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## Non-destructive testing — Ultrasonic thickness measurement

*Essais non destructifs — Mesurage de l'épaisseur par ultrasons*

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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)).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

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 135, *Non-destructive testing*, Subcommittee SC 3, *Ultrasonic testing*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 16809:2012), which has been technically revised. The main changes compared to the previous edition are as follows:

- editorial improvements have been made;
- the terminology has been adapted to the latest edition of ISO 5577;
- Formulae (5) and (6) have been corrected.



# Non-destructive testing — Ultrasonic thickness measurement

## 1 Scope

This document specifies the principles for ultrasonic thickness measurement of metallic and non-metallic materials by direct contact, based on measurement of time of flight of ultrasonic pulses only.

## 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 5577, *Non-destructive testing — Ultrasonic testing — Vocabulary*

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 5577 apply.

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

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

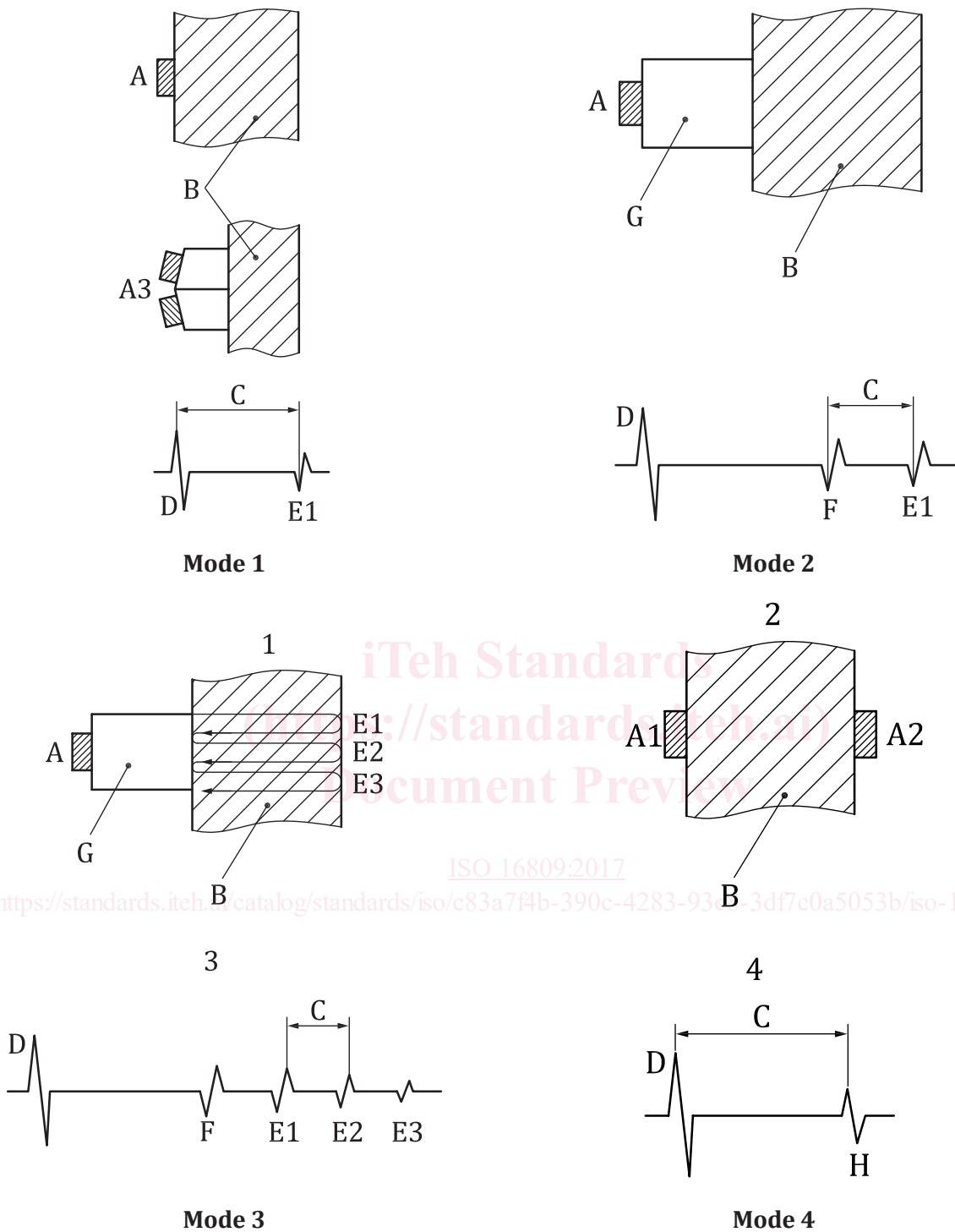
## 4 Measurement modes

The thickness of a part or structure is determined by accurately measuring the time required for a short ultrasonic pulse generated by a transducer to travel through the thickness of the material once, twice or several times.

The material thickness is calculated by multiplying the known sound velocity of the material with the transit time and dividing by the number of times the pulse transits the material wall.

This principle can be accomplished by applying one of the following modes, see [Figure 1](#).

- 1) **Mode 1:** Measure the transit time from an initial excitation pulse to a first returning echo, minus a zero correction to account for the thickness of the probe's wear plate and the couplant layer (single-echo mode).
- 2) **Mode 2:** Measure the transit time from the end of a delay line to the first back wall echo (single-echo delay line mode).
- 3) **Mode 3:** Measure the transit time between back wall echoes (multiple-echo mode).
- 4) **Mode 4:** Measure the transit time for a pulse travelling from the transmitter to a receiver in contact with the back wall (through-transmission mode).



**Key**

A transmit/receive probe  
A1 transmit probe  
A2 receive probe  
A3 dual-element probe  
B test object  
C sound path travel time

D transmission pulse indication  
E1 to E3 back wall echoes  
F interface echo  
G delay path  
H received pulse

**Figure 1 — Measurement modes**



## 5 General requirements

### 5.1 Instruments

The following types of instruments shall be used to achieve thickness measurement:

- a) dedicated ultrasonic thickness measurement instruments with numerical display showing the measured value;
- b) dedicated ultrasonic thickness measurement instruments with numerical display showing the measured value and A-scan presentation (waveform display);
- c) instruments designed primarily for the detection of discontinuities with A-scan presentation of signals. This type of instrument can also include numerical display of thickness values.

See [6.4](#).

### 5.2 Probes

The following types of probes shall be used; these are generally longitudinal wave probes:

- dual-element probes;
- single-element probes.

See [6.3](#).

### 5.3 Couplant

Acoustic contact between probe (probes) and material shall be provided, normally by application of a fluid or gel.

The couplant shall not have any adverse effect on the test object, the equipment or represent a health hazard to the operator.

For the use of the couplant in special measuring conditions, see [6.6](#).

The coupling medium should be chosen to suit the surface conditions and the irregularities of the surface to ensure adequate coupling.

### 5.4 Reference blocks

The measuring system shall be calibrated on one or more samples or reference blocks representative of the object to be measured, i.e. having comparable dimensions, material and structure. The thickness of the blocks or the steps should cover the range of thickness to be measured. Either the thickness or the sound velocity of the reference blocks shall be known.

### 5.5 Test objects

The object to be measured shall allow for ultrasonic wave propagation.

There shall be free access to each individual area to be measured.

The surface of the area to be measured shall be free of all dirt, grease, lint, scale, welding flux and spatter, oil or other extraneous matter that could interfere with the testing.

If the surface is coated, the coating shall have good adhesion to the material. Otherwise it shall be removed.

When measuring through coating its thickness and sound velocity need to be known unless mode 3 is used.

For further details, see [Clause 8](#).

## 5.6 Qualification of personnel

An operator performing ultrasonic thickness measurement according to this document shall have a basic knowledge of the physics of ultrasound, and a detailed understanding and training related to ultrasonic thickness measurements. In addition, the operator shall have knowledge of the product and material to be tested.

It is assumed that ultrasonic thickness testing is performed by qualified and capable personnel. In order to prove this qualification, it is recommended that personnel be qualified in accordance with ISO 9712 or equivalent.

NOTE For categories III and IV according to Pressure Equipment Directive 97/23/EC, Annex I, 3.1.3, there is a requirement for personnel to be approved by a third-party organization recognized by a member state.

## 6 Application of the technique

### 6.1 Surface conditions and surface preparation

Using the pulse-echo method means that the ultrasonic pulse needs to pass the contact surface between test object and the probe at least twice: when entering the object and when leaving it.

Therefore, a clean and even contact area with at least twice the probe's diameter is preferred. Poor contact will result in loss of energy, distortion of signals and sound path.

To enable sound propagation all loose parts and non-adherent coatings shall be removed by brushing or grinding.

Attached layers, like colour coating, plating, enamels, may stay on the object, but only a few thickness meters are able to exclude these layers from being measured.

Very often, thickness measurements need to be done on corroded surfaces, e.g. storage tanks and pipelines. To increase measuring accuracy the contact surface should be ground within an area at least two times the probe's diameter. This area should be clean from corrosion products.

Care should be taken not to reduce the thickness below the minimum acceptable value.

### 6.2 Technique

#### 6.2.1 General

The task of ultrasonic thickness measurements can be separated into two application areas:

- measurement during manufacture;
- in-service measurements of residual wall thickness.

Each area has its own special conditions which require special measuring techniques.

Using a knowledge of the material, geometry and thickness to be measured and the required accuracy, the most suitable measuring equipment and mode shall be selected as follows ([Annex D](#) gives guidance):

- a) depending on the thickness and the material, frequencies from 100 kHz with through-transmission on highly attenuative materials up to 50 MHz on thin metal sheets shall be used;
- b) if dual-element probes are used, then compensation for V-path error is required;

- c) on curved objects, the diameter of the probe contact area shall be significantly smaller than the diameter of the test object.

The accuracy of the thickness measurement depends on how accurate the time of flight can be measured, on the mode of time-measuring (zero crossing, flank-to-flank, peak-to-peak), on the mode chosen (with multiple echoes, mode 3, the accuracy is higher than with modes 1 and 2), and on the frequencies which can be used (higher frequencies provide higher accuracy than lower frequencies because of the more accurate time measurement).

Ultrasonic thickness measurement is often required over an area of the component to be measured. Where this is the case, consideration should be given to the spacing between each measurement. Such spacing should be even and the use of a grid is recommended. The grid size should be selected to give a balance between the confidence in the results and the work content involved.

Measuring the thickness ultrasonically means measuring the time of flight and then calculating the thickness assuming a constant sound velocity (see [Clause 7](#)). If the velocity is not constant within the path the ultrasonic pulse has travelled, the accuracy of the measurement will be severely affected.

## 6.2.2 Measurement during manufacture

### 6.2.2.1 Modes 1, 2 and 3

Where the pulse-echo mode is used, the flow charts in [Figures D.1](#) and [D.2](#) give guidance on the selection of the best technique and equipment.

Thickness measurement on clean parallel surfaces may be carried out with simple numerical display thickness instruments.

On composite materials which generate echoes in addition to the back wall echo, it is recommended that thickness instruments with A-scan displays [type [5.1 b](#)) or [5.1 c](#))] be used to select the correct echo of the thickness measurement.

### 6.2.2.2 Mode 4

If the material is highly attenuative and large thicknesses need to be measured, no echo technique can be used, i.e. only through-transmission (mode 4) is applicable.

Two probes on opposite sides of the test object shall then be used. The instrument therefore shall allow for operation with separate transmitter and receiver (TR mode). In most cases, the frequency shall be lower than 1 MHz. Special low-frequency instruments from group c) in [5.1](#) with low-frequency probes shall be used.

## 6.2.3 In-service measurement of residual wall thickness

During in-service testing, measurements need to be taken on materials that are subject to corrosion or erosion. The surfaces can be rough and contain pitting or other defects (see [Annex A](#)) which are areas of low reflectivity.

For these applications, the use of dual-element probes is recommended. The sensitivity shall be set manually to detect the bad reflecting areas.

Where it is necessary to take a lot of measurements, the readings shall be values with the information on the location of the measuring point. Special testing programs are available to achieve this (data logging).

With in-service testing, the environmental conditions are very important. Equipment can be needed which can withstand high temperatures and harsh environments, or has special electrical shielding.

The flowcharts in [Figures D.3](#) and [D.4](#) give guidance on in-service thickness measurements.

### 6.3 Selection of probe

Having chosen a suitable measurement procedure according to [6.2](#), i.e. a general decision for a probe type (single- or dual-element) has been made, there are other parameters that need to be considered when matching the probe to the measuring conditions.

Wide-band probes offer a shorter pulse than narrow-band probes, thus giving a suited flank or peak to start and stop the time-of-flight measurement, giving a better resolution when measuring thin sheets or coatings.

Additionally, a wide frequency band always gives a stable echo even when attenuating materials need to be measured.

Probe size and frequency shall be chosen to cover the measurement range by a narrow sound beam to get an echo from a well-defined area.

For dual-element probes the focal range shall cover the expected thickness range.

When measuring small thicknesses, a delay path shall be used. The measurement shall be done with the interface echo (delay path/test object) and the first back wall echo from the test object (mode 2) or to make the measurement using mode 3. The material of the delay path shall be chosen to generate a suitable interface echo. Using the same material as the test object does not generate an interface echo. When the material of the delay path has a lower acoustic impedance than the material to be tested, e.g. a plastics delay line on metals, there is a phase shift of the interface echo. This shall be corrected to get accurate results. Some thickness instruments do this correction automatically.

For small thicknesses, a dual-element probe with small focal distance may be used.

When measuring on hot surfaces, the delay path shall act as a thermal barrier.

The material chosen for delay shall withstand the temperatures of the test object. The influence of the temperature on the acoustical properties of the delay path needs to be known (drift of sound attenuation and velocity). Data sheets of the probe manufacturers show the range of temperatures a probe is suitable for and the time it can be used on those temperatures.

### 6.4 Selection of instrument

Selection of instruments of type [5.1](#) a), b) or c) shall be made as follows:

- a) instruments of type [5.1](#) c) shall be used for modes 1 to 4 (see [Clause 4](#)) and shall satisfy the conditions given in [6.2.2](#) and [6.2.3](#);
- b) instruments of type [5.1](#) b) shall be used for modes 1, 2 and 3 only (see [Clause 4](#)) and shall satisfy the conditions given in [6.2.2.1](#) and [6.2.3](#);
- c) instruments of type [5.1](#) a) may be preset by the manufacturer to work only in one of the modes 1, 2 or 3 (see [Clause 4](#)).

The instruments shall be selected to satisfy the individual requirements given in [6.2.2.1](#) or [6.2.3](#).

See also [Annex D](#).

### 6.5 Materials different from the reference material

See [Tables B.1](#) and [B.2](#).