



Designation: D4888 – 06(Reapproved 2011)

Standard Test Method for Water Vapor in Natural Gas Using Length-of-Stain Detector Tubes¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This test method covers a procedure for rapid and simple field determination of water vapor in natural gas pipelines. Available detector tubes provide a total measuring range of 0.1 to 40 mg/L, although the majority of applications will be on the lower end of this range (that is, under 0.5 mg/L). At least one manufacturer provides tubes that read directly in pounds of water per million cubic feet of gas. See [Note 1](#).

1.2 Detector tubes are usually subject to interferences from gases and vapors other than the target substance. Such interferences may vary among brands because of the use of different detection methods. Consult manufacturer's instructions for specific interference information. Alcohols and glycols will cause interferences on some water vapor tubes because of the presence of the hydroxyl group on those molecules.

1.3 *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 The sample is passed through a detector tube filled with a specially prepared chemical. Any water vapor present in the sample reacts with the chemical to produce a color change or stain. The length of the stain produced in the detector tube, when exposed to a measured volume of sample, is directly proportional to the amount of water vapor present in the sample. A hand-operated piston or bellows-type pump is used to draw a measured volume of sample through the tube at a controlled rate of flow. The length of stain produced is converted to milligrams per litre of H₂O by comparison to a calibration scale supplied by the manufacturer for each box of detection tubes. The system is direct reading, easily portable, and completely suited to making rapid spot checks for water vapor under field conditions.

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of Committee D03 on Gaseous Fuels and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D03.07 Analysis of Chemical Composition of Gaseous Fuels.

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NOTE 1—Detector tubes are available with calibration scales printed in pounds of water per million cubic feet of gas (lb/MMCF). The conversion factor is 1 mg/L = 62.3 lb/MMCF (7 lb/MMCF = 0.11 mg/L).

3. Significance and Use

3.1 The measurement of water vapor in natural gas is important because of the gas quality specifications, the corrosive nature of water vapor on pipeline materials, and the effects of water vapor on utilization equipment.

3.2 This test method provides inexpensive field screening of water vapor. The system design is such that it may be used by nontechnical personnel with a minimum of proper training.

4. Apparatus

4.1 *Length-of-Stain Detector Tubes*—A sealed glass tube with the breakoff tips sized to fit the tube holder of the pump. The reagent layer inside the tube, typically a silica gel substrate coated with the active chemical, must be specific for water vapor and produce a distinct color change when exposed to a sample of gas containing water vapor. Any substances known to interfere must be listed in the instructions accompanying the tubes. A calibration scale should be marked directly on the tube; however, other markings that provide for ready interpretation of water vapor content from a separate calibration scale supplied with the tubes shall be acceptable. The calibration scale shall correlate water vapor concentration to the length of the color stain. Shelf life of the detector tubes must be a minimum of two years from date of manufacture when stored according to manufacturers' recommendations.

4.2 *Detector Tube Pump*—A hand-operated pump of a piston or bellows type. It must be capable of drawing 100 mL per stroke of sample through the detector tube with a volume tolerance of ± 5 mL.² It must be specifically designed for use with detector tubes.

NOTE 2—A detector tube and pump together form a unit and must be used as such. Each manufacturer calibrates detector tubes to match the flow characteristics of its specific pump. Crossing brands of pumps and tubes is not permitted, as considerable loss of system accuracy is likely to occur.²

² *Direct Reading Colorimetric Indicator Tubes Manual*, First ed., American Industrial Hygiene Association, Akron, OH 44311, 1976.