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Standard Practice for Ammonia Colorimetric Leak Testing¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers the testing of large single- and double-walled tanks, pressure and vacuum vessels, laminated, lined- or double-walled parts, complex piping systems, flexible containers (such as aircraft fuel tanks), glass-to-metal seals in hybrid packages, and systems that inherently contain or will contain ammonia (such as large tonnage refrigeration systems and fertilizer storage systems).

1.2 This method can be used on piping, valves, and containers with welded, fitted, or laminated sections that can be sealed at their ends or between their outer and inner walls and that are designed for internal pressures of 34.5 kPa [5 psig] or greater.

1.3 Basic procedures are described based on the type of inspection used. These procedures should be limited to finding leakage indications of 4.5×10^{-12} mol/s [1×10^{-7} Std cm³/s]² or larger.

1.4 *Units*—The values stated in Std cm³/s or mol/s are to be regarded separately as standard. The values stated in each system are not necessarily exact equivalents; therefore, to ensure conformance with the standard, each system shall be used independently of the other, and values from the two systems shall not be combined.

1.5 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.* (For more specific safety precautionary information see 7.4, 8.2, 9.4.1, and 10.3.1).

1.6 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recom-*

mendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.

2. Referenced Documents

- 2.1 *ASTM Standards*:³
 - E1002 Practice for Leaks Using Ultrasonics
 - E1316 Terminology for Nondestructive Examinations
- 2.2 *Other Documents*:⁴
 - SNT-TC-1A Recommended Practice for Personnel Qualification and Certification in Nondestructive Testing
 - ANSI/ASNT CP-189 ASNT Standard for Qualification and Certification of Nondestructive Testing Personnel

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of terms used in this standard, see Terminology E1316, Section E.

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 This practice consists of testing a container already filled with ammonia or of introducing an anhydrous ammonia or an ammonia-nitrogen mixture into a container or system so that the final ammonia percentage achieved is between 1 and 100 % by volume at a gauge pressure between 34.5 and 689.5 kPa [5 and 100 psig]. The ammonia flows through leaks existing in welds and connections and reacts with a developer that is applied outside of the container producing a visible indication.

4.2 Two basic developer procedures are described:

- 4.2.1 Smoke-producing developers.
- 4.2.2 Color-change developers.

4.3 Methods of introducing ammonia into unfilled systems are described, together with methods of estimating the concentration and pressure needed to achieve specific detectable leak rates.

4.4 Procedures for testing large tanks and systems are described.

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E07 on Nondestructive Testing and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E07.08 on Leak Testing Method.

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² The gas temperature is referenced to 0 °C. To convert to another gas reference temperature, T_{ref} , multiply the leak rate by $(T_{ref} + 273)/273$.

³ For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

⁴ Available from American Society for Nondestructive Testing (ASNT), P.O. Box 28518, 1711 Arlingate Ln., Columbus, OH 43228-0518, <http://www.asnt.org>.

4.5 Ultrasonic pretesting for gross leaks is described.

5. Personnel Qualification

5.1 It is recommended that personnel performing leak testing attend a dedicated training course on the subject and pass a written examination. The training course should be appropriate for NDT level II qualification according to Recommended Practice No. SNT-TC-1A of the American Society for Nondestructive Testing or ANSI/ASNT Standard CP-189.

6. Significance and Use

6.1 This method is useful for locating and measuring the size of gas leaks either as a quality-control test or as a field-inspection procedure. It can be used to test critical parts or containers that will hold toxic or explosive gases or liquids or as a quick test for other containers.

7. Interferences

7.1 The interior and exterior welds and joints where leaks are often found must be free of oil, grease, flux, slag, paint, or other contaminants that might temporarily block or mask leakage. New containers should not be painted prior to test. Smoking during the test may cause false indications.

7.2 Pure ammonia gas is likely to attack brass or copper metals in a humid environment. It will not if there is no water vapor present.

7.3 Ammonia gas attacks wood fibers when the wood contains a high moisture content. Dry wood tolerates ammonia concentrations below 30 %.

7.4 **Warning**—Ammonia in high concentrations can be hazardous. When working with ammonia it is recommended that an ammonia-sensitive badge be worn for safety.

7.4.1 The lower explosive limit (LEL) for ammonia and air is 15 %. The upper explosive limit (UEL) is 28 %.

7.4.2 The ceiling for limited exposure to ammonia (1 h) is about 500 ppm.

7.5 If the container to be tested has parts made of stainless steel, nickel, or chromium alloys, the color-change developer residue should have a sulfur and halogen content of under 500 ppm of each.

8. Apparatus

8.1 *Apparatus for Precleaning:*

8.1.1 *Gloves.*

8.1.2 *Vacuum Pump or Heat Gun*, if necessary to dry container.

8.1.3 *Spray Gun*, if aerosol cleaner not used.

8.1.4 *Ammonia-Sensitive Monitor*, to test area contamination.

8.2 *Safety Apparatus:*

8.2.1 *Mask*, covering mouth and nose.

8.2.2 *Ammonia Monitors.*

8.2.3 *Gas Mask*, if personnel work inside the tank or with high concentrations of ammonia during a test.

8.3 *Apparatus for Injecting Ammonia Gas:*

8.3.1 *Pressure Gauge*—The gauge must be able to withstand normal test pressures. The gauge must be accurate to within

1 % of full scale. The gauge must read at least 1.5× but not more than 4× the maximum test pressure to be used. The gauge must be in current calibration.

8.3.2 *Pressure-Relief Valve*, if high pressures are to be used.

8.3.3 *Pressure-Reducing, -Control, and -Mixing Valves*, for the ammonia and nitrogen circuits if not already mixed.

8.3.4 *High-Conductance Injection Line and Exhaust Line.*

8.4 *Apparatus for Applying Colorimetric Developer:*

8.4.1 *Spray Gun*, if an aerosol is not used.

8.4.2 *Temperature-Controlled Heat Gun*, if a water-based developer is used.

8.5 *Apparatus for Post Cleaning and Inspection:*

8.5.1 *Brush or Vacuum Sweeper*, for developer powder.

8.5.2 *Tape*, for marking and sealing leaks.

9. General Procedures for Test Objects not Already Containing Ammonia

9.1 *Openings:*

9.1.1 Seal all openings using plugs or covers that can withstand the test pressure and can be completely removed after the test.

9.1.2 Locate the test gas inlet on the bottom of the test object with the trapped air vent at the highest point.

9.1.3 Components rated at pressures below the test pressure must be isolated.

9.2 *Gauges*—One or more test gauges must be connected to the system. If more than one gauge is used, one may be a recording gauge. All gauges must have been calibrated within a specified time period. One indicating gauge must be easily visible to the operator controlling the pressure throughout the pressurizing cycle.

9.3 *Pre-Test Inspection:*

9.3.1 Before pressurizing is begun, inspect the outside (and inside if possible) of the test object to verify that it is dry, free of oils, greases, smoke deposits, or slag and that all welds and connectors are exposed.

9.3.2 An ultrasonic pretest (Section 12) can be used to locate gross leaks.

9.4 *Vacuum Drying:*

9.4.1 If the test object contains wood or copper parts that will be exposed to ammonia, and if the vessel is designed to be safe under vacuum, it may be necessary to vacuum-dry the inside of the object.

9.4.2 Moisture begins to evaporate at a pressure of about 3 kPa [25 torr]. Bring the test object down to a pressure of 250 Pa [20 torr]. At this point water will boil off, indicated by a sudden halt in the vacuum gauge needle. When the needle starts to go down indicating a lower pressure it can be assumed that all but trace amounts of water have been eliminated.

9.5 *Pressurizing*—Gradually increase the pressure in the system to 50 % of test pressure during which time frequent checks should be made for leakage. Thereafter, slowly increase the pressure to the final test pressure. The test pressure usually is between 75 and 150 % of design pressure and should not violate any applicable codes. If large leaks are expected and an