 2, 00185 Roma, Italy
16Institute for Space Science, RO-077125 Bucharest, Măgurele, Romania
17INFN, Gran Sasso Science Institute, Viale Francesco Crispi 7, L’Aquila, 67100 Italy
18INFN - Sezione di Bologna, Viale Bertin-Pichat 6/2, 40127 Bologna, Italy
19INFN - Sezione di Bari, Via E. Orabona 4, 70126 Bari, Italy
20Géoaçur, UCA, CNRS, IRD, Observatoire de la Côte d’Azur, Sophia Antipolis, France
21Univ. Paris-Sud, 91405 Orsay Cedex, France
22University Mohammed I, Laboratory of Physics of Matter and Radiations, B.P.717, Oujda 6000, Morocco
23Institut für Theoretische Physik und Astrophysik, Universität Würzburg, Emil-Fischer Str. 31, 97074 Würzburg, Germany
24Institut d’Investigació per a la Gestió Integrada de les Zones Costaneres (IGIC) - Universitat Politècnica de València. C/ Paraninfo 1, 46730 Gandia, Spain.
25Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia dell’Università, Viale Berti Pichat 6/2, 40127 Bologna, Italy
26Laboratoire de Physique Corpusculaire, Clermont Université, Université Blaise Pascal, CNRS/IN2P3, BP 10448, F-63000 Clermont-Ferrand, France
27Also at APC, Université Paris Diderot, CNRS/IN2P3, CEA/IRFU, Observatoire de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, 75025 Paris, France
28INFN - Sezione di Catania, Viale Andrea Doria 64, 95125 Catania, Italy
29LSIS, Aix Marseille Université CNRS ENSAM LSIS UMR 7296 13397 Marseille, France; Université de Toulon CNRS LSIS UMR 7296 83957 La Garde, France
30Institut Universitaire de France, 75005 Paris, France
31Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ), Landsdiep 4,1797 SZ ’t Horntje (Texel), The Netherlands
32Dipartimento di Fisica dell’Università, Via Dodecaneso 33, 16146 Genova, Italy
33Dr. Remeix-Sternwarte and ECAP, Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Sternwartstr. 7, 96049 Bamberg, Germany

122010-11
34 Moscow State University, Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Leninskie gory, 119991 Moscow, Russia
35 Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography (MIO), Aix-Marseille University, 13288, Marseille, Cedex 9, France; Université du Sud Toulon-Var, 83957, La Garde Cedex, France CNRS-INSU/IRD UM 110
36 Direction de la recherche fondamentale - Institut de recherche sur les lois fondamentales de l'Univers - Service de Physique des Particules, CEA Saclay, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette Cedex, France
37 INFN - Sezione di Pisa, Largo B. Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa, Italy
38 Dipartimento di Fisica dell'Università, Largo B. Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa, Italy
39 INFN - Sezione di Napoli, Via Cintia 80126 Napoli, Italy
40 Université de Strasbourg, IPHC, 23 rue du Loess 67037 Strasbourg, France - CNRS, UMR7178, 67037 Strasbourg, France
41 now at INFN - Sezione di Bari, Via E. Orabona 4, 70126 Bari, Italy
42 Dipartimento di Fisica dell'Università Federico II di Napoli, Via Cintia 80126, Napoli, Italy
43 University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia 5005, Australia
44 Technische Universität München, D-85748 Garching, Germany
45 DESY, D-15735 Zeuthen, Germany
46 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand
47 Université Libre de Bruxelles, Science Faculty CP230, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium
48 Department of Physics and Wisconsin IceCube Particle Astrophysics Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA
49 Oskar Klein Centre and Department of Physics, Stockholm University, SE-10691 Stockholm, Sweden
50 Department of Physics, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802, USA
51 Institute of Physics, University of Mainz, Staudinger Weg 7, D-55099 Mainz, Germany
52 Department of Physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA
53 III. Physikalisches Institut, RWTH Aachen University, D-52056 Aachen, Germany
54 Physics Department, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, South Dakota 57701, USA
55 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California, Irvine, California 92697, USA
56 Department of Physics, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720, USA
57 Department of Physics and Center for Cosmology and Astro-Particle Physics, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA
58 Department of Astronomy, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA
59 Fakultät für Physik & Astronomie, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, D-44780 Bochum, Germany
60 Department of Physics, University of Wuppertal, D-42119 Wuppertal, Germany
61 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York 14627, USA
62 Department of Physics, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742, USA
63 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045, USA
64 Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley, California 94720, USA
65 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Uppsala University, Box 516, S-75120 Uppsala, Sweden
66 Department of Physics, TU Dortmund University, D-44221 Dortmund, Germany
67 Department of Physics, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon 440-746, Korea
68 Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Dienst ELEM, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium
69 Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E1
70 School of Physics and Center for Relativistic Astrophysics, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia 30332, USA
71 Département de physique nucléaire et corpusculaire, Université de Genève, CH-1211 Genève, Switzerland
72 Department of Physics, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 1A7
73 Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802, USA
74 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, USA
75 Bartol Research Institute and Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19716, USA
76 Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Gent, B-9000 Gent, Belgium
77 Institut für Physik, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, D-12489 Berlin, Germany
78 Department of Physics, Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813, USA
79 Department of Physics, Chiba University, Chiba 263-8522, Japan
80 Department of Astronomy, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA
81 Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
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189 University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109, USA
190 Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai 400005, India
191 American University, Washington, D.C. 20016, USA
192 University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003, USA
193 West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506, USA
194 University of Bialystok, 15-424 Bialystok, Poland
195 SUPA, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G1 1XQ, United Kingdom
196 IISER-TVM, CET Campus, Trivandrum Kerala 695016, India
197 Institute of Applied Physics, Nizhny Novgorod, 603950, Russia
198 Pusan National University, Busan 609-735, Korea
199 Hanyang University, Seoul 133-791, Korea
200 NCBJ, 05-400 Swierk-Otwock, Poland
201 IM-PAN, 00-956 Warsaw, Poland
202 Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York 14623, USA
203 Monash University, Victoria 3800, Australia
204 Seoul National University, Seoul 151-742, Korea
205 University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, Alabama 35899, USA
206 ESPCI, CNRS, F-75005 Paris, France
207 Università di Camerino, Dipartimento di Fisica, I-62032 Camerino, Italy
208 Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813, USA
209 College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187, USA
210 Instituto de Física Teórica, University Estadual Paulista/ICTP South American Institute for Fundamental Research, São Paulo, São Paulo 01140-070, Brazil
211 University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1TN, United Kingdom
212 IISER-Kolkata, Mohanpur, West Bengal 741252, India
213 Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, HSIC, Chilton, Didcot, Oxon OX11 0QX, United Kingdom
214 Whitman College, 345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla, Washington 99362 USA
215 National Institute for Mathematical Sciences, Daejeon 305-390, Korea
216 Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York 14456, USA
217 Janusz Gil Institute of Astronomy, University of Zielona Góra, 65-265 Zielona Góra, Poland
218 Andrew University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104, USA
219 Università di Siena, I-53100 Siena, Italy
220 Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas 78212, USA
221 University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195, USA
222 Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio 43022, USA
223 Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas 79699, USA

† Deceased.
‡ Earthquake Research Institute, University of Tokyo, Bunkyo, Tokyo 113-0032, Japan
§ NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland 20771, USA