Designation: E 1774 – 96

An American National Standard

Standard Guide for Electromagnetic Acoustic Transducers (EMATs)[1]

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E 1774; 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.

INTRODUCTION

General—The usefulness of ultrasonic techniques is well established in the literature of nondestructive examination. The generation of ultrasonic waves is achieved primarily by means of some form of electromechanical conversion, usually the piezoelectric effect. This highly efficient method of generating ultrasonic waves has a disadvantage in that a fluid is generally required for mechanical coupling of the sound into the material being examined. The use of a couplant generally requires that the material being examined be either immersed in a fluid or covered with a thin layer of fluid.

Principle—An electromagnetic acoustic transducer (EMAT) generates and receives ultrasonic waves without the need to contact the material in which the acoustic waves are traveling. The use of an EMAT requires that the material to be examined be electrically conductive or ferromagnetic, or both. The EMAT as a generator of ultrasonic waves is basically a coil of wire, excited by an alternating electric current, placed in a uniform magnetic field near the surface of an electrically conductive or ferromagnetic material. A surface current is induced in the material by transformer action. This surface current in the presence of a magnetic field experiences Lorentz forces that produce oscillating stress waves. Upon reception of an ultrasonic wave, the surface of the conductor oscillates in the presence of a magnetic field, thus inducing a voltage in the coil. The transduction process occurs within an electromagnetic skin depth. An EMAT forms the basis for a very reproducible noncontact system for generating and detecting ultrasonic waves.

1. Scope

1.1 This guide is intended primarily for tutorial purposes. It provides an overview of the general principles governing the operation and use of electromagnetic acoustic transducers (EMATs) for ultrasonic examination.

1.2 This guide describes a non-contact technique for coupling ultrasonic energy into an electrically conductive or ferromagnetic material, or both, through the use of electromagnetic fields. This guide describes the theory of operation and basic design considerations as well as the advantages and limitations of the technique.

1.3 This guide is intended to serve as a general reference to assist in determining the usefulness of EMATs for a given application as well as provide fundamental information regarding their design and operation. This guide provides guidance for the generation of longitudinal, shear, Rayleigh, and Lamb wave modes using EMATs.

1.4 This guide does not contain detailed procedures for the use of EMATs in any specific applications; nor does it promote the use of EMATs without thorough testing prior to their use for examination purposes. Some applications in which EMATs have been applied successfully are outlined in Section 9.

1.5 *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 and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*

E 127 Practice for Fabricating and Checking Aluminum Alloy Ultrasonic Standard Reference Blocks[2]

E 428 Practice for Fabrication and Control of Steel Reference Blocks Used in Ultrasonic Inspection[2]

E 1065 Guide for Evaluating Characteristics of Ultrasonic Search Units[2]

E 1316 Terminology for Nondestructive Examinations[2]

2.2 *ASNT Document:*

Recommended Practice SNT-TC-1A Personnel Qualifications and Certification in Nondestructive Testing[3]

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[1] This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E-7 on Nondestructive Testing and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E07.06 on Ultrasonic Method.

Current edition approved Dec. 10, 1996. Published February 1997. Originally published as E 1774 – 95. Last previous edition E 1774 – 95.

[2] *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 03.03.

[3] Available from American Society for Nondestructive Testing, 1711 Arlingate Plaza, Columbus, OH 43228.

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Related terminology is defined in Terminology E 1316.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *electromagnetic acoustic transducer (EMAT)*—an electromagnetic device for converting electrical energy into acoustical energy in the presence of a magnetic field.

3.2.2 *Lorentz forces*—forces applied to electric currents when placed in a magnetic field. Lorentz forces are perpendicular to the direction of both the magnetic field and the current direction. Lorentz forces are the forces behind the principle of electric motors.

3.2.3 *magnetostrictive forces*—forces arising from magnetic domain wall movements within a magnetic material during magnetization.

3.2.4 *meander coil*—an EMAT coil consisting of periodic, winding, non-intersecting, and usually evenly-spaced conductors.

3.2.5 *pancake coil (spiral)*—an EMAT coil consisting of spirally-wound, usually evenly-spaced conductors.

3.2.6 *bulk wave*—an ultrasonic wave, either longitudinal or shear mode, used in nondestructive testing to interrogate the volume of a material.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 *General*—Ultrasonic testing is a widely used nondestructive method for the examination of a material. The majority of ultrasonic tests are performed using transducers that directly convert electrical energy into acoustic energy through the use of piezoelectric crystals. This guide describes an alternate technique in which electromagnetic energy is used to produce acoustic energy inside an electrically conductive or ferromagnetic material. EMATs have unique characteristics when compared to conventional piezoelectric ultrasonic search units, making them a significant tool for some ultrasonic testing applications.

4.2 *Specific Advantages*—Since the EMAT technique is noncontacting, it requires no fluid couplant. Important consequences of this include applications to moving objects, in remote or hazardous locations, to objects at elevated temperatures, or to objects with rough surfaces. The technique is environmentally safe since it does not use potentially polluting or hazardous chemicals. The technique facilitates the rapid scanning of components having complex geometries. EMAT signals are highly reproducible as a consequence of the manner in which the acoustic waves are generated. EMATs can produce horizontally polarized shear (SH) waves without mode conversion and can accommodate scanning while using SH waves. (Note that in order to produce this wave mode by conventional ultrasonic techniques, either an epoxy or a highly viscous couplant is required. Thus, conventional ultrasonic techniques do not lend themselves easily to scanning when using SH wave modes.) Also, EMATs provide for the capability to steer shear waves electronically.

4.3 *Specific Limitations*—EMATs have very low efficiency. The insertion loss of EMATs can be as much as 40 dB or more when compared to conventional ultrasonic methods. The EMAT technique can be used only on materials that are electrical conductors or ferromagnetic. The design of EMAT probes is usually more complex than comparable piezoelectric search units. Due to their low efficiency, EMATs usually require more specialized instrumentation for the generation and detection of ultrasonic signals. High transmitting currents, low-noise receivers, and careful electrical matching is imperative in system design. In general, EMAT probes are application-specific, in the same way as piezoelectric transducers.

5. Calibration and Standardization

5.1 *Reference Standards*—As with conventional piezoelectric ultrasonic examinations, it is imperative that a set of reference samples exhibiting the full range of expected material defect states be acquired or fabricated and consequently examined by the technique to establish sensitivity (see Practices E 127 and E 428).

5.2 *Transducer Characterization*—Many of the conventional contact piezoelectric search unit characterization procedures are generally adaptable to EMAT transducers with appropriate modifications, or variations thereof (see Guide E 1065). Specific characterization procedures for EMATs are not available and are beyond the scope of this document.

6. Theory (1-3)[4]

6.1 *Nonmagnetic Conducting Materials*—The mechanisms responsible for the generation of elastic waves in a conducting material are dependent on the characteristics of that material. The generation of acoustic waves in a nonmagnetic conductive material is a result of the Lorentz force acting on the lattice of the material. In an effort to understand the action of the Lorentz force, one can use the free electron model of solids. According to the free electron model of conductors, the outer valence electrons have been stripped from the atomic lattice, leaving a lattice of positively charged ions in a sea of free electrons. In order to generate elastic waves in a material, a net force must be transmitted to the lattice of the material. If only an electromagnetic field is generated in a conductor (via an eddy current-type coil), the net force on the lattice is zero because the forces on the electrons and ions are equal and opposite. For example:

$$\text{force on electrons} = -qE$$

$$\text{force on ions} = +qE$$

where:

q = electron charge, and

E = electric field vector of EMAT wave.

However, if the same electromagnetic field is generated in the presence of an applied static magnetic field, a net force is transmitted to the lattice and results in the generation of elastic waves. The reason for this net force is the Lorentz force acting on the electrons and ions.

$$\text{Lorentz force} = F_L = qv \times B \qquad (1)$$

where:

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[4] The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this guide.

v = velocity of electrons, and
B = static magnetic inductor vector.

Since the electrons are free to move and the ions are bound to the lattice, the Lorentz force on the electrons is much greater due to its velocity dependence, and this force is transmitted to the ions in the lattice via the collision process.

6.2 *Magnetic Conducting Materials*—For magnetic conductors, other forces such as magnetostrictive forces, in addition to the Lorentz force, influence ion motion. In magnetic materials, the electromagnetic field can modulate the magnetization in the material to produce periodic magnetostrictive stresses that must be added to the stresses caused by the Lorentz force. The magnetostrictive stresses are complicated and depend on the magnetic domain distribution, which also depends on the strength and direction of the applied static magnetic field. Although the magnetostrictive forces present in magnetic conductors may complicate the theoretical analysis, this additional coupling can be an asset because it can significantly increase the signal strength compared to that obtained by the Lorentz force alone. At high applied magnetic field strengths above the magnetic saturation of the material, the Lorentz force is the only source of acoustic wave generation. The magnetostrictive force dominates at low field strengths, however, and the acoustic energy can be much greater than for corresponding field strengths with only the Lorentz mechanism. Therefore, a careful examination of the relationship at low applied field strengths should be made in order to take full advantage of the magnetostrictive effort in magnetic materials.

6.3 *Wave Modes*—With the proper combination of magnet and coil design, EMATs can produce longitudinal, shear, Rayleigh, and Lamb wave modes **(2-4)**. The direction of the applied magnetic field, geometry of the coil, and frequency of the electromagnetic field will determine the type of wave mode generated with EMATs.

6.3.1 *Longitudinal Wave Mode*—Fig. 1 illustrates how the direction of the applied static magnetic field in a conductor and the resultant direction of the Lorentz force can produce longitudinal elastic waves. For longitudinal wave generation, the Lorentz force and thus ion displacement is perpendicular to the surface of the conductor. The efficiency of longitudinal wave generation, as compared with other modes excited in ferromagnetic materials, is very low, and has no practical relevance.

6.3.2 *Shear Wave Modes*—Fig. 2 shows how the direction of the applied static magnetic field in a conductor and the resultant direction of the Lorentz force can produce shear elastic waves. For shear wave generation, the Lorentz force and thus ion displacement is parallel to the surface of the conductor. EMATs are also capable of producing shear wave modes with both vertical and horizontal polarizations. The distinction between these two shear wave polarization modes is illustrated in Fig. 3.

6.3.3 *Rayleigh Wave Mode*—In general, for Rayleigh or surface wave generation, the applied static magnetic field will be oriented perpendicular to the surface of the conductor in the same manner used for shear wave propagation. A meander line or serpentine-type coil is used to provide a tuned frequency EMAT. The frequency of the EMAT is determined by the geometry (that is, line spacing) of the meander lines in the coil. By proper selection of frequency, it is possible to propagate only Rayleigh or surface waves. If the thickness of the material is at least five times the acoustic wavelength that is determined by the frequency and wave velocity, then Rayleigh wave generation is essentially ensured.

6.3.4 *Lamb Wave Modes*—The various Lamb wave modes (symmetric and antisymmetric) can be generated in a manner similar to Rayleigh wave propagation. For Lamb wave production, the tuned frequency of the meander line coil is chosen to give the desired Lamb wave mode and is dependent on the material thickness.

7. System Configuration

7.1 *Transducers*—As in conventional piezoelectric-type ultrasonic testing, there are basically two types of EMATs with respect to beam direction. EMATs can be designed for either straight or angle beam inspection. Examples of these two types of transducers are presented in the following sections.

7.1.1 *Straight Beam*—The spiral or pancake coil design is one of the most efficient EMATs for producing a straight ultrasonic beam. The direction of the applied magnetic field is

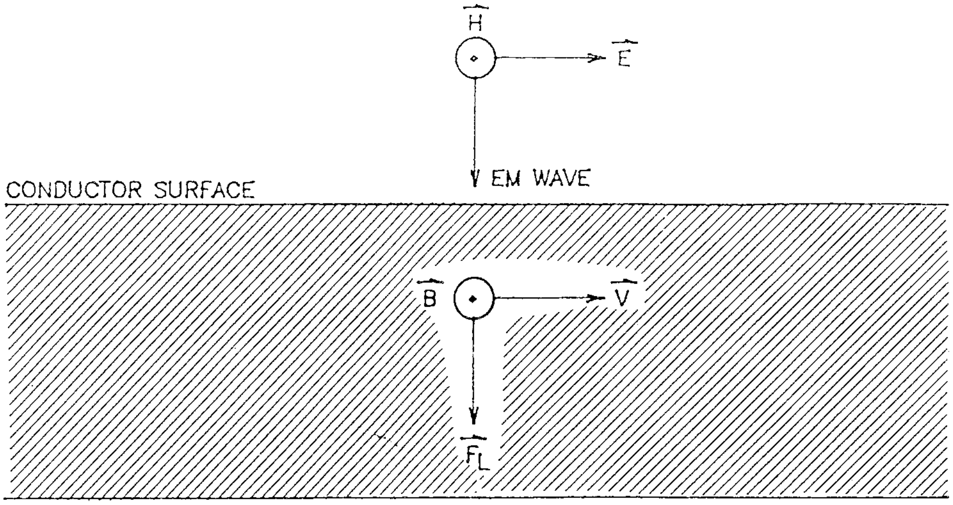

FIG. 1 EMAT Generation of Longitudinal Waves

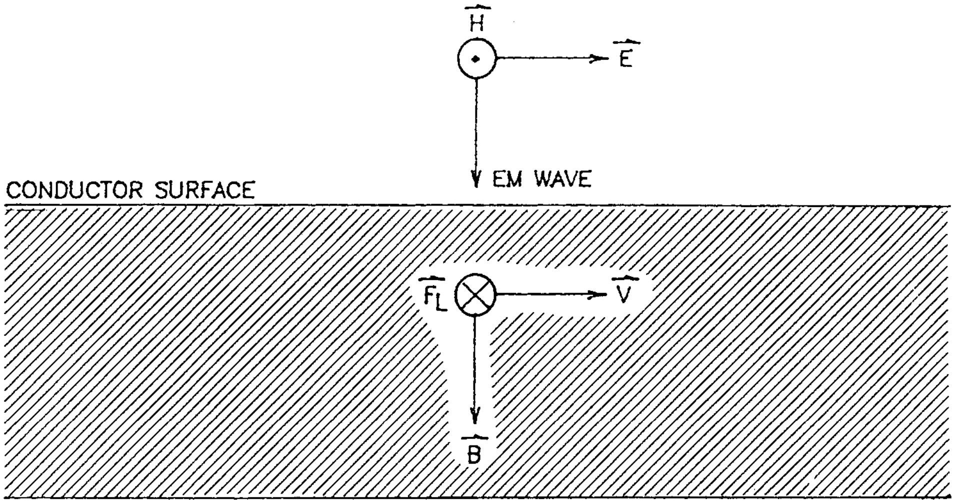

FIG. 2 EMAT Generation of Shear Waves

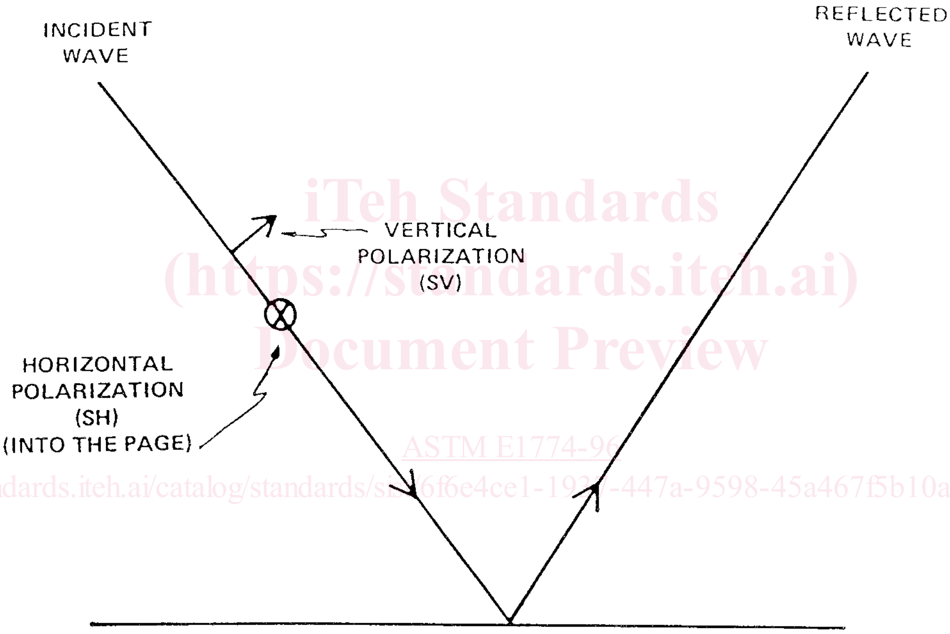

FIG. 3 Illustration of Horizontal and Vertical Polarizations for Shear Waves

perpendicular to the plane of the spiral coil, as shown in Fig. 4. The magnetic field can be produced by a permanent magnet, an electromagnet, or a pulsed magnet. Assuming that there is no fringing of the magnetic field parallel to the coil, a radially polarized shear wave is produced. Since there is always a small gradient of the field lines parallel to the coil, a small amplitude longitudinal wave will also be present. However, the longitudinal wave component can be held to a minimum by the proper design of the EMAT. The same holds for butterfly coils, placed in a perpendicular magnetic field with spatially alternating magnetic direction for the excitation of linearly-polarized shear waves.

7.1.2 *Angle Beam*—The meander line or serpentine coil EMAT can be designed for angle beam ultrasonic inspection. The orientation of the applied magnetic field is perpendicular to the plane of the meander coil, as shown in Fig. 5. The geometry of the meander lines is illustrated in Fig. 6. Due to the geometry of the meander lines, periodic surface stresses are generated in the test specimen. These stresses produce ultrasonic waves when the following phase matching condition is fulfilled:

$$n\lambda = 2L \tag{2}$$

where:
n = odd integer,
λ = Rayleigh wavelength, and
L = spacing between adjacent coil lines.

Phase matching to bulk waves is achieved when the projection of the wire spacing into the propagation direction of the selected bulk mode is given by