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Standard Specification for Mortar for Unit Masonry¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation C 270; 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 This specification covers mortars for use in the construction of non-reinforced and reinforced unit masonry structures. Four types of mortar are covered in each of two alternative specifications: (1) proportion specifications and (2) property specifications.

NOTE 1—When the property specification is used to qualify masonry mortars, the testing agency performing the test methods should be evaluated in accordance with Practice C 1093.

1.2 The proportion or property specifications shall govern as specified.

1.3 When neither proportion or property specifications are specified, the proportion specifications shall govern, unless data are presented to and accepted by the specifier to show that mortar meets the requirements of the property specifications.

1.4 The text of this specification references notes and footnotes which provide explanatory material. These notes and footnotes (excluding those in tables and figures) shall not be considered as requirements of the standard.

1.5 The terms used in this specification are identified in Terminologies C 1180 and C 1232.

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

1.7 The following safety hazards caveat pertains only to the test methods section of this specification: *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.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

C 5 Specification for Quicklime for Structural Purposes

C 91 Specification for Masonry Cement

C 109/C 109M Test Method for Compressive Strength of Hydraulic Cement Mortars (Using 2-in. or [50-mm] Cube Specimens)

C 110 Test Methods for Physical Testing of Quicklime, Hydrated Lime, and Limestone

C 128 Test Method for Density, Relative Density (Specific Gravity), and Absorption of Fine Aggregate

C 144 Specification for Aggregate for Masonry Mortar

C 150 Specification for Portland Cement

C 188 Test Method for Density of Hydraulic Cement

C 207 Specification for Hydrated Lime for Masonry Purposes

C 305 Practice for Mechanical Mixing of Hydraulic Cement Pastes and Mortars of Plastic Consistency

C 511 Specification for Mixing Rooms, Moist Cabinets, Moist Rooms, and Water Storage Tanks Used in the Testing of Hydraulic Cements and Concretes

C 595 Specification for Blended Hydraulic Cements

C 780 Test Method for Preconstruction and Construction Evaluation of Mortars for Plain and Reinforced Unit Masonry

C 952 Test Method for Bond Strength of Mortar to Masonry Units

C 979 Specification for Pigments for Integrally Colored Concrete

C 1072 Test Method for Measurement of Masonry Flexural Bond Strength

C 1093 Practice for Accreditation of Testing Agencies for Masonry

C 1157 Performance Specification for Hydraulic Cement

¹ This specification is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee C12 on Mortars and Grouts for Unit Masonry and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee C12.03 on Specifications for Mortars.

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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 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.

C 1180 Terminology of Mortar and Grout for Unit Masonry
 C 1232 Terminology of Masonry
 C 1324 Test Method for Examination and Analysis of Hardened Masonry Mortar
 C 1329 Specification for Mortar Cement
 C 1357 Test Methods for Evaluating Masonry Bond Strength
 C 1384 Specification for Admixtures for Masonry Mortars
 C 1489 Specification for Lime Putty for Structural Purposes
 C 1506 Test Method for Water Retention of Hydraulic Cement-Based Mortars and Plasters
 C 1586 Guide for Quality Assurance of Mortars
 E 72 Test Methods of Conducting Strength Tests of Panels for Building Construction
 E 514 Test Method for Water Penetration and Leakage Through Masonry
 E 518 Test Methods for Flexural Bond Strength of Masonry
 2.2 *Masonry Industry Council*:³
 Hot and Cold Weather Masonry Construction Manual, January 1999

3. Specification Limitations

- 3.1 Specification C 270 is *not* a specification to determine mortar strengths through field testing.
- 3.2 Laboratory testing of mortar to ensure compliance with the property specification requirements of this specification shall be performed in accordance with 5.3. The property specification of this standard applies to mortar mixed to a specific flow in the laboratory.
- 3.3 The compressive strength values resulting from field tested mortars do not represent the compressive strength of mortar as tested in the laboratory nor that of the mortar in the wall. Physical properties of field sampled mortar shall not be used to determine compliance to this specification and are not intended as criteria to determine the acceptance or rejection of the mortar (see Section 8).

4. Materials

- 4.1 Materials used as ingredients in the mortar shall conform to the requirements specified in 4.1.1 to 4.1.4.
- 4.1.1 *Cementitious Materials*—Cementitious materials shall conform to the following ASTM specifications:
- 4.1.1.1 *Portland Cement*—Types I, IA, II, IIA, III, IIIA, or V of Specification C 150.
- 4.1.1.2 *Blended Hydraulic Cements*—Types IS, IS-A, IP, IP-A, I(PM), I(PM)-A, I(SM), or I(SM)-A of Specification C 595—Types IS(<70), IS(<70)-A, IP, IP-A of Specification C 595.
- 4.1.1.3 *Hydraulic Cements*—Types GU, HE, MS, HS, MH, and LH of Specification C 1157.
- 4.1.1.4 *Portland Blast-Furnace Slag Cement (for Use in Property Specifications Only)*—Types IS(≥70) or IS(≥70)-A of Specification C 595.
- 4.1.1.5 *Masonry Cement*—See Specification C 91.
- 4.1.1.6 *Mortar Cement*—See Specification C 1329.
- 4.1.1.7 *Quicklime*—See Specification C 5.
- 4.1.1.8 *Hydrated Lime*—Specification C 207, Types S or SA. Types N or NA limes are permitted if shown by test or performance record to be not detrimental to the soundness of the mortar.
- 4.1.1.9 *Lime Putty*—See Specification C 1489.
- 4.1.2 *Aggregates*—See Specification C 144.
- 4.1.3 *Water*—Water shall be clean and free of amounts of oils, acids, alkalies, salts, organic materials, or other substances that are deleterious to mortar or any metal in the wall.
- 4.1.4 *Admixtures*—Admixtures shall not be added to mortar unless specified. Admixtures shall not add more than 65 ppm (0.0065 %) water soluble chloride or 90 ppm (0.0090 %) acid soluble chloride to the mortar’s overall chloride content, unless explicitly provided for in the contract documents.
- 4.1.4.1 *Classified Admixtures*—Admixtures which are classified as bond enhancers, workability enhancers, set accelerators, set retarders, and water repellents shall be in accordance with Specification C 1384.
- 4.1.4.2 *Color Pigments*—Coloring pigments shall be in accordance with Specification C 979.
- 4.1.4.3 *Unclassified Admixtures*—Mortars containing admixtures outside the scopes of Specifications C 1384 and C 979 shall be in accordance with the property requirements of this specification and the admixture shall be shown to be non-deleterious to the mortar, embedded metals, and the masonry units.
- 4.1.4.4 *Calcium Chloride*—When explicitly provided for in the contract documents, calcium chloride is permitted to be used as an accelerator in amounts not to exceed 2 % by weight of the portland cement content or 1 % of the masonry cement content, or both, of the mortar.

NOTE 2—If calcium chloride is allowed, it should be used with caution as it may have a detrimental effect on metals and on some wall finishes.

³ Available from the Mason Contractors Association of America, 1910 South Highland Avenue, Suite 101, Lombard, IL 60148.

5. Requirements

5.1 Unless otherwise stated, a cement/lime mortar, a mortar cement mortar, or a masonry cement mortar is permitted. A mortar type of known higher strength shall not be indiscriminately substituted where a mortar type of anticipated lower strength is specified.

5.2 *Proportion Specifications*—Mortar conforming to the proportion specifications shall consist of a mixture of cementitious material, aggregate, and water, all conforming to the requirements of Section 4 and the proportion specifications' requirements of Table 1. See Appendix X1 or Appendix X3 for a guide for selecting masonry mortars.

5.3 *Property Specifications*—Mortar conformance to the property specifications shall be established by tests of laboratory prepared mortar in accordance with Section 6 and 7.2. The laboratory prepared mortar shall consist of a mixture of cementitious material, aggregate, and water, all conforming to the requirements of Section 4 and the properties of the laboratory prepared mortar shall conform to the requirements of Table 2. See Appendix X1 for a guide for selecting masonry mortars.

5.3.1 No change shall be made in the laboratory established proportions for mortar accepted under the property specifications, except for the quantity of mixing water. Materials with different physical characteristics shall not be utilized in the mortar used in the work unless compliance with the requirements of the property specifications is reestablished.

NOTE 3—The physical properties of plastic and hardened mortar complying with the proportion specification (5.1) may differ from the physical properties of mortar of the same type complying with the property specification (5.3). For example, laboratory prepared mortars batched to the proportions listed in Table 1 will, in many cases, considerably exceed the compressive strength requirements of Table 2.

NOTE 4—The required properties of the mortar in Table 2 are for laboratory prepared mortar mixed with a quantity of water to produce a flow of $110 \pm 5\%$. This quantity of water is not sufficient to produce a mortar with a workable consistency suitable for laying masonry units in the field. Mortar for use in the field must be mixed with the maximum amount of water, consistent with workability, in order to provide sufficient water to satisfy the initial rate of absorption (suction) of the masonry units. The properties of laboratory prepared mortar at a flow of 110 ± 5 , as required by this specification, are intended to approximate the flow and properties of field prepared mortar after it has been placed in use and the suction of the masonry units has been satisfied. The properties of field prepared mortar mixed with the greater quantity of water, prior to being placed in contact with the masonry units, will differ from the property requirements in Table 2. Therefore, the property requirements in Table 2 cannot be used as requirements for quality control of field prepared mortar. Test Method C 780 may be used for this purpose.

NOTE 5—Air content of non-air-entrained portland cement-lime mortar is generally less than 8 %.

6. Test Methods

6.1 *Proportions of Materials for Test Specimens*—Laboratory mixed mortar used for determining conformance to this property specification shall contain construction materials in proportions indicated in project specifications. Measure materials by weight for laboratory mixed batches. Convert proportions, by volume, to proportions, by weight, using a batch factor calculated as follows:

$$\text{Batch factor} = 1440 / (80 \text{ times total sand volume proportion}) \quad (1)$$

Determine weight of material as follows:

TABLE 1 Proportion Specification Requirements

NOTE—Two air-entraining materials shall not be combined in mortar.

Mortar	Type	Proportions by Volume (Cementitious Materials)							Aggregate Ratio (Measured in Damp, Loose Con- ditions)	
		Portland Cement or Blended Cement	Mortar Cement			Masonry Cement				Hydrated Lime or Lime Putty
			M	S	N	M	S	N		
Cement-Lime	M	1	1/4	Not less than 2/4 and not more than 3 times the sum of the separate vol- umes of cementi- tious materials
	S	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	over 1/4 to 1/2
	N	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	over 1/2 to 1 1/4
	O	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	over 1 1/4 to 2 1/2
Mortar Cement	M	1	1	Not less than 2/4 and not more than 3 times the sum of the separate vol- umes of cementi- tious materials
	M	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
	S	1/2	...	...	1	...	...	...	...
	S	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...
	N	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	...
Masonry Cement	O	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	...
	M	1	...	...	...	...	1	...	...
	M	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	...
	S	1/2	...	...	...	...	1	...	...
	S	...	...	...	...	...	1	...	...
	N	...	...	...	...	...	1	...	...
	O	...	...	...	...	...	1	...	...

TABLE 2 Property Specification Requirements^A

Mortar	Type	Average Compressive Strength at 28 days, min, psi (MPa)	Water Retention, min, %	Air Content, max, % ^B	Aggregate Ratio (Measured in Damp, Loose Conditions)
Cement-Lime	M	2500 (17.2)	75	12	Not less than 2 ¼ and not more than 3 ½ the sum of the separate volumes of cementitious materials
	S	1800 (12.4)	75	12	
	N	750 (5.2)	75	14 ^C	
	O	350 (2.4)	75	14 ^C	
Mortar Cement	M	2500 (17.2)	75	12	
	S	1800 (12.4)	75	12	
	N	750 (5.2)	75	14 ^C	
	O	350 (2.4)	75	14 ^C	
Masonry Cement	M	2500 (17.2)	75	18	
	S	1800 (12.4)	75	18	
	N	750 (5.2)	75	20 ^D	
	O	350 (2.4)	75	20 ^D	

^A Laboratory prepared mortar only (see Note 4).

^B See Note 5.

^C When structural reinforcement is incorporated in cement-lime or mortar cement mortar, the maximum air content shall be 12 %.

^D When structural reinforcement is incorporated in masonry cement mortar, the maximum air content shall be 18 %.

$$\text{Mat. Weight} = \text{Mat. Volume Proportion} \times \text{Bulk Density} \times \text{Batch Factor} \quad (2)$$

NOTE 6—See Appendix X4 for examples of material proportioning.

6.1.1 When converting volume proportions to batch weights, use the following material bulk densities:

Material	Bulk Density
Portland Cement	Obtain from bag or supplier
Blended Cement	Obtain from bag or supplier
Hydraulic Cement	Obtain from bag or supplier
Slag Cement	Obtain from bag or supplier
Masonry Cement	Obtain from bag or supplier
Mortar Cement	Obtain from bag or supplier
Lime Putty	80 pcf (1280 kg/m ³)
Hydrated Lime	40 pcf (640 kg/m ³)
Sand	80 pcf (1280 kg/m ³)

NOTE 7—All quicklime should be slaked in accordance with the manufacturer's directions. All quicklime putty, except pulverized quicklime putty, should be sieved through a No. 20 (850 µm) sieve and allowed to cool until it has reached a temperature of 80°F (26.7°C). Quicklime putty should weigh at least 80 pcf (1280 kg/m³). Putty that weighs less than this may be used in the proportion specifications, if the required quantity of extra putty is added to meet the minimum weight requirement.

NOTE 8—The sand is oven-dried for laboratory testing to reduce the potential of variability due to sand moisture content and to permit better accounting of the materials used for purposes of air content calculations. It is not necessary for the purposes of this specification to measure the unit weight of the dry sand. Although the unit weight of dry sand will typically be 85–100 pcf (1360–1760 kg/m³), experience has shown that the use of an assumed unit weight of 80 pcf (1280 kg/m³) for dry sand will result in a laboratory mortar ratio of aggregate to cementitious material that is similar to that of the corresponding field mortar made using damp loose sand. A weight of 80 lb (36 kg) of dry sand is, in most cases, equivalent to the sand weight in 1 ft³ (0.03 m³) of loose, damp sand.

6.1.2 Oven dry and cool to room temperature all sand for laboratory mixed mortars. Sand weight shall be 1440 g for each individual batch of mortar prepared. Add water to obtain flow of 110 ± 5 %. A test batch provides sufficient mortar for completing the water retention test and fabricating three 2-in. cubes for the compressive strength test.

6.2 *Mixing of Mortars*—Mix the mortar in accordance with Practice C 305.

6.3 *Water Retention*—Determine water retention in accordance with Specification C 1506, except that the laboratory-mixed mortar shall be of the materials and proportions to be used in the construction.

6.4 *Compressive Strength*—Determine compressive strength in accordance with Test Method C 109. The mortar shall be composed of materials and proportions that are to be used in the construction with mixing water to produce a flow of 110 ± 5.

6.4.1 *Specimen Storage*—Keep mortar cubes for compressive strength tests in the molds on plane plates in a moist room or a cabinet meeting the requirements of Specification C 511, from 48 to 52 h in such a manner that the upper surfaces shall be exposed to the moist air. Remove mortar specimens from the molds and place in a moist cabinet or moist room until tested.

6.5 *Air Content*—Determine air content in accordance with Specification C 91 *except* that the laboratory mixed mortar is to be of the materials and proportions to be used in the construction. Calculate the air content to the nearest 0.1 % as follows:

$$D = \frac{W_1 + W_2 + W_3 + W_4 + V_w}{\frac{W_1}{P_1} + \frac{W_2}{P_2} + \frac{W_3}{P_3} + \frac{W_4}{P_4} + V_w}$$

$$A = 100 - \frac{W_m}{4D} \quad (3)$$

where:

- D = density of air-free mortar, g/cm^3 ,
- W_1 = weight of portland cement, g,
- W_2 = weight of hydrated lime, g,
- W_3 = weight of mortar cement or masonry cement, g,
- W_4 = weight of oven-dry sand, g,
- V_w = millilitres of water used,
- P_1 = density of portland cement, g/cm^3 ,
- P_2 = density of hydrated lime, g/cm^3 ,
- P_3 = density of mortar cement or masonry cement, g/cm^3 ,
- P_4 = density of oven-dry sand, g/cm^3 ,
- A = volume of air, %, and
- W_m = weight of 400 mL of mortar, g.

6.5.1 Determine the density of oven-dry sand, P_4 , in accordance with Test Method C 128, except that an oven-dry specimen shall be evaluated rather than a saturated surface-dry specimen. If a pycnometer is used, calculate the oven-dry density of sand as follows:

$$P_4 = X_1 / (Y + X_1 - Z) \quad (4)$$

where:

- X_1 = weight of oven-dry specimen (used in pycnometer) in air, g,
- Y = weight of pycnometer filled with water, g, and
- Z = weight of pycnometer with specimen and water to calibration mark, g.

6.5.1.1 If the Le Chantelier flask method is used, calculate the oven-dry density of sand as follows:

$$P_4 = X_2 / [0.9975 (R_2 - R_1)] \quad (5)$$

where:

- X_2 = weight of oven-dry specimen (used in Le Chantelier flask) in air, g,
- R_1 = initial reading of water level in Le Chantelier flask, and
- R_2 = final reading of water in Le Chantelier flask.

6.5.2 Determine the density of portland cement, mortar cement, and masonry cement in accordance with Test Method C 188. Determine the density of hydrated lime in accordance with Test Methods C 110.

7. Construction Practices

7.1 *Storage of Materials*—Cementitious materials and aggregates shall be stored in such a manner as to prevent deterioration or intrusion of foreign material.

7.2 *Measurement of Materials*—The method of measuring materials for the mortar used in construction shall be such that the specified proportions of the mortar materials are controlled and accurately maintained.

7.3 *Mixing Mortars*—All cementitious materials and aggregate shall be mixed between 3 and 5 min in a mechanical batch mixer with the maximum amount of water to produce a workable consistency. Hand mixing of the mortar is permitted with the written approval of the specifier outlining hand mixing procedures.

NOTE 9—These mixing water requirements differ from those in test methods in Section 6.

7.4 *Tempering Mortars*—Mortars that have stiffened shall be retempered by adding water as frequently as needed to restore the required consistency. No mortars shall be used beyond 2½ h after mixing.

7.5 *Climatic Conditions*—Unless superseded by other contractual relationships or the requirements of local building codes, hot and cold weather masonry construction relating to mortar shall comply with the Masonry Industry Council's "Hot and Cold Weather Masonry Construction Manual."

NOTE 10—*Limitations*—Mortar type should be correlated with the particular masonry unit to be used because certain mortars are more compatible with certain masonry units.

The specifier should evaluate the interaction of the mortar type and masonry unit specified, that is, masonry units having a high initial rate of absorption will have greater compatibility with mortar of high-water retentivity.

8. Quality Assurance

8.1 Compliance to this specification is verified by confirming that the materials used are as specified, meet the requirements as given in Section 2.1, and added to the mixer in the proper proportions. Proportions of materials are verified by one of the following:

8.1.1 Implementation and observation of appropriate procedures for proportioning and mixing approved materials, as described in Section 7.

8.1.2 Test Method C 780 Annex 4, Mortar Aggregate Ratio to determine the aggregate to cementitious material ratio of mortars while they are still in a plastic state.

8.2 Guide C 1586 is suitable for developing quality assurance procedures to determine compliance of mortars to this standard.

8.3 Test Method C 780 is suitable for the evaluation of masonry mortars in the field. However, due to the procedural differences between Specification C 270 and C780, the compressive strength values resulting from field sampled mortars are not required nor expected to meet the compressive strength requirements of the property specification of Specification C 270, nor do they represent the compressive strength of the mortar in the wall.

8.4 Test Method C 1324 is available to determine the proportions of materials in hardened masonry mortars. There is no ASTM method for determining the conformance of a mortar to the property specifications of Specification C 270 by testing hardened mortar samples taken from a structure.

NOTE 11—The results of tests using Test Methods C 780 Annex 4 and C 1324 can be compared with Specification C 270 proportion requirements; however, precision and bias have not been determined for these test methods.

NOTE 12—The results of tests done using Test Method C 1324 can be compared with the Specification C 270 proportion requirements, however, precision and bias have not been determined for this test method.

NOTE 13—Where necessary, testing of a wall or a masonry prism from the wall is generally more desirable than attempting to test individual components.

NOTE 14—The cost of tests to show initial compliance are typically borne by the seller. The party initiating a change of materials typically bear the cost for recompliance.

Unless otherwise specified, the cost of other tests are typically borne as follows:

If the results of the tests show that the mortar does not conform to the requirements of the specification, the costs are typically borne by the seller.

If the results of the tests show that the mortar does conform to the requirements of the specification, the costs are typically borne by the purchaser.

9. Keywords

9.1 air content; compressive strength; masonry; masonry cement; mortar; portland cement-lime; water retention; water retentivity

APPENDIXES

(Nonmandatory Information)

X1. SELECTION AND USE OF MORTAR FOR UNIT MASONRY

X1.1 *Scope*—This appendix provides information to allow a more knowledgeable decision in the selection of mortar for a specific use.

X1.2 *Significance and Use*—Masonry mortar is a versatile material capable of satisfying a variety of diverse requirements. The relatively small portion of mortar in masonry significantly influences the total performance. There is no single mortar mix that satisfies all situations. Only an understanding of mortar materials and their properties, singly and collectively, will enable selection of a mortar that will perform satisfactorily for each specific endeavor.

X1.3 *Function:*

X1.3.1 The primary purpose of mortar in masonry is to bond masonry units into an assemblage which acts as an integral element having desired functional performance characteristics. Mortar influences the structural properties of the assemblage while adding to its water resistance.

X1.3.2 Because portland cement concretes and masonry mortars contain some of the same principal ingredients, it is often erroneously assumed that good concrete practice is also good mortar practice. Realistically, mortars differ from concrete in working consistencies, in methods of placement and in the curing environment. Masonry mortar is commonly used to bind masonry units into a single structural element, while concrete is usually a structural element in itself.

X1.3.3 A major distinction between the two materials is illustrated by the manner in which they are handled during construction. Concrete is usually placed in nonabsorbent metal or wooden forms or otherwise treated so that most of the water will be retained. Mortar is usually placed between absorbent masonry units, and as soon as contact is made the mortar loses water to the units. Compressive strength is a prime consideration in concrete, but it is only one of several important factors in mortar.

X1.4 *Properties:*

X1.4.1 Masonry mortars have two distinct, important sets of properties, those of plastic mortars and those of hardened mortars. Plastic properties determine a mortar's construction suitability, which in turn relate to the properties of the hardened mortar and, hence, of finished structural elements. Properties of plastic mortars that help determine their construction suitability include workability and water retentivity. Properties of hardened mortars that help determine the performance of the finished masonry include bond, durability, elasticity, and compressive strength.

X1.4.2 Many properties of mortar are not quantitatively definable in precise terms because of a lack of measurement standards. For this and other reasons there are no mortar standards wholly based upon performance, thus the continued use of the traditional prescription specification in most situations.