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Jewellery and precious metals — Non destructive precious metal fineness confirmation by ED-XRF

Joellerie, bijouterie et métaux précieux — Confirmation par analyse non destructive du titre de métal précieux par ED-XRF

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ISO copyright office
CP 401 • Ch. de Blandonnet 8
CH-1214 Vernier, Geneva
Phone: +41 22 749 01 11
Email: copyright@iso.org
Website: www.iso.org

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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).

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 174, *Jewellery and precious metals*.

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.

Introduction

This document describes a non-destructive method to verify (confirm) the fineness of finished and semifinished jewellery items considered homogeneous by ED-XRF (energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence).

Multiple methods are available to determine the fineness of precious metal alloys. They however are all requiring the destruction of the sample and long analysis time; for example gold cupellation by ISO 11426. Under some circumstances, destruction of the sample is not an option. This method proposes a non-destructive alternative, which allows validating a declared fineness.

The standard is not suitable for the regulatory hallmarking application. Because of the inherent higher uncertainty associated with ED-XRF measurements, some results might be inconclusive.

The document gives guidelines on the

- instrumentation,
- number and composition of calibration standards needed for calibration,
- composition of reference material needed to verify the calibration,
- number of measurement and replicates on the sample whose fineness is to be verified
- uncertainty calculation, and
- interpretation of the results.

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Jewellery and precious metals — Non destructive precious metal fineness confirmation by ED-XRF

1 Scope

This document describes a non-destructive method to verify (confirm) the precious metal fineness of finished and semifinished jewellery item(s) considered homogeneous by ED-XRF (energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence), including alloys according to ISO 9202.

This document is not suitable for any coated items. WD-XRF (wavelength dispersive X-ray fluorescence) equipment cannot be used.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document the following terms and definitions 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/>

3.1

ED-XRF

energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence

X-ray fluorescence elemental analysis method where all elements in the sample are simultaneously excited and where the intensities of the characteristic fluorescence radiation emitted by each element are quantified by separating the differential energies specific to each element

3.2

spot

target area on the sample where the X-ray beam strikes the surface

3.3

calibration standard

material with appropriate homogeneity whose exact composition is known and which can be used to calibrate the *ED-XRF* (3.1) instrument

3.4

reference material

RM

material with appropriate homogeneity whose exact composition is known and which has been established to be fit for *ED-XRF* (3.1) measurement

3.5

major element

main precious metal element of interest in the alloy whose concentration is to be verified, as well as any other element whose concentration is higher

EXAMPLE In the case of gold 375 ‰ alloy with 500 ‰ of copper, both gold and copper are the major elements.

**3.6
minor element**

any non-major element (3.5) in the alloy whose concentration is at or above 1 ‰

**3.7
trace element**

element present in the alloy whose concentration is below 1 ‰

Note 1 to entry: Trace elements are not taken into account for calibration. The sum of all trace elements shall be below 1 ‰.

**3.8
coating**

thin layer of covering on the surface of the item

4 Principle

A specific calibration is required for each alloy composition. This calibration is obtained from at least 3 standards whose composition is matching approximately the sample to be analysed. A reference material is analysed to verify the calibration. Samples can then be analysed and the precious metal fineness verified.

This document is not suitable for any coated items; the coating shall be removed by a suitable means if the fineness determination is necessary on a coated item.

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5 Apparatus

5.1 ED-XRF, with the following specifications:

- X-ray tube: adapted for precious metals analysis, minimum rating 50 kV and 40 W;
- primary filter: adapted for precious metals analysis;
- collimator: minimum 2 collimators, at least one <1 mm and one ≥1 mm;
- camera: with magnification of the image of the measuring area;
- detector: Si-PIN, SDD;
- energy resolution: ≤160 eV (for K α of Mn line), the lower eV value the better;
- detectable elements: Z = 22 (Ti) to Z = 92 (U).

6 Procedure

6.1 Calibration

6.1.1 Calibration standards

To calibrate the instrument for a specific alloy, calibration standards with the following features shall be used:

- flat and clean surface of suitable size, with at least a diameter 5 times larger than the collimator used for measurement;
- sufficiently thick (at least 0,5 mm);
- homogeneous;

- known exact composition;
- composition of major and minor elements matching approximatively the sample to be analysed; trace elements may be ignored; a minimum of 3 standards shall be used, with the major element(s) composition covering a range up to 50 ‰.
- minor elements below 5 ‰ do not need to be present in the standards but shall be declared in the calibration; they may be calibrated using the instrument maker's calibration.

EXAMPLE For the measurement of an alloy with Au = 750 ‰, the fineness of Au in the calibration standards may be 730 ‰, 750 ‰, and 770 ‰.

6.1.2 Method calibration

The ED-XRF instrument (5.1) shall be specifically calibrated for each sample to be analysed. Each standard shall be analysed at least on 5 different positions. The standard deviation obtained for the measurements of each calibration standard shall not exceed 1,2 ‰ for the major element.

Inter-element interference corrections should be applied.

Analysis of the calibration standards, the reference material and the samples shall be performed using the same collimator size and using the same parameters (tube voltage, current, etc.). The largest possible collimator compatible with the sample target area should be used.

6.2 Verification

6.2.1 Reference material

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To verify the calibration, a reference material with the following features shall be used:

- flat and clean surface of suitable size, with at least a diameter 5 times larger than the collimator used for measurement;
- sufficiently thick (at least 0,5 mm);
- homogeneous;
- known exact composition;
- not being used as calibration standard;
- certified reference material (CRM) and materials prepared under the ISO 17034 accreditation are preferred;
- the composition of the reference material should be matching as far as practicable that of the sample; for major elements there shall be no more than 10 ‰ absolute difference between the concentration in the sample and in the reference material; for minor elements, that difference shall be no more than 20 ‰ absolute difference; trace elements may be ignored.

EXAMPLE If an alloy with a 750 ‰ Au – 240 ‰ Ag – 10 ‰ Cu is to be analysed, the concentrations in the reference material are between 740 ‰ and 760 ‰ for Au, between 260 ‰ and 220 ‰ for Ag, and between 30 ‰ and 0 ‰ for Cu.

6.2.2 Method verification

Before each batch analysis, the calibration shall be controlled by analysing the reference material.

The reference material shall be analysed at least on 5 different positions. The analysis time for each replicate shall not exceed the time used for the calibration. The standard deviation obtained for the measurements in the reference material shall not exceed 1,2 ‰ for the major element. The calibration is verified by comparing the fineness measured for the reference material (obtained by the mean value

of the analyses) and its declared value. The difference, Δ_{RM} , between those two values shall not be greater than 1,2 ‰ and will be taken into the uncertainty evaluation of the method.

If the standard deviation for the measurements or the difference between the fineness measured for the reference material and its declared value are outside the tolerances, the calibration shall be repeated.

The reference material shall be analysed at regular intervals under the same conditions to monitor the stability of the instrument.

6.3 Analysis

6.3.1 Sample preparation

Samples to be analysed may be cleaned (typically with alcohol, but also possibly by mechanical polishing of a very thin layer) and prepared for measurement for better accuracy and to exclude potential systematic errors.

NOTE Repeatability and accuracy is improved if the surface to be analysed is prepared or scraped.

6.3.2 Sample analysis

The sample shall be analysed at least on 3 different positions. Each position is analysed with a minimum of 3 replicates. The analysis time for each replicate shall be equal to the time used for the reference material.

For the major element, the standard deviation obtained for each set of replicates shall not exceed 1,2 ‰, and the standard deviation obtained for each measurement, σ_{sample} , shall not exceed 1,2 ‰.

If those standard deviations are higher than the tolerances, the result is not valid and the analysis has to be performed again.

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7 Calculation and expression of the results

7.1 Calculation

The fineness of the sample, in part per thousand (‰), is directly obtained from the ED-XRF software and shall be the mean of all measurements performed.

7.2 Uncertainty

Uncertainty is evaluated by taking into account the standard deviations obtained on the reference material and the sample measurements, as well as the difference between the fineness measured for the reference material and its declared value (taking hence into account the uncertainty linked to the calibration).

$$U_+ = \max \left(2 \times \sqrt{\sigma_{RM}^2 + \sigma_{\text{sample}}^2} - \Delta_{RM}; 0 \right)$$

$$U_- = \max \left(2 \times \sqrt{\sigma_{RM}^2 + \sigma_{\text{sample}}^2} + \Delta_{RM}; 0 \right)$$

where

σ_{RM} standard deviation on the reference material measurements;

σ_{sample} standard deviation on the sample measurements;

Δ_{RM} difference between the fineness measured for the reference material and its declared value.