



Standard Test Method for Voltage Endurance of Solid Electrical Insulating Materials Subjected to Partial Discharges (Corona) on the Surface¹

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^{ε1} NOTE—The units statement in subsection 1.2 was corrected and old footnote ten deleted to conform to ASTM guidelines on sole source editorially in July 2008.

1. Scope

1.1 This test method differentiates among solid electrical insulating materials for use at commercial power frequencies with respect to their voltage endurance under the action of corona (see Note 1). In general, this test method is more meaningful for rating materials with respect to their resistance to prolonged a-c stress under corona conditions than is dielectric strength.

NOTE 1—The term “corona” is used almost exclusively in this test method instead of “partial discharge”, because it is a visible glow at the edge of the smaller electrode. This is a difference in location, not in kind. Partial discharges also occur at the edges of electrodes, and in general corona describes an electrical discharge irrespective of its location.

~~1.2 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as the standard. The values given in parentheses are for information only.~~

1.2 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. The values given in parentheses are mathematical conversions to inch-pound units that are provided for information only and are not considered standard.

1.3 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. For specific hazard statements, see Section 7.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

D 149 Test Method for Dielectric Breakdown Voltage and Dielectric Strength of Solid Electrical Insulating Materials at Commercial Power Frequencies

~~D 618 Practice for Conditioning Plastics and Electrical Insulating Materials for Testing~~ 1711 Terminology Relating to Electrical Insulation

~~D 1711 Terminology Relating to Electrical Insulation~~² 1868 Test Method for Detection and Measurement of Partial Discharge (Corona) Pulses in Evaluation of Insulation Systems

~~D 1868 Test Method for Detection and Measurement of Partial Discharge (Corona) Pulses in Evaluation of Insulation Systems~~²

Đ 5032 Practice for Maintaining Constant Relative Humidity by Means of Aqueous Glycerin Solutions

D 6054 Practice for Conditioning Electrical Insulating Materials for Testing

E 41 Terminology Relating to Conditioning

E 104 Practice for Maintaining Constant Relative Humidity by Means of Aqueous Solutions

E 171 Specification for Standard Atmospheres for Conditioning and Testing Flexible Barrier Materials

2.2 Special Technical Publications:

~~Symposium on Corona, STP 198, ASTM, 1956.~~

~~ASTM, 1956.~~²

~~Corona Measurement and Interpretation, Engineering Dielectrics, Vol 1, STP-STP 669, ASTM, 1979.~~²

2.3 International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) Documents:

~~IEC Publication 343 Recommended Test Methods for Determining the Relative Resistance of Insulating Materials to Breakdown by Surface Discharges~~

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D09 on Electrical and Electronic Insulating Materials and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D09.12 on Electrical Tests.

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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, Vol 10.01, volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

IEC Publication 60343 Recommended test methods for determining the relative resistance of insulating materials to breakdown by surface discharges³

2.4 *Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) Document:*

IEEEP930.7-1987“Guide for the Statistical Analysis of Voltage Endurance Data” IEEE SS 11205-TBR Guide for the Statistical Analysis of Electrical Insulation Voltage Endurance Data, 1987⁴

3. Terminology

3.1 Descriptions of Terms:

3.1.1 *threshold voltage*—That voltage below which failure will not occur under the test conditions irrespective of the duration of the test. (Demonstration of a threshold is difficult when the slope of a volt-time curve is small, and failure times are long. High frequency tests are often an aid in demonstration, by reducing the time required to reach a necessary number of voltage cycles.)

3.1.2 *voltage endurance*—the time that an insulating material can withstand a prolonged alternating voltage stress under the action of surface corona.

3.1.3 *voltage stress-time curve*—A plot of the logarithm of the mean or median time to failure of a material against voltage stress (or the logarithm of voltage stress) for a particular set of test conditions. The plot is the quantitative depiction of the voltage stress endurance over a range of voltage stress for the conditions of test, and for the thickness tested. The curves of a material obtained at two thicknesses are different.

3.1.4 *volt-time curve*—A plot of the logarithm of the mean or median time to failure of a material against voltage (or the logarithm of voltage) for a particular set of test conditions. The plot is the quantitative depiction of the voltage endurance over a range of voltage for the conditions of the test, which includes the particular thickness tested.

3.2 *Definitions*—See Terminology D1711 and Test Method D1868

3.1 For definitions of other terms used in this standard, refer to Terminology D 1711 and Test Method D 1868.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.2.1 *threshold voltage*—That voltage below which failure will not occur under the test conditions irrespective of the duration of the test.

3.2.1.1 *Discussion*—Demonstration of a threshold is difficult when the slope of a volt-time curve is small, and failure times are long. High frequency tests are often an aid in demonstration, by reducing the time required to reach a necessary number of voltage cycles.

3.2.2 *voltage endurance, n*—The time that an insulating material can withstand a prolonged alternating voltage stress under the action of surface corona.

3.2.3 *voltage stress-time curve, n*—A plot of the logarithm of the mean or median time to failure of a material against voltage stress (or the logarithm of voltage stress) for a particular set of test conditions.

3.2.3.1 *Discussion*—The plot is the quantitative depiction of the voltage stress endurance over a range of voltage stress for the conditions of test, and for the thickness tested. The curves of a material obtained at two thicknesses are different.

3.2.4 *volt-time curve, n*—A plot of the logarithm of the mean or median time to failure of a material against voltage (or the logarithm of voltage) for a particular set of test conditions.

3.2.4.1 *Discussion*—The plot is the quantitative depiction of the voltage endurance over a range of voltage for the conditions of the test, which includes the particular thickness tested.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 In this test method, voltage sufficient to produce corona is applied to the specimen until failure occurs. Comparative voltage endurance is the relative time to failure of two different materials of the same thickness when tested with similar electrodes at the same voltage. Comparison is also possible in terms of the magnitude of voltage stress (kV/mm or kV/in.) required to produce failure in a specified number of hours.

4.2 Surface corona exists in the electrically stressed gas where electrodes are near insulation surfaces.

4.3 As with most tests at constant stress, there may be a large dispersion of times to failure for a given sample. The median time of nine specimens (time of fifth failure) may be used as the failure time for the sample. This removes the necessity of waiting for the last few to fail. The mean may also be determined statistically (see IEEE P930.7 IEEE SS 11205-TBR for additional information).

4.4 Under the proper conditions, the test may be accelerated by increasing the frequency of the applied voltage (see Appendix X1).

4.5 Standardized test conditions and conditioning prior to testing are important. In particular, tests with specified air flow at both low and moderate humidities may be informative. In special cases, where a service condition is thought to alter the corona

³ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 08.01.

³ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

⁴ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 10.02.

⁴ Available from Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc. (IEEE), 445 Hoes Ln., P.O. Box 1331, Piscataway, NJ 08854-1331, <http://www.ieee.org>.

endurance, this factor should be introduced as part of the test and reported. Such conditions might include elongation, elevated temperature, high humidity, other gases besides air, pollution, etc.

4.6 Additional information from the test may be obtained if corona-voltage levels and corona intensity are measured at the start of the test and monitored at various stages of deterioration of the insulation. The voltage levels include corona-inception voltage, corona-extinction voltage, and corona intensity using Test Method D 1868. Also, comparative measurements of corona power or energy by bridge and oscilloscope techniques can be informative (see ASTM STP 198 and STP 669).

4.7 If elevated frequencies are used to accelerate the test, it is recommended that the corona-discharge pulse heights and energy per cycle at the test frequency be compared with these values at rated power frequency. If the energy per cycle is the same, it can be concluded that failure time is inversely proportional to frequency.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This test method is used to compare the endurance of different materials to the action of corona on the external surfaces. A poor result on this test does not indicate that the material is a poor selection for use at high voltage or at high voltage stress in the absence of surface corona. Surface corona should be distinguished from corona that occurs in internal cavities for which no standardized test has been developed. Evaluation of endurance by comparison of data on specimens of different thickness is not valid.

5.2 The processing of the material may affect the results obtained. For instance, residual strains produced by quenching, or high levels of crystallinity caused by slow cooling may affect the result. Also, the type of molding process, injection or compression, may be important especially if the mixing of fillers or the concentration and sizes of gas-filled cavities are controlled in any degree by the process. Indeed, this test method may be used to examine the effects of processing.

5.3 The data are generated in the form of a set of values of lifetimes at a voltage. The dispersion of failure times can be analyzed using Weibull or extreme value statistics to yield an estimate of the central value of the distribution and its standard deviation. This is particularly recommended when the dispersion of failure times is large, and a comparison of lifetimes of two materials must be made at a specified level of confidence.

5.4 This test is often used to demonstrate the differences between different classes of materials, and to illustrate the importance of eliminating corona in any application of a particular material. When the test is used for such purposes or other similar ones, the need for precision is reduced, and certain time saving techniques, such as truncating a test at the time of the fifth failure of a set of nine, and using that time as the measure of the central tendency, are recommended. Two such techniques are described in 10.2. Both techniques remove the necessity of testing beyond median failure, and reduce the required testing time to approximately half of that required to obtain failures on all specimens.

5.5 Insulating materials operating in a gaseous medium are subjected to corona attack at operating voltage on some types of electrical apparatus in those regions where the voltage gradient in the gas exceeds the corona inception level. On other types of equipment, where detectable corona is absent initially, it may appear later due to transient over-voltages or changes in insulation properties attending aging. Certain inorganic materials can tolerate corona for a long time. Many organic materials are damaged quickly by corona, and for these, operation with no detectable corona is imperative. This test method intensifies some of the more commonly met conditions of corona attack so that materials may be evaluated in a time that is relatively short compared to the life of the equipment. As with most accelerated life tests, caution is necessary in extrapolation from the indicated life to actual life under various operating conditions in the field.

5.6 The failure produced by corona may be due to one of several possible factors. The corona may erode the insulation until the remaining insulation can no longer withstand the applied voltage. The corona may cause the insulation surface to become conducting. For instance, carbonization may occur, so that failure occurs quickly. On the other hand, compounds such as oxalic acid crystals may be formed, as with polyethylene, in which case the surface conductance will vary with ambient humidity, and at moderate humidities the conductance may be at the proper level to reduce the potential gradient at the electrode edge, and thus cause either a reduction in the amount of corona, or its cessation, thus retarding failure. The corona may cause a “treeing” within the insulation, which may progress to failure. It may release gases within the insulation that change its physical dimensions. It may change the physical properties of an insulating material; for instance, it may cause the material to embrittle or crack, and thus make it useless.

5.7 Tests are often made in open air, at 50 % relative humidity. It may be important for some materials to make tests in circulating air at 20 % relative humidity or less (see Appendix X1). If tests are made in an enclosure, the restriction in the flow of air or other gas may influence the results (see Appendix X2).

5.8 The shape of the (voltage stress)-(time-to-failure) curve is sometimes useful as an indicator of the useable electric strength of a material in an application involving surface corona and its variation with time of application of voltage, though such comparisons are risky. (Specimen thickness, electrode system, the presence of more than one mechanism of failure, and the details of the ambient, including the nature of the surface corona, all have significant effects.) For instance, on log-log paper, the volt-time curve often obtained by the procedures of this test for void-free materials such as polyethylene sheet generally has a continuous curvature that is slightly concave upward. The low voltage end of the curve tends toward the horizontal and approaches a threshold voltage below which the curve does not go. A similar threshold would be expected for many materials in an application involving surface corona. Moreover, if the material possesses a low electric strength (as measured by Test Method D 149), or especially if in service there is another mechanism of failure in the short time range of this test, the shape of the left hand end of the curve would

be affected and would not reach the same high levels of stress as are exhibited by polyethylene either on this test or in many service applications, including surface corona. In summary, voltage stress-time curves are useful tools for examining modes and mechanisms of failure, but must be used with care.

5.9 For materials that possess a basic resistance to corona, such as mica, or, to a smaller degree, silicone rubber, the time required for the curve to reach the threshold produced by corona may be greater by many orders of magnitude than the time required for materials such as polyethylene, polyethylene terephthalate, or polytetrafluoroethylene.

5.10 The variability of the time to failure is a function of the constancy of the parameters of the test, such as the test voltages, which should be monitored. It is also a significant material property. The Weibull slope factor, β , is recommended as a measure of variability. β is the slope obtained when percent failure is plotted against failure time on Weibull probability paper. Such a plot is called a “Weibull probability plot” (see Fig. 1).

5.11 The shape of the Weibull probability plot can provide additional information. A non-straight-line plot may indicate more than one mechanism of failure. For instance, a few unaccountably short time failures in the set could indicate a small portion of defective specimens with a different failure mechanism from the rest of the lot.

6. Apparatus

6.1 Electrical Circuit:

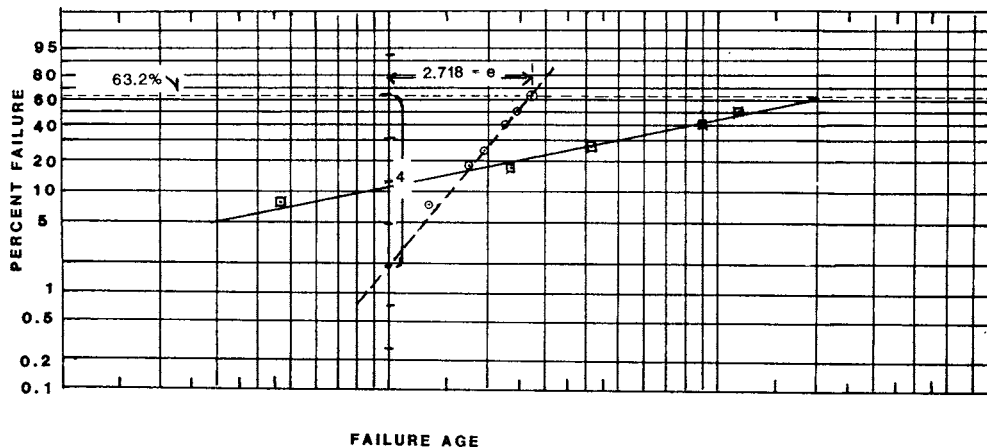
6.1.1 *High-Voltage Supply*—A high-voltage source with controls and voltage-measuring means in accordance with requirements of Test Method D 149; which in addition provides a test voltage stable within $\pm 1\%$ during the test period. If necessary use a voltage stabilizer, or other suitable equipment, for this purpose.

6.1.2 It is essential to provide for safe continuous reliable operation, with automatic detection of failure times and automatic removal of specimens from the test circuit when they fail. Two circuits which provide these functions are described in detail in Annex A1. Particular features are described as follows:

6.1.2.1 *Current Limiting Resistors*—A series of resistors in the high voltage line between the transformer and the specimen limit the current to approximately 0.05 A when a specimen fails. These resistors must have adequate voltage rating. The current limitation prevents pitting of the electrodes and minimizes surges. Since accidental grounding of the high voltage electrode will cause the resistors to become extremely hot, it is important to assure that the current goes through the interruption circuit.

6.1.2.2 *Specimen Circuit Opening*—An additional resistor of $50000 \pm 10\%$ in series with each specimen develops a sufficient voltage across it, when a specimen fails, to operate a special high-voltage fuse system that opens a gap in series with the specimen when it fails (see Fig. A1.1). This allows the other specimens to continue on test. The failure current simultaneously operates a relay which provides a pulse of current to operate a recorder such as a recording ammeter, an event recorder, or a running time meter to indicate the time to failure. (See Fig. A1.2). This allows the other specimens to continue on test. The failure current simultaneously operates a relay which provides a pulse of current to operate a recorder such as a recording ammeter, an event recorder, or a running time meter to indicate the time to failure. (See Fig. A1.1 for instance.)

6.1.2.3 An alternative technique has advantages for lower voltages associated with thin films and with materials of relatively low dielectric strength. In such cases, the failure current may not be high enough to melt fuse wire. It also works better than the fuse wire at higher voltages where intense discharge currents flow sporadically, making the fuse wire scheme unreliable. Fig. A1.3 shows a relay-latch mechanism that has been successfully used. Specimen failure current energizes the coil of relay LM5, closes



NOTE 1—Plotting percentage are 100 times the average of $(n - 1/2)/N$ and $n/(N + 1)$. Artificial data were placed on a line (dashed) drawn to illustrate a Weibull line with a β of 4. A second line (not dashed) illustrates the distribution of failure times which are characteristic of materials with very flat volt-time curves, such as mica composites. This line has a β value of 0.7.

FIG. 1 Representative Weibull Plot Showing the First 5 Failures of a Group Specimen of 9.

the contacts, energizes the coil of the latching relay, and releases the latch, which opens the contacts in the specimen circuit. The latch contacts are designed to open with sufficient clearance to interrupt the high-voltage arc. Auxiliary contacts of relay *LM5* cause the event recorder to indicate the time of failure. The remaining specimens remain under continuous test automatically with no time lost and no need for extra attention by personnel.

6.1.2.4 *Circuit Protection*—An automatic circuit breaking device protects the entire circuit by opening when 0.05 A of secondary current is drawn for more than 15 s. (See Fig. A1.2–Fig. A1.1 for instance).

6.2 *Electrodes:*

6.2.1 Make the smaller upper electrodes either as:

6.2.1.1 *Cylinders*, 13 mm (0.5 in.) in diameter, 13 mm high, with edges rounded to a radius of 1.6 mm (0.0625 in.), loaded to give a total weight of at least 90 g and made self aligning to conform to the surface of the specimen, or

6.2.1.2 *Steel Spheres*, 12.7 mm (½ in.) in diameter loaded to give a total weight of at least 50 g. The steel balls used in ball bearings make satisfactory electrodes, or

6.2.1.3 *Cylinders*, 6.0 ± 0.3 mm (¼ in.) diameter, with edges rounded to a radius of 1 mm (0.04 in.) and weight of approximately 30 g. This is the IEC standard electrode.

6.2.2 Design the electrode system so that the larger lower electrodes extend beyond the small upper electrodes by at least 13 mm (½ in.) and so that the electrode centers are separated by at least 51 mm (2.0 in.). The lower electrodes may be combined into one common plate if that meets the needs of the electrical circuit.

6.2.3 The standard electrode material is stainless steel Type 309 or 310. The surface finish shall be 0.4 μm (16 μin.).

6.3 The test chamber provides for control of the ambient conditions by supplying a constant flow of a chosen atmosphere, or by preventing flow if that is desired. When flow is desired, the atmosphere may be introduced in either of two ways: by controlled draft (as in a hood in a controlled atmosphere laboratory), or by means of a manifold directing the flow to nozzles which terminate at a distance of 13 ± 1 mm from the edge of the top electrode of the specimen. The chamber is usually connected to a vent to remove ozone and other gasses (see also 9.1 and Appendix X1).

6.4 It is imperative to electrically interlock the test chamber. For other items related to safety, see also 7.1 and 7.2 and the following:

6.4.1 A grounded metal base is recommended to be installed under the specimens and under any high voltage bus structure, so that any free lead will contact ground and operate the breaker,

6.4.2 An isolation transformer with a grounded shield to provide power to relay circuits, and event recorders,

6.4.3 A smoke detector in the roof of the chamber, and

6.4.4 Equipment for control of ambient conditions (see Appendix X1).

7. Hazards

7.1 **Warning:** Provide adequate protection against fire. Avoid the use of panels and enclosures made of flammable materials such as transparent plastics. Electrical design features related to this risk are given in 6.4 and 6.1.2.1.

7.2 **Warning:** *Lethal voltages may be present during this test. It is essential that the test apparatus, and all associated equipment that may be electrically connected to it, be properly designed and installed for safe operation. Solidly ground all electrically conductive parts that any person might come in contact with during the test. Provide means for use at the completion of any test to ground any parts which: were at high voltage during the test; may have acquired an induced charge during the test; may retain a charge even after disconnection of the voltage source. Thoroughly instruct all operators in the proper way to conduct the test safely. When making high voltage tests, particularly in compressed gas or in oil, the energy released at breakdown may be sufficient to result in fire, explosion, or rupture of the test chamber. Design test equipment, test chambers, and test specimens so as to minimize the possibility of such occurrences and to eliminate the possibility of personal injury.*

7.3 **Warning:** The tests of this test method generate ozone and other potentially hazardous gasses. This is not a problem if the tests are made in chambers vented to the outside. If the tests are not safely vented, it is important to note that:

7.3.1 *Ozone is a physiologically hazardous gas at elevated concentrations. The exposure limits are set by governmental agencies and are usually based upon recommendations made by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists.⁵ Ozone is likely to be present whenever voltages exist which are sufficient to cause partial, or complete, discharges in air or other atmospheres that contain oxygen. Ozone has a distinctive odor which is initially discernible at low concentrations but sustained inhalation of ozone can cause temporary loss of sensitivity to the scent of ozone. Because of this it is important to measure the concentration of ozone in the atmosphere, using commercially available monitoring devices, whenever the odor of ozone is persistently present or when ozone generating conditions continue. Use appropriate means, such as exhaust vents, to reduce ozone concentrations to acceptable levels in working areas.*

7.4 **Warning:** Oxides of Nitrogen are also hazardous and are generated by this test.

8. Test Specimens

8.1 *Thick Materials (1.4 mm (0.062 in.) and Over)*—Nine specimens with a thickness of 1.4 ± 0.1 mm (0.06 ± 0.004 in.) are

^e Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 06.01.

⁵ Information may be obtained from American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists, Inc. (ACGIH), 1330 Kemper Meadow Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45240, <http://www.acgih.org>.

required for each test voltage. For thicker specimens, reduce the thickness to this value and place the small electrode against the original surface. The size of the specimens shall be sufficient to prevent flashover.

8.2 *Thin Materials (under 1.4 mm (0.062 in.))*—Use sheets of sufficient size to extend under all electrodes with an adequate margin to prevent flashover.

8.3 Films may be stacked to match thicknesses, recognizing that air between films can introduce errors.

9. Conditioning

9.1 Products of corona in combination with moisture from the atmosphere often tend to inhibit the corona discharge so as to influence the time to failure. This makes it necessary to clean and condition the specimens prior to testing and to use conditioned air throughout the life test (see Appendix X1.2) with a minimum flow rate of 0.5 L/min per test electrode. Unless otherwise specified, the conditions given in 9.1.1 and 9.1.2 shall be considered standard for these tests, with designations and standard tolerances in accordance with Practice D 618D 6054 (see also Terminology E 41, Practice E 104, Practice D 5032, and Specification E 171):

9.1.1 Condition 40/23/5: T-23/5 (low humidity), and

9.1.2 Condition 40/23/50: T-23/50 (Standard Laboratory Atmosphere).

10. Procedure

10.1 Apply to the set of test specimens a voltage that is higher than the corona inception voltage, but below the level at which failures will be expected to occur in less than 1 day. Select a voltage high enough that some failures occur in <30 days. A good starting point is usually 20 kV/mm (500 V/mil).

10.2 It is convenient to truncate the test at the time of median failure to save testing time. When nine specimens are used and the scatter is such that the median failure time is not more than twice the time to first failure, report the median failure time as the time to failure. If the scatter is greater than this, draw a straight line through the failure time data plotted on Weibull probability paper. Report the time at 50 % failure as the failure time.

10.3 Using the experience of each test to determine the next lower test voltage, obtain data at three or more voltage levels for a curve of voltage stress versus failure time. Continue the tests until a stress of 4 kV/mm (100 V/mil) or a voltage 40 % above the corona-starting voltage, whichever is higher, is reached. Plot the stress in kV/mm (or V/mil) versus the logarithm of the failure time in hours.

10.4 For the more corona-resistant materials, the tests may be accelerated by increasing the frequency. Life for some materials is a function of the total number of cycles and not the frequency that produced those cycles (see Appendix X1). Tests at elevated frequency should be made to overlap the voltage range of the 60-Hz tests to confirm this constancy of number of cycles to failure. This check is effective because departures from constancy are more likely to occur at high stress than low.

11. Report

11.1 Report the following information:

11.1.1 Material, type designation, conditions of fabrication (if known),

11.1.2 Conditioning prior to test (temperature, humidity, and time),

11.1.3 Test conditions (temperature, humidity, and rate of air flow),

11.1.4 Specimen thickness, maximum, minimum, and average values,

11.1.5 Electrode shape and material,

11.1.6 Frequencies used,

11.1.7 Any corona quantities measured (for example, corona-inception voltage, charge, energy, etc.),

11.1.8 Curve of stress versus logarithm of failure times, and

11.1.9 All failure times for all tests at all voltages, together with all Weibull plots.

12. Precision and Bias

12.1 This test method is used to rate materials in a comparative way with respect to their resistance to prolonged exposure to partial discharge conditions. A precision and bias statement is nonapplicable to this test method.

13. Keywords

13.1 partial discharge; surface discharge; threshold voltage; voltage endurance; voltage stress–time curve; volt–time curve

ANNEX

(Mandatory Information)