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**Sterilization of health care products —  
Radiation —**

**Part 4:  
Guidance on process control**

*Stérilisation des produits de santé — Irradiation —*

*Partie 4: Recommandations sur le contrôle de processus*

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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

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For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 198, *Sterilization of health care products*.

A list of all parts in the ISO 11137 series can be found on the ISO website.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html).

## Introduction

ISO 11137-1 describes the requirements for the development, validation and routine control of a radiation sterilization process, and ISO 11137-3 gives guidance on dosimetric requirements in all stages of this development, validation and control. The purpose of ISO/TS 11137-4 is to provide additional guidance on the establishment and control of the irradiation process, including setting process target doses and verifying that the process is in a state of control.

This document addresses the establishment of methods to set process target doses and verify the process is in a state of control. Dosimetry is used during the validation of a radiation sterilization process to measure doses, and the interpretation of dosimetry results from operational and performance qualification studies is critical in establishing a process that will meet the requirements specified for minimum and maximum dose as outlined in ISO 11137-1, ISO 11137-2 and ISO/TS 13004.

Routine dosimetry is used to monitor that the process is in a state of control and dose specifications have been met. One purpose of this technical specification is to provide guidance on the application of a dose measurement as a tool used for monitoring an irradiation process using statistical techniques.

The guidance given is not normative and is not provided as a checklist for auditors. The guidance provides explanations and methods that are regarded as being suitable means for achieving conformity with the minimum and maximum dose specifications. Methods other than those given in the guidance may be used, if they are effective in achieving conformity with the requirements of ISO 11137-1, ISO 11137-2 and ISO/TS 13004.

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# Sterilization of health care products — Radiation —

## Part 4: Guidance on process control

### 1 Scope

This document provides additional guidance to that given in ISO 11137-3 on meeting the requirements specified in ISO 11137-1, ISO 11137-2 and ISO/TS 13004 for the establishment and control of a radiation sterilization process using gamma, electron beam, and X-irradiation.

### 2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 11137-1:2006, *Sterilization of health care products — Radiation — Part 1: Requirements for development, validation and routine control of a sterilization process for medical devices*

ISO 11137-3:2017, *Sterilization of health care products — Radiation — Part 3: Guidance on dosimetric aspects of development, validation and routine control*

### 3 Terms, definitions and symbols

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 11137-1, ISO 11137-3 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

#### 3.1 General

##### 3.1.1

##### **acceptance range**

range within which the statistic under consideration lies with a specified probability when the process is in a state of control

##### 3.1.2

##### **action level**

value from monitoring that necessitates immediate intervention

[SOURCE: ISO 11139:2018, 3.5]

##### 3.1.3

##### **alert level**

value from monitoring providing early warning of deviation from specified conditions

Note 1 to entry: An alert level value provides early warning of a potential deviation for a process under control. Although further action is not required, increased supervision of the process is recommended.

[SOURCE: ISO 11139:2018, 3.11, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

**3.1.4  
cycle time**

period of time an irradiation container spends in each dwell position in a gamma process, used as a control parameter for dose

Note 1 to entry: Cycle time can also apply to x-ray and could also include the time required to move between dwell positions.

[SOURCE: ISO 11139:2018, 3.73, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

**3.1.5  
influence quantity**

quantity that, in a direct measurement, does not affect the quantity that is actually measured, but affects the relation between the indication and the measurement result

Note 1 to entry: In radiation processing dosimetry, this term includes temperature, relative humidity, time intervals, light, radiation energy, absorbed-dose rate, and other factors that might affect dosimeter response, as well as quantities associated with the measurement instrument.

[SOURCE: VIM 2012, 2.52, modified — Note 1 to entry added from ISO/ASTM 52701:2013.]

**3.1.6  
measurement uncertainty**

parameter, associated with the result of a measurement, that characterizes the dispersion of the values that could reasonably be attributed to the measurand

**3.1.7  
process control**

specific activities to ensure process requirements are achieved

[SOURCE: ISO 11139:2018, 3.209]

**3.1.8  
process load**

volume of material with a specified product loading configuration irradiated as a single entity

Note 1 to entry: The process load consists of one or more irradiation containers.

[SOURCE: ISO/ASTM 52303:2015, 3.1.10]

**3.1.9  
process target dose**

$D_{\text{target}}$   
dose, at a specified monitoring location, which the irradiation process parameters are set to deliver

**3.1.10  
process variability**

measure of factors that result in a random distribution of data around the average that provides information on how well the process can perform when all special cause variation is removed

**3.1.11  
Statistical Process Control  
SPC**

set of techniques for improving the quality of process output by reducing variability through the use of one or more control charts and a corrective action strategy used to bring the process back into a state of statistical control

[SOURCE: ASTM E2587-16]



### 3.1.12 targeting buffer

standard factor or factors used to determine process target doses which has been demonstrated to be more conservative calculated values of  $UF_{lower}$  and  $UF_{upper}$  during historical routine processing

## 3.2 Symbols

Symbol	Meaning
$D_{min}$	direct measurement of minimum dose in a given irradiation container
$D_{max}$	direct measurement of maximum dose in a given irradiation container
$D_{mon}$	direct measurement of dose at the routine monitoring position
$D_{ster}$	Sterilization dose determined in accordance with ISO 11137-1:2006, 8.2
$D_{max,acc}$	maximum acceptable dose determined in accordance with ISO 11137-1:2006, 8.1
$D_{min}^{limit} = D_{ster} * UF_{lower}$	calculated dose at the minimum dose position used for establishing process parameters that ensures at a specified level of confidence that $D_{ster}$ is met or exceeded during routine processing
$D_{max}^{limit} = D_{max,acc} * UF_{upper}$	calculated dose at the maximum dose position used for establishing process parameters that ensures at a specified level of confidence that $D_{max,acc}$ is not exceeded during routine processing
$UF_{lower} = 1/(1 - k * \sigma_{process}^{min}/100)$	process factor used to calculate $D_{target}^{lower}$ and $D_{min}^{limit}$ (where $\sigma_{process}^{min}$ is expressed as a percentage)
$UF_{upper} = 1/(1 + k * \sigma_{process}^{max}/100)$	process factor used to calculate $D_{target}^{upper}$ and $D_{max}^{limit}$ (where $\sigma_{process}^{max}$ is expressed as a percentage)
$R_{min/mon} = D_{min} / D_{mon}$	ratio of minimum to monitor dose determined by dose mapping
$R_{max/mon} = D_{max} / D_{mon}$	ratio of maximum to monitor dose determined by dose mapping
$D_{mon}^{ster} = D_{ster}/R_{min/mon}$	dose at the monitoring position that correlates to the sterilization dose specification
$D_{mon}^{max,acc} = D_{max,acc}/R_{max/mon}$	dose at the monitoring position that correlates to maximum acceptable dose specification
$D_{target}^{lower} = D_{min}^{limit} / R_{min/mon}$	calculated dose at the routine monitoring position used for establishing process parameters that ensures at a specified level of confidence that $D_{ster}$ is met or exceeded during routine processing
$D_{target}^{upper} = D_{max}^{limit} / R_{max/mon}$	calculated dose at the routine monitoring position used for establishing process parameters that ensures at a specified level of confidence that $D_{max,acc}$ is not exceeded during routine processing
$\sigma_{cal}$	component of uncertainty related to the calibration of the dosimetry system including the uncertainty reported by the calibration laboratory, uncertainty in the mathematical fit of the calibration function, and uncertainties due to influence quantities, but excluding components due to the reproducibility of the dosimeter measurement (see $\sigma_{rep}$ )
$\sigma_{mach}$	component of variability related to the radiation source and conveyor system
$\sigma_{map}$	component of variability measured during a dose mapping exercise
$\sigma_{process}$	standard deviation associated with the irradiation process used for setting process target doses  $\sigma_{process}^{max}$ — The standard deviation associated with the process maximum dose  $\sigma_{process}^{min}$ — The standard deviation associated with the process minimum dose
$\sigma_{rep}$	component of variability associated with the reproducibility of the dosimeter measurement

## 4 Principles applied in validating and controlling an irradiation process

### 4.1 General

Many dose measurements are made in the validation of an irradiation process as described in ISO 11137-1 and ISO 11137-3. These measurements are used to establish a relationship between processing parameters, monitoring dose, and the range of doses to a product, and to characterize the variability associated with the process itself. These measurements are made with calibrated dosimetry systems traceable to internationally recognized standards with a known level of uncertainty.

It is a requirement to monitor that the validated radiation sterilization process is in a state of control. ISO 11137-1:2006, 10.6 requires the use of dosimeters in routine monitoring and control and provides guidance on the additional review of monitoring of process parameters when determining that product has been processed according to specification.

The combination of dose measurements, monitoring of the associated processing parameters used to achieve those doses, and procedural controls are critical in establishing a process and determining whether or not it is in a state of control.

### 4.2 Use of the dose measurement at the monitoring location

#### 4.2.1 General

Analysis of measurements from routine monitoring dosimeters is used to determine whether or not process specifications have been met. There are two methods of analysis that can be considered:

- 1) interpretation of dose measurements as a direct or indirect measure of dose delivered to product; and
- 2) interpretation of dose measurements to monitor that a process is in a state of control.

In all cases, a validated process provides an expectation of the monitored dose based on derived process target doses and associated processing parameters. The interpretation of the monitoring dose should be documented in the process specification.

The ability to detect changes in the process is limited by the intrinsic variability of dose at the routine monitoring location i.e. the variability measured when the process is in control. If  $\sigma_{\text{rep}}$  of the monitoring dosimetry system is large or dosimeter placement imprecise, this variability might be significantly higher than the true variability of the process. In such circumstances, significant changes in the process could go undetected, because they are masked by the high intrinsic variability at the monitoring location. Steps should be taken to minimise variability arising from the monitoring dosimetry system and dosimeter placement. See [6.5.4](#) and [Annex A](#), Example 3.

#### 4.2.2 $D_{\text{mon}}$ as an indirect measurement of dose to product

In an indirect measurement, the maximum and minimum doses to product are calculated from the monitoring dose measurement. The calculated doses have uncertainties associated with the dose at the monitoring location as well as the uncertainty associated with the dose at maximum or minimum locations and associated ratios, plus any other applicable components of uncertainty. A combination of these components can be used to determine the maximum and minimum targets for the routine monitoring dose. See [6.5.2](#), [6.5.3](#) and [Annex A](#), Examples 1, 2 and 5.

#### 4.2.3 $D_{\text{mon}}$ as a process monitor

It is acceptable to monitor a process where the maximum or minimum dose to product are not measured routinely (directly or indirectly), but rather where a range of monitoring doses are established that indicate that the process meets specification. In this situation, the variability associated with the measurement of minimum and maximum doses from PQ, combined with other relevant components of uncertainty can be used in determining maximum and minimum targets for the routine monitoring

dose. The variability of dose at the monitoring location is then used to determine the acceptable range of doses that indicate that the process is in a state of control and meets process specifications. Because the routine monitoring dosimeter is not used to measure minimum or maximum dose to product, the uncertainty associated with the relationship between the monitored dose and the maximum and minimum doses within a process load has no relevance in determining process target doses and process conformance.

#### 4.2.4 $D_{\min}$ or $D_{\max}$ as a direct measurement of dose to product

When routine dose is measured at the minimum and/or maximum dose location in the process load, then the dosimeter measurement provides a direct measurement of dose to product. It can also be used as an indicator that the process is in control. In such case, the benefits of both 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 might be achieved. See Annex A, Example 2.

There are circumstances where a limited amount of data is available to predict the outcome of a process. An example of this is an off-carrier process which is based on a single dose map (see 6.4.1). In these cases, enough dosimeters need to be placed on products to provide a direct measurement of minimum and maximum dose.

### 4.3 Monitoring of critical process parameters

An important consideration in process control is the ability to detect if a processing parameter is changing in a manner that can affect the output of the process. The ability to monitor and/or control process parameters critical to the process output is, therefore, an important factor in ensuring the state of control of the irradiation process.

There are three main classes of processing parameters to be considered: parameters that relate to the radiation field, parameters that relate to the exposure time of the product to the radiation field, and parameters that relate to product influence. Table 1 provides an overview of the effect of critical process parameters and how they could be monitored.

**Table 1 — Process parameters critical to radiation sterilization**

Parameter	Effect	Monitoring	Gamma	Elec- tron	X-ray
Radiation field					
Radioisotope decay	Over time the radiation intensity is reduced	Source decay occurs based on the half-life of the isotope; date of irradiation is recorded	✓		
Electron energy	Energy affects the penetration depth of electrons, scan width, and also X-ray conversion efficiency	Irradiator parameters associated with input power and beam current are monitored; indirect measurements using beam penetration profiles are made periodically as part of a quality control check		✓	✓
Beam current	A change in beam current will lead to a change in the radiation intensity and possibly of the beam energy	Can be monitored indirectly during operation; indirect monitors can be calibrated		✓	✓
Beam scan width	For scanned system, width will affect the size of the radiation field and a reduction in width will increase the radiation intensity	Monitored indirectly by feedback of scanning system, or directly through interception of the beam, or through periodic dosimetric tests		✓	✓

**Table 1** (continued)

Parameter	Effect	Monitoring	Gamma	Elec-tron	X-ray
Exposure time					
Cycle time	Dose is directly proportional to cycle time. An increase in cycle time equals an increase in dose.	Cycle time is set by operator, recorded as part of the process and associated timers are calibrated	✓		✓
Conveyor speed	Dose is inversely proportional to speed of product travelling through an irradiation field	Feedback from conveyor speed monitors; direct measurements made during periodic tests	✓	✓	✓
Product influence					
Loading pattern	Changes to loading pattern including product orientation inside a carton and/or carton loading into an irradiation container can affect dose delivery	Defined product loading patterns and procedures to ensure products are loaded according to specification	✓	✓	✓
Density and loading pattern of surrounding materials	Materials surrounding product during irradiation can affect dose delivered through attenuation or scattering of radiation	Appropriate scheduling of process loads; defined criteria resulting from OQ for materials surrounding product during irradiation are documented	✓	✓	✓

## 5 Establishing process target doses

### 5.1 Inputs and steps in establishing a process target dose

#### 5.1.1 General

The irradiation process is monitored using processing parameters and dosimeter measurements. Three process target doses at the routine monitoring position can be defined;  $D_{\text{target}}^{\text{lower}}$ ,  $D_{\text{target}}^{\text{upper}}$  and  $D_{\text{target}}$  corresponding, respectively, to the lower and upper set limits for the process target dose and the actual process target dose chosen for processing under given conditions.

There are a number of factors used in the determination of a range of process target doses.

The inputs and steps in establishing a process target dose are listed in the following sections and depicted in [Figure 1](#).

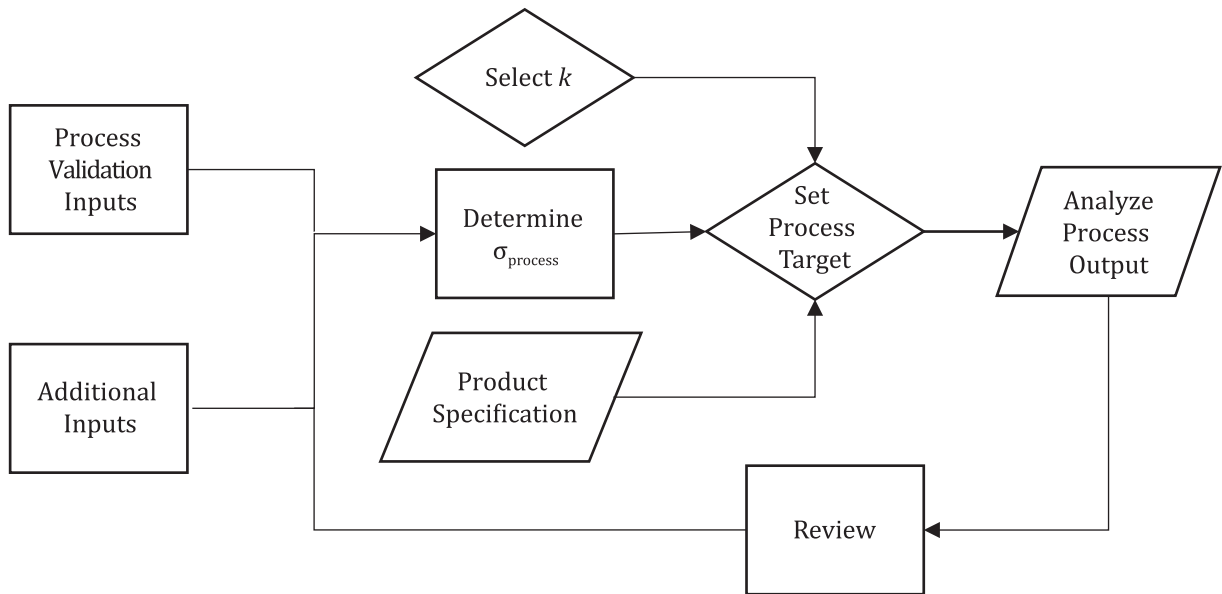


Figure 1 — Inputs and steps in establishing a process target dose

### 5.1.2 Process validation inputs (installation, operational and performance qualification)

The results of process validation that can be used to provide input into establishing process target doses include the following:

- the magnitude of minimum dose to product  $D_{\min}$  for a given loading configuration and set of operating parameters and its relationship to the routine monitoring dose  $D_{\text{mon}}$ ;
- the magnitude of maximum dose to product  $D_{\max}$  for a given loading configuration and set of operating parameters and its relationship to the routine monitoring dose  $D_{\text{mon}}$ ;
- the variability associated with  $D_{\min}$ ,  $D_{\max}$  and  $D_{\text{mon}}$ , and the uncertainty associated with their ratios (if used);

and if applicable the effects of

- process interruptions;
- transitions between different product;
- partially filled irradiation containers.

The application of process validation data in establishing process target doses is discussed further in 5.2.

### 5.1.3 Additional inputs

Additional inputs may include components that contribute to the uncertainty of the process which are not captured during process validation. These might include, but are not limited to  $\sigma_{\text{cal}}$  and/or targeting buffers defined by the operator as applicable.

### 5.1.4 Determine $\sigma_{\text{process}}$

The standard deviation to be used in setting process target doses is designated  $\sigma_{\text{process}}$  and can be derived by quantifying individual components of measurement uncertainty and process variability or by quantifying a combination of components obtained during qualification exercises and by the use of historical data for a given irradiator.