

# Olfactory receptor-based CNT-FET sensor for the detection of DMMP as a simulant of sarin

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1	<b>Olfactory receptor-based CNT-FET sensor</b>
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4	Jin Yoo <sup>a, †</sup> , Daesan Kim <sup>b, †</sup> , Heehong Yang <sup>a</sup> , Minju Lee <sup>c</sup> , So-ong Kim <sup>a</sup> , Hwi Jin Ko <sup>a</sup> ,
5	Seunghun Hong <sup>c*</sup> and Tai Hyun Park <sup>a**</sup>
6	
7	
8	<sup>a</sup> School of Chemical and Biological Engineering, Institute of Chemical Processes, Seoul National
9	University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.
10	<sup>b</sup> Department of Biophysics and Chemical Biology, Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, Republic
11	of Korea.
12	<sup>c</sup> Department of Physics and Astronomy and Institute of Applied Physics, Seoul National University,
13	Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.
14	
15	<sup>†</sup> These authors contributed equally to this work.
16	
17	* Corresponding author at: Department of Physics and Astronomy and Institute of Applied
18	Physics, Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.
19	**Corresponding author at: School of Chemical and Biological Engineering, Seoul National
20	University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.
21	Tel: +82-2-880-8020; Fax: +82-2-875-9348;
22	E-mail: shong@phya.snu.ac.kr (S. Hong), <u>thpark@snu.ac.kr (</u> T. H. Park)
23	'

#### 1 Abstract

Dimetyl metylphosphonate (DMMP) is a simulant of sarin, which is a representative of nerve 2 3 agents. Sarin is an organophosphorus toxic compound that is an inhibitor of acetylcholinesterase, paralyzing human neurotransmission and the autonomic nervous system. 4 5 Detection of these nerve agents has been considered important for safety issues to prevent terrorism and to counter military threats. Although there have been various studies on sensors 6 7 for detecting DMMP as a simulant of sarin, limitations still exist in specificity, sensitivity, and 8 reliability. To overcome these limitations, we utilized a human olfactory receptor (hOR)-based 9 single-walled carbon nanotube-field effect transistor (swCNT-FET) as a platform for the detection of DMMP. The hORs have high specificity for their certain target molecules. swCNT-10 11 FET can also convert biological signals of hORs to electrical signals with high sensitivity. By screening of hORs, hOR2T7 with high selectivity for DMMP was selected, and it was produced 12 for development of the hOR2T7-conjugated bioelectronic nose (hOR2T7 B-nose). A hOR2T7 13 14 B-nose was able to selectively detect DMMP at a concentration of 10 fM. This shows ultrasensitive and selective performance for the detection of DMMP as a tool for sensing 15 chemical warfare agents (CWAs), which could be used for practical applications in the field of 16 safety. 17

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20 Keywords: DMMP, CWAs, olfactory receptor, swCNT-FET, bioelectronic nose, terrorism

#### 1 1. Introduction

Dimethyl methylphosphonate (DMMP) is a structural simulant of sarin, a chemical warfare agent (CWA) [1, 2]. CWAs are those used in chemical weapons, such as sarin, soman, and cyanide. Among CWAs, sarin and soman are representatives of nerve agents [3]. Sarin gas is an organophosphorous toxin that inactivates acetylcholinesterase in the human body, making the control of neurotransmitters difficult at the cholinergic synapses, and paralyzing neurons in the body, leading to death [4]. Previous studies show that when exposed to or inhaling 10 mg/m<sup>3</sup> of sarin vapor for 10 min, approximately half of the exposed people died [5].

In recent years, there have been various studies on the detection of CWAs, especially of DMMP
as the simulant of sarin. Methods for the sensitive and practical sensing of DMMP, such as
chemical sensors [6-9], colorimetric analysis [10, 11], and the microcantilever (MCL) [12],
have been introduced. However, several challenges still remain, such as selectivity, sensitivity,
sensing condition, and complex sensing procedures.

There have been many studies on the bioelectronic nose and bioelectronic tongue [13-15] 14 using human olfactory and taste receptors for the sense of a variety of molecules that have to 15 be detected in everyday life. In particular, most studies focus on the bioelectronic nose, because 16 the number of molecules that can be detected is enormous, and it therefore can be applied to 17 various fields. Many researchers have reported a bioelectronic nose using human olfactory 18 receptors (hORs) as a tool for the selective and sensitive detection of target molecule [14, 16, 19 17]. The hORs expressed in the human olfactory epithelium have the ability to sensitively 20 21 detect specific target molecules in various substances. The hORs can be combined with nanomaterials, such as graphene [18], carbon nanotubes (CNTs) [19], conducting polymer, and 22 polypyrole (PPy)-nanotube [20], to enhance sensitivity through the conversion of biological 23

signals to electrical current changes [13, 14]. Especially, CNTs have a large surface area to
volume ratio due to their unique one-dimensional nanoscale structures. Thus, the electrical
properties of CNTs could be effectively changed by the binding of odorants to hORs
immobilized on the CNT surface. [21]

Although these hOR-conjugated bioelectronic noses (hOR B-noses) have high performance in sensitivity and selectivity, there are still some issues in the stability, reusability, or productivity of biomaterials [22, 23]. It has also been reported that the purified and reconstituted proteins potentially have high stability, and can be overproduced from *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). This bacterial expression system can have many advantages, such as fast and massive production, and simplicity. A protein-based B-nose can offer great advantage in high productivity and specific detection. [24, 25]

Herein, we report a hOR protein-based single-walled CNT field-effect transistor (swCNT-FET)
for the selective and sensitive detection of DMMP. It can be used to detect DMMP in real time
under normal conditions. This work is expected to provide a practical and easy-to-use sensor
for CWAs, such as sarin.

#### 1 **2. Materials and Methods**

#### 2 2.1 Mammalian cell culture and expression of olfactory receptors (ORs)

The cells used in the experiment were Hana3A cells. Hana3A cells are derived from human 3 4 embryonic kidney 293T (HEK-293T) cells, which stably expresses RTP1L, RTP2, REEP1, and 5  $G_{\alpha\alpha\beta}$  proteins to confirm the function of the olfactory receptor [26, 27]. The cells were cultured at 37 °C and 5 % CO<sub>2</sub> in MEM medium containing 10 % fetal bovine serum (FBS) at 6 7 a concentration of 100 µg/mL penicillin streptomycin (Sigma-Aldrich, USA), 1.25 µg/mL amphotericin B (Sigma-Aldrich, USA), and 1 µg/mL of puromycin (Sigma-Aldrich, USA). 8 9 Olfactory receptors were expressed by transfection of a plasmid in which olfactory receptor gene was inserted using Lipofectamine 3000 (Invitrogen, USA). Olfactory receptor genes were 10 subcloned into pcDNA3 mammalian expression vectors (Invitrogen, USA) containing human 11 rhodopsin (Rho tag) for expression confirmation [28]. Hana3A cells were plated in 96-well 12 plates with  $1 \times 10^4$  cells/well for 24 h. After this, Hana3A cells were transfected with 10 ng/well 13 14 of pCRE-Luc, 5 ng/well of OR, 5 ng/well of pSV40-RL, 5 ng/well of RTP1s, and 2.5 ng/well of M3R, and incubated for (18–24) h [29, 30]. Expression of OR on cell surface was confirmed 15 by western blot analysis. Later, at 24 h after transfection, the cells were washed with PBS and 16 17 protein inhibition cocktail. The cells were lysed by sonication (2 s on/off, 5 min). The supernatant was obtained by centrifugation at  $15,000 \times g$  for 30 min. After boiling, sample 18 19 proteins were loaded onto SDS-page gels, and transferred to PVDF membrane (Bio-Rad, USA). The membrane was blocked by TBS with 0.1 % tween-20 (TBST) and 5 % skim milk. The 20 primary antibody used in this report was DYKDDDDK rabbit monoclonal antibody (Cell 21 Signaling Technology, USA), which was treated to the membrane overnight at a 1:1,000 22 23 dilution in TBST with 1 % skim milk at 4 °C. The membrane was washed with TBST for 20

min, and treated with secondary antibody. Goat anti-rabbit IgG-HRP was used as secondary
antibody (Santa Cruz, USA) which was treated to the membrane for 1 h at a 1:500 dilution in
TBST with 5 % skim milk at 4 °C. The substrate was Lumina Forte Western HRP substrate.
(Merck Millipore, Germany)

5

#### 6 *2.2 Biological screening of olfactory receptors repertoire*

7 The Dual-Glo Luciferase Assay System (Promega, USA) was used to find which receptor 8 responds to target molecules. Transfection medium was replaced with diluted 1 mM odorants in CD293 (Gibco, USA) with L-glutamate 24 h after transfection. At 4 h after odorant treatment, 9 luminescence was measured with Spark<sup>™</sup> 10M multimode microplate reader (Tecan, 10 11 Switzerland). The measured luminescence was normalized to luciferase activity by normalization formula [CRE/Renilla (odorant) - CRE/Renilla (negative control)] / 12 [CRE/Renilla (positive control) - CRE/Renilla (negative control)]. Negative control was 13 obtained by treating only DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide, Sigma-Aldrich, USA), while positive 14 control was obtained by treating 1 µM forskolin (Sigma-Aldrich, USA) [31]. For odorant 15 stimulation, each odorant was diluted in DMSO. We prepared odorants, such as dimethyl 16 methylphosphonate (DMMP, Sigma-Aldrich, USA), dimethyl phosphite (DMP, Sigma-Aldrich, 17 USA), diethyl phosphite (DEP, Sigma-Aldrich, USA), diethyl ethylphosphonate (DEEP, 18 Sigma-Aldrich, USA), diethyl allyl phosphate (DEAP, Sigma-Aldrich, USA), trimethyl 19 phosphate (TMP, Sigma-Aldrich, USA), linalool (Fluka, USA), Nerol (Fluka, USA), amyl 20 butyrate (Sigma-Aldrich, USA), ethyl butyrate (Sigma-Aldrich, USA), and guaiacol (Sigma-21 22 Aldrich, USA) for hOR activity analysis.

#### 1 2.3 hOR protein production, purification, and reconstitution

As in previous studies, GPCRs including hORs were overexpressed in E. coli with bacterial 2 3 expression vectors [32, 33]. The pET-DEST42 vector contained hOR genes, and transformed to BL21 E. coli cells. The cells were incubated with LB media containing ampicillin. When 4 5 OD reached 0.5, the cells were treated with IPTG (Sigma-Aldrich, USA), and were incubated 6 for 4 h at 37 °C. The the cells were then lysed by sonication with 5 s on/off for 10 min for 2 times. Insoluble pellet after centrifugation (15,000× g, 4 °C, 20 min) was solubilized in 75 mL 7 8 of 0.1 M tris-HCl (pH 8.0), 20 mM sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS), 100 mM dithiothreitol (DTT), and 1 mM EDTA at 30 °C, and incubated in 120 rpm shaking incubator overnight. After 9 solubilization, dialysis was executed by a 10K MWCO dialysis cassette (Thermo Scientific, 10 11 USA) with 0.1 M sodium phosphate (pH 8.0) and 10 mM SDS. After filtering of the protein using 0.2 µm bottle top filter (Thermo Scientific, USA), the protein was passed through 5 mL 12 HisTrap HP column (GE Healthcare, USA), and eluted from the column in the buffer at 0.1 M 13 sodium phosphate (pH 6.0) and 10 mM SDS. The purified protein that has denatured form was 14 refolded into detergent micelles, which were used to refold the structure of GPCR [34-36]. 15

16

#### 17 2.4 Fabrication of swCNT-FET

Prevalent photolithography and metal deposition were utilized to develop a swCNT-FET device. First, photoresist (PR, Az5214) was patterned on the SiO<sub>2</sub> wafer to make swCNT patterned channels. Then, the PR patterned wafer was immersed in octadecyltrichlorosilane (OTS) solution (OTS:Hexane = 1:400) for 7 min. Here, OTS molecules were adsorbed onto the bare surface of the patterned wafer, to form a self-assembled monolayer (SAM). To remove the PR regions, the OTS patterned wafer was rinsed by acetone and ethanol. The wafer was incubated in swCNT solution (0.05 mg/mL in dichlorobenzene) for 20 s. In this process,
swCNTs were specifically adsorbed on the exposed SiO<sub>2</sub> surface, due to the hydrophobicity of
OTS. After the fabrication of swCNT channels, drain and source electrodes (Ti/Au, 10/30 nm)
were assembled *via* thermal evaporation method. Lastly, to keep any solution off, drain and
source electrodes were passivated by PR (DNR).

6

#### 7 2.5 Development of a bioelectronic nose for the detection of DMMP

8 A CNT-FET channel region was treated with 2 L of methanol containing 0.1 M PSE, and 9 incubated at room temperature (RT) for 1 h. Then, the patterned wafer was rinsed with DDW to remove unbound PSE; and the same region was treated with 2 µL of hOR2T7 protein at RT 10 11 for 1 h. During the immobilization process, a moist environment was maintained, to prevent drying. hOR2T7 was immobilized on the CNT channel via the linker molecules, PSE. To 12 13 monitor the electrical signal of the bioelectronic nose, a buffer zone of 20 µL was formed on the channel region, using detergent micelle refolding buffer. The DMMP samples were diluted 14 with PBS, and 10 µL of the diluted sample was added onto the channel of the bioelectronic 15 nose. The dilution range was from  $10^{-16}$  to  $10^{-7}$ . Conductance changes between the source and 16 drain electrodes were monitored using a Keithley 2636A source meter (Keithley, USA), and a 17 18 MST 8000 probe station (MS Tech, South Korea).

#### 1 **3. Results and Discussion**

#### 2 3.1 Screening hORs using cell-based analysis

Prior to screening ORs, a cytotoxicity assay was performed to confirm the toxicity of DMMP 3 4 to Hana3A cells. Fig. S1 of the Supporting Information (SI) shows that the DMMP does not 5 influence the viability of Hana3A cells in the range of concentration of (30 µM to 10 mM). The result indicates that there is no interference by DMMP in the biological activity assay of 6 7 Hana3A cells. Based on this result, the screening of hORs was performed at the concentration of 1 mM DMMP using the luciferase assay known as a high-throughput ORs screening method 8 9 [27]. Fig. S2 of SI shows the western blot analysis of hORs expressed in Hana3A cell, showing 10 that the hORs were successfully expressed in the Hana3A cell. We tested 120 hORs. Fig. 2a shows that among the 120 hORs, seven hORs indicated by \*'s (hOR10A4, hOR5M10, 11 hOR2D2, hOR2T7, hOR8U1, hOR8G5, and hOR2AG2) bind to DMMP, while only four hORs 12 (hOR5M10, hOR2T7, hOR8G5, and hOR2AG2) strongly bind to DMMP. The relative 13 responses of hORs were compared using a normalization formula as defined in the Materials 14 15 and Methods. Fig. 2b shows the dose-dependent response of the four hORs. In the range of concentrations of (100 µM to 10 mM), the responses of the four hORs increased in a dose-16 dependent manner. In order to select the hOR that selectively responds to DMMP, selectivity 17 test was conducted with two types of odor molecule groups using luciferase assay (Fig. 2c and 18 d). One group is odor molecules that have a chemical structure similar to DMMP. The other 19 group is odor molecules that have a smell similar to DMMP. We added to the second group one 20 21 more molecule of smoky smell, which might exist in warfare situations. Odor molecules that are structurally similar to DMMP are dimethyl phosphite (DMP), diehtyl phosphite (DEP), 22 23 diethyl ethylphosphonate (DEEP), diethyl allyl phosphate (DEAP), and trimethyl phosphate

1 (TMP). Fig. S3 shows the structure of those odor molecules. Odor molecules with similar smell to DMMP are linalool, nerol, amyl butyrate, and ethyl butyrate, which are generally recognized 2 3 by human as pleasant smells. Guaiacol is a molecule known to have a smoky odor. In the selectivity test, Fig. 2c shows that among the four hORs, only hOR2T7 selectively binds to 4 5 DMMP, while hOR8G5 binds to all the five odor molecules, DMMP, DMP, DEP, DEEP, and 6 DEAP, indicating that hOR8G5 is broadly tuned to structurally similar odor molecules. Fig. 2d is a result of the selectivity test with the molecules that have similar odor to DMMP. The result 7 8 shows that hOR2T7 and hOR8G5 can discriminate DMMP from other molecules with similar 9 smell. None of the four ORs bound with a smoky odor molecule. The results in Fig. 2 demonstrate that hOR2T7 can be applied to B-nose for the selective detection of DMMP, which 10 11 is a simulant of sarin.

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#### 13 *3.2 Production of hOR2T7 in E. coli*

The hOR2T7 was produced from E. coli, purified with column chromatography, and 14 reconstituted into detergent micelles for the development of protein-based biosensor. Fig. 3a 15 16 shows the SDS-PAGE and western blot analysis of the hOR2T7. The yield of hOR2T7 was 0.2  $\sim 0.5$  mg per liter culture after finishing the purification step. Since the protein is denatured 17 during the purification process, it should be reconstituted with a hydrophobic environment. 18 19 Thus to recover its natural form, the purified hOR2T7 was reconstituted into detergent micelles. After the reconstitution of hOR2T7, tryptophan fluorescence quenching analysis was carried 20 out to investigate the binding property of hOR2T7. Fig. 3b shows that as the DMMP 21 22 concentration increased from (1 to 20) µM, the fluorescence of hOR2T7 was quenched gradually. When the tryptophan residues of the protein were excited at a wavelength of 280 23

nm, the emission was observed at a wavelength range of (340 to 350) nm [23, 37]. From the analysis of amino acids, it was confirmed that hOR2T7 has three tryptophan residues. Thus, when DMMP was bound to hOR2T7, the conformational change of hOR2T7 hides the tryptophan residues, resulting in the inhibition of their excitation; and then the fluorescence intensity of hOR2T7 was quenched. This quenching clearly demonstrates that the reconstituted hOR2T7 restored its normal function.

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#### 8 3.3 Characteristics of hOR2T7 B-nose

9 Fig. 3c and d show the characteristics of hOR2T7 B-nose. Fig. 3c shows the atomic force microscopy (AFM) images and height profile graph to confirm the immobilization of hOR2T7 10 on the CNT channel. They were imaged *via* tapping mode AFM with scan rates of (0.4 and 0.1) 11 Hz. The left and right AFM images show the swCNT surfaces before and after the 12 immobilization of the receptor onto CNT surfaces, respectively. The height profile graph 13 compares the height profiles at the same region of the AFM images. The black and red lines in 14 the profile graph indicate the height of swCNTs before and after the immobilization of hOR2T7 15 16 on the CNT channel, respectively. The peaks of the red line are higher than those of the black 17 one by (3-4) nm. This indicates that the hOR2T7 was successfully immobilized on the CNT channel. We also compared the I-V characteristics of a CNT sensor before and after the 18 19 immobilization of hOR2T7 on the CNT channel, to confirm that the function of CNT sensor remains intact, even after the protein immobilization process. Fig. S4 of SI shows the I-V20 characteristics of the sensor before and after the immobilization, which indicate that the 21 22 electrical properties of the sensor were well maintained. In addition, Fig. 3d shows that the

- electrical current decreased by the immobilization of hOR2T7 on the CNT surface, maintaining
   the p-type semiconductor characteristics of the sensor.
- 3

#### 4 *3.4 Real-time detection of DMMP using the hOR2T7 B-nose*

The real-time responses of hOR2T7 B-nose to DMMP were confirmed by measuring the drain-5 source conductance changes, after the injection of DMMP solution containing serial 6 7 concentrations of DMMP. The sensing methods were similar to those in previous studies, [38-8 40] in which the binding between hOR and the ligand causes a conformational change in the hOR, and change in conductance of the CNT channels [41, 42]. In the mechanism of olfactory 9 transduction in the olfactory epithelium involves OR switching from a conformationally 10 11 inactive state towards an active state upon ligand binding [43]. Thus, a conformational change of olfactory receptor by the interaction between olfactory receptors and target odor molecules, 12 affects a field effect on the sensing channels, and derives a change of conductance between 13 source and drain electrodes [44]. Fig. 4a shows the real-time responses of a hOR2T7 B-nose 14 to DMMP in the range of concentrations of (10 fM to 100 nM). The electrical conductance of 15 16 the hOR2T7 B-nose exhibited a sharp increase after the injection of DMMP. The responses were saturated at a concentration of 10 nM. These results show that a hOR2T7 B-nose can 17 detect DMMP down to fM level with higher sensitivity than any other DMMP sensor developed 18 19 so far. Fig. 4b is the normalized sensitivity curve of hOR2T7 B-nose to DMMP in the range of concentrations of (10 fM to 0.1 µM), and shows the dose-dependent responses of hOR2T7 B-20 21 nose to DMMP. Fig. S5 shows the real-time current changes with various DMMP 22 concentrations. Also, selectivity tests were performed to confirm that the selectivity of hOR2T7 23 B-nose is the same as the experimental result of the cellular level through the real-time analysis

1 of hOR2T7 B-nose. Fig. 4c is the result of the selectivity test of hOR2T7 B-nose to structurally similar odor molecules, which are DMP, DEP, DEAP, and DEEP, and shows that the hOR2T7 2 3 B-nose has a specificity with DMMP, which is the same as the result of the cellular assay. Fig. 4d shows the selectivity test of hOR2T7 B-nose to various molecules with similar odor to 4 DMMP, or with a smoky odor. Amyl butyrate, ethyl butyrate, linalool, and nerol are molecules 5 6 with similar odor, while guaiacol is a molecule with smoky odor. This result shows that hOR2T7 B-nose also has a selectivity only to DMMP, among various odor molecules with 7 8 pleasant and smoky smells. Each analysis was carried out with the same hOR2T7 B-nose in real-time, and odorant molecules were added in order. These results clearly show that the 9 binding property of hOR2T7 observed in the cellular analysis was successfully reproduced in 10 11 B-nose using hOR2T7, which was produced in E. coli, purified, and reconstituted. The micellebased bioelectronic nose was stable at least for three weeks [45]. 12

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#### 1 4. Conclusions

2 hOR2T7 B-nose was fabricated by the conjugation of a reconstituted hOR2T7 with swCNT-FET platform. The hOR2T7 B-nose detected its target molecule, DMMP, which is a nerve agent 3 simulant, with high sensitivity and selectivity. hOR2T7B-nose detected DMMP at the 4 5 concentration of 10 fM, and discriminated the target molecule from an odor molecule with 6 smoky smell, as well as odor molecules with similar structure and similar pleasant smell. These 7 results indicate that hOR2T7 B-nose could effectively and selectively detect a nerve agent simulant with high sensitivity. However, it is also still possible that hOR2T7 will not bind to 8 9 sarin itself, because hOR2T7 is so specific to DMMP. In this case, we can consider hOR8G5 10 as an alternative. Interestingly, hOR8G5 broadly responded to odor molecules with a similar structure to DMMP, but did not respond to guaiacol or odor molecules with a similar smell to 11 DMMP. Many studies on olfactory receptors have also reported that the hORs could broadly 12 detect molecules that have structural similarity [46, 47]. This suggests that if hOR2T7 is not 13 working for the detection of sarin, hOR8G5 can be used as an alternative choice for the 14 detection of sarin, an actual target molecule. This B-nose technology can be used for early 15 response to nerve gas attacks in various situations, including terrorism and military threats. 16

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#### **1** Figure Captions

Fig. 1. Schematic representation of hOR-based CNT-FET sensor for the detection of DMMP.

4 Fig. 2. Screening of DMMP-binding hORs. (a) Response of 120 hORs to 1 mM DMMP. (b) 5 Dose-dependent response curves of 4 hORs that strongly bind with DMMP. (c) Selectivity test 6 of hOR5M10, hOR2T7, hOR8G5, and hOR2AG2 using DMMP and structurally similar 7 molecules (DMP; dimethyl phosphite, DEP; diethyl phosphite, DEEP; diethyl ethylphosphite, 8 DEAP; diethyl allyl phosphite). (d) Selectivity test of hOR5M10, hOR2T7, hOR8G5, and hOR2AG2 with DMMP, molecules with similar odor (linalool, nerol, amyl butyrate, ethyl 9 10 butyrate) and a molecule with smoky odor (guaiacol). Error bar (standard of the mean), three replicates, \*P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01, \*\*\*P < 0.001, in the two-way ANOVA model. 11

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Fig. 3. Functional production of the hOR and fabrication of the bioelectronic nose by the immobilization of hOR on CNT-FET. (a) SDS-page and western blot analysis of the purified hOR2T7 protein. (b) Tryptophan fluorescence analysis of the reconstituted hOR2T7. (c) AFM images and height profile of bare CNT channel and CNT channel functionalized with hOR. (d) Gate profile of bare CNT channel and CNT channel functionalized with hOR.

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Fig. 4. Detection of DMMP using a hOR2T7 B-nose. (a) Real-time responses of hOR2T7 B-nose
nose to DMMP with various concentrations. (b) Dose-dependent response of hOR2T7 B-nose
with DMMP. Error bar (standard of the mean), three replicates. (c) Real-time selectivity test of
hOR2T7 B-nose with structurally similar molecules. (d) Real-time selectivity test of hOR2T7
B-nose with similar odor molecules and a smoky odor molecule.

**Fig. 1** 



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- **Fig. 3**



1 Fig. 4



## 1 Supporting Information

- 2
- 3

## Olfactory receptor-based CNT-FET sensor for the detection of DMMP as a simulant of sarin

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- <sup>a</sup>School of Chemical and Biological Engineering, Institute of Chemical Processes, Seoul National
  University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.
- 8 <sup>b</sup>Department of Biophysics and Chemical Biology, Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, Republic

9 of Korea.

- 10 <sup>c</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy and Institute of Applied Physics, Seoul National University,
- 11 Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea
- 12

14

15 \* Corresponding author at: Department of Physics and Astronomy and Institute of Applied

16 Physics, Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.

- 17 \*\*Corresponding author at: School of Chemical and Biological Engineering, Seoul National
- 18 University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea.

19 Tel: +82-2-880-8020; Fax: +82-2-875-9348;

20 E-mail: shong@phya.snu.ac.kr (S. Hong), <u>thpark@snu.ac.kr (</u>T. H. Park)

<sup>13 &</sup>lt;sup>†</sup>These authors contributed equally to this work.





Figure S1. Cytotoxicity analysis of DMMP. Hana3A cells were treated with DMMPs in the range of
 concentrations (0.03 to 10) mM, and cell viability was compared with a control that was treated with DMSO.



**Figure S2.** Western blot analysis of OR2T7 and OR8G5 expressed in Hana3A cells.







Figure S3. Odor molecules that are structurally similar to DMMP



Figure S4. Current–voltage curves of the bare CNT channel (pristine), and CNT channel functionalized with
 OR2T7.



2 Figure S5. Real-time current changes of a hOR2T7 B-nose with various concentrations of DMMP