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Standard Test Methods for Rating Adhesion by Tape Test¹

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1. Scope

1.1 These test methods cover procedures for assessing the adhesion of relatively ductile coating films to metallic substrates by applying and removing pressure-sensitive tape over cuts made in the film.

1.2 Test Method A is primarily intended to rate the adhesion of coatings and coating systems greater than 125 μm (5 mils) in total thickness, while Test Method B is primarily intended to rate the adhesion of coatings and coating systems less than 125 μm (5 mils) in total thickness. Test Method B is not considered suitable for films thicker than 125 μm (5 mils) unless wider spaced cuts are employed and there is an explicit agreement between the purchaser and seller. If the thickness of the coating or coating system has not been predetermined, employ the use of a standard such as Practice D7091 or other appropriate standard agreed upon by interested parties prior to proceeding.

1.3 These test methods are used to evaluate whether the adhesion of a coating to a substrate is adequate for the user's application. They do not distinguish between higher levels of adhesion for which more sophisticated methods of measurement are required.

1.4 This test method is similar in content (but not technically equivalent) to ISO 2409.

1.5 In multicoat systems adhesion failure may occur between coats so that the adhesion of the coating system to the substrate is not determined.

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

1.7 *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 These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D01 on Paint and Related Coatings, Materials, and Applications and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D01.23 on Physical Properties of Applied Paint Films.

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1.8 *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

D609 Practice for Preparation of Cold-Rolled Steel Panels for Testing Paint, Varnish, Conversion Coatings, and Related Coating Products

D7091 Practice for Nondestructive Measurement of Dry Film Thickness of Nonmagnetic Coatings Applied to Ferrous Metals and Nonmagnetic, Nonconductive Coatings Applied to Non-Ferrous Metals

D823 Practices for Producing Films of Uniform Thickness of Paint, Coatings and Related Products on Test Panels

D1730 Practices for Preparation of Aluminum and Aluminum-Alloy Surfaces for Painting

D2092 Guide for Preparation of Zinc-Coated (Galvanized) Steel Surfaces for Painting (Withdrawn 2008)³

D2370 Test Method for Tensile Properties of Organic Coatings

D3330/D3330M Test Method for Peel Adhesion of Pressure-Sensitive Tape

D3924 Specification for Standard Environment for Conditioning and Testing Paint, Varnish, Lacquer, and Related Materials

D4060 Test Method for Abrasion Resistance of Organic Coatings by the Taber Abraser

2.2 Other Standards:

ISO 2409 Paint and Varnishes — Cross-cut test⁴

PSTC 101 International Standard for Peel Adhesion of

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

Pressure Sensitive Tape⁵

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.1.1 *adhesion, n*—the molecular attraction and mechanical bonds between a coating and its substrate.

3.1.2 *batch, n*—as it pertains to tape, a unique production run during manufacturing.

3.1.3 *blemish, n*—an obvious surface flaw, such as cracking or discoloration of the coating.

3.1.4 *environmental conditions, n*—the characteristics of the immediate surroundings during the tests, such as temperature, and relative humidity.

3.1.5 *immersion conditions, n*—the characteristics of the fluid to which the test specimen was exposed, such as type of fluid, temperature of fluid and duration of immersion.

3.1.6 *lap, n*—one complete turn of the tape on a roll; the outer exposed layer of tape.

3.1.7 *lattice pattern, n*—one series of parallel lines intersected by another set of parallel lines that are at 90° to and centered on the first set.

3.1.8 *mean, n*—the classification rating that is obtained by adding together the digits of the classification ratings of the tests performed and dividing by the number of tests, frequently rounded to the nearest whole number classification rating.

3.1.9 *pressure-sensitive tape, n*—tape with an adhesive that requires some degree of pressure, and only pressure, to adequately bond to a surface.

3.1.10 *range, n*—the span of classification ratings for a set of tests, from minimum classification rating to maximum classification rating.

3.1.11 *solvent, n*—a liquid agent capable of dissolving or dispersing contaminants from the surface of the coating or film.

3.1.12 *substrate, n*—the structural foundation beneath the coating or film being tested.

3.1.13 *template, n*—a thin, rigid plate containing evenly distributed, parallel slits for use as a guide in generating the lattice pattern when accompanied by a single-blade cutting tool.

3.1.14 *test specimen, n*—the object whose coatings adhesion is of interest.

4. Summary of Test Methods

4.1 *Test Method A*—An X-cut is made through the film to the substrate, pressure-sensitive tape is applied over the cut and then removed, and adhesion is assessed qualitatively on a 0 to 5 scale.

4.2 *Test Method B*—A lattice pattern with either six or eleven cuts in each direction is made through the film to the substrate, pressure-sensitive tape is applied over the lattice pattern and then removed, and adhesion is assessed qualitatively on a 0 to 5 scale.

4.2.1 Subject to agreement between the purchaser and the seller, Test Method B can be used for films thicker than 125 µm (5 mils) if wider spaced cuts are employed.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 In order for a coating is to fulfill its function of protecting or decorating a substrate, the coating must remain adhered to the substrate. Because the substrate and its surface preparation (or lack thereof) have a drastic effect on the adhesion of coatings, a method to evaluate adhesion of a coating to different substrates or surface treatments, or of different coatings to the same substrate, is of considerable usefulness in the industry.

5.2 This test method is limited to evaluating lower levels of adhesion (see 1.3). The intra- and inter-laboratory precision of this test method is similar to other test methods for coated substrates (for example, Test Method **D2370** and Test Method **D4060**), and is insensitive to all but large differences in adhesion. Limiting the range of rankings from 0 to 5 reflects the inability of this test method to make fine distinctions between levels of adhesion. Users shall not use intermediate values for ranking adhesion tests within this method.

5.3 Extremes in temperatures or relative humidity may affect the adhesion of the tape or the coating.

5.4 A given tape may not adhere equally well to different coatings due to several factors, including differences in coating composition and topology. As such, no single tape is likely to be suitable for testing all coatings. Furthermore, these test methods do not give an absolute value for the force required for bond rupture, but serves only as an indicator that some minimum value for bond strength was met or exceeded (**1, 2**).⁶

5.5 Operators performing these test methods must be trained and practiced in order to obtain consistent results. The accuracy and precision of the test result obtained by using these methods depends largely upon the skill of the operator and the operator's ability to perform the test in a consistent manner. Key steps that directly reflect the importance of operator skill include the angle and rate of tape removal and the visual assessment of the tested sample. It is not unexpected that different operators might obtain different results (**1, 2**).

5.6 The standard requires that the free end of the tape be removed rapidly at as close to a 180° angle as possible. When the peel angle and rate vary, the force required to remove the tape can change dramatically due to the rheological properties of the backing and adhesive. Variation in pull rate and peel angle can effect large differences in test values and must be minimized to assure reproducibility (**3**).

NOTE 1—These test methods have been reported being used to measure adhesion of organic coatings on non-metallic substrates (for example, wood and plastic), although related precision and bias data is lacking. If testing coatings on non-metallic substrates, either Test Method A or Test Method B may be more appropriate and the method employed should be discussed by interested parties. Issues with plastic substrates are noted in **Appendix X1**. A similar test method, ISO 2409, permits tests on non-metallic substrates (for example, wood and plaster). Precision and

⁵ Available from the Pressure Sensitive Tape Council (PSTC), 1833 Centre Point Circle, Suite 123, Naperville, IL 60563, <http://www.pstc.org>.

⁶ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this test method.

bias data on the latter is lacking. Test Method D3359 was developed with metal as the substrate and, in the absence of supporting precision and bias data, is so limited.

TEST METHOD A—X-CUT TAPE TEST

6. Apparatus and Materials

6.1 *Cutting Tool*—Sharp razor blade, scalpel, knife or other fine-edged cutting device. The cutting edges shall be in good condition, preferably new or newly sharpened.

6.2 *Cutting Guide*—Steel or other hard metal straightedge to ensure straight cuts.

6.3 *Tape*—25 mm (1.0 in.) wide transparent or semitransparent pressure-sensitive tape with an adhesive peel strength between 6.34 N/cm (58 oz/in.) and 7.00 N/cm (64 oz/in.), as tested in accordance with Test Method **D3330/D3330M**, Test Method A, (equivalent to PSTC 101) and utilizing a 90 second dwell time on a standard steel panel.

6.3.1 Other tapes may be used by agreement between the parties involved.

6.3.2 Due to variability in adhesion strength from batch-to-batch and changes in adhesion properties of tapes over time, tape from the same batch shall be used when tests are to be run in different laboratories. When use of the same batch is not followed the test method shall be used only for ranking a series of test coatings. Refer to **XI.5** for additional information.

6.4 *Pressure Application Device*—Although other devices may suffice, a rubber eraser or rubber roller is commonly used to ensure good and uniform wetting of the coating with the adhesive of the tape.

6.5 *Illumination*—A light source is helpful in determining whether the cuts have been made through the film to the substrate.

7. Test Specimens

7.1 When this test method is used in the field, the specimen is the coated structure or article on which the adhesion is to be evaluated.

7.2 For laboratory use apply the materials to be tested to panels of the composition and surface conditions on which it is desired to determine the adhesion.

NOTE 2—Applicable test panel description and surface preparation methods are given in Practice **D609** and Practices **D1730** and **D2092**.

NOTE 3—Coatings should be applied in accordance with Practice **D823**, or as agreed upon between the purchaser and the seller.

NOTE 4—If desired or specified, the coated test panels may be subjected to a preliminary exposure such as water immersion, salt spray, or high humidity before conducting the tape test. The conditions and time of exposure will be governed by ultimate coating use or shall be agreed upon between the purchaser and seller.

8. Procedure

8.1 Select an area free of blemishes and minor surface imperfections. The area chosen for testing shall be clean and dry.

8.1.1 For specimens which have been immersed: After immersion, clean and wipe the surface with an appropriate

solvent which will not harm the integrity of the coating. Then dry or prepare the surface, or both, as agreed upon between the purchaser and the seller.

8.2 Make two cuts in the film each about 40 mm (1.5 in.) long that intersect near their middle with a smaller angle of between 30° and 45°. When making the incisions, use the straightedge and cut through the coating to the substrate in one steady motion.

8.3 Inspect the incisions for reflection of light from the metal substrate to establish that the coating film has been penetrated. If the substrate has not been reached make another X in a different location. Do not attempt to deepen a previous cut as this may affect adhesion along the incision.

8.4 At each day of testing, before initiation of testing, remove two complete laps of tape from the roll and discard. Remove an additional length at a steady (that is, not jerked) rate and cut a piece about 75 mm (3 in.) long.

8.5 Place the center of the tape at the intersection of the cuts with the tape running in the same direction as the smaller angles. Smooth the tape into place by finger in the area of the incisions taking care not to entrap air under the tape. Rub firmly over the surface of the tape with the pressure application device until the color is uniform in appearance. This indicates good, uniform contact between the tape's adhesive and the coating surface.

8.6 Within 90 s \pm 30 s of application, remove the tape by seizing the free end and pulling it off rapidly (not jerked) back upon itself at as close to an angle of 180° as possible.

8.7 Inspect the X-cut area for removal of coating from the substrate or previous coating and rate the adhesion in accordance with the following scale, illustrated in **Fig. 1**:

- 5A No peeling or removal,
- 4A Trace peeling or removal along incisions or at their intersection,
- 3A Jagged removal along incisions up to 1.6 mm (1/16 in.) on either side,
- 2A Jagged removal along most of incisions up to 3.2 mm (1/8 in.) on either side,
- 1A Removal from most of the area of the X under the tape, and
- 0A Removal beyond the area of the X.

8.8 Repeat the test in two other locations on the test surface. For large structures make sufficient tests to ensure that the adhesion evaluation is representative of the whole surface.

8.9 After making several cuts examine the cutting edge and, if necessary, remove any flat spots or wire-edge by abrading lightly on a fine oil stone before using again. Discard cutting tools that develop nicks or other defects that tear the film.

9. Report

9.1 Report the substrate employed, the type of coating and the method of cure, if known.

9.2 Report the number of tests, their mean and range.

9.3 Report the adhesion strength of the pressure-sensitive tape determined in accordance with Test Method **D3330/D3330M**, Test Method A, (equivalent to PSTC 101) and utilizing a 90 second dwell time on a standard steel panel.

9.3.1 Where the adhesion strength of the tape has not been determined, report the specific product name of the tape used, the manufacturer and the lot number, if available.

Classification		Surface of "X" - Cut from which flaking/peeling has occurred
5A	No peeling or removal	None
4A	Trace peeling or removal along incisions or at their intersection	
3A	Jagged removal along incisions up to 1/16" on either side	
2A	Jagged removal along most of incisions up to 1/8" on either side	
1A	Removal from most of the area of the X under the tape	
0A	Removal beyond the area of the X	

FIG. 1 Classification of Adhesion Test Results for Test Method A

9.4 Report an estimate of the interface at which the coating failure occurred as indicated by visible peeling or removal of the coating. For example, between the first coat and substrate, between the first and second coats, etc.

9.5 For field tests, report the type of coating (where known), the structure or article tested, the location and the environmental conditions at the time of testing.

9.6 If the test is performed after immersion, report immersion conditions, time between immersion and testing, and method of sample preparation.

10. Precision and Bias⁷

10.1 In an interlaboratory study of this test method in which operators in six laboratories made one adhesion measurement on three panels each of three coatings covering a wide range of adhesion, the within-laboratories standard deviation was found to be 0.33 and the between-laboratories 0.44. Based on these

⁷ Supporting data have been filed at ASTM International Headquarters and may be obtained by requesting Research Report RR:D01-1008. Contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org.

standard deviations, the following criteria should be used for judging the acceptability of results at the 95 % confidence level:

10.1.1 *Repeatability*—Provided adhesion is uniform over a large surface, results obtained by the same operator should be considered suspect if they differ by more than 1 rating unit for two measurements.

10.1.2 *Reproducibility*—Two results, each the mean of triplicates, obtained by different operators should be considered suspect if they differ by more than 1.5 rating units.

10.2 Bias cannot be established for these test methods.

TEST METHOD B—CROSS-CUT TAPE TEST

11. Apparatus and Materials

11.1 *Cutting Tool*⁸—Sharp razor blade, scalpel, knife or other cutting device having a cutting edge angle between 15° and 30° that will make either a single cut or several cuts at once. The cutting edge shall be in good condition, preferably new or newly sharpened.

11.2 *Cutting Guide*—If cuts are made manually (as opposed to a mechanical apparatus) a steel or other hard metal straight-edge or template to ensure straight cuts.

11.3 *Rule*—Tempered steel rule graduated in 0.5 mm for measuring individual cuts.

11.4 *Tape*, as described in 6.3.

11.5 *Pressure Application Device*, as described in 6.4.

11.6 *Illumination*, as described in 6.5.

11.7 *Magnifying Glass*—An illuminated magnifier to be used while making individual cuts and examining the test area.

12. Test Specimens

12.1 Test specimens shall be as described in Section 7. It should be noted, however, that multitip cutters⁹ provide good results only on test areas sufficiently plane that all cutting edges contact the substrate to the same degree. Check for flatness with a straight edge such as that of the tempered steel rule (11.3).

13. Procedure

13.1 Where required or when agreed upon, subject the specimens to a preliminary test before conducting the tape test (see Note 4). After drying or testing the coating, conduct the tape test at room temperature as defined in Specification D3924, unless D3924 standard temperature is required or agreed.

⁸ Multiblade cutters are available from a few sources that specialize in testing equipment for the paint industry.

⁹ The sole source of supply of the multitip cutter for coated pipe surfaces known to the committee at this time is Paul N. Gardner Co., 316 NE First St., Pompano Beach, FL 33060. If you are aware of alternative suppliers, please provide this information to ASTM International Headquarters. Your comments will receive careful consideration at a meeting of the responsible technical committee,¹ which you may attend.

13.1.1 For specimens which have been immersed: After immersion, clean and wipe the surface with an appropriate solvent which will not harm the integrity of the coating. Then dry or prepare the surface, or both, as agreed upon between the purchaser and the seller.

13.2 Select an area free of blemishes and minor surface imperfections, place on a firm base, and under the illuminated magnifier, make parallel cuts as follows:

13.2.1 For coatings having a dry film thickness up to and including 50 µm (2 mils) space the cuts 1 mm apart and make eleven cuts unless otherwise agreed upon.

13.2.2 For coatings having a dry film thickness between 50 µm (2 mils) and 125 µm (5 mils), space the cuts 2 mm apart and make six cuts. For films thicker than 125 µm (5 mils), it is generally recommended to use Test Method A. Subject to agreement between the purchaser and the seller, Test Method B can be used for films thicker than 125 µm (5 mils) if wider spaced cuts are employed.¹⁰

13.2.3 Make all cuts about 20 mm (¾ in.) long. Cut through the film to the substrate in one steady motion using just sufficient pressure on the cutting tool to have the cutting edge reach the substrate. When making successive single cuts with the aid of a guide, place the guide on the uncut area.

13.3 After making the required cuts brush the film lightly with a soft brush or tissue to remove any detached flakes or ribbons of coatings.

13.4 Examine the cutting edge and, if necessary, remove any flat spots or wire-edge by abrading lightly on a fine oil stone. Make the additional number of cuts at 90° to and centered on the original cuts.

13.5 Brush the area as before and inspect the incisions for reflection of light from the substrate. If the metal has not been reached make another grid in a different location.

13.6 At each day of testing, before initiation of testing, remove two complete laps of tape from the roll and discard. Remove an additional length at a steady (that is, not jerked) rate and cut a piece about 75 mm (3 in.) long.

13.7 Place the center of the tape over the grid and in the area of the grid. Smooth the tape into place by finger in the area of the incisions taking care not to entrap air under the tape. Rub firmly over the surface of the tape with the pressure application device until the color is uniform in appearance. This indicates good, uniform contact between the tape's adhesive and the coating surface.

13.8 Within 90 s ± 30 s of application, remove the tape by seizing the free end and rapidly (not jerked) back upon itself at as close to an angle of 180° as possible.

13.9 Inspect the grid area for removal of coating from the substrate or from a previous coating using the illuminated magnifier. Rate the adhesion in accordance with the following scale illustrated in Fig. 2:

¹⁰ Test Method B has been used successfully by some people on coatings greater than 0.13 mm (5 mils) by spacing the cuts 5 mm apart. However, the precision values given in 15.1 do not apply as they are based on coatings less than 0.13 mm (5 mils) in thickness.

CLASSIFICATION OF ADHESION TEST RESULTS		
CLASSIFICATION	PERCENT AREA REMOVED	SURFACE OF CROSS-CUT AREA FROM WHICH FLAKING HAS OCCURRED FOR SIX PARALLEL CUTS AND ADHESION RANGE BY PERCENT
5B	0% None	
4B	Less than 5%	
3B	5 – 15%	
2B	15 – 35%	
1B	35 – 65%	
0B	Greater than 65%	

FIG. 2 Classification of Adhesion Test Results for Test Method B

- 5B The edges of the cuts are completely smooth; none of the squares of the lattice is detached.
- 4B Small flakes of the coating are detached at intersections; less than 5% of the area is affected.
- 3B Small flakes of the coating are detached along edges and at intersections of cuts. The area affected is 5% to 15% of the lattice.
- 2B The coating has flaked along the edges and on parts of the squares. The area affected is 15% to 35% of the lattice.
- 1B The coating has flaked along the edges of cuts in large ribbons and whole squares have detached. The area affected is 35% to 65% of the lattice.
- 0B Flaking and detachment worse than Classification 1B.

13.10 Repeat the test in two other locations on each test panel.

14. Report

14.1 Report the substrate employed, the type of coating and the method of cure, if known.

14.2 Report the number of tests, their mean and range.

14.3 Report the adhesion strength of the pressure-sensitive tape determined in accordance with Test Method D3330/D3330M, Test Method A (equivalent to PSTC 101) and utilizing a 90 second dwell time on a standard steel panel.

14.3.1 Where the adhesion strength of the tape has not been determined, report the specific product name of the tape used, the manufacturer and the lot number, if available.