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**Marine technology — Marine  
environment impact assessment  
(MEIA) — On-board bioassay to  
monitor seawater quality using  
delayed fluorescence of microalga**

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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 organisations, 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 of 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 [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 8, *Ships and marine technology*, Subcommittee SC 13, *Marine technology*.

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](http://www.iso.org/members.html).

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## Introduction

Mining of offshore mineral resources has attracted much interest. These resources can be utilized as potential mineral resources. However, deep-sea mining of the seafloor can pose potential hazards to deep-sea environments and ecosystems (see ISO 10253 and References [3], [19], [21]). One concern is the toxicity of heavy metals released from excavated minerals. Such heavy metals can be released into the seawater of the deep marine ecosystem<sup>[7], [18]</sup>. Further, there is a risk of unexpected leakage of the recovered minerals and mining wastewater from the mining plant, which can result in heavy metal contamination of the surface seawater<sup>[8]</sup>.

Considering the above, an appropriate scheme for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of deep and surface seawater can ideally be introduced at each deep-sea mining site. The International Seabed Authority (ISA) states that environmental impact assessments should address not only areas directly affected by mining, but also the wider region impacted by discharged plume and materials released during mineral transport to the surface<sup>[8]</sup>.

An on-board or onsite method for heavy metal evaluation is essential, as it would allow prompt action in case of an unexpected pollution incident. Rapid evaluation of the nature and extent of pollution provides an opportunity to prevent wider spread of the toxic contaminants and, consequently, minimize idle periods of a mining plant.

Although many chemical analytical methods are available at land-based laboratories, few methods have been developed for on-board application. Deep-sea mineral deposits are inhomogeneous and can be the source of release of various types of metal elements. Therefore, evaluation of mining contaminants requires simultaneous analysis of multiple elements. Special instruments are needed to perform such analyses, such as inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry. Further, these instruments have to be operated by expert staff, require considerable laboratory space and are expensive to install. Such instrument types are difficult to install at every mining site as standard equipment for environmental monitoring.

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Bioassays constitute an alternative approach to specialist equipment, and are commonly used to assess ecological risks of chemical contaminations (see ISO 10253). Bioassays do not provide quantitative information about the contaminating substances, but can be used to detect a wide spectrum of toxicants, including unknown toxicants. This feature is advantageous for the monitoring of water quality during deep-sea mining activities.

General bioassay test protocols that use a variety of aquatic organisms have been published by organisations, such as ISO (see ISO 10253), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA). These authorized protocols are accepted in various water quality management fields. However, similarly to chemical analyses, they require a considerable amount of time and space, and are thus not suitable for on-board monitoring. It should also be noted that most protocols have been developed for inland freshwater quality assessments.

This document was developed to address the shortcomings of the currently available bioassays for monitoring seawater quality on-board. It describes a bioassay specifically for on-board determinations.



# Marine technology — Marine environment impact assessment (MEIA) — On-board bioassay to monitor seawater quality using delayed fluorescence of microalga

## 1 Scope

This document specifies a bioassay for the determination of the presence of unknown toxic contaminants in test seawater (see [Figure A.1](#)). It is based on the inhibition of photosynthetic activity of the marine cyanobacterium *Cyanobium* sp. (NIES-981) by such toxic contaminants. The inhibition is determined based on delayed fluorescence (DF) intensity.

The method is rapid and requires less laboratory space than standard bioassays. Hence, it can be used on-board to generate basic data for seawater quality management at deep-sea mining sites where time and space are extremely limited.

## 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 <https://www.electropedia.org/> ref-0171eacdd6d5/iso-23734-2021

### 3.1

**delayed fluorescence**

**DF**

**delayed light emission**

weak fluorescence signal from photosynthetically active cells that originates upon repopulation of the excited energy states of chlorophyll by stored energy after charge separation

### 3.2

**DF decay curve**

time-course change of the DF (3.1) intensity of *test algae* (3.7) that had been left in darkness after exposure to light

Note 1 to entry: See [Annex E, Table E.1](#) and [Figure E.1](#).

### 3.3

**effective concentration**

**EC<sub>x</sub>**

concentration of test substance that results in an x % reduction in specific growth rate relative to the controls

### 3.4

**no observed effect concentration**

**NOEC**

tested concentration below the *LOEC* (3.5) that has no statistically significant effect

**3.5**

**lowest observed effect concentration**

**LOEC**

lowest tested concentration that is significantly different from control

**3.6**

**test seawater**

seawater that is tested

**3.7**

**test algae**

alga (*Cyanobium* sp., NIES-981) that is used for bioassay

**3.8**

**growth medium**

artificial seawater (ASW-SN) containing nutrients and trace metals, commonly used for the culture of *test algae* (3.4)

**3.9**

**test medium**

mixture of the *growth medium* (3.8) and *test seawater* (3.6)

**3.10**

**algal stock culture**

living or cryopreserved culture of *test algae* (*Cyanobium* sp., NIES-981) that has been prepared at a land-based laboratory and is carried on board

**3.11**

**algal inoculum culture**

(<https://standards.iteh.ai>)

culture used in the bioassay, prepared from the *algal stock culture* (3.10) immediately before testing

**3.12**

**cryopreservation**

preservation of cells, tissues or organs at a very low temperature for future use

<https://standards.iteh.ai/catalog/standards/iso/a9168c44-c2a9-4ba3-8bef-0171eacdd6d5/iso-23734-2021>

Note 1 to entry: See [Annex D](#).

## 4 Principle

The described on-board bioassay provides basic data for seawater quality management at deep-sea mining sites using DF (3.1) of the marine cyanobacterium *Cyanobium* sp. (NIES-981). The method is quicker, and requires less laboratory space and equipment, than a standard growth inhibition assay using other algae<sup>[15]</sup>. First, the test seawater is collected at the target site, e.g. the surface seawater in the vicinity of the mining plant or mining wastewater generated by the mining plant. Then, duplicate cyanobacterium cultures in triplicate are set up in control tubes (growth medium with no test seawater) and tubes containing diluted test seawater [test seawater mixed with growth medium at a volume fraction of 80:20] (see [Annex A](#) and [B](#), [Figure A.1](#), [A.2](#) and [B.1](#)). After incubation of 24 h, DF is determined using an appropriate detector system for luminescence (see [6.2](#)). Finally, total DF intensities of the test seawater are compared with those of the control (growth medium with no test seawater) using an appropriate statistical test. Significant differences between the test seawater and control indicate that the collected test seawater has been polluted by mining or other activities. The results of the on-board bioassay would support the appropriate environmental safety actions. As an option, effective concentration (EC<sub>x</sub>), no observed effect concentration (NOEC) and lowest observed effect concentration (LOEC) values may be determined by assaying additional dilutions of the test seawater in a geometric series (see ISO 10253).

DF is measured as a delay (ms to min) after the cells are transferred from light to darkness<sup>[4], [20]</sup>. The delay in emission is associated with the repopulation of excited states of chlorophyll by stored energy after charge separation. More specifically, it is the back-reaction of accumulated charges across the thylakoid membrane in the electron transport chain<sup>[11]</sup>. Because DF is an indicator of the electron

transfer state within the photosynthetic apparatus, it can be used as a sensitive intrinsic index of photosynthetic activity [12],[16],[17].

Bioassays that rely on alga and plant DF are comparable with conventional growth inhibition tests [5],[6],[9],[13],[14],[22]. The method described in this document is a new DF-based bioassay system developed specifically for water quality monitoring in offshore environments. It relies on a marine autotrophic cyanobacterium and a modified method [22]. The DF-based bioassay is rapid and requires less extensive sample handling than the standard growth inhibition test. Consequently, it can be used on-board, where time and space are substantially limited.

## 5 Materials

### 5.1 Test alga

Axenic culture of the marine cyanobacterium *Cyanobium* sp. (NIES-981). Strain NIES-981 is closely related to the genus *Synechococcus* that is one of the major primary producers in the marine environment. It exhibits stable and high growth under the appropriate conditions. The complete genome of strain NIES-981 has been sequenced. It encodes 3 268 proteins, and harbours 46 tRNA genes and three sets of rRNA genes [23]. These genetic features provide a basis for the development of the ecotoxicological bioassay. Strain NIES-981 can be obtained from the Microbial Culture Collection at the National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) (MCC-NIES, <https://mcc.nies.go.jp>).

### 5.2 Reagents

#### iTeh Standards

##### 5.2.1 Water

(<https://standards.iteh.ai>)

Deionised, for the preparation of the medium and stocks (nutrient, metal and tris) for the medium.

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##### 5.2.2 Growth medium

ASW-SN, optimized to allow sufficient growth of *Cyanobium* (NIES-981) to meet the test quality ([Table 1](https://standards.iteh.ai/catalog/standards/iso/23734-2021)), are used for pre-culture and testing (see 7.1).

##### 5.2.3 Nutrient, metal and tris stock solutions

Stock solutions of nutrients, metals and tris for ASW-SN (see [Table 1](https://standards.iteh.ai)), are prepared at a land-based laboratory. The stock solutions are also added to the test seawater so that their concentration is the same as in ASW-SN (see [Annex B](#)).

**Table 1 — Reagents for ASW-SN (left) and stock solutions**

ASW-SN	g	a) Stock solution of nutrients	g	b) Stock solution of trace metals	mg	c) Stock solution of tris	g
NaCl	25,0	NaNO <sub>3</sub>	75	Na <sub>2</sub> EDTA·2(H <sub>2</sub> O)	580	Tris	100
MgCl <sub>2</sub> ·6(H <sub>2</sub> O)	2,0	K <sub>2</sub> HPO <sub>4</sub> ·3H <sub>2</sub> O	3,0	FeCl <sub>3</sub> ·6(H <sub>2</sub> O)	422	Deionised water	1 000 ml
KCl	0,5	Deionised water	1 000 ml	ZnSO <sub>4</sub> ·7(H <sub>2</sub> O)	2,93		
CaCl <sub>2</sub> ·2(H <sub>2</sub> O)	0,5			CoCl <sub>2</sub> ·6(H <sub>2</sub> O)	1,33		
MgSO <sub>4</sub> ·7(H <sub>2</sub> O)	3,5			MnCl <sub>2</sub> ·4(H <sub>2</sub> O)	24,0		
Nutrients a)	10 ml			Na <sub>2</sub> SeO <sub>3</sub>	2,30		
Trace metal b)	100 µl			Na <sub>2</sub> MoO <sub>4</sub> ·2(H <sub>2</sub> O)	0,839		
Tris c)	10 ml			NiCl <sub>2</sub> ·6(H <sub>2</sub> O)	0,37		
Deionised water	1 000 ml			Deionised water	100 ml		
pH	8,2					pH	8,2

## 6 Apparatus

### 6.1 General

All equipment that comes into contact with the test medium and all solutions used for its preparation are made of glass or a chemically inert material. Glassware that is free of chemical contaminants and sterile is used for culturing and testing. Use general laboratory apparatuses and the following (see [6.2](#) to [6.6](#)).

### 6.2 High sensitivity luminometer

Sufficiently sensitive to detect DF of at least  $10^6$  NIES-981 cells per millilitre, able to count photons at 0,1-s intervals for at least 60 s, and equipped with a red light source ( $50 \mu\text{E}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ ) for excitation. In addition, the shutter controls the excitation time accurately (see [Annex C](#) and [Figure C.1](#)).

### 6.3 Incubator and tube shaker

An incubator that can maintain  $23^\circ\text{C} \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$  is recommended, although the assay may also be performed using light equipment in a room controlled at  $23^\circ\text{C} \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ . For culturing and testing, white fluorescent light ( $60 \mu\text{E}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  to  $80 \mu\text{E}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ ) is used. Although a white LED lamp can also be used instead of the white fluorescent light, check that it contains two wavelength ranges, red (with a peak between 660 nm and 670 nm) and blue light (with a peak between 450 nm and 460 nm). These are the appropriate wavelengths for algal photosynthesis. An orbital and wheel shaker with a speed controller is recommended for the pre-culturing and testing.

### 6.4 Apparatus for determining algal cell density

The same device as that used for DF measurements ([6.2](#)) can be used for cell density determinations. Algal cell density determination is needed for preparing a living stock culture at a land-based laboratory and for determining the initial cell density at the beginning of testing on-board.

### 6.5 Culture tubes

[ISO 23734:2021](#)

Autoclaved or disposable sterile tubes with a capacity between 5 ml and 10 ml (glass tubes are recommended) with air-permeable stoppers are used for pre-culture and testing.

### 6.6 Clean bench

Sub-culturing of the living stock cultures is ideally performed on a clean bench, but a portable bench with apron covers and a fan unit is sufficient.

## 7 Preparations at a land-based laboratory

### 7.1 Preparation of the growth medium

ASW-SN is used for testing and pre-culture of strain NIES-981. ASW-SN is also used for the preparation of the test seawater for the incubation of test algae. The growth medium is ideally prepared in advance at a land-based laboratory, and sent to the offshore site in sterile containers.

- Dissolve ASW-SN reagents and stock solutions in 900 ml of deionised water, as indicated in the left column of [Table 1](#). Prepare the stock solutions of nutrients, metals and tris in advance, according to [Table 1](#).
- Adjust pH to 8,2 using 1,0 N HCl (this requires the addition of approximately 5,5 ml of 1,0 N HCl).
- Add deionised water until the volume equals 1 000 ml.