



Designation: F1307 – 20

Standard Test Method for Oxygen Transmission Rate Through Dry Packages Using a Coulometric Sensor¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation F1307; 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 test method covers a procedure for the determination of the steady-state rate of transmission of oxygen gas into packages. More specifically, the method is applicable to packages that in normal use will enclose a dry environment.

1.2 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as the standard.

1.3 *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.*

1.4 *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 Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

D1434 Test Method for Determining Gas Permeability Characteristics of Plastic Film and Sheeting

D3985 Test Method for Oxygen Gas Transmission Rate Through Plastic Film and Sheeting Using a Coulometric Sensor

E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F02 on Primary Barrier Packaging and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F02.10 on Permeation.

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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 *oxygen gas transmission rate (O_2GTR)*—as applied to a package, is the quantity of oxygen gas passing through the surface of the package (PKG) per unit of time.

3.1.1.1 *Discussion*—The SI unit of transmission rate is the mol/s. The test conditions, including temperature, oxygen partial pressure and humidity on both sides of the package, must be stated. A commonly used unit of O_2GTR is the $cm^3(STP)/(PKG \cdot d)$, where 1 cm^3 at Standard Temperature and Pressure (STP = 273.15K; 1.013×10^5 Pa) is 44.62×10^{-6} mol and one day is 86 400 s. Note: The term package (PKG) is utilized within the transmission rate unit to distinguish it from traditional film OTR results. Unlike film testing, where the test area is always known, a package oxygen transmission rate measurement often involves complex systems with seals and closures (for example, a bottle with cap, a tray with lidding or a heat-sealed foil pouch with permeation through the edges), where oxygen transmission is occurring. A package OTR test is often a packaging “system” test versus a simple component test.

3.1.2 *oxygen permeability coefficient ($P'O_2$)*—the product of the permeance and thickness of the barrier.

3.1.2.1 *Discussion*—The permeability is meaningful only for homogenous materials, in which case it is a property characteristic of the bulk material. This quantity should not be used unless the relationship between thickness and permeance has been verified in tests using several thicknesses of the material. The SI unit of permeability is the mol/(m·s·Pa). The test conditions must be stated.

3.1.3 *oxygen permeance (PO_2)*—the ratio of the O_2GTR to the difference between the partial pressure of O_2 on the two sides of the package wall.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—The SI unit of permeance is the mol/(s·Pa). The test conditions (see 4.2) must be stated.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 This test method employs a coulometric oxygen sensor and associated equipment in an arrangement similar to that described in Test Method D3985. Oxygen gas transmission rate (O_2GTR) is determined after the package has been mounted on a test fixture and has equilibrated in the test environment.

4.2 The package is mounted in such a way as to provide that the inside of the package is slowly purged by a stream of

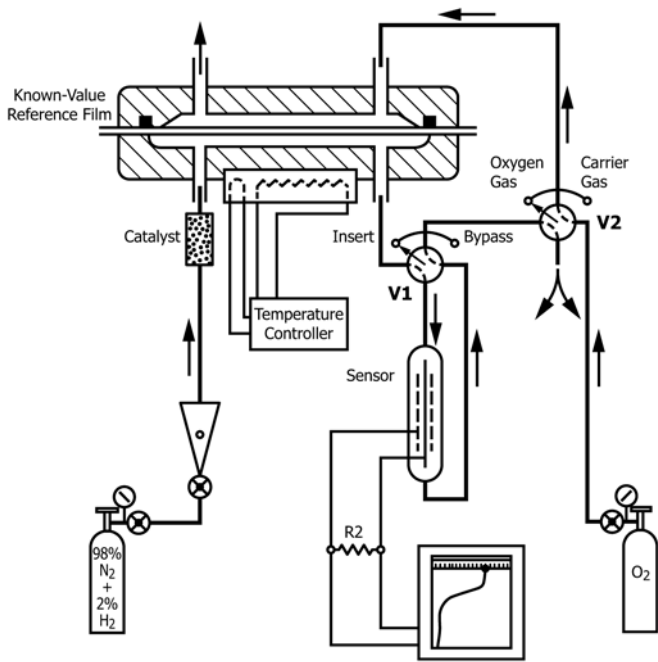


FIG. 1 Arrangement of Components when Reference Film is Used to Calibrate System for Package Testing

nitrogen while the outside of the package is exposed to a known concentration of oxygen. The package may be exposed in ambient room air which contains 20.8 % oxygen, or immersed in an atmosphere of 100 % oxygen. As oxygen permeates through the package walls into the nitrogen carrier gas, it is transported to the coulometric detector where it produces an electrical current, the magnitude of which is proportional to the amount of oxygen flowing into the detector per unit of time.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Oxygen gas transmission rate is an important determinant of the protection afforded by barrier materials. It is not, however, the sole determinant, and additional tests, based on experience, must be used to correlate package performance with O_2 GTR. This test method is suitable as a referee method of testing, provided that the user and source have agreed on sampling procedures, standardization procedures, test conditions, and acceptance criteria.

6. Interferences

6.1 The presence of certain interfering substances in the carrier gas stream may give rise to unwanted electrical outputs and error factors. Interfering substances include free chlorine and some strong oxidizing agents. Exposure to carbon dioxide should also be minimized to avoid damage to the sensor through reaction with the potassium hydroxide electrolyte.

7. Apparatus

7.1 *Oxygen Gas Transmission Apparatus*, as diagrammed in Fig. 1 with the following:

7.1.1 *Package Test Stations*, providing a means for the introduction and exhaust of the nitrogen carrier gas stream without significant loss or leakage.

7.1.1.1 Experience has shown that arrangements using multiple package test stations are a practical way to increase the number of measurements that can be obtained from a coulometric sensor. A valving manifold connects the carrier gas side of each individual test station to the sensor in a predetermined pattern. Carrier gas is continually purging the carrier gas sides of those packages that are not connected to the sensor. Either test gas (100 % oxygen) or normal room air (20.8 % oxygen), whichever is appropriate, contacts the outside of the package.

7.1.2 *Diffusion Cell*, consisting of two metal halves which, when closed upon the film used for system calibration, will accurately define a circular area of that film. Typical diffusion cell areas are 100 cm² and 30 cm². The volumes inside the cell above and below the enclosed film are not critical; they should be small enough to allow for rapid gas exchange, but not so small that an unsupported film which happens to sag or bulge will contact the top or bottom of the cell. Means shall be provided for the measurement of cell temperature.

7.1.2.1 *O-Ring*—An appropriately sized groove, machined into the oxygen (or test gas) side of the diffusion cell, retains a neoprene O-ring. The test area is considered to be the area established by the inside contact diameter of the compressed O-ring when the diffusion cell is clamped shut against the test specimen. The area, *A*, can be obtained by measuring the inside diameter of the imprint left by the O-ring on the specimen after it has been removed from the diffusion cell.

7.1.2.2 The nitrogen (or carrier gas) side of the diffusion cell shall have a flat raised rim. Since this rim is the sealing surface against which the test specimen is pressed, it must be smooth and flat, without scratches which may promote leakage.

7.1.2.3 *Diffusion Cell Pneumatic Fittings*—Each half of the diffusion cell shall incorporate suitable fittings for the introduction and exhaust of gas without significant loss or leakage.

7.1.2.4 It is desirable to thermostatically control the diffusion cell. A simple resistive heater, attached to the carrier gas side of the cell in such a manner as to ensure good thermal contact, is adequate for this purpose. A thermistor sensor and an appropriate control circuit will serve to regulate the cell temperature unless measurements are being made close to ambient temperature. In this case, it is desirable to provide cooling coils to remove some of the heat.

7.1.3 *Catalyst Bed*, a small metal tube with fittings for attachment to the inlet of the nitrogen gas pneumatic fitting containing 3 to 5 g of 0.5 % platinum or palladium catalyst on alumina to provide an essentially oxygen-free carrier gas to the diffusion cell and to each package test station.

7.1.4 *Flowmeter*, a flowmeter having an operating range of 5 to 100 mL/min is required to monitor the flow rate of nitrogen carrier gas through each test station.

7.1.5 *Flow Switching Valves*—Two or more valves for the switching of the nitrogen and test gas flow streams.

7.1.6 *Oxygen-Sensitive Coulometric Sensor*, operating at an essentially constant efficiency is employed to monitor the quantity of oxygen transmitted.

7.1.7 *Load Resistor*—The current generated by the coulometric cell shall pass through a resistive load across which the output voltage is measured. Typical values for load resistors are such that the values yield a convenient relationship between the

output voltage and the oxygen transmission rate as expressed in terms of $\text{cm}^3(\text{STP})/(\text{PKG}\cdot\text{d})$.

7.1.8 *Voltage Recorder*—The voltage across the load resistor is measured and recorded using a strip-chart potentiometer, data-logger or other suitable device. The instrument or system should be able to measure a full-scale voltage of 50 mV. It should be able to measure voltages as low as 0.10 mV with a resolution of at least 10 μV . An input impedance of 5000 ohm or higher is acceptable.

8. Reagents and Materials

8.1 *Nitrogen Carrier Gas*, consisting of a nitrogen and hydrogen mixture in which the percentage of hydrogen shall fall between 0.5 and 3.0 volume percent. The carrier gas shall be dry and contain not more than 100 ppm of oxygen. A commercially available mixture known as “forming gas” is suitable.

8.2 *Sealing Grease*—A high-viscosity silicone stopcock grease or a high-vacuum grease is required for sealing the calibration film in the diffusion cell.

8.3 *Oxygen Test Gas*—The test gas shall be dry and contain not less than 99.5 % oxygen (except as provided for in 14.8).

9. Technical Precautions

9.1 Extended use of the test unit with no moisture in the gas stream may result in a noticeable decrease in output and response time from the sensor (equivalent to an increase in the calibration factor, Q). This condition is due to drying out of the sensor.

9.2 Temperature is a critical parameter affecting the measurement of O_2GTR . Careful temperature control can help to minimize variations due to temperature fluctuations. During testing, monitor and record the temperature, periodically, to the nearest 0.5°C. Report the average temperature and the range of temperatures found during a test.

9.3 The sensor will require a relatively long time to stabilize at a low reading characteristic of a good barrier after it has been used to test a barrier such as low-density polyethylene. For this reason, materials of comparable gas transmission qualities should be tested together.

9.4 Back diffusion of air into the unit is undesirable. Take care, therefore, to ensure that there is a flow of nitrogen through the system at all times. This flow can be low when the instrument is not being used.

9.5 The gas-permeability characteristics of some barrier materials are altered by exposure to water vapor. If a package is to be exposed and tested in normal laboratory air (20.8 % O_2), the ambient relative humidity should be monitored to the nearest 3 %. This may be accomplished using a sling psychrometer or other method of comparable accuracy. Report the average and range of relative humidities measured during the test.

10. Sampling

10.1 The sampling units used for the determination of O_2GTR shall be representative of the quantity of product for which the data are required.

11. Test Specimens

11.1 Test packages shall be representative of the population and shall be free of non-typical defects, unless these defects are a characteristic of the package being analyzed (for example, wrinkled pouch, dented bottle...etc.)

12. Calibration

12.1 *General Approach*—The oxygen sensor used in this method is a coulometric device that yields a linear output as predicted by Faraday’s Law. Since this sensor has an efficiency of 95 to 98 % it is almost an absolute “yardstick” that does not require calibration. Experience has shown, however, that under some circumstances the sensor may become depleted or damaged to the extent that efficiency and response are impaired. For this reason, the method incorporates means for periodic system calibration. This calibration is derived from measurements of a known-value “Reference Package.”

12.2 The reference package is essentially the lower-half of a diffusion cell (Fig. 1) in which a sheet of reference film of known O_2GTR has been sealed and clamped. This creates a “package” into which oxygen will diffuse at a known rate.

12.3 *Assembling the Reference Package*—Ensure the sensor is bypassed to avoid swamping it with air, that is, no flow to the sensor. Unclamp the diffusion cell and open it. Apply a thin layer of sealing grease (see 8.2) around the raised rim of the lower half of the diffusion cell. Insert the reference film in the diffusion cell and place it upon the greased surface, taking care to avoid wrinkles or creases. Lower the upper half of the diffusion cell into place and clamp both halves tightly together.

12.4 *Purging the System*—Start the nitrogen carrier gas flow and purge air from the upper and lower diffusion cell chambers using a flow rate of 50 to 60 cm^3/min (as indicated by the flowmeter). After 3 or 4 min, reduce the flow rate to the desired value between 5 and 15 cm^3/min . Maintain this configuration for 30 min.

12.5 *Establishing Zero Level of Reference Film*—After the system has been flushed with nitrogen for 30 min, with the sensor bypassed, divert the nitrogen carrier gas flow to the sensor. At this time the sensor output, as displayed on the voltage recorder, will usually increase abruptly, indicating that oxygen is entering the sensor with the carrier gas. The most likely sources of this oxygen are (1) outgassing of the sample, (2) leaks in the system, or (3) a combination of (1) and (2). The operator shall observe the recorder trace until the sensor output current stabilizes at a constant low value with no significant trend in either direction. Note the observed deflection of the strip chart recorder at this time and label it E_0 .

12.6 Once the zero level (E_0) has been established, switch to a flow of oxygen on the test gas side of the diffusion cell. Nitrogen will continue to flow on the downstream side of the cell.

12.7 *Establishing a Steady-State O_2GTR* —The sensor output, as displayed by the strip-chart recorder, should increase and gradually level off, approaching a constant value (E_c). Record the observed final steady-state value of E_c .

12.8 *Temperature of the Reference Film*—It is desirable that system calibration should be conducted at the temperature for which the reference film’s O₂GTR is cited. Apply an appropriate correction to the rate that the temperature differs from that value. Temperature shall be obtained by monitoring thermometers or thermocouples placed in the thermometer wells on both sides of the reference film. The film temperature may be assumed to be midway between the two values.

12.9 *Standby Procedure*—At the conclusion of system calibration, but when it is expected that package tests will be performed soon, the instrument should be placed in a standby condition by taking the following steps: (1) stop the flow of O₂ test gas to the sensor, and switch to nitrogen carrier gas on the test gas side of the diffusion cell, (2) turn off the oxygen supply, and (3) reduce the nitrogen flow rate to less than 5 mL/min. It is desirable to maintain a slow flow of nitrogen through the instrument when it is not being used in order to reduce the back diffusion of air into the system.

12.10 *Establish System Calibration Constant*—Determine the exposed area, *A*, of the calibrating reference film (see 7.1.2.1). Using the permeance value furnished with the reference film, determine the O₂GTR through a film of that area (*A*). Use this value to determine the calibration constant, *Q* :

$$Q = \frac{O_2GTR \times R_L}{(E_e - E_o)} \quad (1)$$

where:

O₂GTR = oxygen transmission rate through a film of area *A*, as calculated from data supplied with the reference film,

R_L = value of load resistance (see 7.1.7),

E₀ = observed steady-state zero-level before oxygen gradient is applied (see 12.5), and

E_e = observed steady-state voltage with oxygen gradient across test film (see 12.7).

Repeat the calibration using additional sheets of the reference film until the confidence interval for *Q* defined by the measurements is within acceptable limits. When operating an instrument with multiple diffusion cells, it is desirable to keep a sheet of the reference film in one of the diffusion cells to ensure the reliability of the rates being measured.

12.11 In principle, each molecule of oxygen that enters the sensor causes the transfer of four electrons. Experience indicates that production models of the sensors achieve efficiencies of 95 to 98 %. Any significant drift in the calibration factor *Q* should, therefore, be investigated as to its cause and corrective action should be undertaken.

12.12 The value of *Q* will be a function of the units in which the results are to be expressed. If it is desired to change units, *Q* can be transformed to its proper value in the new set of units using the appropriate relationships between base units (quantity of matter, length, and time) in the new and the old sets of units.

13. Preparation of a Package for Test

13.1 The method by which a package is prepared for attachment to the instrument for testing depends upon the

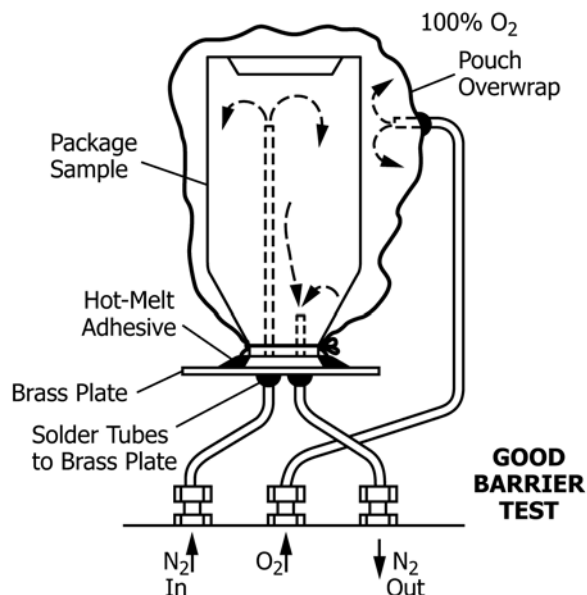


FIG. 2 Typical Method of Attaching a Plastic Bottle or Tub

package shape, type, and test objectives. For a majority of tests, the package may be exposed to ambient air (20.8 % O₂). If the package is an extremely good barrier, however, it may be helpful to increase the test gradient by immersing the package in 100 % oxygen. This is accomplished by securing a plastic bag, pouch overwrap, or other container around the test package and flooding the bag with oxygen as shown in Fig. 2. This will increase the transmission rate by a factor equal to the ratio:

$$\frac{100\%}{21\%} = 4.8 \quad (2)$$

Whenever 100 % oxygen is used to establish the test gradient, the operator should use care not to pressurize the oxygen-containing structure. (Oxygen partial pressure should be equal to the prevailing atmospheric pressure.) Pressurization may be avoided by providing a small vent and by injecting the oxygen at a low rate on the order of 10 to 20 mL/min. Bottles, thermoformed plastic cups, and tubs are usually mounted as shown in Fig. 2. Flat pouches and bags may be mounted using some variation of Fig. 3. In attaching a pouch, it is important that the copper tubes first be connected securely to the fittings and then bent to the desired angles. Corners of the pouch may then be snipped off to provide openings just large enough for the tubes. After the package has been slipped over the tube ends, a fast-curing epoxy or hot-melt adhesive is carefully applied to seal cut openings.

13.2 The detector output is governed by Faraday’s Law, and the calibration does not vary with temperature. It should be noted, however, that the oxygen transmission rate of most plastic materials will vary 3 to 9 %/°C. Since the package test attachment does not provide means for control of package temperature, it will prove advantageous from the standpoint of data reproducibility to locate the instrument in a draft-free, constant-temperature environment.

14. Package Test Procedure

14.1 *Preparation of Apparatus*—If preceding tests have exposed the apparatus to high moisture levels, it will be