
Determination of salt out (crystallization) temperature of liquid fertilizers

*Détermination de la température de désolubilisation (cristallisation)
des engrais liquides*

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Contents

Page

Foreword	iv
Introduction	v
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms and definitions	1
4 Principles	1
5 Reagents	2
6 Equipment	3
7 Set Up	3
8 Procedure	4
Annex A (informative) Examples of the equipment and setup	6
Bibliography	10

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Foreword

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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.

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Introduction

The global liquid fertilizers market size is estimated to account for a value of USD 2,5 billion in 2019 and is projected to grow at a CAGR of 3,7 % from 2019, to reach a value of USD 3,1 billion by 2025. North America is the leading consumer of the liquid fertilizers with 32 % of the market, followed by Europe (25 %), Asia Pacific (21 %), Latin America (13 %), and the rest of the world at 9 %^[2]. Liquid fertilizers cover inorganic nitrogen, phosphorus, potash, and micronutrients as well as organic, and synthetic fertilizers applied to soil, as foliar, in fertigation, and as starter solutions and aerial applications and in crops such as cereals, grains, fruits, vegetable, oilseeds, pulses, turf, ornamentals, forage, and plantation crops. Liquid fertilizers are the most efficient way of delivering the required nutrients to the plants at the correct time and in optimal concentration.

Urea ammonium nitrate (UAN 28-32) is an example of a widely used liquid fertilizer. Ammonium polyphosphate (APP, 10-34-0, and 11-37-0), Ammonium thiosulfate (ATS, 12-0-0-26S), potassium thiosulfate (KTS, 0-0-25-17S), magnesium thiosulfate (0-0-0-10S-4Mg), calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN 17), and solutions of water soluble fertilizers such as potassium nitrate (13-0-46), and ammonium chloride solution (6-0-0-16Cl) are few examples of liquid fertilizers.

Limitations of liquid fertilizers

Liquid fertilizers, although easier to use, and are versatile in application, they have the disadvantage of salting out (crystallize) at cold climate. This phenomenon creates limitation for transportation, storage, and handling during the cold season and proper steps is recommended to avoid crystallization.

Accurate crystallization data and an accurate, easy to use, and a universal method for the determination of salt out temperature (SOT) of liquid fertilizers is a helpful reference for stakeholders to avoid or prevent crystallization of these popular fertilizers during the cold season^[8].

Currently, there is no uniform and standard method for the determination of SOTs of liquid (fluid) fertilizers. There are quite a few methods used internally by several manufacturing companies. ASTM D6660 for the freezing point determination of aqueous ethylene glycol base engine coolants by atomic phase transition method, ASTM D1177-17 for the determination of freezing point of aqueous engine coolants, and the ASTM D97 (pour point) have also been cited in the literature for SOT measurements of liquid (fluid) fertilizers. Pour point of a liquid is defined as the temperature below which the liquid loses its flow characteristic. ^{[4]to[6]}

In addition to these cited methods, there are ISO documents that provide methods to determine the melting/freezing temperature of chemicals. ISO 1392 provides a method for the determination of the crystallization point of chemicals, and ISO 3016 provides a method for petroleum oils for the determination of pour points. ^{[1].[2]}

Differential scanning calorimetry is a thermoanalytical technique in which the difference in the amount of heat required to increase the temperature of a sample and reference is measured as a function of temperature. Both the sample and reference are maintained at nearly the same temperature throughout the experiment. The temperature increase as a function of time linearly and heat flow curve vs. the temperature increase is the instrument output. These instruments are expensive and the price tag is over \$50,000 (USD).

Moreover, OECD Guidelines refers to the term “melting range” for the transition of solid to liquid.

The proposed method is based on cooling/thawing of the liquid fertilizer. The liquid (fluid) fertilizer is cooled in a dry ice/methanol bath until the liquid is crystallized. It then warms at the ambient temperature. Normally, the SOT is the temperature at which the last crystal dissolves.

