



Designation: E 1036 – 02

Standard Test Methods for Electrical Performance of Nonconcentrator Terrestrial Photovoltaic Modules and Arrays Using Reference Cells¹

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1. Scope

1.1 These test methods cover the electrical performance of photovoltaic modules and arrays under natural or simulated sunlight using a calibrated reference cell.

1.2 Measurements under a variety of conditions are allowed; results are reported under a select set of reporting conditions (RC) to facilitate comparison of results.

1.3 These test methods apply only to nonconcentrator terrestrial modules and arrays.

1.4 The performance parameters determined by these test methods apply only at the time of the test, and imply no past or future performance level.

1.5 There is no similar or equivalent ISO standard.

1.6 *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 691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method²

E 772 Terminology Relating to Solar Energy Conversion³

E 927 Specification for Solar Simulation for Terrestrial Photovoltaic Testing³

E 941 Test Method for Calibration of Reference Pyranometers With Axis Tilted by the Shading Method²

E 948 Test Method for Electrical Performance of Photovoltaic Cells Using Reference Cells Under Simulated Sunlight³

E 973 Test Method for Determination of the Spectral Mismatch Parameter Between a Photovoltaic Device and a Photovoltaic Reference Cell³

E 1021 Test Methods for Measuring the Spectral Response of Photovoltaic Cells³

¹ These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E44 on Solar, Geothermal, and Other Alternative Energy Sources and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E44.09 on Photovoltaic Electric Power Conversion.

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² *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 14.02.

³ *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 12.02.

E 1039 Test Method for Calibration of Silicon Non-Concentrator Photovoltaic Primary Reference Cells Under Global Irradiation³

E 1040 Specification for Physical Characteristics of Non-concentrator Terrestrial Photovoltaic Reference Cells³

E 1125 Test Method for Calibration of Primary Nonconcentrator Terrestrial Photovoltaic Reference Cells Using a Tabular Spectrum³

E 1328 Terminology Relating to Photovoltaic Solar Energy Conversion³

E 1362 Test Method for Calibration of Nonconcentrator Photovoltaic Secondary Reference Cells³

G 159 Tables for References Solar Spectral Irradiance at Air Mass 1.5: Direct Normal and Hemispherical for a 37° Tilted Surface⁴

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Definitions of terms used in these test methods may be found in Terminology E 772 and Terminology E 1328.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *nominal operating cell temperature, NOCT, n* —the temperature of a solar cell inside a module operating at an ambient temperature of 20°C, an irradiance of 800 Wm⁻², and an average wind speed of 1 ms⁻¹.

3.2.2 *reporting conditions, RC, n* —the device temperature, total irradiance, and reference spectral irradiance conditions that module or array performance data are corrected to.

3.3 *Symbols:*

3.3.1 The following symbols and units are used in these test methods:

α_r —temperature coefficient of reference cell I_{SC} , °C⁻¹,

α —current temperature coefficient of device under test, °C⁻¹,

$\beta(E)$ —voltage temperature function of device under test, °C⁻¹,

C —calibration constant of reference cell, Am²W⁻¹,

C' —adjusted calibration constant of reference cell, Am²W⁻¹,

C_f —NOCT Correction factor, °C,

⁴ *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 14.04.

$\delta(T)$ —voltage irradiance correction function of device under test, dimensionless,

ΔT —NOCT cell-ambient temperature difference, °C,

E —irradiance, Wm^{-2} ,

E_o —irradiance at RC, Wm^{-2} ,

FF —fill factor, dimensionless,

I —current, A,

I_{mp} —current at maximum power, A,

I_o —current at RC, A,

I_r —short-circuit current of reference cell, A,

I_{sc} —short-circuit current, A,

M —spectral mismatch parameter, dimensionless,

P —electrical power, W,

P_m —maximum power, W,

T —temperature, °C,

T_a —ambient temperature, °C,

T_c —temperature of cell in module, °C,

T_o —temperature at RC, °C,

T_r —temperature of reference cell, °C,

v —wind speed, ms^{-1} ,

V —voltage, V,

V_{mp} —voltage at maximum power, V,

V_o —voltage at RC, V, and

V_{oc} —open-circuit voltage, V.

4. Summary of Test Methods

4.1 Measurement of the performance of a photovoltaic module or array illuminated by a light source consists of determining at least the following electrical characteristics: short-circuit current, open-circuit voltage, maximum power, and voltage at maximum power.

4.2 These parameters are derived by applying the procedure in Section 8 to a set of current-voltage data pairs (I - V data) recorded with the test module or array operating in the power-producing quadrant.

4.3 Testing the performance of a photovoltaic device involves the use of a calibrated photovoltaic reference cell to determine the total irradiance.

4.3.1 The reference cell is chosen according to the spectral distribution of the irradiance under which it was calibrated, for example, the direct normal or global spectrum. These spectra are defined by Tables G 159. The reference cell therefore determines to which spectrum the test module or array performance is referred.

4.3.2 The reference cell must match the device under test such that the spectral mismatch parameter is 1.00 ± 0.05 , as determined in accordance with Test Method E 973.

4.3.3 Recommended physical characteristics of reference cells are described in Specification E 1040.

4.4 The spectral response of the module or array is usually taken to be that of a representative cell from the module or array tested in accordance with Test Method E 1021. The representative cell should be packaged such that the optical properties of the module or array packaging and the representative cell package are similar.

4.5 The tests are performed using either natural or simulated sunlight. Solar simulation requirements are stated in Specification E 927.

4.5.1 If a pulsed solar simulator is used as a light source, the transient responses of the module or array and the reference cell must be compatible with the test equipment.

4.6 The data from the measurements are translated to a set of reporting conditions (see 5.3) selected by the user of these test methods. The actual test conditions, the test data (if available), and the translated data are then reported.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 It is the intent of these procedures to provide recognized methods for testing and reporting the electrical performance of photovoltaic modules and arrays.

5.2 The test results may be used for comparison of different modules or arrays among a group of similar items that might be encountered in testing a group of modules or arrays from a single source. They also may be used to compare diverse designs, such as products from different manufacturers. Repeated measurements of the same module or array may be used for the study of changes in device performance.

5.3 Measurements may be made over a range of test conditions. The measurement data are numerically translated (see Section 8) from the test conditions to SRC, to nominal operating conditions, or to optional user-specified reporting conditions. The SRC are defined in Table 1.

5.4 These test methods are based on two requirements.

5.4.1 First, the reference cell is selected so that its spectral response is considered to be close to the module or array to be tested.

5.4.2 Second, the spectral response of a representative cell and the spectral distribution of the irradiance source must be known. The calibration constant of the reference cell is then corrected to account for the difference between the actual and the reference spectral irradiance distributions using the spectral mismatch parameter, which is defined in Test Method E 973.

5.5 Terrestrial reference cells are calibrated with respect to a reference spectral irradiance distribution, for example, Tables G 159.

5.6 A reference cell made and calibrated as described in 4.3 will indicate the total irradiance incident on a module or array whose spectral response is close to that of the reference cell.

5.7 With the performance data determined in accordance with these test methods, it becomes possible to predict module or array performance from measurements under any test light source in terms of any reference spectral irradiance distribution.

5.8 These test methods are valid for the range of temperature and irradiance conditions over which the correction factors (defined in Annex A2) were determined. Devices for which the correction factors cannot be determined or are unavailable will have to be measured at temperature and irradiance conditions as close to the desired reporting conditions as possible.

TABLE 1 Reporting Conditions

	Total Irradiance, Wm^{-2}	Spectral Irradiance	Device Temperature, °C
Standard reporting conditions	1000	G 159	25
Nominal operating conditions	800	...	NOCT

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Photovoltaic Reference Cell*—A calibrated reference cell is used to determine the total irradiance during the electrical performance measurement.

6.1.1 The reference cell shall be matched in its spectral response to a representative cell of the test module or array such that the spectral mismatch parameter as determined by Test Method E 973 is 1.00 ± 0.05 .

6.1.2 Specification E 1040 provides recommended physical characteristics of reference cells.

6.1.3 Reference cells may be calibrated in accordance with Test Methods E 1039, E 1125, or E 1362, as appropriate for a particular application.

6.1.4 A current measurement instrument (see 6.7) shall be used to determine the I_{sc} of the reference cell when illuminated with the light source (see 6.4).

6.2 *Test Fixture*—The device to be tested is mounted on a test fixture that facilitates temperature measurement and four-wire current-voltage measurements (Kelvin probe, see 6.3). The design of the test fixture shall prevent any increase or decrease of the device output due to reflections or shadowing. Arrays installed in the field shall be tested as installed. See 7.2.3 for additional restrictions and reporting requirements.

6.3 *Kelvin Probe*—An arrangement of contacts that consists of two pairs of wires attached to the two output terminals of the device under test. One pair of wires is used to conduct the current flowing through the device, and the other pair is used to measure the voltage across the device. A schematic diagram of an I-V measurement using a Kelvin Probe is given in Fig. 1 of Test Method E 948.

6.4 *Light Source*—The light source shall be either natural sunlight or a solar simulator providing Class A, B, or C simulation as specified in Specification E 927.

6.5 *Temperature Measurement Equipment*—The instrument or instruments used to measure the temperature of both the reference cell and the device under test shall have a resolution of at least 0.1°C , and shall have a total error of less than $\pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ of reading.

6.5.1 Temperature sensors, such as thermocouples or thermistors, suitable for the test temperature range shall be attached in a manner that allows measurement of the device temperature. Because module and array temperatures can vary spatially under continuous illumination, multiple sensors distributed over the device should be used, and the results averaged to obtain the device temperature.

6.5.2 When testing modules or arrays for which direct measurement of the cell temperature inside the package is not feasible, sensors can be attached to the rear side of the devices. The error due to temperature gradients will depend on the thermal characteristics of the packaging, especially under continuous illumination. Modules with glass back sheets will have higher gradients than modules with thin polymer backs, for example.

6.6 *Variable Load*—An electronic load, such as a variable resistor, a programmable power supply, or a capacitive sweep circuit, used to operate the device to be tested at different points along its I-V characteristic.

6.6.1 The variable load should be capable of operating the device to be tested at an I-V point where the voltage is within 1 % of V_{oc} in the power-producing quadrant.

6.6.2 The variable load should be capable of operating the device to be tested at an I-V point where the current is within 1 % of I_{sc} in the power-producing quadrant.

6.6.3 The variable load should allow the device output power (the product of device current and device voltage) to be varied in increments as small as 0.2 % of the maximum power.

6.6.4 The electrical response time of the variable load should be fast enough to sweep the required range of I-V operating points during the measurement period. It is possible that the response time of the device under test may limit how fast the range of I-V points can be swept, especially when pulsed simulators are used. For these cases, it may be necessary to make multiple measurements over smaller portions of the I-V curve to obtain the entire recommended range.

6.7 *Current Measurement Equipment*—The instrument or instruments used to measure the current through the device under test and the I_{sc} of the reference cell shall have a resolution of at least 0.02 % of the maximum current encountered, and shall have a total error of less than 0.1 % of the maximum current encountered.

6.8 *Voltage Measurement Equipment*—The instrument or instruments used to measure the voltage across the device under test shall have a resolution of at least 0.02 % of the maximum voltage encountered, and shall have a total error of less than 0.1 % of the maximum voltage encountered.

7. Procedures

7.1 *Momentary Illumination Technique*:

7.1.1 This technique is valid for use with pulsed solar simulators, shuttered continuous solar simulators, or shuttered sunlight. For testing under continuous illumination see 7.2.

7.1.2 Determine the spectral mismatch parameter, M , using Test Method E 973.

7.1.3 Mount the reference cell and the device to be tested in the test fixture coplanar within $\pm 2^\circ$, and normal to the illumination source within $\pm 10^\circ$. If an array or module cannot be aligned to within $\pm 10^\circ$, the solar angle of incidence, the device orientation and its tilt angle must be reported with the data.

7.1.4 Connect the four-wire Kelvin probe to the module or array output terminals.

7.1.5 Expose the module or array to the light source.

7.1.6 If the temporal instability of the light source (as defined in Specification E 927) is less than 0.1 %, the total irradiance may be determined with the reference cell prior to the performance measurement. In this case, measure the short-circuit current of the reference cell, I_r .

7.1.7 Measure the I-V characteristic of the test device by changing the operating point with the variable load so that the provisions of 6.6 are met. At each operating point along the I-V characteristic, measure the device voltage, the device current, and I_r .

7.1.7.1 If the provision of 7.1.6 is met, it is not necessary to measure I_r at each operating point.

7.1.8 Measure the temperature of the reference cell, T_r , and the temperature of the test device, T_c . Temperature changes during the test shall be less than 2°C.

7.2 Continuous Illumination Technique:

7.2.1 This technique is valid for testing in continuous solar simulators or natural sunlight.

7.2.2 Determine the spectral mismatch parameter, M , using Test Method E 973.

7.2.3 Mount the reference cell and the device to be tested in the test fixture coplanar within $\pm 2^\circ$, and normal to the illumination source within $\pm 10^\circ$. If an array or module cannot be aligned to within $\pm 10^\circ$, the solar angle of incidence, the device orientation and its tilt angle must be reported with the data.

7.2.4 Connect the four-wire Kelvin probe to the module or array output terminals.

7.2.5 Expose the test device to the illumination source for a period of time sufficient for the device to achieve thermal equilibrium.

7.2.6 If the temporal instability of the light source (as defined in Specification E 927) is less than 0.1 %, the total irradiance may be determined with the reference cell prior to the performance measurement. In this case, measure the short-circuit current of the reference cell, I_r .

7.2.7 Obtain the average temperature, T_c , of a cell in the module or array using one of the following two methods:

7.2.7.1 For outdoor measurements in natural sunlight if the NOCT correction factors are known (see Annex A1), measure the ambient air temperature and the wind speed. The average wind speed for 5 min preceding the test and during the test should not exceed 1.75 ms⁻¹.

7.2.7.2 Measure the temperature of the sensors, following the provisions of 6.5.

7.2.8 Measure the reference cell temperature, T_r .

7.2.9 Measure the I - V characteristic of the test device by changing the operating point with the variable load so that the provisions of 6.6 are met. At each operating point along the I - V characteristic, measure the device voltage, the device current, and I_r .

7.2.9.1 If the provision of 7.2.6 is met, it is not necessary to measure I_r at each operating point.

7.2.10 Immediately following the I - V recording, repeat the temperature measurements and verify that temperature changes during the test were less than 2°C.

8. Calculation of Results

8.1 Adjust the reference cell calibration constant using:

$$C' = \frac{C}{M} [1 + \alpha_r(T_r - T_o)] \quad (1)$$

8.2 Correct the current at each point of the I - V data for irradiance using the following equation:

$$I = I_m \frac{E_o C'}{I_r} \quad (2)$$

where:

I_m = the uncorrected device current as measured in Section 7.

8.3 Calculate the total irradiance during the performance measurement using the following equation (if I_r was measured at each operating point, use the average value of I_r):

$$E = \frac{I_r}{C'} \quad (3)$$

8.4 Determine the uncorrected short-circuit current, I_{scu} , from the I - V data using one of the following procedures:

8.4.1 If an I - V data pair exists where V is $0.0 \pm 0.005 V_{oc}$, I from this pair may be considered to be the short-circuit current.

8.4.2 If the condition in 8.4.1 is not met, calculate the short-circuit current from several I - V data pairs where V is closest to zero using linear interpolation or extrapolation.

8.5 Determine the uncorrected open-circuit voltage, V_{ocu} , from the I - V data measured in Section 7 using one of the following procedures:

8.5.1 If an I - V data pair exists where I is $0.0 \pm 0.001 I_{sc}$, V from this pair may be considered to be the open-circuit voltage.

8.5.2 If the condition in 8.5.1 is not met, calculate the open-circuit voltage from several I - V data pairs where I is closest to zero using linear interpolation or extrapolation.

8.6 Translate the uncorrected short-circuit current to RC using the following equation:

$$I_{sc} = \frac{I_{scu}}{[1 + \alpha(T_c - T_o)]} \quad (4)$$

8.7 Translate the uncorrected open-circuit voltage to RC using the following equation:

$$V_{oc} = \frac{V_{ocu}}{[1 + \beta(E_o)(T_c - T_o)][1 + \delta(T_c) \ln(E/E_o)]} \quad (5)$$

NOTE 1—The translation functions α , β , and δ are obtained from experimental determination. An acceptable method is described in Annex A2. Measurement of the translation functions for every device tested is not required; functions previously determined for a device of identical design and construction may be used.

8.8 Translate each I - V data point to RC using the following equations:

$$I_o = I \frac{I_{sc}}{I_{scu}} \quad (6)$$

and:

$$V_o = V \frac{V_{oc}}{V_{ocu}} \quad (7)$$

8.9 Form a table of P versus V_o values by multiplying I_o by V_o .

8.10 Find the maximum power point P_{mp} , and the corresponding V_{mp} , in the P versus V_o table. Because of random fluctuations and the probability that one point in the tabular I_o - V_o data will not be exactly on the maximum power point, it is recommended that the following procedure be used to calculate the maximum power point, especially for devices with fill factors greater than 80 %.

8.10.1 Perform a fourth-order polynomial least-squares fit to the P versus V_o data that are within the following limits:

$$0.751_{mp} \leq I_o \leq 1.15I_{mp} \quad (8)$$

and:

$$0.75V_{mp} \leq V_o \leq 1.15V_{mp} \quad (9)$$