



Designation: D388 – 19a

Standard Classification of Coals by Rank¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D388; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This standard covers the classification of coals by rank, that is, according to their degree of metamorphism, or progressive alteration, in the natural series from lignite to anthracite.

1.2 This classification is applicable to coals that are composed mainly of vitrinite.

NOTE 1—Coals rich in inertinite or liptinite (exinite), or both, cannot be properly classified because, in those macerals, the properties that determine rank (calorific value, volatile matter, and agglomerating character) differ greatly from those of vitrinite in the same coal. Often, such coals can be recognized by megascopic examination. In North America, these coals are mostly nonbanded varieties that contain only a small proportion of vitrain and consist mainly of attrital materials. The degree of metamorphism of nonbanded and other vitrinite-poor coals can be estimated by determining the classification properties of isolated or concentrated vitrinite fractions, or by determining the reflectance of the vitrinite (see Test Method D2798 and Appendix X1 of this classification). However, in the use of these vitrinite-poor coals, some properties normally associated with rank, such as rheology, combustibility, hardness, and grindability (as well as the rank determining properties) may differ substantially from those of vitrinite-rich coals of the same degree of metamorphism.

1.3 The accuracy of the classification of impure coal may be impaired by the effect of large amounts of mineral matter on the determination of volatile matter and calorific value, and on their calculation to the mineral-matter-free basis.

1.4 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are for information only.

1.4.1 *Exception*—The values stated in British thermal units per pound (Btu/lb) are to be regarded as the standard. The SI equivalents of Btu/lb are provided for information only and are not considered standard.

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.*

1.6 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standard-*

ization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

- D121 Terminology of Coal and Coke
- D720/D720M Test Method for Free-Swelling Index of Coal
- D1412/D1412M Test Method for Equilibrium Moisture of Coal at 96 to 97 Percent Relative Humidity and 30 °C
- D2013/D2013M Practice for Preparing Coal Samples for Analysis
- D2234/D2234M Practice for Collection of a Gross Sample of Coal
- D2798 Test Method for Microscopical Determination of the Vitrinite Reflectance of Coal
- D3172 Practice for Proximate Analysis of Coal and Coke
- D3173/D3173M Test Method for Moisture in the Analysis Sample of Coal and Coke
- D3174 Test Method for Ash in the Analysis Sample of Coal and Coke from Coal
- D3175 Test Method for Volatile Matter in the Analysis Sample of Coal and Coke
- D3302/D3302M Test Method for Total Moisture in Coal
- D4239 Test Method for Sulfur in the Analysis Sample of Coal and Coke Using High-Temperature Tube Furnace Combustion
- D4596 Practice for Collection of Channel Samples of Coal in a Mine
- D5016 Test Method for Total Sulfur in Coal and Coke Combustion Residues Using a High-Temperature Tube Furnace Combustion Method with Infrared Absorption
- D5192 Practice for Collection of Coal Samples from Core
- D5865 Test Method for Gross Calorific Value of Coal and Coke

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

¹ This classification is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D05 on Coal and Coke and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D05.23 on Sampling.

Current edition approved Nov. 1, 2019. Published November 2019. Originally approved in 1934. Last previous edition approved in 2019 as D388 – 19. DOI: 10.1520/D0388-19A.

² 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.

3.1.1 For additional definitions of terms used in this classification, refer to Terminology D121.

3.1.2 *agglomerating, adj*—as applied to coal, the property of softening when heated to above about 400 °C in a nonoxidizing atmosphere and appearing as a coherent mass when cooled to room temperature.

3.1.3 *apparent rank, n*—of a coal seam, the estimated rank designation obtained using samples other than face channel samples or core samples with 100 % recovery of the seam, but otherwise conforming to procedures of Classification D388.

3.1.4 *class, n*—a designation of coal rank indicating the degree of metamorphism, or progressive alteration.

3.1.4.1 *Discussion*—In order of increasing metamorphism, these classes range from lignitic through subbituminous and bituminous to anthracitic coals. Refer to Table 1 of Classification D388.

3.1.5 *coal seam, n*—the stratum, layer, or bed of coal (containing less than a 50 % mass fraction of ash on the dry basis) that lies between two other rock layers whose compositions differ significantly from that of coal.

3.1.6 *group, n*—a subdivision within a coal rank class indicating a coal’s designated rank; for example, subbituminous A rank coal is a group within the subbituminous class.

3.1.7 *high rank coal, n*—denotes a range of coal classes with a greater degree of metamorphism or alteration, including bituminous and anthracitic coals.

3.1.7.1 *Discussion*—These coals are generally characterized by lower inherent moisture and higher calorific value. Rank alone is not a sufficient indicator of whether a coal is suitable for a specific end use.

3.1.8 *low rank coal, n*—denotes a range of coal classes with a lesser degree of metamorphism or alteration, including lignitic and subbituminous coals.

3.1.8.1 *Discussion*—These coals are generally characterized by higher inherent moisture and lower calorific value. Rank alone is not a sufficient indicator of whether a coal is suitable for a specific end use.

3.2 Abbreviations:

TABLE 1 Classification of Coals by Rank^A

| Class/Group | $FC_{d,MMf}$ Limits, % | | $VM_{d,MMf}$ Limits, % | | $GCV_{im,MMf}$ Limits ^B | | | | Agglomerating Character |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| | Equal or Greater Than | Less Than | Greater Than | Equal or Less Than | Btu/lb | | MJ/kg ^C | | |
| | | | | | Equal or Greater Than | Less Than | Equal or Greater Than | Less Than | |
| Anthracitic: | | | | | | | | | |
| Meta-anthracite | 98 | ... | ... | 2 | ... | ... | ... | ... | } non-agglomerating |
| Anthracite | 92 | 98 | 2 | 8 | ... | ... | ... | ... | |
| Semianthracite ^D | 86 | 92 | 8 | 14 | ... | ... | ... | ... | |
| Bituminous: | | | | | | | | | |
| Low volatile bituminous coal | 78 | 86 | 14 | 22 | ... | ... | ... | ... | } commonly agglomerating ^E |
| Medium volatile bituminous coal | 69 | 78 | 22 | 31 | ... | ... | ... | ... | |
| High volatile A bituminous coal | ... | 69 | 31 | ... | 14 000 | ... | 32.557 | ... | |
| High volatile B bituminous coal | ... | ... | ... | ... | 13 000 | 14 000 | 30.232 | 32.557 | |
| High volatile C bituminous coal | ... | ... | ... | ... | 11 500 | 13 000 | 26.743 | 30.232 | |
| | | | | | 10 500 | 11 500 | 24.418 | 26.743 | } agglomerating |
| Subbituminous: | | | | | | | | | |
| Subbituminous A coal | ... | ... | ... | ... | 10 500 | 11 500 | 24.418 | 26.743 | } non-agglomerating |
| Subbituminous B coal | ... | ... | ... | ... | 9 500 | 10 500 | 22.09 | 24.418 | |
| Subbituminous C coal | ... | ... | ... | ... | 8 300 | 9 500 | 19.30 | 22.09 | |
| Lignitic: | | | | | | | | | |
| Lignite A | ... | ... | ... | ... | 6 300 | 8 300 | 14.65 | 19.30 | } non-agglomerating |
| Lignite B | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 6 300 | ... | 14.65 | |

^A This classification does not apply to certain coals, as discussed in Section 1.

^B Refers to coal containing its natural inherent moisture but not including visible water on the surface of the coal.

^C Megajoules per kilogram. To convert British thermal units per pound to megajoules per kilogram, multiply by 0.0023255.

^D If agglomerating, classify in low volatile group of the bituminous class.

^E It is recognized that there may be nonagglomerating varieties in these groups of the bituminous class, and that there are notable exceptions in the high volatile C bituminous group.

3.2.1 Where it is desired to abbreviate the designation of the ranks of coal, the following abbreviations shall be used:

ma—meta-anthracite
 an—anthracite
 sa—semianthracite
 lvb—low volatile bituminous
 mvb—medium volatile bituminous
 hvAb—high volatile A bituminous
 hvBb—high volatile B bituminous
 hvCb—high volatile C bituminous
 subA—subbituminous A
 subB—subbituminous B
 subC—subbituminous C
 ligA—lignite A
 ligB—lignite B

3.3 Symbols:

3.3.1 *Descriptive Symbols (symbols used for describing quantities, all in lowercase, roman)*

d—dry basis
 f—free basis (for example, mineral-matter-free and sulfur-trioxide-free)
 im—inherent moisture basis

3.3.2 *Simple Quantity Symbols (calculated quantities with units, all in upper case, italicized)*

A—ash, %
 FC—fixed carbon, %
 FSI—free swelling index
 GCV—gross calorific value, Btu/lb
 IM—inherent moisture, %
 MM—mineral matter, %
 S—total sulfur, %
 SO₃:A—sulfur trioxide in the ash, %
 SO₃:C—sulfur trioxide in the ash, expressed as a percentage of the coal, %
 VM—volatile matter, %

3.3.3 *Complex Quantity Symbols (simple quantity symbols with roman subscripts)*

A_d—ash, dry basis (possibly sulfate-bearing), %
 A_{im}—ash, inherent-moisture basis, %
 A_{im,SO₃f}—ash, inherent-moisture basis, sulfur-trioxide-free basis, %
 FC_d—fixed carbon, dry basis, %
 FC_{d,MMf}—fixed carbon, dry basis, mineral-matter-free basis, %
 FC_{im}—fixed carbon, inherent-moisture basis, %
 FC_{im,SO₃f}—fixed carbon, inherent-moisture basis, sulfur-trioxide-free basis, %
 GCV_d—gross calorific value, dry basis, Btu/lb
 GCV_{im}—gross calorific value, inherent-moisture basis, Btu/lb
 GCV_{im,MMf}—gross calorific value, inherent-moisture basis, mineral-matter-free basis, Btu/lb
 MM_{d,SO₃f}—mineral matter, dry basis, sulfur-trioxide-free basis, %
 MM_{im,SO₃f}—mineral matter, inherent-moisture basis, sulfur-trioxide-free basis, %
 S_d—total sulfur, dry basis, %
 S_{im}—total sulfur, inherent-moisture basis, %
 SO₃:A_d—sulfur trioxide in the ash, dry basis, %
 SO₃:C_{im}—sulfur trioxide in the ash, expressed as a percentage of the coal, inherent moisture basis, %
 VM_d—volatile matter, dry basis, %
 VM_{d,MMf}—volatile matter, dry basis, mineral-matter-free basis,

%
 VM_{im}—volatile matter, inherent moisture basis, %

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This classification establishes categories of coal based on gradational properties that depend principally on the degree of metamorphism to which the coal was subjected while buried. These categories indicate ranges of physical and chemical characteristics that are useful in making broad estimates of the behavior of coal in mining, preparation, and use.

5. Basis of Classification

5.1 Classification is according to fixed carbon and gross calorific value (expressed in British thermal units per pound, Btu/lb) calculated to the mineral-matter-free basis. The higher-rank coals are classified according to fixed carbon on the dry basis; the lower-rank coals are classified according to gross calorific value on the moist basis. Agglomerating character is used to differentiate between certain adjacent groups.

6. Classification by Rank

6.1 *Fixed Carbon and Gross Calorific Value*—Coals shall be classified by rank in accordance with [Table 1](#).

6.1.1 Coals having 69 % or more fixed carbon on the dry, mineral-matter-free basis shall be classified according to fixed carbon, regardless of gross calorific value.

6.1.2 Coals having less than 69 % fixed carbon on the dry, mineral-matter-free basis shall be classified according to gross calorific value on the moist, mineral-matter-free basis.

6.2 *Agglomerating Character*—Classify coals having 86 % or more fixed carbon on the dry, mineral-matter-free basis, if agglomerating, in the low volatile group of the bituminous class. Classify coals having gross calorific values in the range from 10 500 Btu/lb to 11 500 Btu/lb on the inherent-moisture, mineral-matter-free basis according to their agglomerating character ([Table 1](#)).

6.3 *Supplemental Information*—A correlation of the ranking property, volatile matter (100–fixed carbon), with the mean-maximum reflectance of the vitrinite group macerals in coals tested in one laboratory over a period of several years is shown in [Appendix X1](#).

7. Sampling

7.1 *Samples*—Classify a coal seam, or part of a coal seam, in any locality based on the average analysis and gross calorific value (and agglomerating character where required) of not less than three and preferably five or more whole seam samples, either face channels or cores, taken in different and uniformly distributed localities, either within the same mine or closely adjacent mines representing a continuous and compact area not greater than approximately 10 km² (4 square miles) in regions of geological uniformity. In regions in which conditions indicate that the coal probably varies rapidly in short distances, the spacing of sampling points and grouping of analyses to provide average values shall not be such that coals of obviously different rank will be used in calculating average values.

7.1.1 Take channel samples by excluding mineral partings more than 1 cm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in.) and lenses or concretions (such as sulfur balls) more than 1.25 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in.) thick and 5 cm (2 in.) wide, as specified in Practice [D4596](#).

7.1.2 A drill core sample may be used provided it was collected as specified in Practice [D5192](#) and meets the following provisions: core recovery is 100 % of the seam, the major mineral partings and concretions are excluded as specified in [7.1.1](#), and drilling mud is removed from the core (see also [7.1.6](#)).

7.1.3 Place all samples in metal or plastic cans with airtight lids, or heavy vapor impervious bags, properly sealed to preserve inherent moisture.

7.1.4 Analyses of samples from outcrops or from weathered or oxidized coal shall not be used for classification by rank.

7.1.5 In case the coal is likely to be classified on the *moist* basis, that is, inclusive of its natural complement of inherent moisture, take samples in a manner most likely to preserve inherent moisture for purposes of analysis. Because some of the moisture in a freshly collected sample condenses on the inside of the sample container, weigh both the container and the coal before and after air drying, and report the total loss in mass as air-drying loss.

7.1.6 It is often difficult to obtain samples without including visible surface moisture, such as in typical coring situations where injected water or drilling mud is used or when the coal seam is an aquifer. When the as-received basis moisture in samples is questionable in terms of representing inherent moisture, and the coal is likely to be classified on the *moist* basis, the sampler shall include the following statement in the description: *Moisture questionable*. Samples so marked shall not be used for classification on a moist basis unless brought to a standard condition of moisture equilibrium as specified in Test Method [D1412/D1412M](#). Analyses of such samples that have been treated in this manner shall be designated as *samples equilibrated per Test Method [D1412/D1412M](#)*.

7.1.7 Equilibrium moisture results for suspected lignite and subbituminous coals shall be adjusted utilizing the procedure outlined in Test Method [D1412/D1412M](#), Appendix X1 to estimate inherent moisture content.

7.1.8 The assessment of whether the as-received basis moisture in a sample is equivalent to inherent moisture is a key criterion when classifying coal on the moist basis. Samples may be at their inherent moisture level, or may be above or below.

7.1.8.1 If the surfaces of sample pieces appear wet, the total moisture present is in excess of inherent moisture. Possible sources of that moisture may include groundwater contamination, precipitation on the coal, contamination of coal drill core samples by drilling fluids and additives, and fresh water used to clean the core. Make note of any visible water on the surface of the coal. Break all larger sample pieces into smaller fragments (particularly if obtained from core) to inspect for visible water occurring in internal cleats, fractures, voids, etc. Any visible water indicates a total moisture content in excess of inherent moisture.

7.1.8.2 If the surfaces of sample fragments appear dry, the total moisture present may be the full complement of inherent

moisture or somewhat less than that amount. In Appendix X1 of Test Method [D1412/D1412M](#), the section titled *Characteristics and Conditions of Sampling Locality* describes a simple field test that can help determine which case is at hand.

NOTE 2—ASTM Manual 11³ provides additional useful information regarding the sampling and handling of core samples.

7.2 *Other Types of Samples*—A standard rank determination cannot be made unless samples have been obtained in accordance with [7.1](#). However, the relation to standard determinations may be usefully given for other types of samples taken under unspecified conditions, providing the same standards of analysis and computation are followed. Designate these comparative indications as *apparent rank*, which indicates the correct relative position for the sample analyzed but does not imply any standards of sampling. Whenever apparent rank is stated, give additional information as to the nature of the sample.

7.2.1 The apparent rank of the coal product from a mine shall be based on representative samples taken in accordance with the Organization and Planning of Sampling Operations section (Section 7) of Practice [D2234/D2234M](#).

7.2.2 In case the coal is likely to be classed on the *moist* basis, take samples at the tipple or preparation plant and seal the sample to prevent loss of moisture.

8. Methods of Analysis and Testing

8.1 *Laboratory Sampling and Analysis*—Prepare coal in accordance with Practice [D2013/D2013M](#) and analyze it in accordance with Test Methods [D3173/D3173M](#), [D3174](#), [D3175](#), [D4239](#), [D3302/D3302M](#), and Practice [D3172](#). Determine its gross calorific value in accordance with Test Method [D5865](#). Determine the sulfur trioxide (SO₃) retained in the ash in accordance with Test Method [D5016](#) and express the result on a dry basis. Inherent moisture is reported as as-received (AR) moisture if the sample was collected according to [7.1.1](#) or as equilibrium moisture if [7.1.6](#) (Test Method [D1412/D1412M](#)) applies.

8.2 Adjust the ash value determined in accordance with Test Method [D3174](#) to be free of sulfur trioxide as follows:⁴

$$A_{\text{im,SO}_3\text{f}} = A_d \left(1 - \frac{\text{SO}_3 : A_d}{100} \right) \left(1 - \frac{\text{IM}}{100} \right) \quad (1)$$

Add to the value of fixed carbon that is determined in accordance with Practice [D3172](#) the value of the SO₃ determined in the ash to obtain the value fixed carbon to be used in [Eq 2](#).

8.3 *Agglomerating Character*—The test carried out by the examination of the residue in the platinum crucible incident to

³ Luppens, J. A., Wilson, S. E., and Stanton, R.W., Eds., *Manual on Drilling, Sampling, and Analysis of Coal*, Compiled by ASTM Subcommittees D05.18 and D05.23, West Conshohocken, PA: ASTM International, 1992, <https://doi.org/10.1520/MNL11-EB>.

⁴ To perform the calculations in this standard, the percentage values (rather than their decimal equivalent) should be entered in the equations. The result is the value expressed as a percentage (except for calculations of gross calorific value, which is expressed as Btu/lb). For example, a value of 40 % should be entered into the calculation as “40” and a result of 90 should be expressed as 90 %. The use of the factor “100” allows the conversion to %.