



Designation: D6868 – 21

Standard Specification for Labeling of End Items that Incorporate Plastics and Polymers as Coatings or Additives with Paper and Other Substrates Designed to be Aerobically Composted in Municipal or Industrial Facilities¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D6868; 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 specification covers end items that include plastics or polymers where plastic film/ sheet or polymers are incorporated (either through lamination, extrusion or mixing) to substrates and the entire end item is designed to be composted under aerobic conditions in municipal and industrial composting facilities, where thermophilic temperatures are achieved.

1.2 This specification is intended to establish the requirements for labeling of end items which use plastics or polymers as coatings or binders, as “compostable in aerobic municipal and industrial composting facilities.”

1.3 The properties in this specification are those required to determine if end items (including packaging) which use plastics and polymers as coatings or binders will compost satisfactorily, in large scale aerobic municipal or industrial composting where maximum throughput is a high priority and where intermediate stages of plastic biodegradation must not be visible to the end user for aesthetic reasons.

1.4 The following safety hazards caveat pertains to the test methods portion of this standard: *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.*

NOTE 1—There is no known ISO equivalent for this standard.

1.5 *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.*

¹ This specification is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D20 on Plastics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D20.96 on Environmentally Degradable Plastics and Biobased Products.

Current edition approved Feb. 1, 2021. Published February 2021. Originally approved in 2003. Last previous edition approved in 2019 as D6868 - 19. DOI: 10.1520/D6868-21.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

D883 Terminology Relating to Plastics

D3715/D3715M Practice for Quality Assurance of Pressure-Sensitive Tapes

D5338 Test Method for Determining Aerobic Biodegradation of Plastic Materials Under Controlled Composting Conditions, Incorporating Thermophilic Temperatures

D6002 Guide for Assessing the Compostability of Environmentally Degradable Plastics (Withdrawn 2011)³

D6400 Specification for Labeling of Plastics Designed to be Aerobically Composted in Municipal or Industrial Facilities

D6866 Test Methods for Determining the Biobased Content of Solid, Liquid, and Gaseous Samples Using Radiocarbon Analysis

2.2 Organization for Economic Development (OECD) Standard:

OECD Guideline 208 Terrestrial Plants, Growth Test⁴

2.3 Comité Européen de Normalisation (CEN):

EN 13432 Packaging-Requirements for Packaging Recoverable through Composting and Biodegradation-Test Scheme and Evaluation Criteria for the Final Acceptance of Packaging⁵

2.4 ISO Standards:⁵

ISO 14851 Determination of the ultimate aerobic biodegradability of plastic materials in an aqueous medium—Method by measuring the oxygen demand in a closed respirometer

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 The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

⁴ Available from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2 rue André Pascal, F-75775, Paris Cedex 16, France, <http://www.oecd.org>.

⁵ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard

ISO 14852 Determination of the ultimate aerobic biodegradability of plastic materials in an aqueous medium—Method by analysis of evolved carbon dioxide

ISO 14855 Evaluation of the Ultimate Aerobic Biodegradability and Disintegration of Plastics under Controlled Composting Conditions-Method by Analysis of Evolved Carbon Dioxide

ISO 16929 Determination of the degree of disintegration of plastic materials under defined composting conditions in a pilot-scale test

ISO 20200 Plastics—Determination of the degree of disintegration of plastic materials under simulated composting conditions in a laboratory-scale test

2.5 *Government Standard:*

40 CFR Part 503.13 Standards for the Use or Disposal of Sewage Sludge⁶

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Definitions appearing in this specification are found in Terminology **D883**, unless otherwise noted.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *materials of natural origin, n*—Chemically unmodified ligno-cellulosic packaging materials and constituents of natural origin, such as wood, wood fibre, cotton fibre, starch, paper pulp or jute.

3.3 *Definition found in Terminology Practice D3715/D3715M:*

3.3.1 *end item*—the actual product or commodity being sold under the material specification.

3.3.1.1 *Discussion*—In its most complete form, either packed for shipping or at a production stage just preceding packing.

4. Classification

4.1 The purpose of this specification is to establish requirements for identifying end items, where plastics or polymers are used as a coating or incorporated into a substrate so that they do not interfere with their satisfactorily composting in commercial and municipal aerobic composting facilities. Products meeting the requirements outlined below shall be eligible to be labeled as “compostable in municipal or industrial aerobic composting facilities” in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Federal Trade Commission⁷ as long as proper qualifications as to the availability of such facilities are included on the label.”

5. Basic Requirements

5.1 In order to compost satisfactorily, an end item must demonstrate each of the characteristics found in **5.1.1 – 5.1.3**, and which are quantified in Section **6**.

5.1.1 *Disintegration During Composting*—An end item will disintegrate during composting such that any remaining residu-

als (plastic, polymer, or substrate) are not readily distinguishable from the other organic materials in the finished product. Additionally, the material or product must not be found in significant quantities during screening prior to final distribution of the compost.

5.1.2 *Biodegradation*—A level of biodegradation for the plastic coatings and additives shall be established by tests under controlled conditions.

5.1.3 *No Adverse Impacts on Ability of Compost to Support Plant Growth*—After incorporation with soils, the end items shall not adversely impact on the ability of composts to support plant growth, when compared to composts derived from biowaste without any addition of tested end items or reference materials. Additionally, the polymeric products or other materials must not introduce unacceptable levels of heavy metals or other toxic substances into the environment, upon sample decomposition.

NOTE 2—For a better understanding of why these criteria are important, the reader should consult Guide **D6002**, Compost Facility Operating Guide,⁸ and EN 13432.

6. Detailed Requirements

6.1 In order to be identified as compostable in municipal or industrial aerobic facilities, end items must pass the requirements of **6.2**, **6.3**, and **6.4** using the appropriate laboratory tests, representative of the conditions found in aerobic composting facilities, which reach thermophilic temperatures. End items (products and finished articles) shall be tested in the same form as they are intended to be used. For end items that are made in multiple thicknesses or densities, such as films, containers and foams, only the thickest or most dense products need to be tested as long as the chemical composition and structure remains otherwise the same. It is assumed that thinner gauges and lower densities will also compost satisfactorily. Similarly, if additives are present in test samples that pass testing, lower levels of the same additives are similarly passed.

6.2 *Disintegration During Composting*—An end item is considered to have demonstrated satisfactory disintegration if after twelve weeks in a controlled composting test, no more than 10 % of its original dry weight remains after sieving on a 2.0-mm sieve. The test shall be carried out in accordance with ISO 16929 with a minimum vessel volume of 35 L, or ISO 20200 under thermophilic aerobic composting conditions with a minimum vessel volume of 5 L. In case of differing results between ISO 16929 and ISO 20200, the results from ISO 16929 take precedence.

NOTE 3—With ISO 20200, it is advisable to use larger volumes than the minimum 5 L, because larger volumes can accommodate larger-sized samples that more realistically represent the end items, and larger volumes are more representative of the physical interactions in composting operations.

6.3 *Biodegradation*—An end item, having a plastic coating(s) or additives are considered to have achieved a satisfactory level of biodegradation if the criteria in **6.3.1** and **6.3.2** are met or exceeded.

⁶ Available from U.S. Government Printing Office Superintendent of Documents, 732 N. Capitol St., NW, Mail Stop: SDE, Washington, DC 20401, <http://www.access.gpo.gov>.

⁷ *Guidelines for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims*, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC, 1992.

⁸ *Compost Facility Operating Guide*, Composting Council, Alexandria, VA, 1995.