



Designation: C 1458 – 09

Standard Test Method for Nondestructive Assay of Plutonium, Tritium and ²⁴¹Am by Calorimetric Assay¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation C 1458; 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.

1. Scope

1.1 This test method describes the nondestructive assay (NDA) of plutonium, tritium, and ²⁴¹Am using heat flow calorimetry. For plutonium the typical range of applicability corresponds to ~1 g to ~2000 g quantities while for tritium the typical range extends from ~0.001 g to ~10 g. This test method can be applied to materials in a wide range of container sizes up to 50 L. It has been used routinely to assay items whose thermal power ranges from 0.001 W to 135 W.

1.2 This test method requires knowledge of the relative abundances of the plutonium isotopes and the ²⁴¹Am/Pu mass ratio to determine the total plutonium mass.

1.3 This test method provides a direct measure of tritium content.

1.4 This test method provides a measure of ²⁴¹Am either as a single isotope or mixed with plutonium.

1.5 The values stated in SI units are to be regarded as standard. No other units of measurement are included in this standard.

1.6 *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 697 Test Methods for Chemical, Mass Spectrometric, and Spectrochemical Analysis of Nuclear-Grade Plutonium Dioxide Powders and Pellets

C 1009 Guide for Establishing a Quality Assurance Program for Analytical Chemistry Laboratories Within the Nuclear Industry

C 1030 Test Method for Determination of Plutonium Isotopic Composition by Gamma-Ray Spectrometry

C 1592 Guide for Nondestructive Assay Measurements

C 1673 Terminology of C26.10 Nondestructive Assay Methods

2.2 ANSI Standards:³

ANSI N15.22 Plutonium—Bearing Solids—Calibration Techniques for Calorimetric Assay

ANSI N15.54 Radiometric Calorimeters—Measurement Control Program

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:* Terms shall be defined in accordance with C26.10 Terminology **C 1673** except for the following:

3.1.1 *baseline, n*—the calorimeter output signal with no heat-generating item in the calorimeter item chamber.

3.1.2 *basepower, n*—a constant thermal power applied in a calorimeter through an electrical resistance heater with no heat-generating item in the item chamber.

3.1.3 *equilibrium, n*—the point at which the temperature of the calorimeter measurement cell and the item being measured stops changing.

3.1.4 *heat distribution error, n*—the bias arising from the location of the heat source within the calorimeter chamber.

3.1.5 *passive mode, n*—a mode of calorimeter operation where no external power is applied to the calorimeter except in the case of Wheatstone bridge temperature sensors where electrical current is needed to excite the bridge circuit.

3.1.6 *sensitivity, n*—the change in calorimeter response per Watt of thermal power (usually in units of micro Volts per Watt) for a heat flow calorimeter.

3.1.7 *servo control mode, n*—a mode of calorimeter operation where a constant applied thermal power is maintained in a calorimeter measurement chamber through the use of an electric resistance heater in a closed loop control system.

3.1.8 *specific power, n*—the rate of energy emission by ionizing radiation per unit mass of a radionuclide, such as ²⁴¹Am or tritium.

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee C26 on Nuclear Fuel Cycle and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee C26.10 on Non Destructive Assay.

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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.

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

3.1.9 *thermal diffusivity, n*—the ratio of thermal conductivity to the heat capacity. It measures the ability of a material to conduct thermal energy relative to its ability to store thermal energy.

3.1.10 *thermal power, n*—the rate at which heat is generated in a radioactively decaying item.

3.1.11 *thermal resistance, n*—ratio of the temperature difference at two different surfaces to the heat flux through the surfaces at equilibrium.

3.1.12 *thermal time constant, n*—an exponential decay constant describing the rate at which a temperature approaches a constant value. An item container combination will have numerous thermal time constants.

3.1.13 *thermel, n*—the THERMal ELement of the calorimeter, including the item chamber, and temperature sensor.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 The item is placed in the calorimeter measurement chamber and the heat flow at equilibrium, that is, the thermal power, from the item is determined by temperature sensors and associated electronic equipment.

4.2 The thermal power emitted by a test item is directly related to the quantity of radioactive material in it. The power generated by ionizing radiation absorbed in the item is measured by the calorimeter.

4.3 The mass (*m*) of Pu, tritium, or ²⁴¹Am is calculated from the measured thermal power of an item (*W_i*) using the following relationship:

$$m = \frac{W_i}{P_{eff}} \quad (1)$$

where:

P_{eff} = the effective specific power calculated from the isotopic composition of the item (see 11.3.2 for details of the calculation of *P_{eff}* for plutonium).

4.3.1 When tritium is the only heat source the measured thermal power can be directly converted into mass using the specific power of tritium, *P_{eff}* = (0.3240 ± 0.00045) (SD) W/g (1).⁴

4.3.2 For ²⁴¹Am as a single isotope the measured thermal power can be directly converted into mass using the specific power of ²⁴¹Am, *P_{eff}* = (0.1142 ± 0.00042) (SD) W/g (see Table 1).

⁴ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this standard.

4.3.3 For ²⁴¹Am mixed with plutonium, the ²⁴¹Am mass, *M_{Am}*, is determined by

$$M_{Am} = R_{Am}M_{Pu} \quad (2)$$

where:

R_{Am} = the mass ratio of ²⁴¹Am to Pu, and

M_{Pu} = the mass of Pu.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This test method is the most accurate NDA technique for the assay of many physical forms of Pu. Isotopic measurements by gamma-ray spectroscopy or destructive analysis techniques are part of the test method when it is applied to the assay of Pu.

5.1.1 Calorimetry has been applied to a wide variety of Pu-bearing solids including metals, alloys, oxides, fluorides, mixed Pu-U oxides, mixed oxide fuel pins, waste, and scrap, for example, ash, ash heels, salts, crucibles, and graphite scarfings) (2,3). This test method has been routinely used at U.S. and European facilities for Pu process measurements and nuclear material accountability for the last 40 years (2-9).

5.1.2 Pu-bearing materials have been measured in calorimeter containers ranging in size from about 0.025 m to about 0.60 m in diameter and from about 0.076 m to about 0.9 m in height.

5.1.3 Gamma-ray spectroscopy typically is used to determine the Pu-relative isotopic composition and ²⁴¹Am to Pu ratio (see Test Method C 1030). Isotopic information from mass spectrometry and alpha counting measurements may be used (see Test Method C 697).

5.2 This test method is the most accurate NDA method for the measurement of tritium. For many physical forms of tritium compounds calorimetry is the only practical measurement technique available.

5.3 Physical standards representative of the materials being assayed are not required for the test method. 458-09

5.3.1 This test method is largely independent of the elemental distribution of the nuclear materials in the matrix.

5.3.2 The accuracy of the method can be degraded for materials with inhomogeneous isotopic composition.

5.4 The thermal power measurement is traceable to national measurement systems through electrical standards used to directly calibrate the calorimeters or to calibrate secondary ²³⁸Pu heat standards.

5.5 Heat-flow calorimetry has been used to prepare secondary standards for neutron and gamma-ray assay systems (7-12).

TABLE 1 Nuclear Decay Parameters for Pu Calorimetric Assay^A

Isotope	Half-Life, Years	Standard Deviation, Years		Specific Power, W/g	Standard Deviation, W/g		References
²³⁸ Pu	87.74	0.04	(0.05 %)	0.56757	0.00026	(0.05 %)	(19,20)
²³⁹ Pu	24 119	16	(0.11 %)	1.9288 × 10 ⁻³	0.0003 × 10 ⁻³	(0.02 %)	(20-22)
²⁴⁰ Pu	6564	11	(0.17 %)	7.0824 × 10 ⁻³	0.0020 × 10 ⁻³	(0.03 %)	(23-28)
²⁴¹ Pu	14.348	0.022	(0.15 %)	3.412 × 10 ⁻³	0.002 × 10 ⁻³	(0.06 %)	(29-33)
²⁴² Pu	376 300	900	(0.24 %)	0.1159 × 10 ⁻³	0.00026 × 10 ⁻³	(0.22 %)	(34)
²⁴¹ Am	433.6	1.4	(0.32 %)	0.1142	0.00042	(0.37 %)	(32,35)

^A Numbers in parentheses are % relative standard deviation (RSD).

5.6 Calorimetry measurement times are typically longer than other NDA techniques. Four parameters of the item and the item packaging affect measurement time. These four parameters are density, mass, thermal conductivity, and change in temperature. The measurement well of passive calorimeters will also affect measurement time because it too will need to come to the new equilibrium temperature. Calorimeters operated in servo mode maintain a constant measurement well temperature and have no effect on measurement time.

5.6.1 Calorimeter measurement times range from 20 minutes (13) for smaller, temperature-conditioned, containers up to 24 h for larger containers and items with long thermal-time constants.

5.6.2 Measurement times may be reduced by using equilibrium prediction techniques, by temperature preconditioning of the item to be measured, or operating the calorimeter using the servo-control technique.

6. Interferences

6.1 Interferences for calorimetry are those processes that would add or subtract thermal power from the power of the radionuclides being assayed. Some examples include phase changes, endothermic or exothermic chemical reactions, such as oxidation, radiolysis of liquids, and bacterial action.

6.2 Heat-generating radionuclides that are not included in the P_{eff} determination.

7. Apparatus

7.1 Calorimeters are designed to measure different sizes and quantities of nuclear material. Different types of heat-flow calorimeter systems share the common attributes listed below.

7.1.1 *Measurement Chamber*—Heat flow calorimeters have a cylindrical measurement chamber from which all of the heat flow generated by radioactive decay is directed through temperature sensors.

7.1.1.1 An electrical heater may be built into the walls or the base of the chamber to provide measured amounts of thermal power into the calorimeter well.

7.1.1.2 Insulation or active heaters (or both) are used to shield the chamber from outside temperature variations that would influence the thermal power measurement. Typically, an insulated plug is inserted above the item container inside the calorimeter. For some calorimeter types an insulating plug is installed permanently below the measurement chamber.

7.1.2 *Calorimeter Can*—The item to be measured may be placed in a special can that is designed to be inserted and removed easily from the calorimeter. It will typically have only a small air gap to provide good thermal conductivity between the outer surface of the can and the inner surface of the measurement chamber.

7.1.3 *Temperature Sensors*—Temperature sensors consist of thermistors, thermocouples, temperature sensitive resistance wire, or thermopiles.

7.1.4 *Thermal Sink*—The temperature increases due to heat flows generated by items are measured against a reference temperature of a thermal sink. The thermal sink could be a water bath, air bath, or a solid, usually metal, maintained at a constant temperature.

7.1.5 *Electrical Components*—Sensitive, stable electronic components are required for accurate calorimeter measurements.

7.1.5.1 High precision voltmeters are required to measure the voltage changes generated from the temperature sensors. The resolution of the voltmeters should be better than one part per million of the voltage range.

7.1.5.2 Stable power supplies are necessary to provide constant current to Wheatstone bridge sensors and calorimeter heaters.

7.1.5.3 Precision resistors with certified resistances traceable to a national measurement system may be used with calibrated voltmeters to accurately determine electrical power delivered to heaters in the calorimeter chamber. If radioactive heat standards are used as part of the measurement control program the calorimeter voltmeters need not be calibrated, nor are precision resistors required.

7.1.5.4 For a calorimeter operated in the servo (power replacement) mode digital-to-analog controller units are used to supply power to an internal resistance heater to maintain a constant temperature differential across thermal resistances.

7.1.6 *Heat Standards*—Thermal power standards are required to calibrate the calorimeter and may be used as measurement control standards to check the stability of calorimeter performance (14-17).

7.1.6.1 Radioactive heat standards, typically powered by ^{238}Pu , also may be used to calibrate calorimeters over a range of thermal powers. These standards are calibrated against electrical standards traceable to a national measurement system. The certified power is typically decay corrected to the nearest day using certified decay tables.

7.1.6.2 Removable electrical heaters may be used to calibrate calorimeters. For this type of standard the power generated by the heater must be measured with electrical equipment regularly calibrated against standards or standard methods traceable to a national measurement system. The power supplied to the electrical calibration heater may be varied over the calibration range.

7.1.7 *Wheatstone Bridge*—When temperature sensitive resistance wire is used as the sensor, it is arranged in a Wheatstone bridge configuration shown in Fig. 1.

7.1.8 *Data Acquisition System*—Calorimeter data collection is performed using computer-based data acquisition systems. The system should be able to read signal voltages or resistances at a fixed time frequency and be able to calculate and report a power value from the item using software that detects equilibrium. Graphics and numerical data indicating system power and temperatures may be displayed to aid the operator.

7.1.9 *Adapters*—Low mass cylindrical metal adapters may be fabricated to accept smaller calorimeter containers in the calorimeter well, and thus, provide good thermal contact between the outer container surface and calorimeter inner wall. Heat-conducting metal foil or metal gauze fill material, typically Al or Cu, or metal shot can be used in place of machined metal adapters. Smaller items may be placed in the calorimeter container and the void space inside the container may be filled

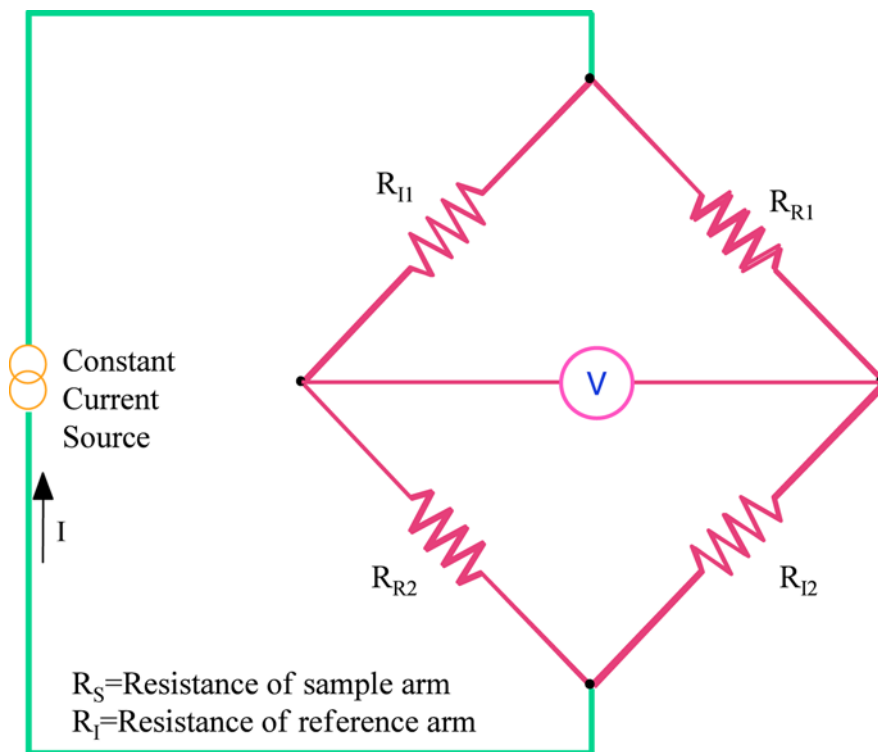


FIG. 1 Calorimeter Wheatstone Bridge Circuit

with metal fill material or shot to provide good thermal contact. Lack of fill material does not preclude measurement of the item.

7.1.10 *Loading Apparatus*—A hoist or assist may be used to load and unload items. Robotic loading systems may be used to handle the items.

8. Heat-Flow Calorimeter Systems

8.1 *Equilibrium*—A heat flow calorimeter consists of an item chamber thermally insulated from a constant temperature environment by a thermal resistance. When an item is placed in the calorimeter the temperature difference across the thermal resistance is disturbed and the difference changes with time until it converges to a constant value and equilibrium is achieved. The magnitude of the shift in the measured voltage (passive mode) or supplied power (servo mode) is used to determine the thermal power of the item in the calorimeter.

8.1.1 The curve describing the approach to equilibrium of the temperature difference is a function of several exponentials with different time constants related to the specific heats and thermal conductivities of the item matrix material, packaging, and the calorimeter.

8.1.1.1 Equilibrium may be detected by visual inspection of the measurement data versus time or through statistical tests performed on a set of the latest data points in the time series.

8.1.1.2 Statistical prediction algorithms may be used earlier during transient temperature conditions to predict equilibrium and reduce measurement time. These typically consist of exponential functions that are used to fit the measurement data. The fitted parameters then are used to predict the final equilibrium power.

8.1.1.3 The temperature of the item to be measured may be adjusted through the use of preconditioning heaters or baths in order to decrease the time required to reach equilibrium.

8.2 Heat-flow calorimeters are operated typically in one of two modes, passive or servo controlled (power-replacement).

8.2.1 *Passive Mode*—In this mode of calorimeter operation a Wheatstone bridge is frequently used as the heat sensor. The only heat generated comes from the item being measured and the current required to excite the bridge inside the thermel. A graph of the calorimeter response to a heat source is shown in Fig. 2. This plot shows that after a period of time the temperature transient caused by the insertion of the item into the calorimeter disappears and the calorimeter and item are in thermal equilibrium.

8.2.1.1 The item wattage, W_i , is calculated by the following:

$$W_i = (BP_s - BP_0)/S \quad (3)$$

where:

S = the calorimeter sensitivity (microvolts/Watt) at the power level, determined by electrical or ^{238}Pu standards,

BP_s = the equilibrium sensor response with the item in the calorimeter, and

BP_0 = the baseline sensor response with no item in the calorimeter.

8.2.2 *Servo Mode (Power Replacement Mode)*—In this mode of operation, a constant amount of thermal power is applied to the item chamber by electrical heaters. The temperature of the calorimeter item chamber is held at a constant temperature difference above the temperature of the thermal sink by means of a servo-controller. The constant power causes

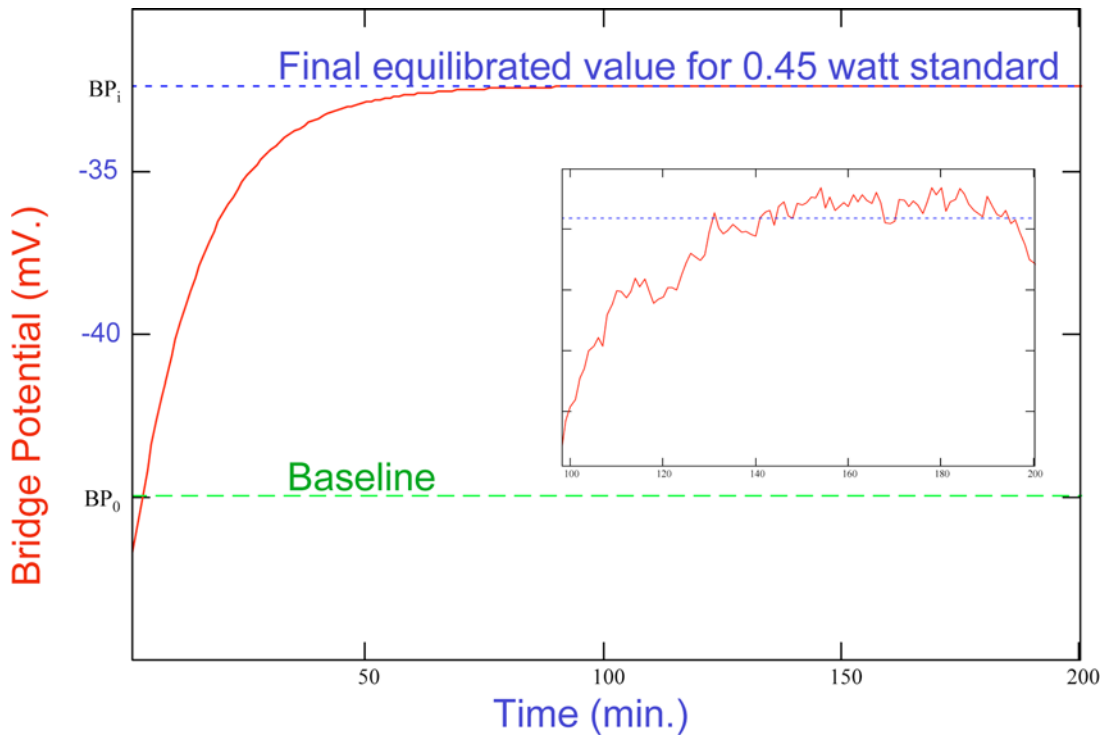


FIG. 2 Approach to Equilibrium for a Calorimeter Operated in the Passive Mode

a constant temperature differential to be maintained across the thermal resistance separating the measurement chamber from a controlled reference temperature. The temperature differential is proportional to the signal, voltage or resistance, and is the temperature difference between a sensor (or sensors) located adjacent to the item being measured and the other(s) located at the reference temperature. A closed-loop controller monitors

the output signal, and if a radioactive heat-generating item is inserted, the external power applied is decreased to precisely maintain the same signal differential. When the unknown item is placed in the calorimeter, the control power drops over time to a lower level. The power of the unknown is the difference between the two control power readings at equilibrium. A graph of the calorimeter response is shown in Fig. 3.

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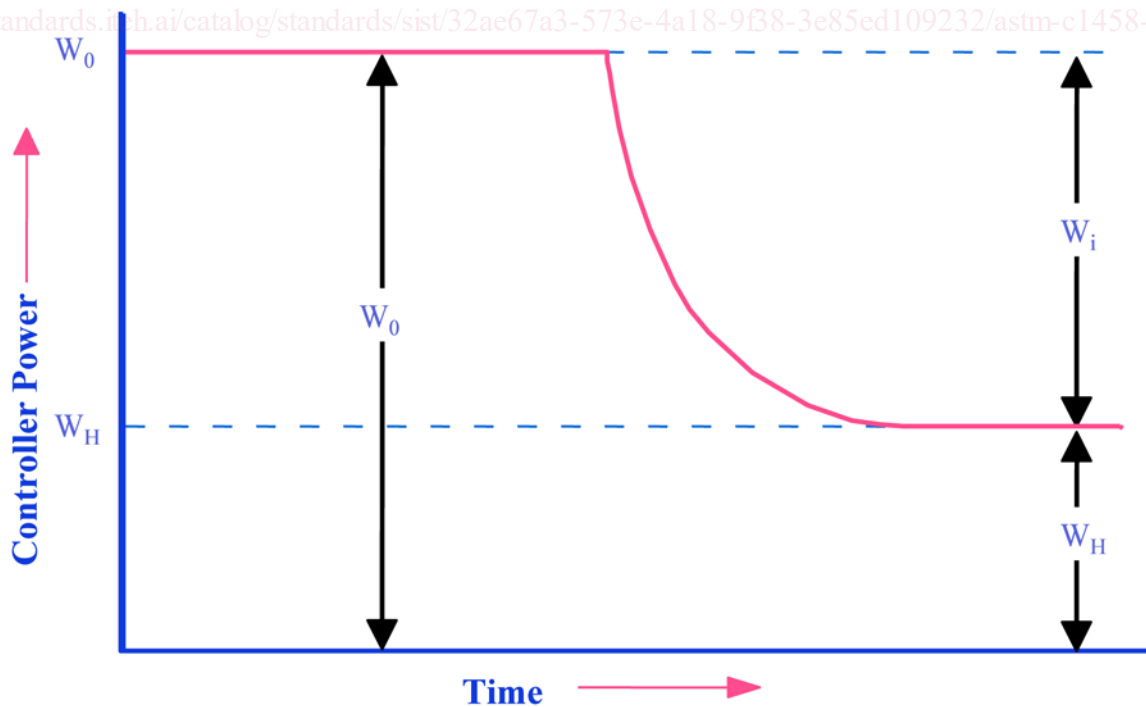


FIG. 3 Approach to Equilibrium for a Calorimeter Operated in the Servo (Power Replacement) Mode

8.2.2.1 The item wattage, W_i , is calculated by the following:

$$W_i = W_0 - W_H \quad (4)$$

where:

W_0 = the basepower with no item in the calorimeter, and

W_H = the power supplied to the calorimeter with the item in the calorimeter.

8.2.2.2 The measurement time for the servo mode of operation is normally shorter than for the passive mode because the calorimeter components are at the equilibrium temperature and the servo-controlled internal heater can supply heat actively to bring the item to equilibrium.

9. Hazards

9.1 Safety Hazards:

9.1.1 It is recommended that a criticality evaluation be carried out if fissile material is to be measured.

9.1.2 Precautions should be taken to minimize electrical shock hazards.

9.1.3 Precautions should be taken to avoid contamination with radioactive materials.

9.1.4 Precautions should be taken to minimize personnel radiation exposure to ionizing radiation.

9.1.5 Pinch-point and lifting hazards may be present during the loading and unloading of heavy items with calorimeters. Mechanical aids, such as a hoist, should be used for movement of heavy items.

9.1.6 A burn hazard can exist for high-power items. Caution should be taken to avoid burns.

9.2 Technical Hazards:

9.2.1 Room temperature variations may affect the stability of the reference temperature and increase measurement uncertainty.

9.2.2 Using a measurement result outside of the range of the calibration is not recommended.

9.2.3 Care should be taken in the insertion or removal of the calorimeter can so that it is not jammed in the calorimeter well.

9.2.4 Noise in the electronics AC supply power generated by machinery may increase the measurement uncertainty.

9.2.5 The base power for servo-operated calorimeters must not be less than the highest power expected from items.

9.2.6 Mechanical stress on the item chamber from the weight of the item may cause a bias in the final result.

9.2.7 The calorimeter may exhibit a small heat distribution error dependent on calorimeter design and item characteristics.

9.2.8 The following conditions could extend measurement time.

9.2.8.1 Large masses of material.

9.2.8.2 Items that make poor thermal contact with their containers.

9.2.8.3 Items that contain a large amount of insulating material or dead air spaces caused by several layers of containment.

9.2.9 Errors can result from incorrect algorithms used for equilibrium detection or prediction. The algorithm used for equilibrium prediction that is suitable for a ^{238}Pu heat standard or electrical standard in a conductive matrix may not be suitable for items with Pu in a matrix with poor thermal conductivity.

9.2.10 Bias in the determination of P_{eff} will lead to a bias in the assay result.

9.2.11 The item introduced into the calorimeter should not generate enough heat such that the temperature inside the calorimeter would exceed safe limits.

9.2.12 For removable electrical heat standards the heater leads to the standard will serve as a heat path for heat to exchange between the measurement chamber and the environment; this may bias the calibration.

9.2.13 Improperly closing the calorimeter (for example, not completely inserting the insulating baffle) may bias the measurement results, degrade precision, or both.

9.2.14 Cables or any other conductor providing a thermal conduction path into and out of the calorimeter. Variability in these paths is a more severe hazard.

10. Calibration Procedure

10.1 The type of calibration procedure depends on whether the calorimeter is operated in the passive or servo mode. In the passive mode calibration consists of determining the calorimeter sensitivity, S , the conversion factor between the differential voltage or resistance output of the sensor system and the thermal power of the item being measured. In the servo mode calibration is setting the sensor output setpoint voltage that corresponds to a specific base power.

10.2 Calibration—Passive Mode:

10.2.1 Select a series of ^{238}Pu heat standards or calibrated electrical standard power settings that span the expected power range of items to be measured. A minimum of three different standard powers must be used.

10.2.2 Initiate a baseline measurement of the bridge potential (voltage) with a calorimeter can filled with conductive material in the calorimeter chamber. There should be no heat source in the calorimeter can. Record the baseline, BP_0 (1), after equilibrium is reached.

10.2.3 Remove the calorimeter can and place the ^{238}Pu or electrical standard in the can. Center the standard in the can.

10.2.3.1 Whether using radioactive or electrical heat standards, the calorimeter can must be removed from the calorimeter between each measurement, baseline, or standard. This removal is necessary even when using electrical standards to simulate as closely as possible real calorimeter operating conditions.

10.2.4 Close the calorimeter can and place it in the calorimeter well. For all measurements, the calorimeter should be properly closed before a measurement is commenced.

10.2.5 Initiate the calorimeter run. Record the bridge potential voltage output (BP_{std}) after equilibrium has been achieved.

10.2.6 Remove the calorimeter can from the calorimeter, then remove the heat standard from the can and place the can back in the calorimeter.

10.2.7 Repeat another baseline run. Record the baseline BP_0 (2) after equilibrium is reached.

10.2.8 Calculate the average baseline, $BP_{0(av)} = [BP_0$ (1) + BP_0 (2)]/2.

10.2.9 Use the known power output of the heat standard, W_{std} , the calorimeter sensor value, BP_{std} , and the calculated average baseline, $BP_{0(av)}$ to calculate the calorimeter sensitivity, S .