
**Petroleum products — Determination of
sulfur content — Oxidative
microcoulometry method**

*Produits pétroliers — Dosage du soufre — Méthode par
microcoulométrie oxydante*

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Contents

Page

Foreword	iv
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Principle	2
4 Reagents and materials	2
5 Apparatus	3
6 Samples and sampling	5
7 Apparatus preparation	5
7.1 Titration cell	5
7.2 Microcoulometer and recorder	6
7.3 Heating tape	6
7.4 Typical operating conditions	6
8 Apparatus verification and calibration curve construction	6
9 Procedure	7
10 Calculation	8
11 Expression of results	8
12 Precision	8
12.1 General	8
12.2 Repeatability, r	9
12.3 Reproducibility, R	9
13 Test report	9
Annex A (informative) Determination of sulfur contents below 1 mg/kg — Standby technique	10
Annex B (informative) Troubleshooting	11
Annex C (informative) Calculation of sulfur content from electrochemical data	13
Bibliography	15

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.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. 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.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 16591 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 28, *Petroleum products and lubricants*.

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Petroleum products — Determination of sulfur content — Oxidative microcoulometry method

WARNING — The use of this International Standard may involve hazardous material, operations and equipment. This International Standard does not purport to address all of the safety problems associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this International Standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.

1 Scope

This International Standard specifies a method for the determination of the sulfur content by oxidative microcoulometry of petroleum light and middle distillates with a final boiling point not higher than 400 °C. It is applicable to materials with sulfur contents in the range of 1 mg/kg to 100 mg/kg. Products with sulfur contents above 100 mg/kg can be analysed after dilution with a suitable sulfur-free solvent. Products with sulfur contents below 1 mg/kg can also be analysed by a modified technique described in Annex A. The precision quoted only applies to measurements in the 1 mg/kg to 100 mg/kg range. Nitrogen interferes with the analysis at concentrations above 0,1 % (*m/m*), and chlorine interferes at concentrations above 1,0 % (*m/m*), but these interferences are overcome by the addition of sodium azide to the cell electrolyte. Bromine and organometallic compounds also interfere with the analysis at concentrations above approximately 500 mg/kg.

NOTE 1 The microcoulometric method is capable of analysing light liquid hydrocarbons boiling in the range from 26 °C to 274 °C (for example, naphtha and MS samples) that undergo pyrolysis at 900 °C to 1 200 °C. The combustion of high boiling components (for example, diesel) can result in the formation of carbonaceous deposits in the inlet portion of the combustion tube, which need to be removed frequently.

NOTE 2 The results obtained using this International Standard on light and light-middle distillates generally approximate to those obtained using ISO 4260.

NOTE 3 For the purposes of this International Standard, the term “% (*m/m*)” is used to represent the mass fraction of a material.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 3170, *Petroleum liquids — Manual sampling*

ISO 3171, *Petroleum liquids — Automatic pipeline sampling*

ISO 3675, *Crude petroleum and liquid petroleum products — Laboratory determination of density — Hydrometer method*

ISO 3696, *Water for analytical laboratory use — Specification and test methods*

ISO 12185, *Crude petroleum and petroleum products — Determination of density — Oscillating U-tube method*

3 Principle

A test portion is burned in a combustion tube under a flowing stream of oxygen plus an inert gas. The combustion products are swept into a titration cell, where the sulfur dioxide reacts with tri-iodide ion present in the electrolyte. The tri-iodide ions that are consumed are coulometrically replaced, and the current required for replacement is a direct measure of the sulfur content of the sample. The reactions are:



4 Reagents and materials

All reagents shall be of recognized analytical grade, and water shall conform to the requirements of Grade 3 of ISO 3696.

4.1 Electrolyte

Dissolve $0,5 \text{ g} \pm 0,01 \text{ g}$ of potassium iodide (KI) and $0,6 \text{ g} \pm 0,01 \text{ g}$ of sodium azide (NaN_3) in approximately 500 ml of water in a 1 000 ml volumetric flask. Add 5 ml of glacial acetic acid (CH_3COOH) and make up to the mark with water. Store in a dark glass bottle or in a dark place.

CAUTION — Sodium azide is highly toxic in contact with the skin. Wear protective clothing at all times when handling sodium azide. Crystalline sodium azide decomposes explosively under conditions of heat, shock, concussion and friction. Ensure adequate precautions are taken to prevent these conditions occurring.

NOTE The shelf life of bulk electrolyte has been found to be approximately three months.

4.2 Oxygen, of high-purity grade, minimum purity of 99,995 %.

4.3 Carrier gas, of high-purity grade argon, helium or nitrogen, with a minimum purity of 99,995 %. If nitrogen is used, it should be tested in the apparatus for baseline stability.

4.4 Iodine, resublimed.

4.5 Sulfur-free solvent, preferably a sulfur solvent which is essentially sulfur-free ($< 0,5 \text{ mg/kg}$) or has an accurately known low ($< 5 \text{ mg/kg}$) sulfur content, similar in characteristics to the sample being analysed. Alternatively, a high-purity grade of cyclohexane, 2,2,4-trimethylpentane, toluene or hexadecane is suitable, as appropriate.

4.6 Sulfur stock solution

4.6.1 General

A certified reference material (CRM), or a prepared stock solution with a sulfur content in the range 200 mg/kg to 500 mg/kg.

4.6.2 Preparation

Select a solvent-soluble sulfur compound (see the note in this subclause) of accurately known sulfur content, preferably appropriate to the boiling range and sulfur type expected to be present in the sample. Weigh, to the nearest 0,1 mg, a quantity of this compound into a weighed 100 ml volumetric flask. Add solvent (4.5), swirl to ensure dissolution, make up to the mark with solvent and reweigh to the nearest 0,1 mg. Calculate the exact sulfur content to the nearest 0,000 1 % (*m/m*) (1 mg/kg).

NOTE Suitable sulfur compounds include:

- a) thiophene, of nominal sulfur content 38,103 % (*m/m*);
- b) dibutyl sulfide (DBS), of nominal sulfur content 21,915 % (*m/m*);
- c) dibenzothiophene (DBT), of nominal sulfur content 17,399 % (*m/m*);
- d) thionaphthene (TNA), of nominal sulfur content 23,89 % (*m/m*).

4.7 Sulfur standard solutions

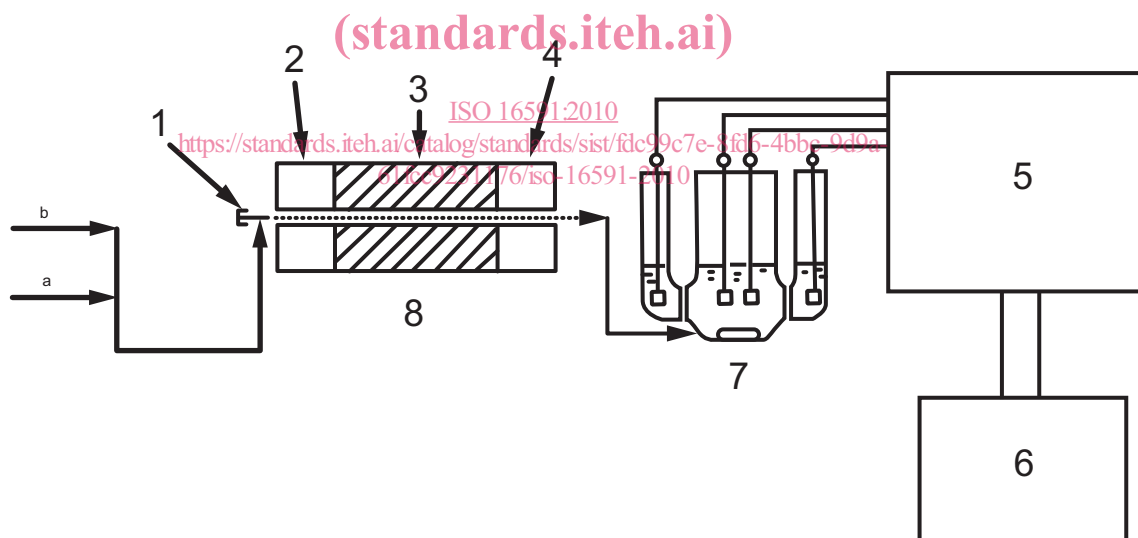
Prepare a range of sulfur standard solutions to cover the range of concentrations expected in the samples being analysed, by dilution of the stock solution (4.6) with solvent (4.5) calculated on the basis of mass fraction. At least three standard solutions are required for each concentration level, or a range of not less than five standard solutions to cover a set of sample analyses within the total scope of this International Standard.

5 Apparatus

5.1 Microcoulometric apparatus

5.1.1 General

The microcoulometer and associated apparatus are described in 5.1.2 to 5.1.7, and the general arrangement is shown in Figure 1.



Key

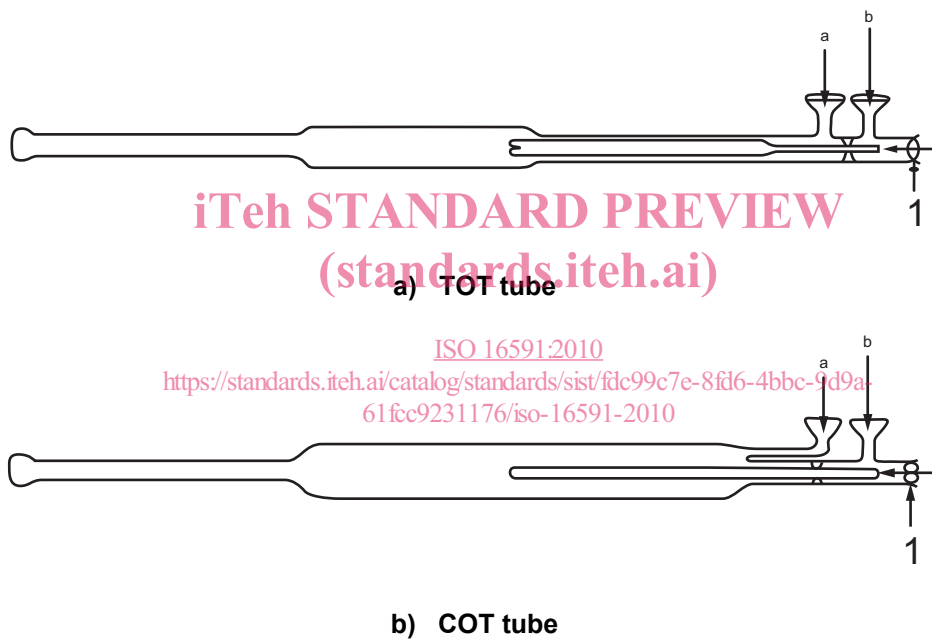
- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | sample injection septum | 5 | microcoulometer |
| 2 | inlet zone | 6 | potentiometric recorder |
| 3 | oxidizing combustion zone | 7 | titration cell |
| 4 | outlet zone | 8 | pyrolysis furnace |
| a | Oxygen, O ₂ . | | |
| b | Carrier gas. | | |

Figure 1 — General arrangement of microcoulometric apparatus

5.1.2 Pyrolysis furnace, electrically powered, consisting of two or three independently controlled temperature zones. The first, or inlet, zone shall maintain a temperature sufficient to volatilize the entire organic sample. The second zone, or oxidizing combustion zone, shall maintain a temperature sufficient to pyrolyze the organic matrix and oxidize all the organically bound sulfur. The third, or outlet, zone for further pyrolysis, is optional. The manufacturer's instructions should be consulted for optimum temperatures.

5.1.3 Pyrolysis tube, of quartz, constructed in such a way that the test portion is completely vaporized in an inert gas atmosphere in the inlet section and swept into the oxidation zone, where it mixes with oxygen and is burned. The inlet end of the tube shall hold a septum for syringe introduction of the test portion, and side arms for the admission of oxygen and carrier gas. The oxidizing combustion zone(s) shall be of sufficient volume to ensure complete pyrolysis of the test portion. The outlet section of the tube may be closed by a 20 mm length of quartz-wool if desired. Typical designs of pyrolysis tube are shown in Figure 2. Some manufacturers recommend the use of a chemical scrubber in line between the pyrolysis furnace and the titration cell. This scrubber is used for the removal of soot, water and heavy metals, and aids the stability of the titration cell.

For the analysis of products with a substantial portion boiling above 230 °C, a boat inlet system may give better recovery.



Key

- 1 septum
- a Oxygen, O₂.
- b Ar, He or N₂.

Figure 2 — Typical designs of pyrolysis tube

5.1.4 Boat inlet system, sealed to the combustion tube, with boats made from platinum or quartz, and with a drive mechanism that advances and withdraws the boat at a controlled and repeatable rate.

5.1.5 Titration cell, containing a sensor-reference pair of electrodes to detect changes in tri-iodide ion concentration, and a generator anode-cathode pair of electrodes to maintain constant tri-iodide ion concentration in the cell electrolyte. For the description of the sensor electrodes used, consult the manufacturer's operating manual.

Shielding of the cell from electrical interferences by means of an earthed (grounded) Faraday cage is recommended by some manufacturers and should be described in the manufacturer's operating manual, particularly in the determination of very low milligram per kilogram levels of sulfur.

The cell shall be provided with a suitable inlet for the combustion gases from the pyrolysis tube, and supplied with appropriate stirring. If a magnetic stirrer is used, the stirring rate should not be excessive, to ensure that the stirring bar does not rise in the cell and damage the electrodes. The creation of a slight vortex is adequate. Some instruments rely on the agitation caused by gas bubbling through the solution.

5.1.6 Microcoulometer, supplied with variable or automatic attenuation and gain control, and capable of measuring the potential of the sensor-reference electrode pair, and comparing this potential with a bias potential, amplifying this difference in potential, and applying the equivalent current to the amplified difference to the generator electrode pair so as to generate a titrant. The microcoulometer output voltage shall be proportional to the generating current.

5.1.7 Recorder/integrator, having a sensitivity of at least 0,1 mV/25 mm, with speeds of 10 mm/min to 20 mm/min. A mechanical or electronic integrator is recommended for peak area measurement. Modern systems normally have an integrated or separate PC/printer for recording and printing of data.

5.1.8 Heating tape, electrically powered, of capacity 30 W to 60 W, wound around the cell gas inlet tube, required to maintain a temperature of approximately 90 °C to 300 °C to prevent condensation of water (consult the manufacturer's operating manual).

5.2 Sampling (micro)syringes, of appropriate capacity, fitted with needles of sufficient length to reach the inlet zone of the pyrolysis furnace (used according to the manufacturer's instructions).

Means should be provided to control the test portion injection rate to ensure that the pyrolysis capacity of the tube is not exceeded. Consult the manufacturer's recommendations for the appropriate injection rate. Automatic injection devices are available and are recommended as a means to control the rate of injection.

5.3 Gas regulators, comprising two-stage regulators for the oxygen (4.2) and carrier gas (4.3), to provide the specified flow rates at the outlet.

5.4 Analytical balance, single-pan or two-pan, capable of weighing with an accuracy of 0,1 mg.

5.5 Volumetric flasks, one-mark, of capacities between 100 ml and 1 000 ml for the preparation of electrolyte, stock and sample solutions.

6 Samples and sampling

6.1 Unless otherwise specified, laboratory samples shall be obtained in accordance with ISO 3170 or ISO 3171.

6.2 Samples that are clear and bright at the laboratory ambient temperature can have subsamples or test portions removed directly from the container. For some heavier middle distillates, gentle warming to a temperature at least 15 °C above the cloud point is necessary to ensure homogeneity prior to subsampling, although the sample temperature shall not exceed 70 °C.

7 Apparatus preparation

7.1 Titration cell

7.1.1 Ensure that the generator electrodes and the sensor electrode are perfectly clean. If in doubt, wash with water followed by acetone, dry, and then carefully heat to a bright orange colour in a gas flame. Allow to cool before insertion in the electrolyte. Consult the manufacturer's instructions for the cleaning procedures for their particular electrode types.

7.1.2 Prepare the reference electrode using approximately 2 g of coarsely ground iodine (4.4), covered with electrolyte (4.1). Fill the cell with electrolyte to a height of approximately 50 mm and transfer the ground iodine in small portions to the reference side arm, making sure that no air bubbles are trapped between the iodine granules. Carefully insert the platinum electrode into the iodine granules with the ground-glass joint very lightly greased to give a gas-tight seal. Ensure that no air bubbles are trapped in the electrolyte above the iodine.

7.1.3 Flush the cell with several volumes of electrolyte, ensuring that no air bubbles are trapped in the cell, particularly the generator and reference electrode side arms. Adjust the electrolyte level to between 5 mm and 8 mm above the electrodes.

7.1.4 If a magnetic stirrer is used, slide in the stirring bar and place the cell cap in position, such that the sensor electrode is adjacent to the reference side arm. With the magnetic stirrer switched off, place the cell centrally on the stirrer and connect the gas inlet to the combustion tube.

7.1.5 Connect the electrodes to the microcoulometer via the appropriate connecting plugs.

7.2 Microcoulometer and recorder

Assemble and connect the microcoulometer and recorder (and/or integrator) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and in the general arrangement shown in Figure 1.

CAUTION — For certain instruments, it is recommended that the microcoulometer unit not be placed on top of the furnace without a heat-resistant layer between the two units (see the manufacturer's instructions).

7.3 Heating tape

For certain instruments, it is necessary to independently turn on the heating tape (5.1.8).

7.4 Typical operating conditions

Adjust the flow of gases, the pyrolysis furnace temperatures, titration cell and microcoulometer to the desired operating conditions. See the manufacturer's operating conditions for the correct setting for the instrument.

8 Apparatus verification and calibration curve construction

8.1 Select sulfur standard solutions (4.7) to cover the range of sulfur contents expected. Perform at least three measurements on each standard solution.

8.2 Adjust the operational parameters according to the manufacturer's recommendations, and select the appropriate test portion sizes.

8.3 Inject the test portion, and record the volume and/or mass injected. If the density of the sulfur standard solution is known, or has been determined, the mass can be calculated from the volume injected. Alternatively, weigh, to the nearest 0,1 mg or better, the syringe containing the sulfur standard solution before and after injection, and determine the difference between the two masses to obtain the mass injected. An even injection rate of the solution within the range of 0,1 µl/s to 1,0 µl/s is recommended.

For volumetric injection, it is important to be aware of the sample present in the needle of the syringe — the "needle blank". Thus, the volume injected should be obtained by withdrawal of the plunger to a suitable graduation on the syringe barrel prior to injection and the volume noted. The needle is then placed through the septum, allowing the remaining sample in the needle to evaporate. Once the base-line returns to a stable position, the analyser is then started.

8.4 Check the shape of the sulfur peak.

8.4.1 The sulfur peak shall be of the correct shape [see Figure 3 b)].

8.4.2 If the peak is tailing [see Figure 3 a)], increase the gain and/or bias control in small increments until the peak has the correct shape.

8.4.3 If the peak is overshooting [see Figure 3 c)], reduce the gain and/or bias control in small increments until the peak has the correct shape.

8.5 Record the peak area, either manually or by means of an integrator (5.1.7) or the system data station. With manual instruments, select the attenuation to give a peak size of approximately half the chart width.

8.6 Plot the average peak area for each standard against mass of sulfur, in micrograms (μg), for each series of sulfur standard solutions.

Since not all of the sulfur is converted in the strongly oxidative conditions of the furnace to sulfur dioxide (SO_2), and some is converted to sulfur trioxide (SO_3) which does not react with the titrant, more than one series of sulfur standard solutions may be required to cover the different conversion rates related to sample and sulfur compound type (see 4.5 to 4.7). Recoveries of less than 75 % are suspect, and the operator should check the instrument parameters, the coulometric system and his/her operating techniques. Recoveries of between 75 % and 90 % are to be expected. Annex B gives information on possible faults and corrective actions. Further information should be available from the manufacturer of the instrument.

8.7 Repeat points on the calibration curves frequently to ensure consistency of operating conditions.

8.8 It is recommended that daily, or every 10 determinations, a sulfur solution close in characteristics to the last sample analysed be run, and the results examined for compliance within the repeatability of this International Standard. This may be done by a standard solution (4.7), but not by one that has been used to construct the calibration curve (see 8.1).

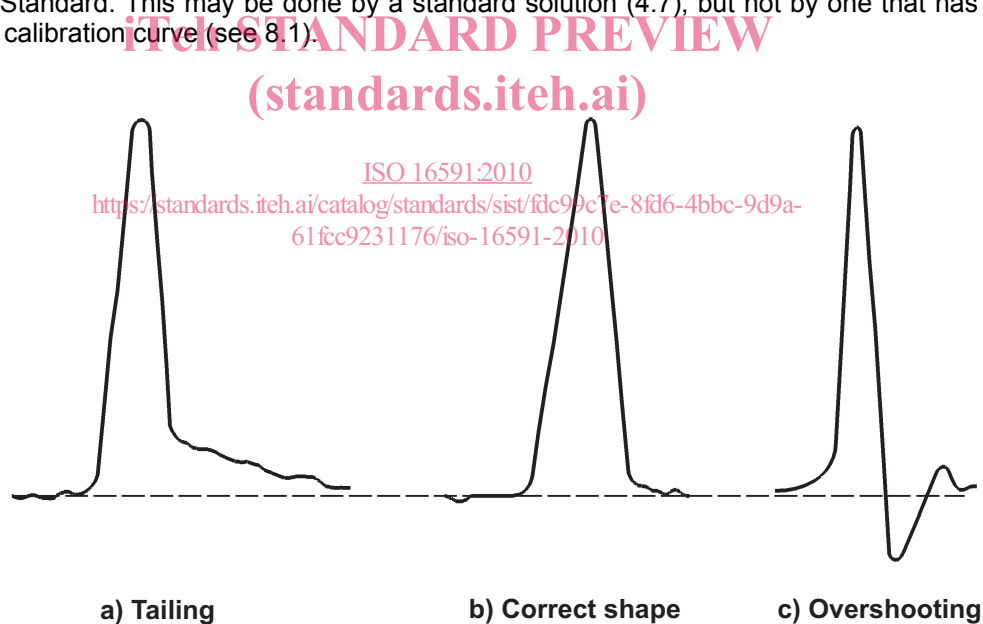


Figure 3 — Sulfur peak shapes

9 Procedure

9.1 Determine the density of the sample at laboratory ambient temperature, to the nearest $0,1 \text{ kg/m}^3$, in accordance with ISO 3675 or ISO 12185.

If the temperature of sample injection is more than $3 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ from the temperature of determination, or if the density used is at a reference temperature, ISO 91-1 may be used to calculate the density at the injection temperature.