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Standard Practices for Electrical Methods for Locating Leaks in Geomembranes Covered with Water or Earth Materials¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D 7007; 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 standard practice describes~~ 1.1 These practices describe standard procedures for using electrical methods to locate leaks in geomembranes covered with water or earth materials containing moisture.

~~1.2 This standard practice is~~ 1.2 These practices are intended to ensure that leak location surveys are performed with demonstrated leak detection capability. To allow further innovations, and because various leak location practitioners use a wide variety of procedures and equipment to perform these surveys, performance-based operations are used that specify the minimum leak detection performance for the equipment and procedures.

~~1.3 This standard practice requires~~ 1.3 These practices require the leak location equipment, procedures, and survey parameters used are demonstrated to result in an established minimum leak detection sensitivity. The survey shall then be conducted using the demonstrated equipment, procedures, and survey parameters.

1.4 Separate procedures are given for leak location surveys for geomembranes covered with water and for geomembranes covered with earth materials. Separate procedures are given for leak detection sensitivity tests using actual and artificial leaks.

1.5 Leak location surveys can be used on geomembranes installed in basins, ponds, tanks, ore and waste pads, landfill cells, landfill caps, and other containment facilities. The procedures are applicable for geomembranes made of materials such as polyethylene, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride, chlorosulfonated polyethylene, bituminous material, and other electrically-insulating materials.

~~1.6~~

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

1.7 **Warning**—The electrical methods used for geomembrane leak location could use high voltages, resulting in the potential for electrical shock or electrocution. This hazard might be increased because operations might be conducted in or near water. In particular, a high voltage could exist between the water or earth material and earth ground, or any grounded conductor. These procedures are potentially VERY DANGEROUS, and can result in personal injury or death. The electrical methods used for geomembrane leak location should be attempted only by qualified and experienced personnel. Appropriate safety measures must be taken to protect the leak location operators as well as other people at the site.

~~1.7~~

1.8 *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

D4439

D 4439 [Terminology for Geosynthetics](#)

D6747

D 6747 [Guide for Selection of Techniques for Electrical Detection of Potential Leak Paths in Geomembranes](#)

3. Terminology

~~3.1~~

3.1 For general definitions related to geosynthetics, see Terminology D 4439.

¹ These practices are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D35 on Geosynthetics and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D35.10 on Geomembranes. Current edition approved Dec. 1, 2003. Published January 2004.

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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.

3.2 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.1.1

3.2.1 artificial leak, *n*—an electrical simulation of a leak in a geomembrane.

3.1.2

3.2.2 current source electrode, *n*—the electrode that is placed in the water or earth material above the geomembrane.

3.1.3

3.2.3 dipole measurement, *n*—an electrical measurement made on or in a partially conductive material using two closely-spaced electrodes.

3.1.4

3.2.4 earth material, *n*—sand, gravel, clay, silt, combinations of these materials, and similar materials with at least minimal moisture for electrical current conduction.

3.1.5

3.2.5 leak, *n*—any unintended opening, perforation, slit, tear, puncture, crack, hole, cut, or similar breaches through an installed geomembrane. Significant amounts of liquids or solids might or might not flow through a leak. Scratches, gouges, dents, or other aberrations that do not completely penetrate the geomembrane are not considered to be leaks.

3.1.6 3.2.6 leak detection sensitivity, *n*—the smallest size leak that the leak location equipment and survey methodology are capable of detecting under a given set of conditions. The leak detection sensitivity specification is usually stated as a diameter of the smallest leak that can be reliably detected.

3.1.7 3.2.7 pole measurement, *n*—an electrical measurement made on or in a partially conductive material using one measurement electrode and a remote reference electrode.

3.2 Definitions:

3.2.1

3.2.7 noise, *n*—the unwanted part of a measured signal contributed by phenomena other than the desired signal.

3.2.2

3.2.8 pole measurement, *n*—an electrical measurement made on or in a partially conductive material using one measurement electrode and a remote reference electrode.

3.2.9 potential, *n*—electrical voltage measured relative to a reference point.

4. Summary of the Leak Location Methods

4.1 The principle of the electrical leak location method is to place a voltage across a geomembrane and then locate the points where electrical current flows through discontinuities in the geomembrane.

4.1 The principle of the electrical leak location method is to place a voltage across a geomembrane and then locate the points of anomalous potential distribution where electrical current flows through leaks in the geomembrane. Additional information can be found in Guide D6747.

4.2 General Principles:

4.2.1 Figs. 1 and 2 show diagrams of the electrical leak location method for a geomembrane covered with water and for a geomembrane covered with earth materials respectively. One output of an electrical excitation power supply is connected to a current source electrode placed in the material covering the geomembrane. The other output of the power supply is connected to an electrode in contact with electrically conductive material under the geomembrane.

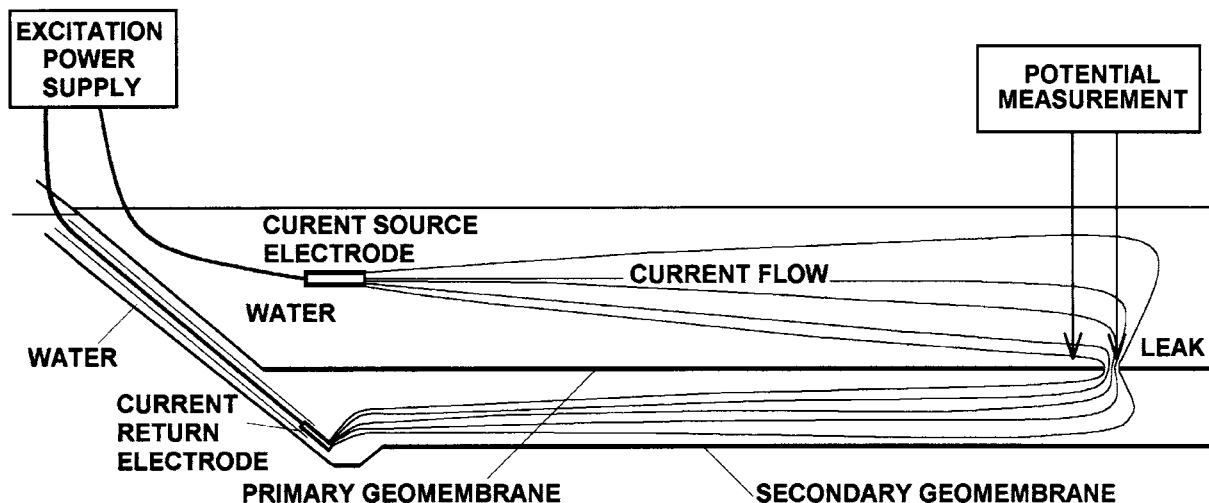


FIG. 1 Diagram of the Electrical Leak Location Method for Surveys with Water Covering the Geomembrane

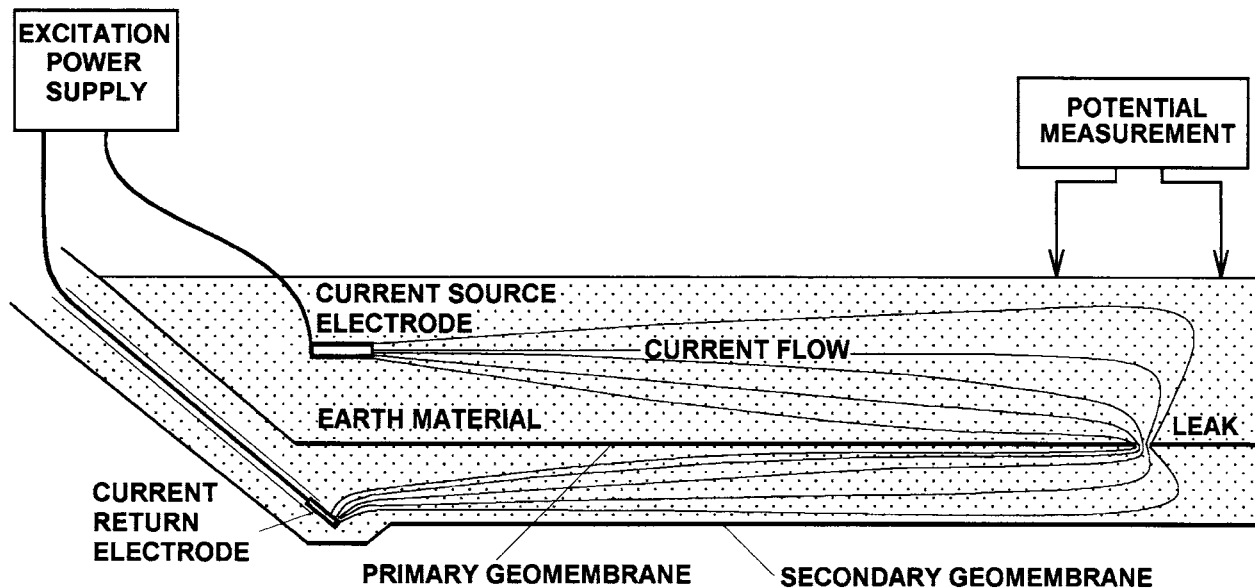


FIG. 2 Diagram of the Electrical Leak Location Method for Surveys with Earth Material Covering the Geomembrane

4.2.2 When there are leaks, electrical current flows through the leaks, which produces high current density and a localized abnormality anomaly in the potential distribution in the material above the geomembrane. Electrical measurements are made to locate those areas of abnormal anomalous signal at the leaks.

4.2.3 Measurements are made using a dipole or pole measurement configuration. Various types of data acquisition are used, including audio indications of the signal level, manual measurements with manual recording of data, and automated digital data acquisition.

4.2.4 Direct current and alternating current excitation power supplies and potential measurement systems have been used for leak location surveys.

4.3 Leak Location Surveys of Geomembranes Covered with Water:

4.3.1 Leak location surveys for geomembranes covered with water can be conducted with water on the geomembrane or with water covering a layer of earth materials on the geomembrane.

4.3.2 For leak location surveys with water on the geomembrane, usually a dipole probe is systematically scanned through the water covering the geomembrane to locate the points of abnormal anomalous potential distribution. The dipole spacing is typically 0.2 to 1 metres.

4.3.3 Various types of probes can be used to perform the surveys. Some are for when the operator wades in the water; some are for towing the probe back and forth across the geomembrane; and some are for raising and lowering along vertical or sloping walls.

4.3.4 The probe is typically connected to an electronic detector assembly that converts the electrical signal from the probe to an audible signal that increases in pitch and amplitude as the leak signal increases.

4.3.5 When a leak signal is detected, the point with the maximum signal is then determined. This point of maximum signal corresponds to the location of the leak. The location of the leak is then marked or measured relative to fixed points.

4.3.6 The leak detection sensitivity depends on the conductivity of the materials within, above, and below the leak, the electrical homogeneity of the material above the leak, the output level of the excitation power supply, the design of the measurement probe, the sensitivity of the detector electronics, the distance away from the leak, and the survey procedures. Leaks as small as 1 mm in diameter have been routinely found, including tortuous leaks through welds in the geomembrane. Leaks larger than 25 mm in diameter can usually be detected from several metres away.

4.3.7 The survey rate depends primarily on the spacing between scans and the depth of the water. A close spacing between scans is needed to detect the smallest leaks.

4.4 Leak Location Surveys of Geomembranes Covered with Earth Materials:

4.4.1 For leak location surveys with earth materials covering the geomembrane, point-by-point measurements are made on the earth material using either dipole measurements or pole measurements. Dipole measurements are typically made with a spacing of 0.5 to 5 metres. Measurements are typically made along parallel survey lines or on a grid pattern.

4.4.2 The survey procedures are conducted in a systematic data collection mode. The measurements and positions are recorded manually or using a digital data acquisition system.

4.4.3 The data is typically downloaded or manually entered into a computer and plotted. Sometimes data is taken along survey lines and plotted in raster. Sometimes data is taken in a grid pattern and plotted in two-dimensional contour, shade of gray, or color contour plots, or in three-dimensional representations of the contours. The data plots are examined for characteristic leak signals.

4.4.4 The approximate location of the leak signal is determined from the data plots and additional measurements are made on the earth material in the vicinity of the detected leak signal to more accurately determine the position of the leak.

4.4.5 The leak detection sensitivity depends on the conductivity of the materials within, above, and below the leak, the electrical homogeneity of the material above the leak, the design of the measurement electrodes, the output level of the excitation power supply, the sensitivity of the detector electronics, the distance away from the leak, the survey procedures, and data interpretation methods and ~~skill~~. ~~Leak~~ expertise. Usually leaks as small as 5 mm in diameter can be located under 600 mm of earth material. Leaks larger than 25 mm in diameter can usually be detected from several metres away.

4.4.6 The survey rate depends primarily on the spacing between the measurement points, the type of data acquisition, and whether data interpretation is accomplished in the field. A close spacing between measurement points is needed to adequately replicate the leak signals and to detect smaller leaks.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 Geomembranes are used as impermeable barriers to prevent liquids from leaking from landfills, ponds, and other containments. The liquids may contain contaminants that if released can cause damage to the environment. Leaking liquids can erode the subgrade, causing further damage. Leakage can result in product loss or otherwise prevent the installation from performing its intended containment purpose. For these reasons, it is desirable that the geomembrane have as little leakage as practical.

5.2 Geomembrane leaks can be caused by poor quality of the subgrade, poor quality of the material placed on the geomembrane, accidents, poor workmanship, and carelessness.

5.3 The most significant causes of leaks in geomembranes that are covered with only water are related to construction activities including pumps and equipment placed on the geomembrane, accidental punctures, and punctures caused by traffic over rocks or debris on the geomembrane or in the subgrade.

5.4 The most significant cause of leaks in geomembranes covered with earth materials is construction damage caused by machinery that occurs while placing the earth material on the geomembrane. Such damage also can breach additional layers of the lining system such as geosynthetic clay liners.

5.5 Electrical leak location methods are an effective final quality assurance measure to locate previously undetected or missed leaks.

6. General Leak Location Survey Procedures

6.1 The following measures shall be taken to optimize the leak location survey:

6.1.1 Conductive paths such as metal pipe penetrations, pump grounds, and batten strips on concrete should be isolated or insulated from the water or earth material on the geomembrane whenever practical. These conductive paths conduct electricity and mask nearby leaks from detection.

6.1.2 In applications where a single geomembrane is covered with earth materials that overlap the edges of the geomembrane, if practical, measures should be taken to isolate the edges. If earth materials overlap the edges of the survey area to earth ground, electrical current will flow from the earth material to earth ground, causing a large signal that will mask small leak signals near the edges of the survey area. Isolation can be accomplished by either: performing the leak location survey before the edges of the geomembrane are covered; removing the earth materials from a narrow path around the perimeter of the geomembrane; or allowing the edge of the geomembrane to protrude above the earth materials.

6.1.3 ~~There shall be a conductive material below the geomembrane being tested to conduct electrical current through the leaks. The detection of a leak depends on the amount of electrical current flowing through it. The current must flow through the subgrade to complete an electrical circuit. Therefore, the conductive material below the geomembrane must have adequate conductivity. Most earth materials and geosynthetic clay liners will have sufficient conductivity for surveys with water on the geomembrane. This is because water leaking through the leaks will increase the conductivity of the material under the geomembrane. For surveys with earth material on the geomembrane, most earth materials will have sufficient conductivity. Under proper conditions and preparations, geosynthetic clay liners (GCLs) are also adequate for surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane. However, for surveys with earth material on the geomembrane, if the earth materials or GCL below the geomembrane is desiccated, the conductivity may be insufficient to detect leaks.~~

6.1.4 ~~For lining systems comprised of two geomembranes with only a geonet or only a geocomposite between them, the volume between the geomembranes shall be filled with water to provide the conductive material. The water level in the area between the geomembranes should be limited so that it exerts a pressure less than the pressure exerted by the water and any earth materials on the primary geomembrane. When the head pressure of the water under the geomembrane exceeds the downward pressure exerted by the weight of the water and any earth materials on the geomembrane, the primary geomembrane will begin to float. For surveys with only water on the geomembrane, the survey area will be limited to the area of the geomembrane that is covered with water. For surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane, the survey area can be calculated from the relative density of the earth materials, the thickness of the earth materials and the slope of the geomembrane. Additional area can be surveyed by placing water on the earth material on the primary geomembrane.~~

6.1.5 ~~For surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane, the earth materials shall have adequate moisture to provide a continuous path for electrical current to flow through the leak. Earth materials usually have sufficient moisture at depth, but~~

sometimes the surface of the earth materials becomes too dry. This dry material shall be scraped away at the measurement points, or the surface shall be wet with water. The earth materials do not have to be saturated with water. The amount of moisture required depends on the earth material, the equipment and procedures. Successful leak location surveys have been conducted on earth materials containing as little as 0.5 percent moisture by weight.

6.1.3 There must be a conductive material directly below the electrically-insulative geomembrane being tested. Typically leak location surveys on a properly-prepared subgrade will have sufficient conductivity. Under proper conditions and preparations, geosynthetic clay liners (GCLs) can be adequate as conductive material. There are some conductive geotextiles or other conductive materials with successful field experience which can be installed beneath the geomembrane to facilitate electrical leak location survey (i.e. on dry subgrades, or as part of a planar drainage geocomposite).

6.1.4 For lining systems where an electrically-insulative geomembrane is overlain by a drainage geonet geocomposite, if the geocomposite is not saturated or is not manufactured to be conductive, only leaks that penetrate both geosynthetics can be detected; as a dry drainage geonet geocomposite is electrically-insulative.

6.1.5 For lining systems comprised of two geomembranes with only a geonet or only a geocomposite between them, the volume between the geomembranes shall be filled with water to provide the conductive material. The water level in the area between the geomembranes should be limited so that it exerts a pressure less than the pressure exerted by the water and any earth materials on the primary geomembrane. When the head pressure of the water under the geomembrane exceeds the downward pressure exerted by the weight of the water and any earth materials on the geomembrane, the primary geomembrane will begin to float. For surveys with only water on the geomembrane, the survey area will be limited to the area of the geomembrane that is covered with water. For surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane, the survey area can be calculated from the relative density of the earth materials, the thickness of the earth materials and the slope of the geomembrane. Additional area can be surveyed by placing water on the earth material on the primary geomembrane.

6.1.6 For surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane, the earth materials shall have adequate moisture to provide a continuous path for electrical current to flow through the leak. Earth materials usually have sufficient moisture at depth, but sometimes the surface of the earth materials becomes too dry. This dry material shall be scraped away at the measurement points, or the surface shall be wet with water. The earth materials do not have to be saturated with water. The amount of moisture required depends on the earth material, the equipment and procedures.

7. Leak Location Survey Procedures for Surveys with Water Covering the Geomembrane

7.1 The leak location survey shall be performed by scanning the leak location probe along the submerged geomembrane. The maximum distance between adjacent scans shall be determined by a leak detection sensitivity test using an artificial or actual leak. The advantages and disadvantages of using the artificial or actual leak are listed in Table 1. A leak detection sensitivity test shall be conducted on each geomembrane being tested for each set of equipment used before the set is used on that geomembrane. Periodic leak detection sensitivity tests are also specified tests are specified in 7.8.

7.2 *Artificial Leak Procedures*—Annex A1 contains the procedures for using an artificial leak to conduct a leak detection sensitivity test and determine the detection distance for surveys with water on the geomembrane.

7.3 *Actual Leak Procedures*—Annex A2 contains the procedures for using an actual leak to conduct a leak detection sensitivity test and determine the detection distance for surveys with water on the geomembrane.

7.4 *Leak Location Survey*—The leak location survey shall be conducted using procedures whereby the leak location probe passes within the detection distance of all locations on the geomembrane being surveyed for leaks. Because the probe detects leaks within the detection distance on both sides of the probe, the distance between leak detection sweeps can be no more than twice the detection distance. In addition to these procedures, any seams that can be visually located, or located by feel as the probe is scanned on the geomembrane, shall be surveyed for leaks by passing the probe directly along the seam or seam flap.

7.5 The leak location survey shall be conducted using procedures whereby the leak location probe is maintained no farther from the current source electrode than that used during the leak detection sensitivity test.

TABLE 1 Comparison of Artificial Leaks versus Actual Leaks for Leak Detection Sensitivity Test with Water on the Geomembrane

Factor	Actual Leak	Artificial Leak
Repairs	Geomembrane must be repaired after test	No geomembrane repair
Mobility	Moving location requires making another hole in the geomembrane and subsequently repaired	Can be easily moved without needing geomembrane repair
Test adequacy of the conductivity of the material under the geomembrane	Yes, could be important for double geomembranes	No, but not critical for single geomembranes because water leaking through any leaks to the material under the geomembrane will provide sufficient conductivity
Signal measurement accuracy during leak detection sensitivity test	Less accurate because increase in signal due to leak must be determined by arbitrarily sweeping the probe near the leak	Accurate because measurements are made while switching the artificial leak on and off
Convenience	Must drill hole, sometimes under water, position is difficult to determine	Artificial leak is just placed in the water, can usually see the position

7.5 The leak detection sensitivity test shall be conducted at the farthest distance where the leak location survey will be performed from where the current source electrode is located.

7.6 The percent of full scale criteria used to define the system leak detection sensitivity as required in 7.3 and 7.4 and described in Annex A1 and Annex A2 shall not to be used as the leak detection criteria. Any definite, repeatable leak signal indication shall be considered to be a leak.

7.7 The locations of all leaks found shall be marked or measured relative to fixed points.

7.8 *Periodic Leak Detection Sensitivity Test*—The leak detection sensitivity test using the artificial or actual leak shall be conducted for each set of equipment, as a minimum, at the beginning and end of each day of survey. For this test, the current source electrode shall be no closer to the artificial or actual leak than the maximum distance used during the survey. The periodic leak detection sensitivity tests shall produce a leak detection distance larger than the leak detection distance used for the leak location survey. If any leak detection distance is smaller, then the area surveyed with that set of equipment in the period since the previous leak detection sensitivity test shall be repeated.

8. Leak Location Survey Procedures for Surveys with Earth Material Covering the Geomembrane

8.1 The leak location survey measurements shall be made on survey lines or on a survey grid. The maximum distance between adjacent survey lines or grid points shall be determined by a leak detection sensitivity test using an artificial or actual leak. The advantages and disadvantages of using the artificial leak and actual leak are listed in Table 2. A leak detection sensitivity test shall be conducted on each geomembrane being tested for each set of equipment used before the set is used on that geomembrane. Periodic leak detection sensitivity tests are also specified in 8.12

8.2 *Artificial Leak Procedures*—Annex A3 contains the procedures for using an artificial leak to conduct a leak detection sensitivity test and determine the detection distance for surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane.

8.3 *Actual Leak Procedures*—Annex A4 contains the procedures for using an actual leak to conduct a leak detection sensitivity test and determine the detection distance for surveys with earth materials on the geomembrane.

8.4 *Leak Location Survey*—The results of the leak detection sensitivity test shall determine the maximum measurement spacings for the leak location survey. The leak location data shall be taken on survey lines or on a grid spaced no farther apart than twice the leak detection distance determined in the leak detection sensitivity test.

8.5 For dipole measurements, the measurement electrode spacing shall be no more than that used for the leak detection sensitivity test.

8.6 The spacing between measurements along the survey line or longitudinally along the grid shall be no more than that used during the leak detection sensitivity test.

~~8.7 The leak location survey shall be conducted using procedures whereby the leak location measurements are no farther from the current source electrode than that used during the leak detection sensitivity test.~~

8.7 The leak detection sensitivity test shall be conducted at the farthest distance where the leak location survey will be performed from where the current source electrode is located.

8.8 **Warning**—Because of the high voltage that could be involved, and the shock or electrocution hazard, do not come in electrical contact with any leak unless the excitation power supply is turned off.

~~8.9 Data shall be recorded, plotted and analyzed for leak signals. The positions of these leak signals shall be located and the leaks excaevated. The leaks shall be repaired or electrically isolated from the earth material on the geomembrane. The leak location survey shall be repeated on the two closest survey lines for a distance extending five metres before and beyond the leak. If another leak signal is detected, this process shall be repeated until no additional leaks are detected.~~

TABLE 2 Comparison of Artificial Leaks versus Actual Leaks for Leak Detection Sensitivity Test with Earth Material on the Geomembrane

Factor	Actual Leak	Artificial Leak
Repairs	Geomembrane must be repaired after test. If a geotextile cushion is on the geomembrane, it also must be removed and repaired.	No geomembrane or geotextile cushion repair.
Mobility	Moving location requires another actual leak to be made and repaired.	Can be easily moved without needing geomembrane repair
Test adequacy of the conductivity of the material under the geomembrane	Yes	No
Signal measurement accuracy during leak detection sensitivity test	Less accurate because current from excitation power supply flowing through inhomogeneities produce noise, but noise test as detailed in Annex A4 must be conducted with the excitation power supply off. Likewise, any noise in the excitation power supply is not taken into consideration.	More accurate because current to the artificial leak can be switched off, allowing noise test detailed in Annex A3 to be conducted with excitation power supply on.
Convenience	Must drill hole and take measures to prevent damage to secondary geomembrane.	No drilling of hole or possible damage to secondary geomembrane.