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Adaptive Reporting for Energy Efficient Wireless Environmental Sensor Nodes

Bhavya Tiwari[1], Anjali Trivedi[2], Vaishnavi Arora[3]
[1,2] *Students, Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shasun Jain College for Women*
[3] *Assistant Professor, Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shasun Jain College for Women*

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Corresponding Author:
Bhavya Tiwari

Abstract:
Battery powered environmental sensors must preserve energy while detecting meaningful changes and maintaining evidence of continued operation. This paper develops a reproducible analytical comparison of periodic reporting, event driven reporting, and event reporting supplemented by an hourly heartbeat. A constructed daily workload contains 1,440 local samples and 40 persistent changes. Energy consumption includes sleep, sensing, and bounded retransmission costs. Under the main assumptions, five minute periodic reporting requires 288 reports and 16.785 joules per day, while the hybrid policy requires 63 reports and 6.795 joules. The resulting 59.5 percent energy reduction corresponds to an idealized battery life increase from 118.9 to 293.7 days. Event only reporting uses still less energy but supplies no periodic evidence of node liveness. Sensitivity tests examine increased packet loss and spurious change reports. The analysis shows that communication suppression is useful only when sensing cost, event persistence, link behavior, and monitoring objectives are explicitly represented. The reported values are calculated scenario outcomes, not hardware measurements or claims about a particular radio product. The framework provides a basis for selecting reporting policies and planning subsequent experimental validation.
Keywords: Wireless sensor networks; adaptive reporting; energy consumption; event detection; duty cycling; environmental monitoring.

1 Introduction

Environmental monitoring frequently requires battery powered nodes to operate in locations where frequent maintenance is inconvenient. A node may sample temperature, moisture, vibration, or another slowly changing quantity and transmit information to a gateway. A fixed reporting interval is simple to implement and produces a predictable data stream. However, transmitting nearly identical measurements repeatedly can consume energy without improving the decisions made by the monitoring application. Reducing this redundancy requires a precise understanding of which changes matter and how silence should be interpreted.

Foundational sensor network research describes the importance of energy, topology, and application requirements in system design [1]. Later surveys show that hardware constraints and communication organization remain interconnected [2]. Energy conservation spans sensing, computation, and networking rather than a single radio parameter [3]. A design that reduces transmission frequency can therefore fail if it requires continuous expensive sensing or computation. Equally, an apparently efficient node may be operationally unsuitable if the gateway cannot distinguish stable conditions from a disconnected or failed sensor.

The distinction between sensing and reporting is especially important. Sampling every minute does not require sending every sample. Local processing can compare the current value with a reference and transmit only when a relevant change occurs. Yet event only reporting creates long silent periods during stable conditions. Periodic heartbeats provide a modest amount of additional communication to confirm operation and refresh the gateway's view. Their cost should be compared with the monitoring value they provide, rather than assumed negligible.

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This study asks whether a hybrid reporting rule can reduce energy while retaining rapid notification of persistent changes and periodic liveness evidence. It contributes an explicit workload, an additive energy model, a bounded retransmission calculation, and comparisons with two periodic baselines. The aim is not to introduce a new medium access protocol. It is to expose the application level choices that should precede protocol selection and hardware testing. The numerical inputs describe a hypothetical low power node; they are deliberately independent of manufacturer claims or an unreported field deployment.

2 Detailed Literature Review

S-MAC uses coordinated sleeping to reduce energy wasted by continuously active radios [4]. B-MAC develops a flexible low power listening approach [5], and X-MAC uses short preambles to improve communication in duty cycled networks [6]. These mechanisms act at the medium access layer. They can reduce the energy of sending a report, but they do not by themselves establish how many reports an environmental application needs. Application level suppression and radio duty cycling should therefore be treated as complementary design dimensions.

ContikiMAC demonstrates how carefully organized radio activity can support low duty cycle communication [7]. LEACH addresses energy distribution through clustering and rotation of cluster heads [8]. Directed diffusion organizes communication around data interests and supports in-network processing [9]. These contributions demonstrate that network organization can alter where energy is spent. The present study isolates one node's reporting decision so that the consequences of message frequency remain visible before routing, clustering, or gateway placement introduces additional variables.

Embedded operating system design also affects whether local sampling and communication can be scheduled efficiently. Hill and colleagues describe system architecture directions for networked sensors [10]. Their emphasis on a small, event oriented execution environment is relevant to a reporting controller that spends most of its time inactive. Nevertheless, operating system capability should not be confused with a measured application energy budget. The controller's processing, sensor warm-up, and radio startup costs still require direct characterization on the selected device.

Low power wide area communication expands the range of monitoring applications while introducing its own constraints. Bor and colleagues investigate LoRa network scalability [11]. Centenaro and colleagues discuss long range communication in unlicensed bands [12], and Adelantado and colleagues analyze limitations of LoRaWAN [13]. These studies caution against treating long range connectivity as unlimited capacity. Large populations of sensors can create contention, and additional retransmissions can erode the expected benefit of a low reporting rate.

Augustin and colleagues examine LoRa's functional behavior [14]. Raza and colleagues review the broader low power wide area network landscape [15], while Mekki and colleagues compare technologies for large scale Internet of Things deployment [16]. Their conclusions motivate application specific selection rather than a universal radio recommendation. A slowly changing environmental variable and a time critical alarm impose different requirements. The illustrative radio cost used here does not reproduce any of these technologies and should be replaced by measurements before a technology decision is made.

Application and network protocols can also create hidden traffic. The Constrained Application Protocol defines lightweight request and response exchanges, including reliability mechanisms [17]. RPL addresses routing in low power and lossy networks [18], while the Trickle algorithm adjusts dissemination activity in response to consistency or change [19]. These specifications show why payload reporting counts alone may underestimate communication. The present model includes a bounded attempt budget for each report but excludes separate routing, joining, and management traffic, which must be added in a complete implementation.

Singh and colleagues analyze energy consumption and lifetime estimation for low power wide area applications [20]. Their application oriented perspective supports accounting for sensor activity and reporting intervals alongside communication behavior. The literature collectively establishes that energy savings depend on the workload as well as the radio. This paper's narrower contribution is a transparent comparison in which the same sensing schedule, battery budget, and attempt model are applied to every reporting policy. The review is selective and explanatory; it does not claim to rank all available protocols or synthesize their reported performance into a common benchmark.

3 Detailed Methodology & Framework

3.1 Workload and reporting policies

The modeled node takes one sample at the end of each minute, producing 1,440 samples per day. Forty persistent changes occur in the intervals ending at minutes 17, 48, 79, and subsequent values obtained by adding 31 minutes, through minute 1,226. Each change is assumed large enough to pass the local reporting threshold and to persist until the next change. Its occurrence is uniformly distributed within its one minute sampling interval. This constructed pattern permits an exact calculation of scheduling delay without generating random observations.

Four policies use the same samples. The five minute periodic policy reports at minutes 5, 10, and so forth through 1,440. The fifteen minute policy reports at multiples of 15. The event only policy reports when a qualifying change is detected. The hybrid policy reports qualifying changes and also at fixed hourly boundaries. If a change and heartbeat coincide, one combined report serves both purposes. There is one such coincidence, at minute 420, giving 40 plus 24 minus one, or 63 hybrid reports. The heartbeat is fixed to the clock and is not reset by an intervening event.

The local controller compares the newest valid sample with its application reference. A threshold crossing triggers a report and updates the reference. Invalid sensor readings should be recorded as diagnostic conditions rather than interpreted as environmental stability. Figure 1 illustrates the two triggers feeding a common reporting path. The modeled gateway does not infer device health solely from the absence of environmental events; it uses the expected heartbeat schedule to identify missing updates. Actual outage declaration requires additional tolerance for packet loss and clock drift.

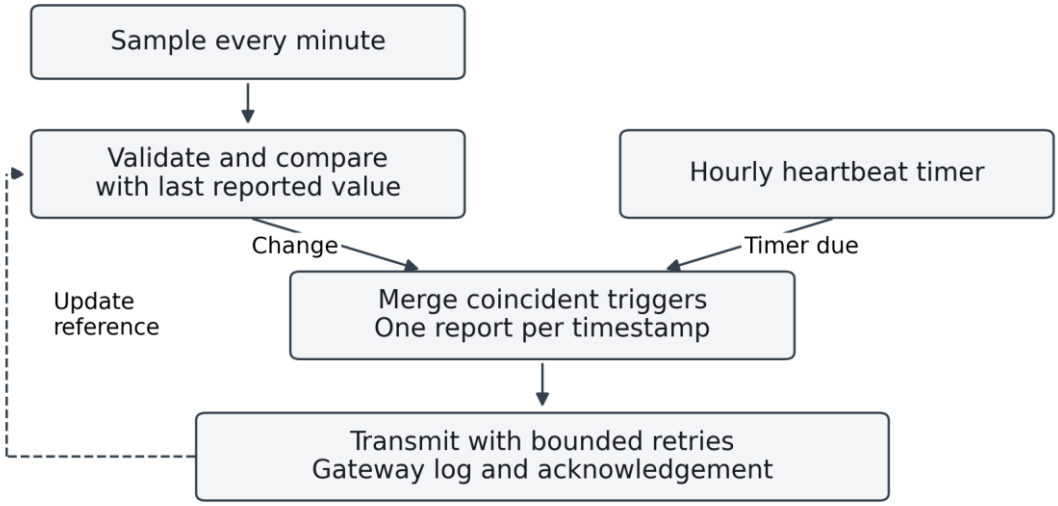


Figure 1. Hybrid reporting framework. Sampling continues every minute while events and hourly heartbeats share the transmission path.

3.2 Energy and reliability model

The supply voltage is assumed to be 3.3 volts and the sleep current 12 microamperes. Each sample consumes 0.4 millijoules above the sleep baseline. Each communication attempt consumes 40 millijoules above that baseline, including the assumed wake-up and acknowledgment handling cost. Thus sleep and sampling together require 3.99744 joules per day. These are illustrative design values, not specifications of a named component. The battery is 240 milliampere-hours at 3.3 volts, with only 70 percent of nominal energy treated as usable, yielding 1,995.84 joules.

An individual communication attempt fails independently with probability 0.10. A report is attempted at most three times, stopping after success. The expected number of attempts is one plus the failure probability plus its square, or 1.11. Delivery probability is one minus the cube of the failure probability, or 0.999. Equation 1 combines the background energy with report energy. The report count includes heartbeats, and the attempt cost is charged for unsuccessful attempts as well as successful ones.

$$E_{day} = VI_s \times 86{,}400 + N_s E_s + N_r E_{tx}(1 + p + p^2)$$

Equation 1. Expected daily energy in joules; I_s is sleep current in amperes, N_s is sample count, N_r is report count, and p is attempt failure probability.

Idealized lifetime is usable battery energy divided by daily energy. This calculation excludes calendar aging, temperature effects, changing battery voltage, and maintenance overhead. It is therefore an energy budget estimate, not a guaranteed service life. The same assumptions apply to every comparator. The analysis also calculates normalized offered airtime for 100 identical nodes, assuming 0.15 seconds per attempt and a shared channel. This is an aggregate traffic measure; it is not a collision model, channel capacity estimate, or regulatory compliance assessment.

3.3 Detection metrics and stress tests

Scheduling delay is the elapsed time from a change's occurrence until its first scheduled report. For an event report, the mean is half a minute because detection occurs at the next sample. For a periodic report, the residual time from the detecting sample to the next reporting boundary is added. The calculation averages that residual over all 40 changes. It excludes propagation, queueing, and retransmission delays. Delivery probability is reported separately so that a short scheduling delay is not misrepresented as guaranteed successful notification.

The first stress test increases independent attempt failure probability to 0.30 while leaving the event pattern unchanged. The second adds 100 distinct spurious hybrid reports per day, producing 163 reports, with the original link condition. These scenarios examine two different failure mechanisms: poor communication and excessive local triggering. No confidence intervals are supplied because the study calculates expectations under fixed assumptions rather than estimating parameters from observations. Reproducing the results requires only the event schedule, arithmetic expressions, and parameters stated above.

4 Detailed Results and Analysis

4.1 Energy and reporting comparison

Table 1 shows that the hybrid rule reduces report count from 288 to 63 relative to five minute periodic reporting. This 78.1 percent reduction in reports translates into a smaller 59.5 percent reduction in total daily energy because sensing and sleep remain unchanged. Treating the report reduction as an equal battery saving would therefore exaggerate the benefit. The hybrid lifetime estimate is 293.7 days, compared with 118.9 days for five minute reporting and 241.6 days for fifteen minute reporting.

Table 1. Calculated reporting and energy outcomes under the main assumptions.

Policy	Reports per day	Mean detection delay (min)	Energy (J/day)	Ideal battery life (days)
Periodic: 5 min	288	2.500	16.785	118.9
Periodic: 15 min	96	7.875	8.260	241.6
Event only	40	0.500	5.773	345.7
Event + hourly heartbeat	63	0.500	6.795	293.7

Detection delay excludes communication retries. Battery life is an ideal energy-budget estimate, not a hardware measurement.

Event only reporting achieves the lowest calculated energy consumption, 5.773 joules per day, and the longest idealized lifetime, 345.7 days. Its advantage over the hybrid policy is 1.021 joules per day. This difference is the price of 23 additional noncoincident heartbeat reports, including their expected retries. The hybrid policy should therefore be selected only when periodic liveness information or stable-value refresh is useful. Energy efficiency alone would select the event only policy in this workload.

Five minute reporting gives a mean scheduling delay of 2.5 minutes. Fifteen minute reporting gives 7.875 minutes for this particular event schedule, rather than the 7.5 minutes that would arise from event phases uniformly distributed across an entire fifteen minute cycle. Both event based policies give 0.5 minutes. This difference illustrates why the temporal assumptions matter: a general formula for random arrivals should not replace an exact calculation when the constructed arrival pattern is known. Moreover, the persistence assumption is essential because short transient changes could disappear before sampling.

For 100 nodes, expected offered airtime is 5.55 percent under five minute reporting and approximately 1.21 percent under the hybrid rule. The calculation includes retries but not simultaneous transmissions or gateway downlink constraints. Reduced offered traffic creates a plausible opportunity to lower contention; it does not prove a particular packet delivery improvement. A deployment simulation would need channel allocation, spatial interference, payload size, and timing synchronization to connect the traffic reduction to reliability.

4.2 Sensitivity and practical interpretation

At a failure probability of 0.30, expected attempts increase to 1.39 and report delivery probability falls to 0.973. Hybrid daily energy rises to 7.500 joules and idealized lifetime falls to 266.1 days. Energy remains below the five minute baseline, but the reliability deterioration may be unacceptable for some monitoring objectives. Retransmission limits therefore cannot be selected solely to maximize battery life. Repeated failures should also trigger a local diagnostic or delayed recovery mechanism whose energy and communication costs are measured separately.

Adding 100 spurious reports increases hybrid consumption to 11.235 joules per day and reduces lifetime to 177.7 days. This result demonstrates that threshold tuning and sensor noise can matter more than modest changes in retry probability. Hysteresis, minimum change persistence, or filtering may reduce spurious triggers, but those mechanisms can delay or suppress real events. Their selection requires labeled signal traces and explicit detection requirements. The present calculation does not assume that filtering is costless or that every environmental variable is suitable for simple thresholding.

The comparison also has a data completeness trade-off. Event and heartbeat logs do not reproduce the same uniformly spaced remote time series as periodic reporting, even though local sampling remains regular. A future analysis task may need those missing values. Local buffering and occasional batch transmission could preserve them, but memory, write endurance, and burst traffic would change the model. The appropriate reporting policy therefore depends on whether the primary objective is event notification, continuous reconstruction, maintenance monitoring, or some combination of these functions.

5 Future Enhancement

The next stage should measure current traces on a chosen microcontroller, sensor, and radio combination. Sleep transitions, sensor warm-up, packet serialization, acknowledgment windows, and failed transmissions should be measured separately before fitting the additive model. A controlled signal source should generate persistent steps, short pulses, gradual drift, and noise so that reporting reductions can be evaluated alongside missed events and delay distributions. Long duration battery tests would then assess the limitations of the idealized lifetime calculation.

A larger network study should investigate correlated losses, synchronized heartbeats, interference, and gateway capacity. Randomized heartbeat offsets may reduce simultaneous traffic without changing the required reporting frequency. Adaptive thresholds could respond to seasonal signal variation, provided that their own energy and detection costs are included. Security and device management should also be incorporated through measured message budgets. These enhancements would extend the present decision framework while retaining transparent accounting of what is measured, what is assumed, and what is inferred.

6 Conclusion

Adaptive reporting can reduce energy consumption when an application does not require every locally sampled value to be transmitted immediately. In the constructed workload, event reporting with an hourly heartbeat provides rapid scheduling of persistent changes and periodic liveness information at substantially lower daily energy than either periodic baseline. Event only reporting remains more efficient, showing that the heartbeat has a measurable operational cost rather than a free reliability benefit.

The results depend on sparse persistent changes, an inexpensive sensing process, and the stated communication assumptions. Increased false triggers materially weaken the energy advantage, while higher packet loss reduces delivery probability even when battery savings remain. The paper therefore supports a conditional engineering choice and a reproducible validation method. Hardware measurements and realistic signal traces are required before the calculated lifetime or delay values can be applied to an actual environmental monitoring installation.

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