



Designation: D2477 – 07 (Reapproved 2012)

Standard Test Method for Dielectric Breakdown Voltage and Dielectric Strength of Insulating Gases at Commercial Power Frequencies¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D2477; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This test method covers the determination of the dielectric breakdown voltage and dielectric strength of insulating gases used in transformers, circuit breakers, cables, and similar apparatus as an insulating medium. The test method is applicable only to gases with boiling points below room temperature at atmospheric pressure.

1.2 This standard may involve hazardous materials, operations, and equipment. *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.*

1.3 *Mercury has been designated by EPA and many state agencies as a hazardous material that can cause central nervous system, kidney and liver damage. Mercury, or its vapor, may be hazardous to health and corrosive to materials. Caution should be taken when handling mercury and mercury containing products. See the applicable product Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for details and EPA's website — <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/faq.htm> for additional information. Users should be aware that selling mercury and/or mercury containing products into your state may be prohibited by state law.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

[D2864 Terminology Relating to Electrical Insulating Liquids and Gases](#)

2.2 *IEEE Standard:*³

[No. 4 Standard Techniques for High Voltage Testing](#)

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D27 on Electrical Insulating Liquids and Gases and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D27.05 on Electrical Test.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

³ Available from The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, Inc. (IEEE), 445 Hoes Ln., P.O. Box 1331, Piscataway, NJ 08854-1331.

2.3 *ASTM Adjuncts:*

Dielectric cell assembly and detail (2 drawings)⁴

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 For definitions of terms used in this test method, refer to Terminology [D2864](#).

4. Significance and Use

4.1 The dielectric breakdown voltage and dielectric strength of an insulating gas in a uniform field depends primarily on the molecular structure of the gas. As different gases are mixed either by plan or by contamination, any change in dielectric breakdown voltage and dielectric strength will depend on both the nature and proportion of the individual gases. This test method uses plane and spherical electrodes which provide a nearly uniform field (see Appendix) in the area of electrical discharge. It is suitable for determining the dielectric breakdown voltage and dielectric strength of different gases and mixtures thereof for research and application evaluations and also as a field test. A more complete discussion of the significance of the dielectric strength test is given in the Appendix.

5. Apparatus

5.1 *Electrical Apparatus:*

5.1.1 *Transformer*— The desired test voltage may be most readily obtained by a step-up transformer energized from a variable low-voltage commercial power frequency source. The transformer and controlling element shall be of such size and design that, with the test specimen in the circuit, the crest factor (ratio of maximum to mean effective) of the 60-Hz test voltage does not differ by more than $\pm 5\%$ from that of a sinusoidal wave over the upper half of the range of test voltage. The crest factor may be checked by means of an oscilloscope, a sphere gap, or a peak-reading voltmeter in conjunction with an rms voltmeter. Where the waveform cannot be determined conveniently, a transformer having a rating of not less than $\frac{1}{2}$

⁴ Detailed drawings of this apparatus are available at a nominal cost from: ASTM International Headquarters. Order Adjunct No. [ADJD2477](#).

kVA at the usual breakdown voltage shall be used. Transformers of larger kVA capacity may be used, but in no case should the power frequency short circuit current in the specimen circuit be outside the range of 1 to 10 mA/kV of applied voltage. This limitation of current may be accomplished by using a suitable external series resistor or by employing a transformer with sufficient inherent reactance.

5.1.2 Circuit-Interrupting Equipment—The test transformer primary circuit shall be protected by an automatic circuit-breaking device capable of opening (as nearly instantaneously as possible) on the current produced by the breakdown of the test specimen; a circuit breaker that opens within 5 cycles may be used if the short-circuit current as described in **5.1.1** does not exceed 200 mA. A prolonged flow of current at the time of breakdown causes contamination of the gases and damage of the electrodes, thereby affecting the subsequent test results, and increasing the electrode and test cell maintenance and time of testing.

5.1.3 Voltage-Control Equipment—The rate of voltage rise shall be $\frac{1}{2}$ kV/s \pm 20 %. Voltage control may be secured by a motor-driven variable-ratio-autotransformer. Preference is given to equipment having an approximately straight-line voltage-time curve over the desired operating range. Motor drive is preferred to manual drive because of the ease of maintaining a reasonably uniform rate-of-voltage rise with this test method. The rate-of-voltage rise may be calculated from measurements of the time required to raise the voltage between two prescribed values. When motor-driven equipment is used, calibrate the speed control rheostat in terms of rate-of-voltage rise for the test transformer used.

5.1.4 Voltmeter—Measure the voltage by a method that fulfills the requirements of IEEE Standard No. 4, giving crest and also (if available) rms values, preferably by means of:

5.1.4.1 A voltmeter connected to the secondary of a separate potential transformer, or

5.1.4.2 A voltmeter connected to a well-designed tertiary coil in the test transformer, or

5.1.4.3 A voltmeter connected to the low-voltage side of the test transformer.

5.1.5 Accuracy—The combined accuracy of the voltmeter and voltage divider circuit is not to exceed 5 % at the rate of voltage rise specified in **5.1.3**.

5.2 Evacuation and Filling Apparatus :

5.2.1 Vacuum Pump—The vacuum pump shall have sufficient pumping capacity to be able to evacuate the test cell to a pressure below 0.133 kPa (1 torr).

5.2.2 Vacuum and Pressure Gage—Either a mercury manometer, or one or more gages, capable of measuring pressures below 0.133 kPa (1 torr) and also near atmospheric pressure. The manometer, or vacuum and pressure gages, shall be calibrated in kPa or millimetres of mercury (torr).

5.2.3 Connections—Vacuum-tight tubing and valves shall be used while evacuating and purging the test cell and filling it with the gas sample.

5.3 Electrodes and Test Cell:⁴

5.3.1 The sphere and plane electrodes shall be mounted vertically as shown in **Fig. 1**. The sphere shall be a precision steel bearing ball 19.1 mm (0.75 in.) in diameter. The plane

electrode shall be of brass 38.1 mm (1.50 in.) in diameter. The gap setting shall be 2.54 ± 0.025 mm (0.100 ± 0.001 in.). The tolerance of all dimensions is ± 2 %, unless otherwise stated.

5.3.2 The cell shall consist of a borosilicate glass cylinder clamped by flanges to end plates which seal the cell and support the electrodes.⁵ The lower plane electrode shall be fixed. The sphere electrode, held in place by a magnet, shall be adjustable by means of a micrometer screw suitably mounted through the top plate. The micrometer screw must be suitable for setting the electrodes to within the specified tolerance. The bottom plate shall have a valved port for evacuation and admission of the sample. If considered more convenient, two ports, one in the top for evacuation and one in the bottom for admission of the sample may be used. The dimensions are shown in **Fig. 1**.

6. Sampling

6.1 Obtain the gas sample from the gas cylinder or gas-filled equipment through a pressure-reducing regulator valve so that the flow into the cell may be controlled. The sample and cell must be at room temperature before the gas is admitted to the cell.

7. Preparation of Cell

7.1 Clean the cell except for the electrodes by washing with soap or detergent, then rinse with distilled or demineralized water and oven-dry. Clean the cell whenever necessary to remove detectable decomposition products formed by the breakdown arc, or when testing different gases.

7.2 Clean the electrodes with crocus cloth and naphtha. When the sphere electrode becomes pitted, it may be turned to a new position until it is necessary to replace it.

7.3 Assemble the cell by positioning and tightening the two end flanges and gaskets.

7.4 Turn the micrometer screw until the sphere just touches the plane electrode. The point where contact is made is best checked by a continuity meter connected to the two electrodes.

7.5 Note the reading on the micrometer, add 2.54 mm (0.100 in.), and adjust the micrometer to this new setting.

8. Test Conditions

8.1 The dielectric breakdown voltage of an insulating gas under ambient conditions varies with temperature and pressure. The standard conditions for the test are 101 kPa (760 torr) and 25°C. If the ambient temperature deviates slightly from 25°C adjust the gas pressure for the test as follows:

$$P = [(273 + T) \times 101] / 298$$

where:

P = gas pressure for the test, kPa, and
 T = ambient temperature, °C.

8.2 As an alternative to the pressure adjustment in **8.1** the test may be made at ambient temperature and pressure and the

⁵ Standard laboratory borosilicate glass pipe and connecting flanges may be used.