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**Soil quality — Determination of soil  
microbial diversity —**

Part 1:

**Method by phospholipid fatty acid  
analysis (PLFA) and phospholipid ether  
lipids (PLEL) analysis**

*Qualité du sol — Détermination de la diversité microbienne du sol —*

*Partie 1: Méthode par analyse des acides gras phospholipidiques  
(PLFA) et par analyse des lipides éther phospholipidiques (PLEL)*

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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.

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.

In other circumstances, particularly when there is an urgent market requirement for such documents, a technical committee may decide to publish other types of document:

- an ISO Publicly Available Specification (ISO/PAS) represents an agreement between technical experts in an ISO working group and is accepted for publication if it is approved by more than 50 % of the members of the parent committee casting a vote;
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An ISO/PAS or ISO/TS is reviewed after three years in order to decide whether it will be confirmed for a further three years, revised to become an International Standard, or withdrawn. If the ISO/PAS or ISO/TS is confirmed, it is reviewed again after a further three years, at which time it must either be transformed into an International Standard or be withdrawn.

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/TS 29843-1 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 190, *Soil quality*, Subcommittee SC 4, *Biological methods*.

ISO/TS 29843 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Soil quality — Determination of soil microbial diversity*:

- *Part 1: Method by phospholipid fatty acid analysis (PLFA) and phospholipid ether lipids (PLEL) analysis*
- *Part 2: Method by phospholipid fatty acid analysis (PLFA) using the “simple PLFA extraction method”*

## Introduction

Phospholipids are essential components of membranes of all living cells, and their fatty acid (PLFA: phospholipid fatty acids) or ether-linked isoprenoid side chains (PLEL: phospholipid ether lipid) allow for taxonomic differentiation within complex microbial communities (References [5] and [7]). This approach is now well established in soil ecology and serves as a phenotypic and thus complementary tool to genotypic (molecular genetic) approaches for determining microbial diversity.

Different methodologies for determination of soil fatty acids are available. These methodologies present different levels of complexity when applied and provide different levels of resolution in the description of soil microbial communities.

The determination of total PLFA and PLEL provides a quantitative measure of the viable biomass of soil: microorganisms of all three domains of the biosphere (bacteria, fungi and archaeobacteria). Viable microbes have an intact membrane, which contains phospholipids. Cellular enzymes hydrolyze and release the phosphate group within minutes or hours following cell death (Reference [6]).

Apart from taxonomic descriptions, the PLFA technique enables the determination of physiological changes within microbial consortia. For instance, the monoenic PLFA 16:1  $\omega$ 7c and 18:1  $\omega$ 7c are increasingly converted to the cyclopropyl fatty acids cy17:0 and cy19:0 in Gram-negative bacteria in response to environmental stress (Reference [2]).

Besides the method described in this part of ISO/TS 29843, other methods for the determination of PLFA are available (References [3] and [6]). With these methods, only bacterial and fungal PLFA can be estimated; the determination of hydroxy-substituted fatty acids (PLOH), non-ester-linked (NEL) fatty acids and PLEL is not possible.

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