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Standard Specification for Evaluation of Cellulosic-Fiber-Based Packaging Materials and Products for Compostability in Municipal or Industrial Aerobic Composting Facilities¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This specification covers cellulosic-fiber-based packaging materials and products associated with food, landscape waste, and other compost feedstocks, which are intended to be composted under aerobic conditions in municipal and industrial composting facilities, where thermophilic temperatures are achieved.

1.2 This specification covers cellulosic-based uncoated and coated packaging materials and products and covers whole packaging products. Products covered in this specification include cellulosic fiber-based products produced from cellulosic pulp, corrugated materials, containerboard, paper, paperboard, and molded fiber.

1.3 This specification excludes end items where thermoplastic polymer is laminated or extruded to cellulosic substrates.

1.4 This specification is intended to establish the requirements for labeling cellulosic-fiber-based packaging materials and products as “compostable in aerobic municipal and industrial composting facilities” in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Federal Trade Commission,² provided the label includes proper qualifications as to the availability of such facilities.

1.5 The properties in this specification are those required to determine if packaging materials and products will compost satisfactorily in large-scale aerobic municipal or industrial composting where maximum throughput is a high priority and where intermediate stages of biodegradation must not be apparent to the end user for aesthetic reasons.

1.6 This specification is technically equivalent to ISO 18606.1.7.

1.7 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

1.8 *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.*

1.9 *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 D10 on Packaging and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D10.19 on Sustainability & Recycling. Current edition approved Oct. 1, 2024/Nov. 1, 2022. Published November 2024/November 2022. Originally approved in 2021. Last previous edition approved in 2021 as D8410 – 21. DOI: ~~10.1520/D8410-21~~.10.1520/D8410-22.

² *Guidelines for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims*, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC, 1992.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:³

D996 Terminology of Packaging and Distribution Environments

D1968 Terminology Relating to Paper and Paper Products

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

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:⁴

OECD Guideline 208 Terrestrial Plants, Growth Test

2.3 European Standards (EN):⁵

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

2.4 ISO Standards:⁵

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 18606 Packaging and the environment — Organic recycling

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

2.5 Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater:⁶

2540G Total, Fixed, and Volatile Solids in Solid and Semisolid Samples

2.6 Government Standards:

USEPA Method 1684 Total, Fixed, and Volatile Solids in Water, Solids, and Biosolids⁷

40 CFR Part 503.13 Standards for the Use or Disposal of Sewage Sludge⁸

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Terms appearing in this specification are found in Terminologies D996 and D1968, unless otherwise noted.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *additive, n pl*—substances added to cellulosic fiber to impart or enhance material properties or to improve production efficiencies. Additives can be mixed and incorporated into or applied to the surface of the cellulosic material as a coating.

3.2.2 *blank composts, n*—compost generated without the addition of the test material.

3.2.3 *cellulosic, adj*—material derived from or containing cellulose.

3.2.4 *materials of natural origin, n*—chemically unmodified ligno-cellulosic and other naturally occurring organic materials, such as wood, wood fiber, cotton fiber, starch, recycled fiber pulp, or jute.

3.2.5 *mesophilic, adj*—the moderate-temperature phase where certain microorganisms are active. Mesophilic micro-organisms are primarily active up to 40 °C and then activity trails off towards thermophilic temperatures.

3.2.6 *package component, n*—the identifiable parts that together constitute the packaging product. Examples of components include paper, paperboard, inks, and adhesives.

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 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>.

⁶ Available from Standard Methods, <http://www.standardmethods.org>, (877) 574-1233 or American Public Health Association (APHA), P.O. Box 933019, Atlanta, GA 31193-3019, (888) 320-APHA (2742), <http://www.apha.org/publications/pubscontact>.

⁷ Available from United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), William Jefferson Clinton Bldg., 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20460, https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/method_1684_draft_2001.pdf

⁸ Available from U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO), 732 N. Capitol St., NW, Washington, DC 20401, <http://www.gpo.gov>.

3.2.7 *packaging product, n*—the final article in the form in which it is to be used as packaging and ultimately composted. The product may consist of a single or multiple component(s).

3.2.8 *positive control, n*—a reference material known to be biodegradable used to validate the viability of the microbial community, and to provide a comparison with the test material under evaluation. The positive reference material is typically microcrystalline cellulose.

3.2.9 *thermophilic, adj*—the high-temperature phase where certain microorganisms are active. Thermophilic micro-organisms begin to become active around 40 °C with highest activity between 50 °C and 60 °C. Thermophilic microorganisms begin to die off above 65 °C.

3.2.10 *volatile organic solids, n*—determined by comparing the dry weight to the mass remaining after incineration at 550 °C which determines the amount of organic matter.

4. Classification

4.1 This specification covers one type of packaging material: cellulosic-fiber-based packaging, with or without additives, or adhesives.

4.2 The packaging product is intended to be used to protect, hold or transport contents that are or become desirable organic wastes for composting.

4.3 The purpose of this specification is to allow for the identification of these packaging materials as 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 Commission² as long as proper qualifications as to the availability of such facilities are included on the label.

5. Materials and Manufacture

5.1 For packaging components and products that are made in multiple thicknesses or densities, only the thickest or most dense products need to be tested for disintegration as long as the chemical composition and structure remains otherwise the same. It is presumed that lower thickness and densities of the same products will also compost satisfactorily.

5.2 If the packaging product is too large to be tested in its entirety in the disintegration test, it is acceptable to take a representative portion of that product, provided the thickest or densest portions of the product are used.

5.3 If additives are present in test samples at a given dry weight percentage of the whole product and the product satisfies the requirements of Section 6, then the same product with lower levels of the same additives also satisfy the requirements.

5.4 Packaging products which are constructed from components that have satisfied the requirements of this specification combined with some components that have not, must still be shown to satisfy the requirements.

6. Basic Requirements

6.1 In order to comply with the requirements of this specification satisfactorily, a packaging product must demonstrate each of the characteristics found in 6.1.1 – 6.1.4, and quantified in Section 7.

6.1.1 *Disintegration During Composting*—A packaging product shall disintegrate during composting such that any remaining residuals (are not readily distinguishable from the other organic materials in the finished compost product. This means that any remaining fragments after sieving must not differ significantly in appearance, texture, or size from the surrounding compost.

6.1.2 *Biodegradation*—A level of biodegradation for the fiber-based packaging product, including any additives, shall be established by tests under controlled conditions.

6.1.3 *No Adverse Impacts on Ability of Compost to Support Plant Growth*—After incorporation with soils, the composted