
Simultaneous determination of uranium and plutonium in dissolver solutions from reprocessing plants — Combined method using K-absorption edge and X-ray fluorescence spectrometry

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Dosage simultané de l'uranium et du plutonium dans les solutions de dissolution des usines de retraitement — Méthode combinée de spectrométrie d'absorption K et de fluorescence X
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Contents

1 Scope	1
2 Principle.....	1
3 Apparatus	1
4 Operating procedure	5
5 Method of calculation	6
6 Calibration	8
7 Bias correction factors.....	10
8 Measurement uncertainty	11
Annex A (informative) Bibliography	13

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

International Standard ISO 13464 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 85, *Nuclear energy*, Subcommittee 5, *Nuclear fuel technology*.

Annex A of this International Standard is for information only.

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Simultaneous determination of uranium and plutonium in dissolver solutions from reprocessing plants — Combined method using K-absorption edge and X-ray fluorescence spectrometry

1 Scope

This International Standard specifies a nondestructive method for the simultaneous determination of volumetric uranium and plutonium concentrations in nitric acid feed solutions from reprocessing plants. The method is directly applicable, without interference, to the original feed solution, which typically contains about 150 g·l⁻¹ to 300 g·l⁻¹ uranium and 1 g·l⁻¹ to 2,5 g·l⁻¹ plutonium in the presence of fission products with a total β,γ -activity of up to 10 TBq·l⁻¹.

2 Principle

A sample vial containing about 3 ml to 5 ml of the feed solution is irradiated with a suitably filtered X-ray continuum from an X-ray tube. The X-ray continuum must include X-ray energies up to about 150 keV, and the maximum of its intensity distribution should occur at an energy above 100 keV.

The attenuation of a highly collimated X-ray beam, crossing a well-defined pathlength of solution in the vial, is measured with a HPGe detector below and above the K-absorption edge energy of uranium ($E_K = 115,6$ keV). The underlying K-edge densitometry (KED) method determines the uranium concentration from the abrupt change of the photon attenuation across the K-absorption edge.

At the same time a second HPGe detector, viewing a larger portion of the sample, measures the intensity ratio of fluoresced $K\alpha$, X-rays from uranium and plutonium. This X-ray fluorescence (XRF) measurement determines the U/Pu element ratio. The plutonium concentration is calculated from the measured values for the uranium concentration and the U/Pu ratio. The advantage of this XRF method arises from the fact that it is totally based on intensity ratio measurements. Further details on the measurement principle can be found in [1].

3 Apparatus

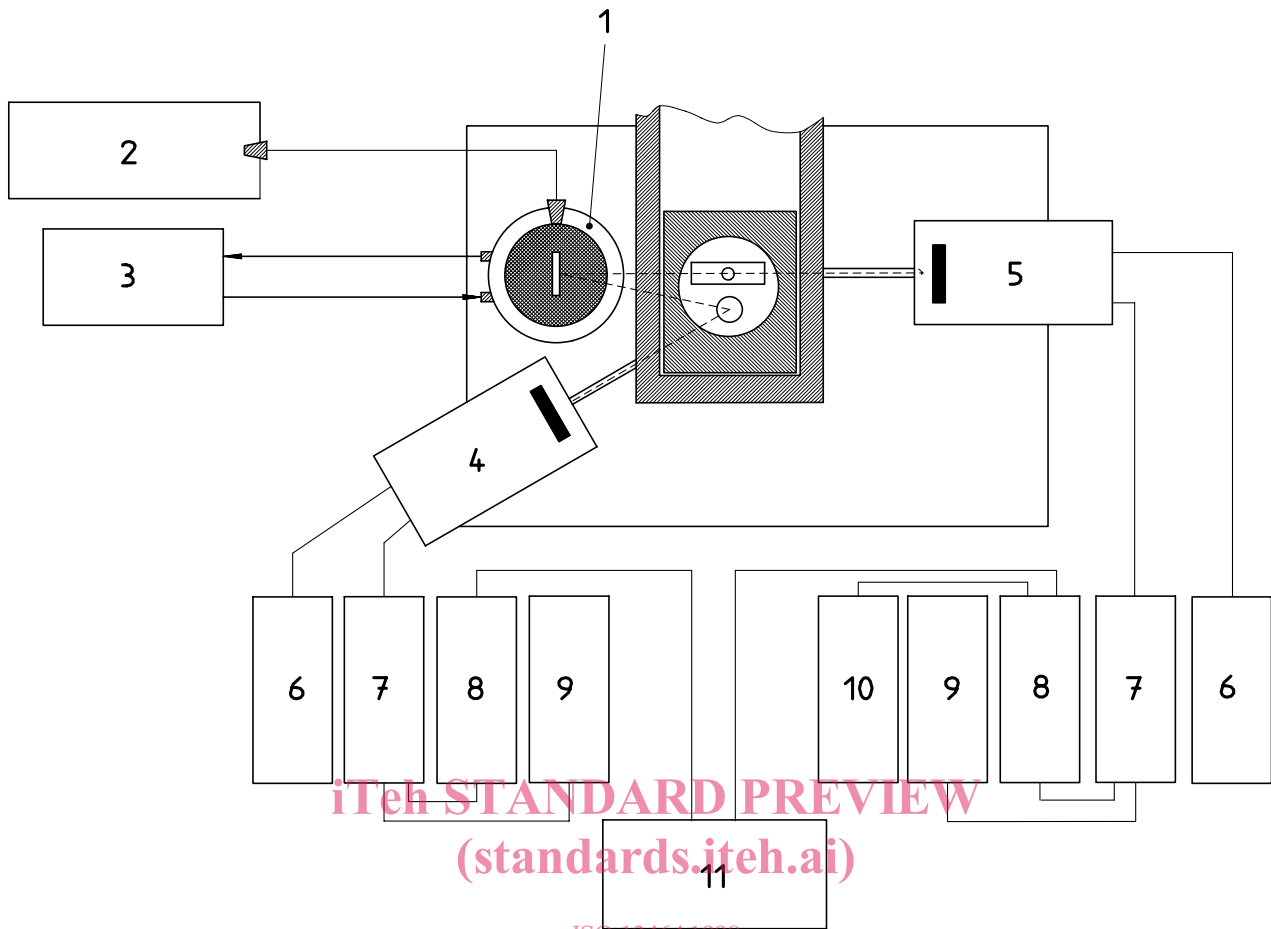
3.1 Components

3.1.1 Advanced standard spectroscopy equipment for high-resolution gamma spectroscopy including two HPGe detectors, electronics for fast pulse processing, and a computer-based multichannel analyzer for spectrum acquisition and evaluation.

3.1.2 X-ray equipment with X-ray tube, high voltage power supply, operating console and a circuit for water cooling.

3.1.3 Mechanics including beam collimators, shielding materials, adjustment device for the X-ray tube, and a system for transferring the sample into a defined position in the spectrometer.

A block diagram of the instrument components is shown in figure 1.



Key:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1 | X-ray tube | 7 | Main amplifier |
| 2 | H.V. generator | 8 | ADC |
| 3 | Water cooling | 9 | Ratemeter |
| 4 | HPGe detector XRF | 10 | Stabilizer |
| 5 | HPGe detector K-edge | 11 | MCA and PC system |
| 6 | H.V. | | |

Figure 1 — Block diagram of the instrument components

3.2 Geometric arrangement

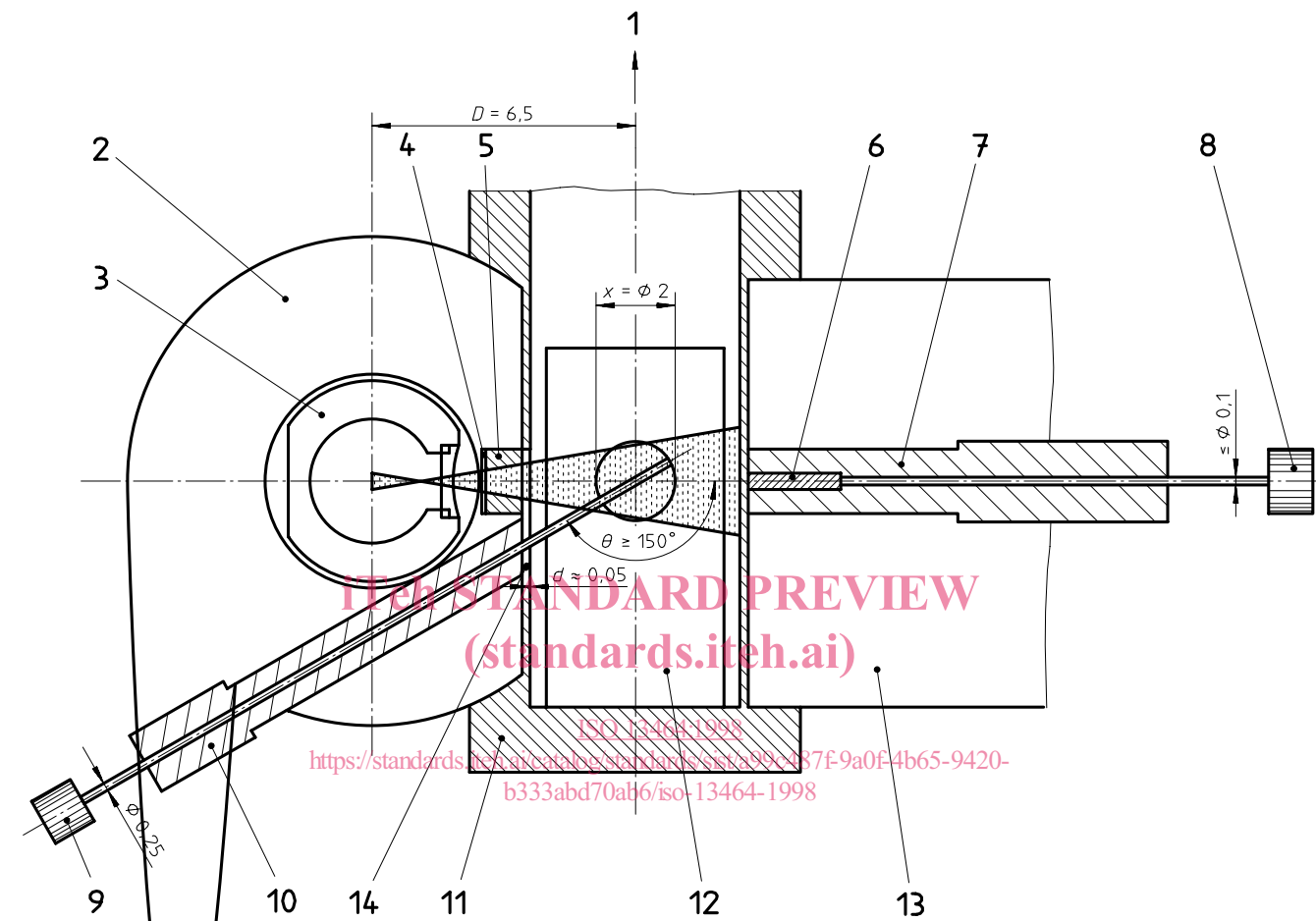
The geometric arrangement (see figure 2) shall satisfy three basic requirements:

- a) The distance D between X-ray tube and sample shall be kept as short as technically feasible ($D \approx 6,5$ cm) in order to achieve the highest possible flux of X-rays from the tube at the sample position (integrated flux of X-rays with energies from 115 keV to 150 keV $\approx 5 \times 10^{10}$ photons·cm⁻²·s⁻¹).
- b) The angle θ between primary X-ray beam and collimator axis directed towards the XRF detector shall take values $\theta \geq 150^\circ$ in order to shift inelastically scattered radiation out of the energy region of analysis in the XRF spectrum.
- c) The solid angle subtended by the collimator between sample and K-edge detector shall be limited to values $\Omega \leq 10^{-4}$ sr in order to minimize elastic scattering towards the detector.

The transfer of the sample into the spectrometer can be accomplished either horizontally by means of a suitably designed sample conveyor system coupled to a shielded glovebox or hot cell facility (as indicated in figure 2), or vertically through a pneumatic sample transfer system.

The material thickness of the containment of the sample transfer system in the area of the incoming and outgoing X-ray beams shall be properly adapted to ensure an optimum signal rate for the XRF measurement. For a containment made of stainless steel, the window thickness, d , should be reduced to about 0,05 cm. If aluminium is used as containment, a window thickness, d , of up 0,4 cm is acceptable.

Dimensions in centimetres



Key:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|----|--|
| 1 | Access to shielded glovebox | 8 | HPGe detector for KED |
| 2 | Shielding | 9 | HPGe detector for XRF |
| 3 | X-ray tube, $\varnothing \leq 5$ | 10 | Collimator (W) $L \geq 10$ |
| 4 | Filter (Cd), $d \simeq 0,1$ | 11 | Containment of sample transfer system |
| 5 | Collimator (W) | 12 | Sample conveyor |
| 6 | Filter (Fe), $d \simeq 2$ | 13 | Shielding |
| 7 | Collimator (W) $L \geq 10$ | 14 | Window of containment of sample transfer system; for XRF measurements $d \approx 0,05$ (stainless steel) or $d \leq 0,4$ (aluminium) |

Figure 2 — Principle geometric arrangement.

3.3 Specifications

3.3.1 X-ray system

A 3 kW X-ray unit providing maximum ratings of 160 kV/19 mA, preferably equipped with a metal-ceramic X-ray tube of smallest possible diameter (≤ 5 cm) along the radiation window section to allow a shortest possible distance between focus and sample, thus minimizing interferences from fission products. Stability of the high-voltage supply $\leq 0,1$ %. High-voltage and tube current continuously adjustable. Water cooling at a minimum flowrate of 4 l·min⁻¹

3.3.2 Detectors

True planar or pseudoplanar-type HPGe detectors in standard horizontal dipstick cryostate. Active detector area 100 mm² to 200 mm², depletion depth 10 mm to 13 mm. Detector coupled to an RC feedback preamplifier with an energy rate limit of about 20 GeV·s⁻¹. Energy resolution ≤ 0,6 keV FWHM at 122 keV at an input pulse rate of 5 × 10⁴ counts·s⁻¹.

3.3.3 Pulse processing chain

Fast-pulse processing equipment with a typical processing time of about 5 μs, ensuring throughput rates ≥ 60 % at input rates of 5 × 10⁴ counts·s⁻¹. Pulse processor equipped with an effective pulse pile-up rejection circuit. Conventional amplifiers with near-Gaussian filter shaping should be operated at a shaping time constant of 1 μs.

NOTE It is recommended to include into the electronic chain of the K-edge detector a dual-point digital stabilizer for zero and gain stabilization in order to simplify the data evaluation procedure. The reference lines for stabilization may be obtained from a suitable radioactive source such as ¹⁰⁹Cd ($E = 22$ keV and 88 keV). A source activity of about 0,5 MBq to 1 MBq will be sufficient when the source is located near the detector.

3.3.4 Data acquisition system

Advanced computer-based multichannel analyzer system providing two independent input channels with direct memory access for digitized data. Memory size ≥ 16 MB.

3.3.5 Sample container

Both cylindrical vials and rectangular cuvettes are suitable. The optimum inner diameter or cell length is in the range of 1,5 cm to 2,5 cm. The wall thickness of the sample container should be kept as thin as possible at the level of the incident X-ray beam in order to minimize the intensity of scattered radiation for the XRF measurement. The vertical sample position and the filling height shall ensure a solution layer extending at minimum from about 0,5 cm below to 0,5 cm above the level of the incident X-ray beam.

The K-edge measurement critically depends on the effective pathlength of solution crossed by the X-ray beam. This geometrical parameter shall be carefully controlled, because its uncertainty propagates directly into the measurement result. The preferred types of sample vial are standard spectroscopy glass cells with exactly known cell length. If cylindrical samples are used, the tolerances for lateral displacements relative to the X-ray beam axis shall be limited to meet a certain degree of measurement accuracy. For guidance refer to figure 3. Further, cylindrical sample containers should be perfectly circular to make the measurement result independent of the azimuthal position of the sample.

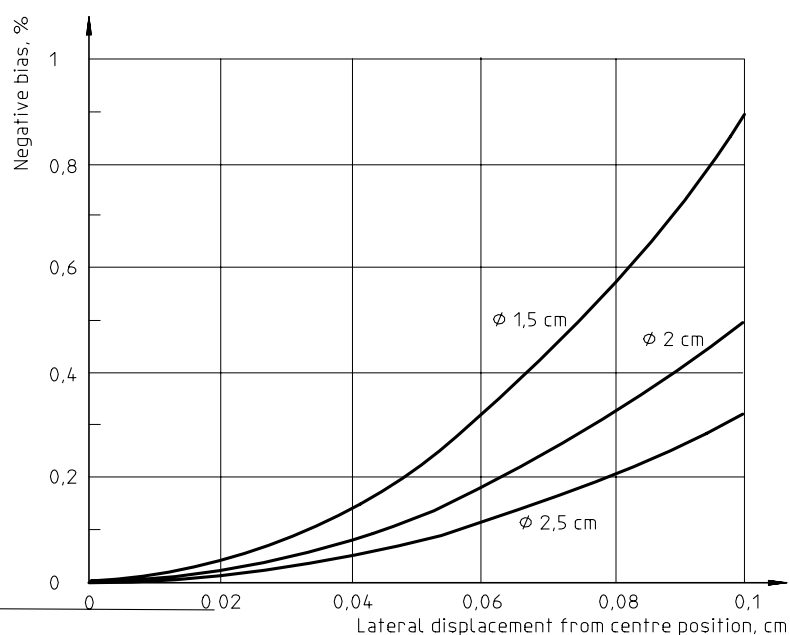


Figure 3 — Effect of lateral displacements on the KED result for cylindrical samples with different inner diameter ϕ_i

3.3.6 Collimators and beam filters

Collimators should be made from high-density heavy metal (for example tungsten). The aperture of the primary collimator next to the X-ray tube shall allow the irradiation of the full sample section seen by the XRF detector (see figure 2). Use a primary beam filter of about 0,1 cm Cd (or equivalent material) to reduce the intensity of low-energy X-rays.

Choose the length L of the collimators in front of the K-edge and XRF detector to be ≥ 10 cm to provide sufficient shielding against self-radiation from the feed solution. The condition $\Omega \leq 10^{-4}$ sr for the K-edge collimator (see 3.2) will be met with collimator hole diameters $\leq 0,1$ cm.

Adjust the length of the beam filter in the K-edge collimator (≈ 2 cm of stainless steel or equivalent, see figure 2) to yield, with a sample containing about 250 g U·l⁻¹, a total counting rate of $\approx 2 \times 10^4$ counts·s⁻¹ in the K-edge detector at the nominal X-ray tube rating of 150 kV/15 mA.

Adjust likewise, under the same conditions, the collimator diameter for XRF to yield a total counting rate of $\approx (3,5 \text{ to } 4) \times 10^4$ counts·s⁻¹ in the XRF detector. Typical collimator diameters are about 0,25 cm.

3.4 Instrument settings

Accumulate both the K-edge and XRF spectra into two K channels.

Adjust the amplifier gain to cover energy ranges in both spectra from zero up to about 170 keV, corresponding to a conversion gain of approximately 80 eV to 85 eV per channel.

Adjust the vertical position of the X-ray tube to yield maximum counting rate in the K-edge detector.

Operate the X-ray tube at a high voltage of about 150 kV, and set the tube current to about 15 mA.

The actual value of the high voltage supplied to the X-ray tube shall be not exactly equal to 150 kV. Deviations of about ± 2 kV from this value are acceptable for the voltage setting. However, once selected, the high voltage setting shall be kept constant within about 0,1 % for all measurements. The high voltage can be monitored from the endpoint energy of the X-ray continuum measured with the K-edge detector. Small changes in the tube current will not affect the measurement, because both the K-edge and XRF method are based on intensity ratio measurements.

4 Operating procedure

Perform an initial instrument calibration as described in clause 6.

Introduce by means of the adopted system for sample transfer the feed solution sample in its appropriate sample container (see 3.3.5) into a defined measurement position in the spectrometer.

Run the X-ray tube at the adopted ratings (150 kV/10 mA to 15 mA).

Initiate the simultaneous acquisition of spectra from the K-edge and XRF detector. Make sure that the digital stabilizer for the K-edge electronics is properly stabilizing on the selected reference lines.

Choose the counting time according to the desired uncertainty level for repeatability. The expected standard deviations (s) of results from repeated measurements with counting time t (t = live time, in seconds) are for representative feed solutions (250 g U·l⁻¹ and 2 g Pu·l⁻¹) as follows :

$$s(\%) \approx 0,25 \cdot \sqrt{\frac{1000}{t}} \quad \text{for [U] from KED, and}$$

$$s(\%) \approx 0,8 \cdot \sqrt{\frac{1000}{t}} \quad \text{for the U/Pu-ratio from XRF}$$