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Standard Practice for Field Calibration and Application of Hand-Held Moisture Meters¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D7438; 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 reappraisal. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reappraisal.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice applies to the measurement of moisture content of solid wood, including solid wood products containing additives, that is, chemicals or adhesives, by hand-held moisture meters under conditions of end-use.

1.1.1 This practice includes calibration, use, and interpretation of meters for conditions that relate to wood product characteristics, such as nonuniform grain and growth ring orientation, and to end-use process conditions, such as moisture gradients.

1.1.2 Meters employing differing technologies ~~may will~~ not necessarily provide equivalent readings under the same conditions. When this practice has been applied, it is assumed that the referenced meter is acceptable unless otherwise specified. Meters shall have been calibrated by Test Methods ~~D4442~~ D4444.

1.2 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this 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~~ safety, health, and ~~health~~ 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

D9 Terminology Relating to Wood and Wood-Based Products

D2915 Practice for Sampling and Data-Analysis for Structural Wood and Wood-Based Products

D4442 Test Methods for Direct Moisture Content Measurement of Wood and Wood-Based Materials

D4444 Test Method for Laboratory Standardization and Calibration of Hand-Held Moisture Meters

D4933 Guide for Moisture Conditioning of Wood and Wood-Based Materials

D6782 Test Methods for Standardization and Calibration of In-Line Dry Lumber Moisture Meters

2.2 Other ASTM Sources:

ASTM Standards on Precision and Bias for Various Applications, 1992

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D07 on Wood and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D07.01 on Fundamental Test Methods and Properties.

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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. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

3.1.1 For definitions of general terms used in this standard related to wood and wood-based products, refer to Terminology [D9](#).

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 ~~conductance meters—conductance moisture meters are those that measure predominantly ionic conductance between points of applied voltage, usually direct current. Direct-current conductance meters have been commonly referred to as “resistance-type” meters. Most commercial conductance meters are high-input impedance (about $10^{12} \Omega$), wide-range (10^4 to $10^{12} \Omega$) ohmmeters. Their scales are calibrated to read directly in moisture content (oven-dry mass basis) for a particular calibration species and at a specific reference temperature.~~

3.2.1.1 Discussion—

Direct-current conductance meters have been commonly referred to as “resistance-type” meters. Most commercial conductance meters are high-input impedance (about $10^{12} \Omega$), wide-range (10^4 to $10^{12} \Omega$) ohmmeters. Their scales are calibrated to read directly in moisture content (oven-dry mass basis) for a particular calibration species and at a specific reference temperature.

3.2.2 ~~capacitive-admittance meters—capacitive-admittance moisture meters that transmit electromagnetic wave energy into the wood to detect the influence of moisture in the wood on these waves as an estimate of moisture content. Wave energy is most often in the radio frequency range; hand-held meters commonly are placed directly on the wood surface.~~

3.2.2.1 Discussion—

Wave energy is most often in the radio frequency range; hand-held meters commonly are placed directly on the wood surface.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 Hand-held meters provide a rapid means of sampling moisture content of wood-based materials during and after processing to maintain quality assurance and compliance with standards. However, these measurements are inferential; that is, electrical parameters are measured and compared against a calibration to obtain an indirect measure of moisture content. The electrical measurements are influenced by actual moisture content, a number of other wood variables, environmental conditions, geometry of the measuring probe circuitry, and design of the meter. The maximum accuracy can only be obtained by an awareness of the effect of each parameter on the meter output and correction of readings as specified by these test methods. [Appendix X1](#) is a commentary that provides explanation of the mandatory sections and discussion of historical practices. [Appendix X2](#) addresses the influence of process and wood variables.

4.1.1 This practice provides for calibration and application of wood products that contain commercial characteristics and that reflect the manufacturing environment.

4.2 Most uses of hand-held moisture meters employ correlative (predictive) relationships between the meter reading and wood areas or volumes that exceed that of the direct meter measurement (for example, larger specimens, pieces of lumber, lots). The field calibration section of this practice anticipates the potential need for this type of sampling. These correlative uses are examined in [Appendix X3](#).

5. Standardization

5.1 *General*—Standardization shall be performed to establish the integrity of the meter and electrode under the field conditions of use. The meter circuit shall be tested by applying either the reference material-external reference check (calibration block or resistance points) or the internal standardization check (if incorporated into the meter), in accordance with manufacturer’s recommendations, noting the corresponding meter response value, and comparing with the manufacturer’s data. Standardization shall be done before calibration. If alternate electrodes are to be used with a meter, standardization shall be done for all electrode types and alternate assemblies.

5.1.1 Initially, standardization ~~should~~shall be performed before each period of use. ~~The time interval may be extended~~It is possible to extend the time interval if experience shows that the particular meter is stable for a longer time under equivalent use conditions.

5.1.2 Standardization procedures in the field will be affected by the standardization performance of the meter during evaluation under Test Methods [D4444](#). The report of section 5.2.3 of Test Methods [D4444](#) provides this information.

5.2 The standardization shall be carried out with the instrument, including electrodes, at the temperature of the anticipated

application. This shall include the range of anticipated conditions; the reference material shall maintain its essential characteristics over this range. The sensitivity of this standardization to temperature of the meter shall be part of the evaluation.

5.2.1 If the environmental conditions change during the usage period beyond those evaluated in the initial standardization, the standardization shall be repeated.

5.2.2 If the manufacturer recommends an area, a method, or a standard specimen for standardization that does not reflect the entire direct measurement area of the meter, this shall be noted as the manufacturer's recommendation.

5.2.3 Field standardization ~~may be~~ is difficult to carry out under some ambient field conditions and with the electrodes to be used. One example is the use in monitoring in-kiln performance. If the measurement conditions are difficult to reproduce or are transient (for example, in a hot dry kiln), then it shall be understood that the validity of the meter readings are dependent upon the laboratory standardization and manufacturer's recommendations.

6. Calibration

6.1 *General*—Under processing conditions, it is possible that laboratory calibration procedures ~~maybe~~ will be impractical, particularly because of moisture and temperature gradients, nonstandard temperatures, unverified species within commercial species groups, ~~non-straight-grain non-straight-grain~~ wood, and common production variables such as mixtures of heartwood and sapwood. Further, it is possible that these process variables maywill change or invalidate some of the calibration results obtained under laboratory conditions in Test Methods [D4444](#).

6.2 *Methods*—The principles and procedures of calibration in Test Methods [D4444](#) shall be applied to the degree possible and relevant to develop a meaningful relationship between meter readings and actual moisture content (MC).

6.2.1 All field calibrations shall be referenced to direct MC measurements (Test Methods [D4442](#)).

6.2.2 Field calibration shall be carried out with meters that have been laboratory standardized and calibrated for appropriate wood variables, such as species and temperature using Test Methods [D4444](#), and subsequently field standardized.

6.3 *Field Variables*—~~The calibration may~~ It is acceptable for the calibration to be based on end-use environmental and product and process conditions that are more ~~restricted~~ restrictive than those evaluated by Test Methods [D4444](#). In addition, it is possible that the process conditions maywill produce interactions that must be considered in the calibration.

6.3.1 Special care must be taken to minimize errors caused by the influence of unintended wood variables, such as density and temperature (uncorrected) on readings. Specimen size for field testing mayshall be selected to represent the appropriate geometry of the target sample. Field meter readings are conditional upon both the prior standardization and calibration process, the influence of wood variables in the field test, and application information supplied by the meter manufacturer.

6.4 *Calibration Steps*—The field calibration shall be conducted on specimens and in conditions that are representative of the process and are carefully documented. See [Appendix X2](#) for discussion of process variables and wood characteristics.

6.4.1 *Sample Selection*—The number of wood specimens used for the calibration shall be selected following the concepts of Practice [D2915](#), considering the variables to be represented and the desired precision of the calibration. For example, if the sample is to represent grain patterns, moisture gradients, etc. found in a lumber grade, these variables shall be considered in setting sampling criteria. (See also Test Methods [D4444](#).)

6.4.2 *Sample Preparation*—~~While the sample may be intended to include~~ If it is the intent that the sample includes process variables such as moisture gradients, temperature, etc., the measurement and subsequent preservation of these variables prior to and during meter measurement shall be considered part of the sampling process. See Test Methods [D4444](#) for discussion of other relevant issues.

6.4.3 *Testing*—Field calibration shall be based on the relationship of the meter readings to Test Methods [D4442](#) moisture measurement values. ~~Because process conditions may be transient (for example,~~ When process variables such as temperature and moisture gradients, or ~~both), both,~~ are transient, calibration that reflects these variables requires special treatment of specimens (such as subdividing specimens) or additional equipment (such as temperature probes). Care shall be taken to not distort the original specimen condition with these additional steps.

6.4.4 *Determination of Corrections*—To establish a correction that reflects the influence of the measured variables, the principles of Test Methods **D4444**, section 6.2.4, shall be followed.

6.5 *Report*—Useful application of field test calibration is conditional upon the relevance of the test sample. Consequently, accurate reporting of the wood and process variables (see 6.3 and 6.4) is critical. The report shall follow the practice of Test Methods **D4444**, section 6.2.5.

6.5.1 Field samples often contain uncertainties with respect to exact species or species mixtures, temperature at the point of electrode measurement, in-exact moisture gradients, and other specimen variables. Where these non-uniformities and uncertainties cannot be measured or corrected, their presence shall be noted in the report and quantified where possible.

APPENDIXES

(Nonmandatory Information)

X1. COMMENTARY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this appendix is to supply auxiliary information on the basis for and practice of this practice. It is organized with paragraphs that correspond by section number to those in the mandatory text; text paragraphs needing no explanation are not listed. This concept permits changes at any time in order to keep the practice current and to improve its usefulness.

This is a practice standard; thus, it describes and standardizes, to the degree possible, the calibration and measurement practices that occur outside the environment of the testing laboratory.

TABLE X1.1

Section	Comments
1.1	The principal concepts of this practice, as first incorporated in Practice D2016 in 1965 and then in subsequent editions of this practice, addressed only meters based on the change of wood conductance or dielectric properties with moisture content. Specific electrode configurations were anticipated, based on early commercial use. Meters were classified as “resistance-type” and “dielectric-type”; no provisions were made other electrode configurations or measurement technologies. Meters are now classified as “conductance” rather than “resistance-type,” and “capacitive-admittance” rather than “dielectric-type” to better reflect current understanding of the underlying physics of their function. The current practice makes no distinction between meter measurement technologies for standardization and calibration requirements. Provision for unique characteristics of measurement technologies is accommodated in Appendix X1 – Appendix X3 . The use of “field” to describe calibrations and measurement issues denotes conditions that cannot be controlled as in a laboratory, yet the conditions are very commonly the environment in which the meters are used.
1.1.1	This practice targets use outside of the laboratory where controlled conditions are not usually possible. In addition, most commercial wood products are not “clear” and straight-grain and are heterogenous in other characteristics. Sampling is necessarily tied to commercial product descriptions.
1.1.2	Requiring calibration under Test Methods D4444 ensures prior technical evaluation of a meter, with an associated report describing performance under controlled conditions. Although the intended use may not adhere to these same conditions, the performance in the laboratory establishes the minimum performance criteria for field use as well as reference points on sensitivity to variables such as species, density, temperature, etc.
3.1	This practice is designed to apply to meters using technologies other than the two technologies included in the section. Conductance and capacitive admittance meters are included because they provide the generic descriptions of principal, current commercial meters. Individual characteristics of commercial meters are not intended to be covered in these generic descriptions. As other meter technologies are developed, more generic descriptions should be added to this section.
3.2	This practice is designed to apply to meters using technologies other than the two technologies included in the section. Conductance and capacitive admittance meters are included because they provide the generic descriptions of principal, current commercial meters. Individual characteristics of commercial meters are not intended to be covered in these generic descriptions. As other meter technologies are developed, more generic descriptions should be added to this section.
4.1.1	Much of the content of this practice was incorporated in previous versions and drafts of Test Methods D4444 , and some earlier in Practice D2016. The mixing of test methods and practices in one standard is not desirable; thus, this practice attempts to capture the critical elements of the many and varied commercial applications of hand-held meters while Test Methods D4444 concentrates on the base-line laboratory test methods. Specific issues of meter technology in use are covered in more detail in Appendix X2 .
5.1.1	Meter features and the conditions under which the meters are used can vary widely. The intent is not to say that the meter needs to be standardized before it is used with each piece of lumber, although that might be the case in some applications. As with any piece of equipment, the user should build on the manufacturer’s recommendations and augment as necessary to suit the end use but only after understanding how the equipment operates for their application. This then becomes part of the user’s quality procedures.

TABLE X1.1 *Continued*

Section	Comments
4.2	Correlative methods of data analysis are critical to many meter uses; however, they vary widely and are difficult to characterize as true calibration of a meter. Consequently, Appendix X3 addresses both calibration of a meter and predictive uses as separate topics of standard practice.
5.2.3	The standardization of a meter under severe environmental conditions can be a serious operating issue. If the manufacturer's recommendations (for example, standard specimens or standard methods for standardization) cannot be followed, the correct operation of the meter is in question.
6.1	The essence of this practice is that many uses of meters demand performance on products and under conditions that are not covered by laboratory calibration (Test Methods D4444). Field calibration is the only recourse. It is emphasized that field-type calibrations often will apply very narrowly to the conditions of that calibration and do not extend to other uses or conditions.
6.2.2	Although the calibrations carried out in the field may be the only ones of commercial interest because they reflect the actual operating conditions, the meter must have the basis of laboratory calibration to ensure satisfactory operation under stable conditions and knowledge of response to variables important in the field.
6.3	Common wood variables encountered when conducting a calibration on commercial samples include non-uniform grain and growth ring orientation, moisture and density gradients within the measurement zone, mineral streaks, and "wet wood" (bacterially infected pockets). In many cases, the size and shape of the wood specimens is different from that used in laboratory calibration because the goal of the field calibration may be to calibrate the meter assembly for a particular application in which influence of specimen size and shape is an important element. These factors pose a challenge to field calibration because they produce results conditional upon all the incorporated factors; the resultant calibration may not extend to other uses. The results also have a component of sample "error" that may not be clearly identified (see Appendix X3). A common example of a field calibration with a narrow scope is a calibration of a meter used with deep members (for example, 200 mm) dried in a commercial kiln. A gradient is expected and accommodated in the calibration; however, this calibration may not be valid if the depth of the specimens in the next kiln charge is different from the original or if the kiln schedule is changed to accommodate the change in size.
6.5	Because field calibrations can have a very narrow scope, the report must clarify the variables evaluated, the variables not controlled, the "grade" description, etc. These provide boundaries within which the results may apply.

X2. METER USE

X2.1 General

X2.1.1 Measurement of moisture content in end-use applications requires consideration of meter technology, wood characteristics and environmental influences. Sampling and related analysis are additional essential elements. **Appendix X2** incorporates historical observations on end-use applications.

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X2.1.2 *Meter Technology*—Different meter technologies require differing operating procedures in end-use. Some operating variables, however, have a generally common influence on most meter/electrode assemblies. The following sections include both these generally common influences and those that are technology specific.

X2.2 Common Operating Variables

X2.2.1 Among the more common operating variables that can be addressed in a generic fashion are environmental factor of temperature, the wood variable of species, the sensitivity to chemicals, and the issues of sampling.

X2.2.2 *Temperature Influence and Corrections:*

X2.2.2.1 *Temperature Effect on Meter*—Meter circuits can be temperature sensitive, therefore, frequent zero or span adjustments, or both, may be necessary during use. The manufacturer should indicate the optimum range of temperature for operation of the meter without loss of accuracy due to temperature. It is recommended that whenever possible, the meter be equilibrated with the measurement environment before readings are taken. The intent is that in no case temperature or humidity alter the operating characteristics of a meter (that has been equilibrated and adjusted) to the degree that the accuracy is impaired.

X2.2.2.2 *Temperature Correction*—Temperature corrections are obtainable from manufacturer’s data, published data, or using built-in adjustments in the meter. Temperature corrections require special care to obtain the wood (not air) temperature, and may be unreliable to correct some species. A reference temperature of 2°C shall be standard for zero correction. Clearly indicate the reference temperature at some point on the meter. Always make temperature correction before species correction.

X2.2.3 *Species Influence and Corrections:*

X2.2.3.1 *Species Correction*—Only use manufacturer’s data developed in accordance with acceptable calibration procedures for the particular meter. The data should be accompanied with documentation on whether the corrections are for either the dial calibration species, a specific species, or for a species market group. Where appropriate correction data are not available, calibrate the meter in accordance with Section 6.

X2.2.3.2 *Other Species Correction Considerations*—There are numerous species-related effects that may result in different meter readings for the same actual moisture content. These include wood property variations related to site or genetics and, for some species, differences in between the heartwood and sapwood portions. Quantifying these effects to a precision sufficient to justify a separate correction, such as for temperature, may be difficult. Similarly, species market groups (such as Hem-Fir and Spruce-Pine-Fir) may contain species that cannot be visually separated at the point of moisture measurement or where such separation is impractical. In field measurements where these influences cannot be practically separated, make some judgment in defining the population that encompass these sources of variation and calibrate the meter in accordance with Section 6.

X2.2.4 *Chemical Additives and Adhesive Influence and Corrections:*

X2.2.4.1 *Chemicals*—Wood products which have been treated with preservatives, fire retardants, or dimensional stabilization agents may give abnormal readings (usually high). Of these chemicals, creosote and pentachlorophenol solutions appear to have insignificant effects.³ However, salt solutions may cause abnormally high readings that should be considered qualitative or semiquantitative at best. Conductance meters having insulated pins can be used to measure MC of materials that have been surface-treated with chemicals provided that confirmation is made of the accuracy through direct MC determination (for example, Test Methods D4442).

(1) *Specific Treatments*—CCA-C treatment⁴ has been reported to be less conductive than salt treatments, reducing the error of readings of treated southern pine to about 2 % MC in the range of 12 to 24 % MC. New preservative treatments were introduced in 2004, replacing some traditional treatments; no data on the effect of these treatments on moisture meter readings is available.

X2.2.4.2 *Adhesives*—Adhesives may cause abnormally high readings in reconstituted wood products. Before any particular meter is used in moisture sensing of any particular product containing adhesives, its calibration must be demonstrated on that product. Re-calibration must be carried out following any change in processing conditions. The calibrations must be consistent with these test methods.

X2.2.5 *Sampling:*

X2.2.5.1 *Sampling Plan*—The goals of sampling (for example, estimating mean MC or MC variability, wet spot identification, measurement of within piece gradients, etc.) and the intended use of the information (for example, kiln performance, specification adherence, effect of wood variables, etc.) directly influence a sampling plan. If the moisture and wood characteristics, or both, vary significantly within a piece, more than one location on a piece will need to be sampled. The size of the lot and the number of sampling locations both influence the confidence with which conclusions may be drawn from the resulting data.

(1) *Sampling Location*—Selection of the location for sampling should consider wood characteristics and possible moisture gradients. For example, in selecting the location on a piece of lumber, take the readings at least 500 mm from the end and in the

³ James, W. L., “Effects of Wood Preservatives on Electric Moisture Meter Readings,” *U.S. Forest Service Research Note*, FPL-0.06, 1965.

⁴ Richards, M. J., “Effect of CCA-C Wood Preservative on Moisture Content Readings by Electronic-Type Moisture Meter,” *Forest Products Journal*, Vol 40, No. 2, pp. 29–33, 1990.

center of the face. Readings should be taken in areas that are reasonably straight grain and free of characteristics such as knots that affect the moisture level and influence the reading, or both.

X2.2.5.2 *Lot Size*—The number of readings per sample or per lot should be selected for consistency with the desired accuracy. Practice **D2915** provides guidance on selection of lot size.

X2.3 Technology-Specific Considerations for End-Use

X2.3.1 The majority of hand-held meters employ either conductance or capacitive-admittance operating technologies. The following sections contain observations on operating characteristics of, and recommendations for, these technologies in end-use.

X2.3.2 Use of Conductance Meters:

X2.3.2.1 *Electrode Sensing Region*—Conductance moisture meters respond to the moisture content between the electrodes. They can be used to determine “point” moisture content directly, if insulated pins are used, or average moisture content indirectly. All readings should be taken with the pins aligned so that the current flow is parallel to the grain. Average moisture content can be obtained through the thickness by integrating moisture content versus thickness. Under the following conditions it can also be inferred from a single point measure.

(1) *Obtaining an Average MC Reading*—Wood of rectangular cross section tends to develop a parabolic gradient during drying (assuming that the maximum moisture content is below fiber saturation point (FSP). From the geometry of a parabola, the point of average MC lies between one fourth and one fifth of the total thickness. Therefore, if the pins are driven to this point, an approximation can be obtained for average MC of the cross section. Using the same principle, a circular cross section has its average MC at one sixth to one seventh of the diameter. The parabolic generalization generally does not pertain if lumber has been dried in conditions that induce steep moisture gradients (such as in drying above 100°C) or if the lumber is known or thought to contain wet pockets or streaks. This can be examined by driving insulated pins to mid-thickness. With thick (deep) members, the difference between one fourth and one fifth of the depth can produce significant differences in MC when a gradient exists; testing is necessary to verify the correct depth.

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X2.3.2.2 *Moisture Content Range*—The range of moisture contents that can be detected is from a minimum of 6 or 7 % MC to a maximum of 25 to 27 % MC (nominal value of the fiber saturation point). Meter scales extend above this limit only to permit temperature corrections of moisture contents up to the fiber saturation point and do not imply reliability of readings above the fiber saturation point.

(1) *“Hot-Metering”*—One use of conductance meters is for “hot metering” of kiln-dried lumber during which readings are taken to determine if the load has reached the desired endpoint MC. However, such readings are subject to considerable error because of “edge-readings,” assumptions of wood temperature, unknown moisture gradients, and temperature effects on the meter circuitry. A further use is for moisture measurement of dry lumber that is exposed to below-freezing temperatures. As with hot lumber, considerable errors are possible due to assumptions of wood temperature, unknown moisture gradients, and temperature effects on meter circuitry. Any use of these meters outside of the normal range is contingent upon correlative tests and careful adjustments for the environment effects.

X2.3.2.3 *Moisture Gradients*—Unless the moisture distribution and measuring techniques are well understood, readings can be easily misinterpreted. Three special problems should be considered:

(1) *Non-Insulated Electrodes*—See **X2.3.2.5**.

(2) *Non-Parabolic Gradients*—See **X2.3.2.1 (1)**.

(3) *High Surface MC on Sample*—High surface MC of the material from condensation, wetting, and high relative humidity can cause excessively high readings that are not representative of the overall moisture content of the wood if non-insulated pins are used. If non-insulated pins are used, a higher surface than core MC can cause a misleading reading at the depth of the pin tips. This can be tested by noting the indication at initial contact and as the pins are driven in.