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Standard Practice for Measuring Plasma Arc Gas Enthalpy by Energy Balance[1]

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers the measurement of total gas enthalpy of an electric-arc-heated gas stream by means of an overall system energy balance. This is sometimes referred to as a bulk enthalpy and represents an average energy content of the test stream which may differ from local values in the test stream.

1.2 *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. Summary of Test Method

2.1 A measure of the total or stagnation gas enthalpy of plasma-arc heated gases (nonreacting) is based upon the following measurements:

2.1.1 Energy input to the plasma arc,

2.1.2 Energy losses to the plasma arc hardware and cooling water, and

2.1.3 Gas mass flow.

2.2 The gas enthalpy is determined numerically by dividing the gas mass flow into the net power input to the plasma arc (power to plasma arc minus the energy losses).

2.3 The technique for performing the overall energy balance is illustrated schematically in Fig. 1. The control volume for the energy balance can be represented by the entire envelope of this drawing. Gas enters at an initial temperature, or enthalpy, and emerges at a higher enthalpy. Water or other coolant enters the control volume at an initial temperature and emerges at a higher temperature. Across the arc, electrical energy is dissipated by virtue of the resistance and current in the arc itself. A heat balance of the system requires that the energy gained by the gas must be defined by the difference between the incoming energy (electrical input) and total coolant and external losses. This is a direct application of the First Law of Thermodynamics and, for the particular control volume cited here, can be written as follows:

$$\text{Energy In} - \text{Energy Out} = \text{Energy to Gas} \quad (1)$$

$$\bar{E}\,\bar{I} - Q_{CR} - \sum_{i=1}^{n} W_{H_2O_i} C_p\,(\Delta T_0 - \Delta T_1)_{H_2O_i} - \sum_{j=1}^{p} M_j H_j = \text{Energy to gas}$$

where:

C_p	=	water, specific heat,
E	=	plasma arc voltage,
H_g	=	exhaust gas enthalpy,
H_{in}	=	inlet gas enthalpy,
H_j	=	heat of vaporization corresponding to the material M_j,
I	=	plasma arc current,
M_j	=	mass loss rate of electrode insulator, interior metal surface, etc.
Q_{CR}	=	energy convected and radiated from external surface of plasma generator,
$\Delta T_{0_{H2O}}$	=	$T_{0_2} - T_{0_1}$ = water temperature rise during plasma arc operation,
$\Delta T_{1_{H2O}}$	=	$T_2 - T_1$ = water temperature rise before plasma arc operation,
T_{0_2}	=	water exhaust temperature during plasma arc operation,
T_{0_1}	=	inlet water temperature during plasma arc operation,
T_2	=	water exhaust temperature before plasma arc operation,
T_1	=	inlet water temperature before plasma arc operation,
W_g	=	gas flow rate,
W_{H_2O}	=	mass flow rate of coolant water, and
$\bar{E}\,\bar{I}$	=	average of the product of voltage, E, and current, I.

2.4 An examination of Eq 1 shows that, in order to obtain an evaluation of the energy content of the plasma for a specified set of operating conditions, measurements must be made of the voltage and current, the mass-flow rate and temperature rise of the coolant, the mass-flow rate and inlet ambient temperature of the test gas, and the external surface temperature and housing of the arc chamber. For all practical purposes, the external surface temperature of the water-cooled plasma arc is minimum. Consequently, it will be assumed throughout this discussion that negligible energy (compared to the input energy) is lost from the external plasma generator surface by

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[1] This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E21 on Space Simulation and Applications of Space Technology and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E21.08 on Thermal Protection.

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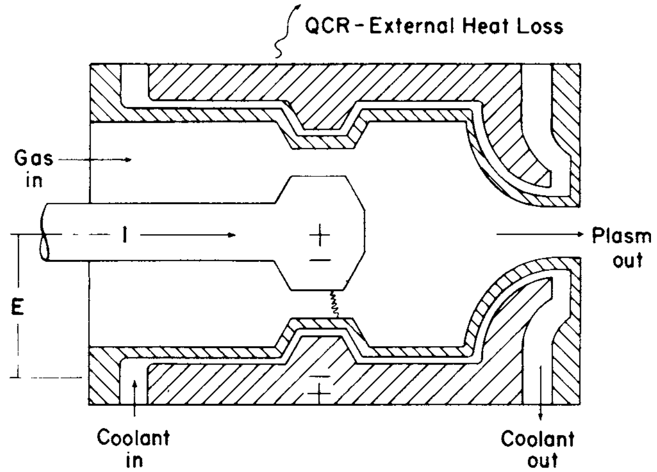

ENERGY IN − ENERGY LOSS = ENERGY TO GAS

FIG. 1 Schematic Energy Balance Method for Determining Gas Enthalpy

convective or radiative mechanisms and that the internal loss of electrode or plasma generator material is small compared with the energy input. In addition, as some plasma generators utilize magnetic fields in their design, the magnetic field coil electrical power and ohmic-heating dissipation should be included in the over-all heat balance. Precautions should be taken to assure that only a negligible portion of magnetic energy is being dissipated in hardware not within the heat balance circuit. For the purposes of this discussion, the magnetic field power input and loss aspects have been omitted because of their unique applicability to specific plasma generator designs.

2.5 The energy balance is given by Eq 2 when these factors are taken into account:

$$\overline{EI} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} W_{H_2O_i} C_p (\Delta T_0 - \Delta T_1)_{H_2O_i} \quad (2)$$

The exhaust enthalpy, H_g, of the effluent as defined by Eq 1 and 2 is a measure of the average total (stagnation) enthalpy at the nozzle exit plane of the plasma-arc heater. This enthalpy does not necessarily apply to the plasma downstream of the nozzle exit plane.

3. Significance and Use

3.1 The purpose of this practice is to measure the total or stagnation gas enthalpy of a plasma-arc gas stream in which nonreactive gases are heated by passage through an electrical discharge device during calibration tests of the system.

3.2 The plasma arc represents one heat source for determining the performance of high temperature materials under simulated hyperthermal conditions. As such the total or stagnation enthalpy is one of the important parameters for correlating the behavior of ablation materials.

3.3 The most direct method for obtaining a measure of total enthalpy, and one which can be performed simultaneously with each material test, if desired, is to perform an energy balance on the arc chamber. In addition, in making the energy balance, accurate measurements are needed since the efficiencies of some plasma generators are low (as low as 15 to 20 % or less in which case the enthalpy depends upon the difference of two quantities of nearly equal magnitude). Therefore, the accuracy of the measurements of the primary variables must be high, all energy losses must be correctly taken into account, and steady-state conditions must exist both in plasma performance and fluid flow.

3.4 In particular it is noted that total enthalpy as determined by the energy balance technique is most useful if the plasma generator design minimizes coring affects. If nonuniformity exists the enthalpy determined by energy balance gives only the average for the entire plasma stream, whereas the local enthalpy experienced by a model in the core of the stream may be much higher. More precise methods are needed to measure local variations in total enthalpy.

4. Apparatus

4.1 *General*—The apparatus shall consist of the plasma-arc facility and the necessary instrumentation to measure the power input to the arc, gas stream and coolant flow rates, inlet gas temperature and net coolant temperature rise of the plasma generator hardware. Although the recommended instrumentation accuracies are state-of-the-art values, higher accuracy instruments (than those recommended) may be required for low efficiency plasma generators.

4.2 *Input Energy Measurements*—The energy input term, *EI*, to a large degree may be time dependent. Fluctuations in the power input can produce errors as large as 50 % under certain conditions. The magnitude of the error will depend on the amplitude of the unsteady compared with the steady portion of the current and voltage and also on the instantaneous phase relationship between current and voltage. The power input portion term should be written:

$$\overline{EI} = 1/t \int_0^t EI \, dt \quad (3)$$

As a consequence each plasma generator should make use of oscilloscopic voltage-current traces during operation in order to ascertain the time variation of the voltage-current input. If