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## Standard Specification for Silicon Nitride Bearing Balls<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation F 2094; 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 ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

### 1. Scope

1.1 This specification covers the establishment of the basic quality, physical/mechanical property, and test requirements for silicon nitride balls Classes I, II, and III to be used for ball bearings and specialty ball applications.

1.2 The values stated in either SI units or inch-pound units are to be regarded separately as standard. The values stated in each system are not exact equivalents; therefore, each system must be used independently of the other. Combining values from the two systems may result in nonconformance with the specification.

### 2. Referenced Documents

#### 2.1 Order of Precedence:

2.1.1 In the event of a conflict between the text of this document and the references herein, the text of this document takes precedence. Nothing in this document, however, supersedes applicable laws and regulations unless a specific exemption has been obtained.

#### 2.2 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

- C 373 Test for Water Absorption, Bulk Density, Apparent Porosity, and Apparent Specific Gravity of Fired Whiteware Products
- C 1161 Test Method for Flexural Strength of Advanced Ceramics at Ambient Temperature
- C 1198 Test Method for Dynamic Young's Modulus, Shear Modulus, and Poisson's Ratio for Advanced Ceramics by Sonic Resonance
- C 1239 Practice for Reporting Uniaxial Strength Data and Estimating Weibull Distribution Parameters for Advanced Ceramics
- C 1327 Test Method for Vickers Indentation Hardness of Advanced Ceramics
- C 1421 Test Methods for Determination of Fracture Toughness of Advanced Ceramics at Ambient Temperatures

- E 165 Test Method for Liquid Penetrant Examination
- E 384 Test Method for Microindentation Hardness of Materials
- E 831 Test Method for Linear Thermal Expansion of Solid Materials by Thermomechanical Analysis
- E 1417 Practice for Liquid Penetrant Examination
- 2.3 *ANSI Standard:*
  - ANSI/ASQC Z1.4 Sampling Procedures and Tables for Inspection by Attributes<sup>3</sup>
- 2.4 *ABMA Standards:*
  - STD 1 Terminology for Anti-Friction Ball and Roller Bearings and Parts<sup>4</sup>
  - STD 10 Metal Balls<sup>4</sup>
- 2.5 *ASME Standard:*
  - B 46.1 Surface Texture (Surface Roughness, Waviness, and Lay)<sup>5</sup>
- 2.6 *DIN Standards:*<sup>6</sup>
  - 5401 Rolling Bearings; Balls of Through-Hardening Rolling Bearing Steel, Part 1
  - 5401 Rolling Bearings; Balls of Through-Hardening Rolling Bearing Steel, Part 2
- 2.7 *ISO Standards:*
  - 3290 Rolling Bearings, Bearing Parts, Balls for Rolling Bearings<sup>3</sup>
  - 4505 Hardmetals—Metallographic Determination of Porosity and Uncombined Carbon<sup>3</sup>
- 2.8 *JIS Standards:*
  - R 1601 Testing Method for Flexural Strength (Modulus of Rupture) of High Performance Ceramics<sup>7</sup>
  - R 1602 Testing Method for Elastic Modulus of High Performance Ceramics<sup>7</sup>
  - R 1603 Methods for Chemical Analysis of Fine Silicon Nitride Powders for Fine Ceramics<sup>7</sup>
  - R 1607 Testing Method for Fracture Toughness of High

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Application for copies should be addressed to the American National Standards Institute, 25 West 43rd Street, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036.

<sup>4</sup> Application for copies should be addressed to the American Bearing Manufacturer's Association, 1200 19th Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036-2401.

<sup>5</sup> Application for copies should be addressed to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, 345 East Street, New York, NY 10017.

<sup>6</sup> Application for copies should be addressed to the Deutsches Institut Für Normung (German Standards Institute), Burggrafenstrasse 6, D 10787 Berlin, Germany.

<sup>7</sup> Application for copies should be addressed to the Japanese Standards Association, 1-24 Akasaka 4 chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo. 107 Japan.

- Performance Ceramics<sup>7</sup>
- R 1610 Testing Method for Vicker's Hardness of High Performance Ceramics<sup>7</sup>
- R 1611 Testing Methods of Thermal Diffusivity, Specific Heat Capacity and Thermal Conductivity for High Performance Ceramics by Laser Flash Method<sup>7</sup>
- R 1618 Measuring Method of Thermal Expansion of Fine Ceramics by Thermomechanical Analysis<sup>7</sup>
- R 1624 Weibull Statistics of Strength Data for Fine Ceramics<sup>7</sup>

### 2.9 CEN Standards:

- EN 843-1 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—Mechanical Properties at Room Temperature, Part 1. Determination of Flexural Strength<sup>8</sup>
- EN 843-2 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—Mechanical Properties at Room Temperature, Part 2 Determination of Elastic Moduli<sup>8</sup>
- ENV 843-4 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—Mechanical Properties at Room Temperature, Part 4. Vickers, Knoop and Rockwell Superficial Hardness Tests<sup>8</sup>
- ENV 843-5 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—Mechanical Properties at Room Temperature, Part 5, Statistical Analysis<sup>8</sup>
- EN 623-2 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—General and Textural Properties—Determination of Density and Porosity<sup>8</sup>
- EN 821-2 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—Thermo-physical Properties—Part 2: Determination of Thermal Diffusivity by the Laser Flash (or Heat Pulse) method<sup>8</sup>
- EN 821-1 Advanced Technical Ceramics—Monolithic Ceramics—Thermo-physical Properties—Part 1: Determination of Thermal Expansion<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Terminology

### 3.1 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.1.1 *ball diameter variation (Vdws)*—ball diameter variation is the difference between the largest and smallest diameter measured on the same ball.

3.1.2 *ball gage (S)*—prescribed small amount by which the lot mean diameter should differ from nominal diameter, this amount being one of an established series of amounts. A ball gage, in combination with the ball grade and nominal ball diameter, should be considered as the most exact ball size specification to be used by a customer for ordering purposes.

3.1.3 *ball gage deviation ( $\Delta S$ )*—difference between the lot mean diameter and the sum of the nominal diameter and the ball gage.

3.1.4 *ball grade (G)*—specific combination of dimensional form and surface roughness tolerances. A ball grade is designated by a grade number followed by the letter “C” indicating Silicon Nitride Ceramic.

3.1.5 *blank lot*—single group of same-sized ball blanks processed together from one material lot through densification.

3.1.6 *deviation from spherical form ( $\Delta R_w$ )*—greatest radial distance in any radial plane between a sphere circumscribed around the ball surface and any point on the ball surface.

3.1.7 *finish lot*—single group of same-sized balls (which may be derived from multiple blank lots of the same material lot) processed together through finishing.

3.1.8 *lot diameter variation (Vdwl)*—difference between the mean diameter of the largest ball and that of the smallest ball in the lot.

3.1.9 *lot mean diameter (Dwml)*—arithmetic mean of the mean diameter of the largest ball and that of the smallest ball in the lot.

3.1.10 *material lot*—single process lot of silicon nitride raw powder received from a material supplier.

3.1.11 *mean diameter of a ball (Dwm)*—arithmetic mean of the largest and the smallest actual diameters of the ball.

3.1.12 *nominal diameter (Dw)*—size ordered that is the basis to which the nominal diameter tolerances apply. The nominal diameter is specified in inches or millimeters (decimal form).

3.1.13 *nominal diameter tolerance*—maximum allowable deviation from true specified nominal diameter for the indicated grade.

3.1.14 *single diameter of a ball (Dws)*—the distance between two parallel planes tangent to the surface of the ball.

3.1.15 *surface roughness (Ra)*—surface irregularities with relative small spacings, which usually include irregularities resulting from the method of manufacture being used or other influences, or both.

3.1.16 *unit container*—container identified as containing balls from the same manufacture lot of the same composition, grade, and nominal diameter, and within the allowable diameter variation per unit container for the specified grade.

## 4. Classification

4.1 Silicon nitride materials for bearing and specialty ball applications are specified according to the following material classes (see Appendix X1 for typical current applications):

4.1.1 *Class I*—Highest grade of material in terms of properties and microstructure. Suitable for use in the most demanding applications. This group adds high reliability and durability for extreme performance requirements.

4.1.2 *Class II*—General class of material for most bearing and specialty ball applications. This group addresses the concerns of ball defects as is relative to fatigue life, levels of torque, and noise.

4.1.3 *Class III*—Lower grade of material for low duty applications only. This group of applications primarily takes advantage of silicon nitride material properties. For example: Light weight, chemical inertness, lubricant life extension due to dissimilarity with race materials, etc.

## 5. Ordering Information

5.1 Acquisition documents should specify the following:

5.1.1 Title, number, and date of this specification.

5.1.2 Class, grade, and size (see 4.1, 8.6, and 8.7).

<sup>8</sup> Application for copies should be addressed to the British Standards Institute, 389 Chiswick High Road, London, W4 4AL, UK.

## 6. Material

6.1 Unless otherwise specified, physical and mechanical property requirements will apply to all material classes.

6.2 Silicon nitride balls should be produced from either silicon nitride powder having the compositional limits listed in Table 1 or from silicon metal powder, which after nitridation complies with the compositional limits listed in Table 1.

6.3 Composition is measured in weight percent. Testing shall be carried out by a facility qualified and approved by the supplier. Specific equipment, tests, and/or methods are subject to agreement between suppliers and their customers.

6.4 The following compounds may be added to promote densification and/or enhance product performance and quality. The following may be added as oxides, nitrides, oxynitrides, or mixtures:

- 6.4.1 Aluminum,
- 6.4.2 Magnesium,
- 6.4.3 Barium,
- 6.4.4 Lanthanum,
- 6.4.5 Yttrium,
- 6.4.6 Calcium, and
- 6.4.7 Other rare earths.

6.5 The following may be added as nitrides, oxynitrides, or carbonites:

- 6.5.1 Titanium,
- 6.5.2 Tantalum, and
- 6.5.3 Zirconium.

6.6 Aluminum silicon oxynitrides (aluminum nitride polytypes) may be added to promote densification.

6.7 Precautions should be taken to minimize contamination by foreign materials during all stages of processing up to and including densification.

6.8 A residual content of up to 2 % tungsten carbide from powder processing is allowable.

6.9 Final composition shall meet and be reported according to the specification of the individual supplier.

6.10 Notification will be made upon process changes.

6.11 Specific requirements such as specific material grade designation, physical/mechanical property requirements (for example, density) or quality or testing requirements shall be established by specific application. The special requirements shall be in addition to the general requirements established in this specification.

6.12 Typical mechanical properties will fall within the range listed in Table 2. Individual requirements may have tighter ranges. The vendor shall certify that the silicon nitride material supplied has physical and mechanical properties within the range given in Table 2. In the case of properties indicated by (+), the provision of the data is not mandatory.

**TABLE 1 Compositional Limits<sup>A</sup>**

Constituents	Limits (wt %)
Silicon nitride	97.0 min.
Free silicon	0.3 max.
Carbon	0.3 max
Iron	0.1 max.

<sup>A</sup> Other impurities or elements such as sodium, potassium, chlorine, etc. individually shall not exceed 0.02 wt % max.

**TABLE 2 Typical Mechanical Properties<sup>A</sup>**

Properties	Minimum	Maximum
Density, g/cc (lb/ft <sup>3</sup> )	3.0 (187)	3.4 (212)
Elastic modulus, GPa (ksi)	270 (39 150)	330 (47 850)
Poisson's ratio	0.23	0.29
Thermal conductivity, W/m-°K (Btu/h-ft-°F) – @ 20°C (room temp.)	20 (11.5)	38 (21.9)
Specific heat, J/kg-°K (Btu/lbm-°F)	650 (0.167)	800 (0.191)
Coefficient of thermal expansion, ×10 <sup>6</sup> /°C (room temp. to 500°C)	2.3	3.4
+ Resistivity, Ohm-m	10 <sup>10</sup>	10 <sup>16</sup>
+ Compressive strength, MPa (ksi)	3000 (435)	

<sup>A</sup> Special material data should be obtained from individual suppliers.

## 7. Physical Properties

7.1 The following physical properties shall be measured, at a minimum, on each material lot.

7.1.1 Average values for room temperature rupture strength (bend strength/modulus of rupture) for a minimum of 20 individual determinations shall exceed the minimum values given in Table 3. Either 3-point or 4-point test methods may be used for flexural strength, which should be measured in accordance with Test Method C 1161 (size B), CEN 843-5, or JIS R 1601. Weibull modulus for each test series shall also exceed the minimum permitted values given in Table 3. If a sample set of specimens for a material lot does not meet the Weibull modulus requirement in Table 3, then a second sample set may be tested to establish conformance.

7.1.2 The hardness (HV) shall be determined by the Vickers method (see Annex A1) using a load of at least 5 kg but not exceeding 20 kg. Fracture resistance shall be measured by

**TABLE 3 Minimum Values for Mean Flexural Strength and Weibull Modulus**

Unit	Material Class		
	I	II	III
Transverse-rupture strength <sup>A</sup> 3 point $\sigma_{3,40}(\sigma_{3,30})$	MPa 900 (920)	800 (825)	600 (625)
Weibull modulus	12	9	7
Transverse-rupture strength <sup>A</sup> 4-point $\sigma_{4,40}(\sigma_{4,30})$	MPa 700 (745)	600 (645)	450 (495)
Weibull modulus	10	8	6

<sup>A</sup> The Flexural strength equivalents are based on Weibull volume or surface scaling using the value of m for each cell and are rounded to the nearest 5 MPa.

$\sigma_{n,L}$  = denotes the flexure strength, n = 3 or 4 point, on spans of size L.  
 $\sigma_{4,40}$  = 660 MPa means the four point flexure strength, on 40 mm spans is 660 MPa as per Test Method C 1161 (size B) and CEN EN 843-1.

$\sigma_{4,30}$  = 700 MPa means the four point flexure strength, on 30 mm spans is 700 MPa as per JIS R1601.

either an indentation technique (see Annex A1) or by a standard fracture toughness test method. Average values for hardness and fracture resistance shall exceed the minimum of values for the specified material class given in Table 4.

7.1.3 Microstructure constituents visible at magnification in the range  $\times 100$  to  $\times 200$  shall not exceed the maximum values given in Table 5 for the specified material class.

7.1.4 The number of ceramic metallic or mixed inclusions observed in transverse sections shall not exceed the limits given in Table 6.

7.1.5 Macrostructure variation visible at  $1\times$  on a polished section is not permissible.

7.1.6 Density variation from the mean value of a sample of at least 10 pieces taken from a batch of components manufactured under the same conditions shall not exceed the values for 3 times the standard deviation ( $3 \times \text{sigma}$ ) given in Table 7, according to the volume of the component after any finishing operations and the specified material class. Density variation testing will apply to all lots of material for the initial 50 lots. If consistent results are achieved, the testing will be optional.

**8. Inspection and Verification**

8.1 The intent of this section is to list potential defects and methods of inspection of finished balls. As the spectrum of applications for silicon nitride balls is very broad, this is not intended to define requirements, but to highlight these points. The type of defects, methods of inspection, and limits should be agreed upon by the customer and vendor to meet the specific requirements for a given application.

8.2 Unless otherwise specified, all dimensional and form inspections shall be performed under the following conditions:

8.2.1 *Temperature*—Room ambient 20° to 25°C (68° to 77°F).

8.2.2 *Humidity*—50 % relative, maximum.

8.3 Unless otherwise required, product shall be capable of passing acceptance inspection in accordance with ANSI/ASQC Z1.4 as specified in Table 8.

8.4 Certain manufacturer to manufacturer or lot to lot variation in color is acceptable. Color variation within a single ball should be investigated per 8.5.

8.5 There may exist in silicon nitride bearing balls the defects listed in Section 8.5.1, which may be inspected for using the methods in 8.5.2 as required.

8.5.1 *Types of Defects:*

8.5.1.1 Inclusions;

8.5.1.2 Porosity;

8.5.1.3 Pits, scratches, nicks, scuffs;

**TABLE 5 Maximum Limits for Microstructural Constituents**

	Material Class		
	I	II	III
Porosity: Size (µm)	10	10	25
Volume Rating / ISO 4505	0.02	0.06	0.06
Metallic Phases: Size (µm)	10	10	25
Ceramic 2nd Phases: Size (µm)	25	25	25

**TABLE 6 Maximum Number of Inclusions per cm<sup>2</sup> of Transverse Section**

Maximum Extent in µm	Material Class		
	I	II	III
200	0	0	1
100 to <200	0	1	2
50 to <100	1	2	4
25 to <50	4	8	16

**TABLE 7 Maximum Allowable Density Variation (3 × Sigma) Within a Single Lot**

Ball Diameter in Inches (mm)	Density Variation (g/cm <sup>3</sup> )		
	Material Class		
	I	II	III
$\frac{3}{32}$ to $<\frac{15}{64}$ (2.38 to <5.95)	0.010	0.015	0.020
$\frac{15}{64}$ to $<\frac{13}{32}$ (5.95 to 10.32)	0.008	0.010	0.015
$\frac{13}{32}$ to $<\frac{5}{8}$ (10.32 to <15.88)	0.005	0.008	0.012
$\frac{5}{8}$ to $\frac{13}{16}$ (15.88 to 33.34)	0.005	0.005	0.010

**TABLE 8 Quality Conformance Inspections**

Requirement	Inspection Level	AQL
Quality of geometry (see 8.6 for limits)	S4 <sup>A</sup>	0.4 %
Quality of surface (see 8.8 for tolerances)	S4	0.4 %
Surface roughness	Use sample size shown below and accept lot if all test results are within specifications	
	Number of Balls per Lot	Sample Size
	0–35 000	5
	35 001 and over	8

<sup>A</sup> Minimum sample size of 32 balls shall apply only to lots of 1200 or more pieces. For lots of less than 1200, sample size shall be set by agreement between manufacturer and customer.

**TABLE 4 Minimum Values for Hardness and Toughness**

Property	Unit	Load	Material Class		
			I	II	III
Hardness	HV5	5 kg	1500	1400	1350
	HV10	10 kg	1480	1380	1325
	HV20	20 kg	1460	1360	1300
Indentation Fracture Resistance, IFR (or "TP") (Annex A1)	MPa√m		6.0	5.0	5.0
Fracture Toughness, K <sub>Ic</sub> (Test Methods C 1421 or JIS R 1607)	MPa√m		6.0	5.0	5.0

8.5.1.4 Cracks or linear indications; and

8.5.1.5 Color variation.

8.5.2 *Methods of Inspection:*

8.5.2.1 Visual white light (unaided eye and magnification-aided eye);

8.5.2.2 Black light (unaided eye and magnification-aided eye);

8.5.2.3 Fluorescent penetrant inspection (FPI) (unaided eye and magnification-aided eye); and