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Standard Test Methods for Particle Size (Sieve Analysis) of Plastic Materials¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D1921; 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 (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the Department of Defense.

1. Scope*

1.1 These test methods cover the measurement of the particle size of plastic materials in the powdered, granular, or pelleted forms in which they are commonly supplied. As these test methods utilize dry sieving, the lower limit of measurement is considered to be about 38 μm (No. 400 sieve). For smaller particle sizes, sedimentation test methods are recommended.

1.2 Two test methods are described:

1.2.1 *Test Method A*—This test method uses multiple sieves selected to span the particle size of the material. This method is used to determine the mean particle diameter and particle size distribution.

1.2.2 *Test Method B*—This test method is an abbreviated version of Test Method A conducted with a few specific sieves. This test method determines “percent passing” or “percent retained” on a given sieve. Test Method B is applicable to materials which do not have a normal particle size distribution such as pellets and cubes.

1.3 The values stated in SI units shall be considered standard for dimensions of the wire cloth openings and the diameter of the wires used in the wire cloth. The values stated in inch-pound units shall be considered standard with regard to the sieve frames.

1.4 *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.*

NOTE 1—There is no technically equivalent ISO standard.

¹ These test methods are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D20 on Plastics and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D20.70 on Analytical Methods (Section D20.70.01).

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2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards*:²

E11 Specification for Woven Wire Test Sieve Cloth and Test Sieves

E691 Practice for Conducting an Interlaboratory Study to Determine the Precision of a Test Method

3. Summary of Test Methods

3.1 A dry mass of plastic material is placed on a series of sieves arranged in order of increasing fineness and the mass is divided into fractions corresponding to the sieve opening.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 These test methods can be used to determine particle size distribution and therefore are useful for determining lot-to-lot uniformity.

4.2 The particle sizes of plastic materials affect the handling characteristics and sometimes will affect the processing characteristics of some polymers.

5. Interferences

5.1 Some materials develop a static charge during sieving. This charge interferes with the sieving process and results in a coarse bias. Use of an antistat is necessary to obtain meaningful results.

5.2 The choice of antistat (or slip agent) has been known to affect the coarse bias. Some materials are more effective in aiding the fines to separate from the mass.

5.3 Too much material on a sieve causes mass blinding and results in a coarse bias. The sieve selection and charge weight must be chosen to avoid overloading any sieve.

² 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.

*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard.

5.4 Wavy, improperly stretched wire-cloth may allow wires to separate without being visually damaged. Sieves with wavy or torn wires shall not be used, as they no longer conform to Specification E11.

6. Apparatus

6.1 *Balance*, 500-g minimum capacity with the capability of reading to the nearest 0.1 g.

6.2 *Mechanical Sieving Device and Time Switch*—A mechanical sieve-shaking device equipped with an automatic time switch. This device shall be capable of imparting uniform rotary motion and a tapping action at a rate of 150 ± 10 taps/min.

6.3 *Wire Cloth Sieves*, woven wire cloth conforming to Specification E11, as shown in Table 1, mounted in 8-in. [203-mm] frames. The number of sieves and the choice of sizes shall be selected for the material being tested. A cover and a bottom pan are also required.

6.4 *Accessories for Cleaning the Screens:*

6.4.1 *Brush*³,

6.4.2 *Vacuum Cleaner*, and

6.4.3 *Air Hose*.

7. Reagents and Materials

7.1 Antistat (or slip) agent suitable to the material being tested.

8. Hazards

8.1 The sieving operation and cleaning of the sieves sometimes introduce fine plastic particles and antistat agent into the atmosphere. Take precautions to avoid breathing these particles.

9. Sampling

9.1 Homogenize the lot where possible before removing the test sample to avoid segregation of particles during handling.

10. Preparation of Apparatus

10.1 Thorough cleaning and inspection of the sieve are required prior to initiating a test. Carefully clean the sieves with a brush and vacuum cleaner or compressed air, or both. Periodic washing with soap and water or suitable solvent is recommended with some materials.

10.2 Tare each sieve and the pan. Record tare weights to the nearest 0.1 g.

10.3 Assemble sieves so that the sieve openings decrease in size in sequence from the top of the stack. Place the pan at the bottom.

10.4 Use full- or half-size screens to accommodate the holder in the shaker.

11. Conditioning

11.1 The plastic material must be in a free-flowing condition.

11.2 If possible, condition the material to the laboratory temperature and humidity.

TEST METHOD A

12. Procedure

12.1 Select sieves in sufficient number to cover the expected range of particle sizes, and nest them together in order of diminishing opening with the coarsest sieve on top and the pan on the bottom.

12.2 Select sieves in sufficient number to have significant measurable quantities on four or more sieves. Weigh the sieves on a balance reading to the nearest 0.1 g. Record these sieve masses as their tare masses, respectively.

12.3 Weigh 50 g of sample to the nearest 0.1 g and transfer it to the top of the stack. Record the sample weight used. Large sample size causes screen blinding and will skew the results to the coarse particle size. A screen is considered blinded if it is holding 20 or more g. For repeatable results, use a smaller sample size.

NOTE 2—For some materials an antistat (or slip agent) is needed. Add 1 % of the antistat (or slip agent) to the sample and mix in with a spatula. With polyvinyl chloride resins, it has been found that the distribution will skew to either the fine or the coarse particle size depending on the antistat used. Record the antistat (or slip agent) used.

12.4 Cover the stack and place it in the mechanical sieve shaker. Start the shaker and run for 10 min. Run the shaker for a longer time if it is required by the material and the efficiency of the shaker.

12.5 After shaking, carefully separate the stack of sieves, beginning at the top, and weigh each sieve with powder to the nearest 0.1 g. Determine the net weight of the powder remaining in each sieve by subtracting the sieve tare masses from the total weight of the sieve and the powder in that sieve.

12.6 If the cumulative total of actual weight is less than 98 %, carefully check the weights and operations and repeat the work if necessary.

13. Analysis of Particle Distribution

13.1 *Calculation of Particle Distribution:*

13.1.1 Obtain net weight of material retained on each sieve. Calculate percentage by dividing net weight by total sample weight $\times 100$.

13.1.2 Repeat for each sieve.

13.2 *Calculation of Mean Particle Size:*

13.2.1 Obtain net weight of material retained on each sieve.

13.2.2 Determine an average particle size for each sieve.

The average particle size is defined as the nominal opening size of that sieve plus the nominal opening size of the next larger sieve in the stack divided by two.

NOTE 3—Options are recommended to determine the average mesh size of the top sieve and the pan. On the coarse end, if the particles have already been through a coarser screen, the screen size of the “through screen” can be used as the upper limit of the top screen (first screen). A commonly used method is to place a set of sieves with openings greater than the desired top sieve. Select the lowest sieve where there is no particle on or the amount of particles on the sieve is insignificant. Use the opening size of this sieve for calculation. Similar analog can be used to the pan by using smaller opening sieves. A more practical way is to divide the

³ The sole source of supply of the Type 8577 (W. S. Tyler) Brush known to the committee at this time is W. S. Tyler, Inc., 8750 Tyler Blvd., Mentor, OH 44060. If you are aware of alternative suppliers, please provide this information to ASTM International Headquarters. Your comments will receive careful consideration at a meeting of the responsible technical committee,¹ which you may attend.